

Korean Wave in India: An Insight into Fan Participation

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Abstract. As the Hallyu movement is taking over the world, its growing followers have only gained so much power as the movement itself. From K-dramas, K-pop to K-culture, no phenomenon has ever seen such mass fan participation, liking, and acceptance. Thus, this study aims to decode and understand what causes this undeniable affinity to cultural products of the Korean wave. The research explores and deconstructs the impact of texts and graphics in Korean content on the Indian audience. It also examines the relationship between Korean cultural products (Korean content) and fan participation. This study aims to know whether texts and graphics enable the audience to create and produce content by virtue of giving them the language skills and understanding of the cultural nuances. To explore the possibility of a communication model that begins from perception and reception of texts and graphics on Korean content to how it aids the audience in reproducing more audience-generated content. An underlying communication goal that has led to the undeniable popularity of Hallyu.

Keywords: Korean Wave, K-pop, texts and graphics, fan participation, cultural affinity, fandom, transcultural texts, language, fluid cultural identities.

INTRODUCTION

India, although influenced by diverse cultural content, has demonstrated a huge affinity to the Hallyu movement. This is observed through many fan groups, events, and conversations dedicated to the Korean Wave. Hallyu movement or the Korean Wave was first described as the increasing popularity of Korean entertainment in China by Beijing journalists. While films and dramas were the forerunners of this phenomenon, the Korean entertainment industry has since grown and provided a wide variety of audio-visual content. The Hallyu wave also got popularized among Indian audiences because of the growing access of Korean content to Indian viewers.

For this study, we limit the observation of texts and graphics to the official videos on K-pop group's channels posted on Korean streaming sites, their official YouTube handles, and supplementary entertainment channels that produce shows with idol artists as guests. These videos can range from weekly episodes of talk shows, games, tasks, activities, and sometimes a combination of the above performed by idol groups to just a single episode release featuring similar content produced to promote album comebacks.

[3]proposed the fandom and participatory culture theory. He sees the audience not as passive members at the receiving end of media messages but as "active producers and manipulators of meaning" (p.23). This means that the audience is constantly reproducing and re-appropriating meaning and adding their perceptions to things they watch, leading to more and more content generation, as is the case with K-pop fandom. He further iterates that the content produced by fans is about learning from each other, a social mode of production, and about remembering the community [4].

Keeping this in mind, it is important to know that the willingness to embrace the other (in this case, the Korean content and culture learned through Korean content) is related to self. Here the self is created where the cultures mirror one another [5].

In essence, one could say that fans reproduce and re-appropriate content within fandom groups to mirror one another, thereby accepting, imitating, and becoming a part of the "other" culture. This study aims to understand what enables Indian K-Pop fans to get access to such fandom and the culture this fandom is part of. To put it simply, a certain level of cultural affinity must exist between the transcultural texts of K-pop and its global audience that contributes to transcultural fan practices [6]. The transcultural texts are then further put into relatable contexts, as cited in contributing to the fans' everyday lives, causing even more cultural affinity towards the content and the object of fandom.

A part of these transcultural texts is texts and graphics embedded within Korean audio-visual content. This further leads us to relate this study to Roland Barthes' contribution in semiotics and Rhetoric of the image. Each sign and symbol represent and is a suggestion of something. Graphics in shows indicate and explain these representations

and suggestions. In Korean content, the study analyses if these signs and symbols are a part of cultural code and nuances. As for graphics and images from on the viewer's screen, within one frame, these graphics communicate both coded (symbolic) and non-coded (literal) messages. They are helping the audience to understand and respond and evoke emotions that are in tandem with the messages communicated through these graphics and texts.

However, one must keep in mind that for this study and as an assumption, the designers of such texts and graphics' main intention is to communicate cultural nuances and other implicit meanings to the audience, making it direct and straightforward. The audience isn't any further involved than decoding references to the subject. i.e., they aren't involved in the meaning-making process of design, as cited, unlike that of graphics on posters that require the audience to engage in an active meaning-making process and interpret messages which come from their interaction and learnings from the culture they belong to [7]. To most, a gateway to Korean Culture, language, and society is through their exposure to Hallyu content [8]. The texts and graphics on Korean content show the hybridity of entertainment and education, where fans also learn Korean, thus becoming the gateway to Korean Culture, language, and society. Therefore, this understanding of texts and graphics as a gateway and the theory of audience participation gives us insight into an unexplored communication model.

