

# The Role of the Hallyu Phenomenon in Shaping a Destination Image among Malaysian Adolescents

Farah Hidayah Mohd Zaini<sup>a</sup>, Muaz Azinuddin<sup>b\*</sup>, Nur Shahirah Mior Shariffuddin<sup>c</sup>, Wan Mohd Adzim Wan Mohd Zain<sup>d</sup>, <sup>a,b,c,d</sup>Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Gong Badak Campus, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, 21300, Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia, Email: <sup>b\*</sup>[muazazinuddin@unisza.edu.my](mailto:muazazinuddin@unisza.edu.my)

Hallyu refers to the surge of global visibility of popular Korean cultural products, such as Korean entertainment including music, television (TV) shows, dramas and films, cuisine, and fashion. The commodification of these products by the Korean Government to sustain and strengthen their culture worldwide has led to the emergence of Korea as one of the top tourism destinations in the world. However, the exponential growth of the country's broadcasting and entertainment industry appears to greatly impact the values and ways of life among people, especially adolescents. Given the scarcity of tourism studies that investigate this impact, it is the aim of this research to analyse the mediating role of the idolisation of celebrities among adolescents in the State of Terengganu, Malaysia on the Korean music, TV shows and dramas, and the destination image. The data was collected through convenience sampling, where 301 usable questionnaires were subsequently analysed using descriptive, regression, and mediating analyses. It can be reported that both music, and television shows and dramas have a statistically significant relationship with the idolisation and the destination image. This is also the case in the context of the relationship between idolisation and the destination image. Interestingly, idolisation does not have the mediating impact on both independent variables and the destination image. These empirical results provide valuable insights to relevant stakeholders for the purpose of the strategic marketing of cultural products abroad and through the improvement of national brand value.

**Keywords:** *Hallyu, Adolescent, Idolisation, Destination image, Music, Drama, Television.*

## Introduction

The Asian entertainment industry has been thriving due to the rise in popularity of Korean entertainment products, such as television (TV) shows and drama series, movies, music, fashion, cuisine, and lifestyle. Hanryu or Hallyu, which means “Korean Wave”, is used to reflect this phenomenon, as these entertainment products have infiltrated other Asian countries since the late nineteen-nineties (Segers, 2000; Teh & Goh, 2016). Importantly, the information transmitted through these mediums, especially TV media, does not only present a destination but could be a tool to promote the image of a destination (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Muhoho-Minni & Lubbe, 2017; Terzidou, Styliadis & Terzidis, 2018). The literature has highlighted the influence of the Korean Wave content on the construction of the image of Korea to tourists (Lee, 2011; Lee & Workman, 2015), as well as on the promotion of Korean consumer products globally, which subsequently improved the national brand value (Chae, 2010) (as cited in Bae, Chang, Park & Kim, 2017). With this, the TV content ultimately plays an integral role in conveying the image of the modern popular culture globally (Kim et al., 2008).

Korean dramas (K-dramas) have also been proven to be a successful media for the marketing of the country as a tourism destination. The K-dramas have indirectly become a critical marketing tool to project and promote tourism destination images and at the same time, motivate viewers to have the intention to visit (Goodall, 1990; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Riley, Baker & Van Doren, 1998). This is in line with the fact that Korean TV drama series are seen as the most favourable media genre (Ju, 2010; Ariffin, Bakar & Yusof, 2018). Ariffin (2016) reported that the Korean media content is no longer filled by American TV programs and films as they have managed to grasp the viewers through the Asian mediascape (visual, cultural or imaginary impact). Korean music, television shows and dramas have contributed to the phenomenon of idolisation, especially among adolescents. Adolescents are easily influenced by others and participate in idolisation due to their weak self-identity (Ang & Chan, 2018), as well as having their identity partially constructed by being exposed to popular media (Engle & Kasser, 2005).

Despite the prevalence of the phenomenon, there is still inadequacy on the number of studies and attention given by scholars on the nexus of the various attitudinal and psychological factors linked to entertainment-based products (i.e. drama or music), celebrities, and tourism (Suhud & Wilson, 2018; Tkalec, Zilic & Recher, 2017; Yen & Croy, 2016). This is important, especially in the context of adolescents, since their access to and utilisation of media as sources of information are substantial (Liao et al., 2020). Based on this premise, this study looks to analyse the impacts of the TV shows and dramas, music, and idolisation on the formation of Korea as a tourism destination among the adolescents in the State of Terengganu. For a constructive discussion, this paper was structured to address the theoretical

platform of adolescents generally before moving on to the development of the Korean pop entertainment and idolisation. From the literature reviewed, the hypotheses and a conceptual model were then developed. Then, the research methodology was discussed, and the results were presented. Finally, this study concluded with the theoretical and practical implications.