Hallyu and the worldview

In Canada, Asian Canadians saw K-pop as a mode of self-expression, answering the questions of identity and confirming the notion of positive racialization, as cited in [9]. They negotiated their identity through means at their disposal within their popular culture contexts, as cited in [10]. K-pop was received as a highly visualized and emotional resource; therefore, it was culturally translated and not literally from the audiences' end [11].

In Romania, fans who were interviewed were a part of both National and International fandom. Being a part of these communities meant learning Korean and making Korean friends, sharing common interests, and learning from each other. When asked what they first thought of when the word Korean was said, most respondents related it to music, Korean Culture, Korean traditional costumes, novel places, a place they wanted to settle in [12].

While in Kathmandu, Hallyu was experienced unconventionally. This was because of the history that Nepal shared with South Korea. The Hallyu movement was governed by labor laws that strictly required immigrant laborers to possess Korean language skills, making the ability to know the language the gateway and access to surviving in culture [13].

In North-east India, women assumed fluid national and cultural identity by the knowledge they possessed about Korean culture and language. They even engaged in covert conversations in Korean with their peers, all due to watching Korean dramas and films [14]. Further studies suggest that Korean culture was taught through Korean advertisements, another example of a visual medium that educates people about Korean culture and language. Classroom discussions and tasks then followed this, and the improvement of the students was analyzed based on how much they were able to grasp both technical and cultural skills of the Korean language and culture, respectively [15].

The scope of understanding the Hallyu movement is not just limited to evaluating the reasons for its popularity but also about its remarkable capability to cause its audience to feel an affinity towards Korean culture. This is prompted mainly because of the heavy visual content or by learning a language that was seen as necessary to blend in with a new culture [16]. This has only probed the curiosity of this study to further examine and deconstruct aspects of Korean content and audience behavior in India. In this paper, the hybridity of Korean content with respect to entertainment and education was briefly touched upon [17]. Only to make a safe hypothesis of whether texts and graphics remove uncertainty and uncomfortable feelings and notions about a foreign cultural content by explicitly giving cultural cues and enabling the audience to learn the language, which is often considered the key to unlocking any foreign culture that is possessing the knowledge of the language. It has also been identified that texts and graphics on Korean content are a new form of literacy paving the way for teaching Korean and Korean culture [18]. These visual aspects are "not just essential to communicate information but also express one's opinion, feelings and to communicate rightly and appropriately in a specific socio-cultural discourse."

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To encapsulate the overall aim of the study, the following objectives have further guided the research:

- 1)The perception and reception of texts and graphics on Korean content by the Indian Audience.
- 2)To understand and analyze whether these texts and graphics promote cultural affinity, become a gateway to learning Korean language and thereby giving access to a culture different from the culture the audience was inherently born into, followed by whether knowing a language and nuances of culture allows to take on fluid cultural identity.

3)Hallyu movement is largely encouraged through audience participation, i.e., production and re-production of audience generated content. This study aims to know whether texts and graphics enable the audience to create and produce content by virtue of giving them the language skills and understanding of the cultural nuances. To explore the possibility of a communication model that begins from perception and reception of texts and graphics on Korean content to how it aids the audience in reproducing more audience generated content. An underlying communication goal that has led to the undeniable popularity of Hallyu.

METHODOLOGY

As stated above, the purpose of this study revolves around acquiring an in-depth understanding of how Indian audiences watching Korean content process visual information and the motivation behind the subsequent fan participation. To complement the research intently, interviews were the chosen research methodology. Participants were profiled based on eight categories. Each member of the sample belonged to at least six out of the eight categories. All categories are represented as a question that was asked as an introduction of the participant. Table I mentions the questions asked during the interview-

TABLE 1. Questions asked during the interview

Category/Question No.	Category/Question
1.	How long they have been watching Korean content (in years, months, etc.).
2.	What do they usually watch (Korean variety shows, idol content on Korean streaming sites, music videos, etc.).
3.	If they have tried learning Korean after watching Korean content, how long has it been since.
4.	If they produce their fan content.
5.	If they were part of fan clubs locally, internationally, or part of Korean origin fan clubs.
6.	If they participated in discussions and watched and read fan-produced content by members of the fan club.
7.	If they shared each other's content and learned more about Korea and the idol/stars from one another.
8.	If they liked learning about Korean culture.