## Literature Review

### *Adolescents and Popular Culture*

The word adolescent comes from the Latin language, which means increasing maturity, and adolescents are categorised as youth who are between childhood and adulthood (Rice & Dolgin, 2008). This process of growth and development strengthens one's identity and initiates change in the physical characteristics, maturity of mind, emotional development, adaptation to community life, and willingness to act as an adult (Ingersoll & Orr, 1989; Albert & Steinberg, 2011). According to Khalid (1994), adolescence can be divided into three stages, which are based on age differences between women's and men's sexual organ maturity, physical change, and emotional development and intellect. The first stage is early adolescence, between 10 and 15 years old for males, and between nine and 12 years old for females. This is followed by middle adolescence, which is between 14 and 18 years old for males, and 13 to 17 years old for females. In the later stages of late adolescence, males are between 19 and 24 years old, and females are between 18 and 23 years old (Khalid, 1994).

At these different stages, as part of their growth, adolescents are exposed to popular culture that includes information, role models and guidance about career opportunities, lifestyle, and ambitions (Wood, 2019). As stated by Storey (2006), popular culture is defined through a complex combination of the different meanings of the terms 'culture' and 'popular'. Popular culture is rooted from the word 'popular' that originally comes from the Latin word 'popularis', which means "belonging to people" (Jenkins III, Shattuc & McPherson, 2003). Meanwhile, Badley et al. (2010) defined popular culture as beliefs and practices. Williams (1983, 236–237) offered various definitions which connote a quantitative dimension: "widely favoured or well-liked", "inferior kinds of work", "work deliberately setting out to win favour", "well-liked by many people", and "made by people for themselves".

Beliefs, practices, and objects in everyday life are considered as parts of popular culture (Storey, 2006). As popular culture is spread through mass media, such as television, film and radio, it substantially shapes the contemporary public attitudes and consumption (Taylor & Anderson, 2005). This is consistent in the context of American popular culture and selected aspects of consumer behaviour among Malaysian adolescents. In this region, American popular culture derived from their entertainment-based products are considered as part of the

significant content that is essentially regarded as modern and attractive to the young people (Ariffin, 2010).

Apart from the American products, it is equally important to highlight the placement of Korean popular culture or Hallyu as part of the aforementioned appealing and contemporary content, since it receives great popularity within Asian countries (Jalaluddin & Ahmad, 2011). According to Briandana and Ibrahim (2015), Korean popular culture began penetrating into the global market at the end of the nineteen-nineties through television dramas, movies, and songs. It is important to note that the first Korean drama to be recognised worldwide in the mass media is “Winter Sonata”, which is said to have created the Korean wave (Hallyu) (Amaran & Wen, 2018). As a consequence of the drama, Nami Island has become one of the most visited destinations in Asia due to its food, culture, and attractive atmosphere (Briandana & Ibrahim, 2015). This example reflects the substantial impacts of the drama where the entertainment-based products become the key element in spreading and fortifying the international prominence of Korean popular culture all over the world (Yang, 2012).

### ***Entertainment in Korean Pop Culture***

Entertainment has a complex definition in that it reaches some of the passive audience through communication with external stimuli that provides enjoyment (Bates & Ferri, 2010). As the audience of different cultures voluntarily spend a considerable amount of time consuming these entertainment products, it subsequently shapes their identities and values (McKee et al., 2014). This can be seen in the relationship between the Hallyu phenomenon and the viewers, especially in East and Southeast Asia. Evidently, the entertainment programs within this region perceive Korean pop culture to be essential daily content through Korean films and television dramas (Cho, 2010). For instance, Malaysia has begun to implement changes in their local programming by incorporating Korean music and dramas due to popularity and demand (Ariffin, 2016). There are also increasing numbers of Korean dramas being made available as Malaysian viewers continue to demand for more, ever since the acclaimed traditional romantic drama “Winter Sonata” became a phenomenon in the entertainment world (Ariffin, 2016).

In 2012, Korean music was at its peak when the song “Gangnam Style” became a hit all around the world and rapidly infiltrated the market in other countries (Lee et al., 2017). Within the same year, the Korean Government also declared the “3.0 Hallyu Generation” and promoted “K-Culture” projects to expand the Korean Wave culture (Lee et al., 2017). The attention showered on the Korean dramas has created a tremendous boom for *Hallyu*, which significantly made the Korean celebrities famous and improved the image of Korean popular culture (Lim, 2007). The most impacted societies from this current popular entertainment are

adolescents. Boehnke, Münch, and Hoffmann (2002) argued that the adolescents are at the stage of identity formation and popular music, for example, plays a crucial role in enriching their intergenerational differences in life.

### ***Idolisation***

The phenomenon of idolisation comes from many components and the most popular culture idolises figures from music and entertainment. These components consist of celebrities who receive greater exposure in the mass media and other related events, such as concerts (Raviv et al., 1996; Jalaluddin & Ahmad, 2011). It is also claimed that music, singers or bands have a special place among the younger generations as they represent specific symbols, especially in the context of adolescents' idolisation of pop singers (Raviv et al., 1996). For this reason, idolisation is considered to be based on the two important premises of worship (adoration) and modelling (Raviv et al., 1996).

This phenomenon is made possible due to the closer virtual proximity through screen time from TV, computers, tablets, and cell phones, as this enables the fans to have access to the daily lives of their icons or celebrities (Nelson, 2018). Subsequently, these easy and unhealthy approaches also create a disconcerting trend of idolatry among the adolescents (Olson, 2015). In addition, celebrity obsession is increasing and needs great attention as celebrity worship is significantly associated with poorer psychological well-being (Maltby et al., 2004).

### ***Image Formation through Korean Wave***

Ever since the Korean Wave began to bloom across the world, it has become one of the major influences on the image establishment of Korea to the world (Bae et al., 2017; Lee, 2011; Lee & Workman, 2015). The destination image is a crucial component in creating beliefs, ideas, and impressions that are associated with the features of a destination (Andrades-Caldito, Sánchez-Rivero & Pulido-Fernández, 2013). This, specifically in the efforts of promoting the Korean Wave indirectly through the mass media, has improved the image of the country and created a new brand value for Korea (Lee, 2016). Based on Kim and Richardson (2003), the exposure through entertainment, such as movies, reported favourability on the destination image of the film location. This is important, as having a favourable image will influence a tourist's perception towards the destination (Choi, Tkachenko & Sil, 2011). Eventually, the outcome of an intention to visit through image formation will substantially lead to an influence on their travel behaviour (Noh, 2007). Hence, a prediction model on the effect of the Korean Wave is required as there is still paucity on research looking into the impact of this phenomenon towards tourism demand (Bae et al., 2017).

## Research Model and Hypotheses

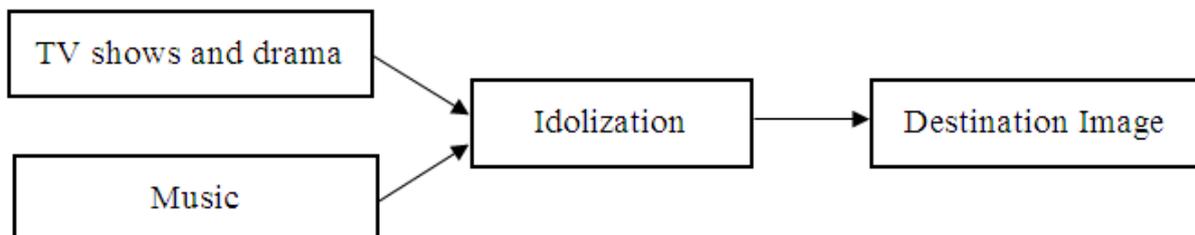
Figure 1 shows the research model of this study. The framework assumes ‘TV shows and dramas, and music’ and ‘idolisation’ are positively related to the ‘destination image’. It could be theorised that the variables have a significant relationship and the study presented the following hypotheses:

**H1:** TV shows and dramas, and music are positively associated with the destination image.

**H2:** Idolisation is positively associated with the destination image.

**H3:** Idolisation mediates the positive significant relationship between TV shows and dramas, and music, and the destination image.

**Figure 1.** The proposed conceptual framework



## Research Methodology

The Malay communities in Malaysia have always been regarded as open-minded and possess the energy to make changes (Dasuki et al., 2015). Given these traits, it is important to investigate the extent of how the *Hallyu* global phenomenon is impacting the Malay populations, especially among the adolescents. The adolescents are specifically targeted due to the nature of the *Hallyu* content, which is attractive to the younger generation who can easily absorb new culture (Teh & Goh, 2016). For this reason, the State of Terengganu in Malaysia was considered to be the most suitable setting for this research, as the region has the highest Malay majority (91.7 per cent of population) among the 14 States in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017). Given that Kuala Nerus — one of the eight districts in Terengganu — has two public universities, as well as a high number of secondary schools, this area was chosen for the data collection in order to achieve a better possibility of acquiring a high number of respondents.

In terms of the research design, a quantitative and cross-sectional approach was adopted. The sampling frame on two different age groups (15 to 19 years, and 20 to 24 years) of adolescents in Kuala Nerus was obtained from the Public Sector Open Data Portal, which serves as an online one-stop service centre to access and download Malaysian Government data. The population stands at 37,200, and responses with a minimum number of 397 is

sufficient to achieve a  $\pm 5\%$  precision level (Isaac & Michael, 1981). Due to manpower and time constraints, a convenience sampling was employed, and a questionnaire-based survey was carried out from October 2019 to November 2019. A total of 301 usable questionnaires were collected.

The questionnaire consisted of five main sections: (1) music, (2) television shows and dramas, (3) idolisation, (4) destination image, and (5) demography. The first four sections of the questionnaire consist of 74 items and are measured using a seven-point Likert scale. All the items from the respective sections are adapted and modified from previous works (Raviv et al., 1996; Yen, 2016; Suhud & Wilson, 2018; Ariffin et al., 2010; Martin & Bush, 2000) to suit the study setting. In relation to the demography, five items were used to measure gender, age, education, and the information source of Korean popular culture in categorical scales. This study uses the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 24 to analyse the data obtained from the population sample. The data analysis technique comprises reliability, frequency, regression, and mediating analyses.

## Results

### *Reliability Test*

The results of the reliability test are shown in Table 1. This test was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the measures used. It was found that all the variables have a Cronbach Alpha value of more than 0.6, which is higher than that recommended by Hair et al. (2007). From this, it is concluded that all the variables were internally consistent, and the scales are considered reliable for further analyses.

**Table 1:** Results of Reliability Test

Variable	Item	Cronbach Alpha
Television Shows and Dramas	18	0.936
Music	19	0.954
Idolisation	19	0.950
Destination Image	18	0.951

### *Characteristics of the Respondents*

A majority of the respondents were female (60.5 per cent), and the remaining were male (39.5 per cent). For the age group of the respondents, most of them were within the age group of 16 to 18 years (62.2 per cent) and were followed by those aged 22 to 24 years (33.2 per cent). Consistent with the age groups, more than half of the respondents had either received their diploma and/or finished their foundation at matriculation (66.9 per cent), and about 20.3

per cent had received their bachelor's degree. It appears that a majority of the respondents' source for information on Korean pop cultural products is from the radio, television and friends (63.7 per cent), with some of them also preferring other mediums such as newspapers, magazines, and websites (18.6 per cent).

### ***Regression and Mediating Analyses***

Linear and multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate the impacts of TV shows and dramas, music, and idolisation on the destination image. The results of the first regression model estimation in Table 2 show that the R square value is 0.569, which means that almost 57 per cent of variance in the destination image has been significantly explained by TV shows and dramas, and music. Specifically, the largest standardised beta coefficient is 0.627 ( $p < 0.001$ ), which is for TV shows and dramas. Thus, it can be concluded that TV shows and dramas make the strongest unique contribution to explaining the destination image, as compared to music ( $\beta = 0.165$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Given the nature of the results, the first hypothesis is accepted. As for the second regression model estimation of idolisation and the destination image, the variance of the R square value stood at 31.1 per cent, with a significant level  $p < 0.001$ . This means that the second hypothesis is accepted.

**Table 2:** Model Summary

Model	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Standardised Coefficients, $\beta$
<b>Model Estimation 1: TV Shows and Dramas, Music, and Destination Image</b>				
TV Shows and Dramas	0.569***	0.566	0.844	0.627***
Music				0.165**
<b>Model Estimation 2: Idolisation and Destination Image</b>				
Idolisation	0.311***	0.308	1.065	0.557***

**Note:** Confidence Interval, \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

In the case of the third hypothesis, Table 3 illustrates the series of results based on a mediating regression procedure specified by Baron and Kenny (1986). Accordingly, it must be demonstrated that TV shows and dramas, and music (predictor variables) are related independently to both idolisation (mediating variable) and the destination image (outcome variable). To measure the mediating effect, it must be reflected that the previously significant regression coefficient of both (1) TV shows and drama, and the destination image, and (2) music, and the destination image, their relationships shrink or go to zero when idolisation is added to the equation. The outcome will be considered as full mediation if the mediating variable is added and the effect goes to zero. If the effect only shrinks when the mediating variable is present, then the interpretation will be considered as partial mediation.

**Table 3: Mediating Analysis**

Step	Predictor Variable	Outcome Variable	R Square	Standardised Coefficients, $\beta$
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TV shows and dramas</li> <li>• Music</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Idolisation</li> </ul>	0.634***	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 0.124*</li> <li>• 0.703***</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Idolisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destination Image</li> </ul>	0.311***	0.557***
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TV shows and dramas</li> <li>• Music</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destination Image</li> </ul>	0.569***	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 0.627***</li> <li>• 0.165**</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TV shows and dramas</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Idolisation</li> </ul>		0.572***	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 0.616***</li> <li>• 0.101</li> <li>• 0.091</li> </ul>

**Note:** Confidence Interval, \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Table 2 shows that the first two conditions or steps for mediation proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) are met. First, both TV shows and dramas ( $\beta = 0.124$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and music ( $\beta = 0.703$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) have a significant relationship with idolisation. For the second condition, it is fulfilled through the previous statistical procedure between idolisation and the destination image. However, when idolisation is added to the model as the mediator, the variable itself does not have a statistically significant relationship with the destination image. This is despite the absolute effects of both TV shows and dramas, and music on the destination image becoming slightly less when the mediator was added. Therefore, it can be considered that the third condition is not fulfilled and hence, leads to the conclusion where idolisation does not have any mediating effect on the relationship between TV shows and dramas, music, and the destination image. Considering the result, the third hypothesis is rejected.

## Discussion

*Hallyu* or Korean wave creates a multifaceted nature of cultural and economic phenomenon, where it has been proven to be a successful platform for the marketing of the country as a tourism destination (Bae et al., 2017; Lin & Huang, 2008). The main focus of this research is to delve deeper into the role of *Hallyu* as an intercultural and personal platform that connects adolescents and the host through the entertainment-based products of TV shows and dramas, and music. The significance of this study is heightened since there is a limited body of knowledge to be synthesised by the commentators, scholars and industry practitioners with past literature offering generally uncertain explanations on these relationships (Yen & Croy, 2016). This is especially accurate in the context of a niche and significant marketing segment of adolescents, where idolisation may be considered as a crucial element in elucidating how the intensive commodification of entertainment-based products can be linked with their image formation of Korea as a tourism destination.

Given the significant role of adolescents in the major decision-making stages of destination selection for holidays (Ashraf & Khan, 2018), it is important to highlight that the Hallyu phenomenon does have a measurable positive effect among adolescents in Malaysia. The empirical evidence demonstrates that TV shows and dramas, and music have a significant stimulation on the destination image. This finding seems to be consistent with previous studies, which found TV as a medium that conveys information and subsequently projects the image about a destination (Hirata, 2008; Vagionis & Loumioti, 2011). This finding also confirms the idea of Echtner and Ritchie (1993), as well as Hudson and Ritchie (2006), where they suggested that by incorporating a destination as a tourism product into media or entertainment mediums, this may aid in influencing the beliefs and behaviours of audiences about that destination.

On the other hand, idolisation among adolescents is found to be influential on the destination image. This finding supports the idea of Yen and Croy (2016) who concluded that celebrity endorsement, whether it is done overtly or covertly, has been previously emphasised to raise awareness and experiential values. In fact, the pattern of the result is also comparable to the cosmetic industry, where Korean celebrities are used in promotional efforts to gain the image and high status of leading the newest trends (Chae, 2014; Witt, 2017; Yun, 2015). In other words, this illustrates that the celebrities have a direct influence on the adolescents' destination image and choice. However, it is important to note that idolisation was not found to be a key element in enhancing the relationship between the TV shows and dramas, music, and the destination image. This is because not every adolescent idolises the celebrities through the consumption of TV shows and dramas, as well as music — this may reflect the psychological uptake in the shape of idolisation as an incidental experience for many other adolescents.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the nature of the results affirmed the importance of the role of adolescents and hence, they cannot be neglected altogether in strategic tourism decision-making among destination management organisations (DMOs). This involves policy formulations and promotional activities linked with the presentation of entertainment-based products or services that appeal to the modern adolescents, especially in this era of globalisation. However, it is important to approach the results of this study with caution as there are a few limitations that need to be addressed in future research. The generalisability of the findings is limited due to the utilisation of convenience sampling and it is proposed that future research may wish to employ more variability in the methodological approach of data collection. Another limitation is that this study does not employ a longitudinal approach, where it enables the identification of cause and effect of changes over time. Future research may benefit from such an approach, as it would allow the travelling patterns of the adolescents to



be studied over time and provide additional insights of their perspectives into these relationships. This study also did not integrate any other potential influences on destination choice and the role of TV shows and dramas, music, and idolisation within this. Therefore, future research might use a multitude of potential variables to strengthen the theoretical basis, since the identification of destination choice is a complex area of study.

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