This was followed by testing the question through a pilot sample. The sample consisted of four participants. Two out of the four participants were given the interview questions and videos to watch prior to the interview. These questions were different from the above-mentioned category and were part of the questionnaire that guided the whole discussion. All participants, including those who were given the questions and the videos, were made to watch the videos during the interview. Each sample member watched two videos, one which was common to all and another which was different for all the four participants.

The results of the pilot sampling were as follows.

- 1) Participants who were given the questions and the videos prior to the interview could relate and remember the texts and graphics used in the interview better than those who did not.
- 2) This greatly helped the interview, as participants were quickly able to associate and use examples from the videos to answer the questions.
- 3) However, the answers from all the four participants were similar, but the ones given prior information presented the opportunity to ask more questions, making the interview fluid.

After the pilot sampling, 14 participants were chosen for the research interview. And in accordance with the results of the pilot sampling, each research partaker was given the questions and videos in advance.

READINGS

The analysis of the data collected from the interviews is elucidated, keeping the objective in mind and examining it through the lens of theories stated earlier. This review bases itself on Roland Barthes's contribution in semiotics with reference to connotations and denotations and his essay "The Rhetoric of the Image," written in 1977.

Objective 1 - The perception and reception of texts and graphics on Korean content by the Indian Audience.

When they initially began watching Korean content, most participants felt that the continual projection of texts and graphics on the screen were jarring and distracting from the videos they watched. This was supplemented by the comment of one participant who, even after watching the content for more than a year, preferred if the fonts of texts weren't so bold and big. However, a majority of participants acknowledged that once the viewer is accustomed to watching texts and graphics appear regularly on the show, they found it attractive and interesting. It became the reason for their liking and consumption of Korean content. They saw it as a creative, visually impactful, and entertaining way of communication. They said it made funny things funnier, emphasized emotions, and without it, the humorous conversations and comments would lose their comedic element. Participants perceived the graphics faster than the texts. At the same time, some, in contrast, felt that in the design of the texts concerning the pointiness, curves, boldness, the softness, they interpreted the texts faster than the graphics. They said that both texts and graphics enabled them as viewers to perceive the show's mood and help them understand the context of what was being spoken in the show. It became their source of navigation throughout the episode. Participants remarked they wouldn't watch a show without texts and graphics because it wouldn't look and feel Korean to them. It removed and pulled out the feeling of the show being Korean from the content they were watching. Giving them cues through these texts and graphics gave them the power to understand the mood, context, and emotions the characters and people on the show were trying to portray. It was the one factor they relied on even when the subtitles weren't available. Even those who did not look at the texts and graphics and relied heavily on the subtitles for understanding what was happening on the show felt they would still like the texts and graphics because of the emphasis it created and how it made things and situations look funnier. It allowed them to understand each and every character on the show. For example, one participant said that texts and graphics created the personality of the idols on the show; this gave her insight into understanding the Korean culture and how each idol/guest was viewed by Koreans themselves, placing them right at the heart of the popular culture in Korea. Another participant mentioned that texts and graphics were cues from which they were able to create memes and gifs because texts and graphics helped them understand the feeling and emotion the idol/guest was portraying—allowing them to catch on and perceive the emphasis created by the text and graphics around the guest and thereby using it as a meme when the participants felt similar emotions or feelings.

Objective 2 - To understand and analyze whether these texts and graphics promote cultural affinity, become a gateway to learn Korean language and thereby giving access to a culture different from the culture the audience was inherently born into, followed by whether knowing a language and nuances of culture allows to take on fluid cultural identity.

One of the things that a participant mentioned was that texts and graphics "add the oomph factor" to the show or the content. They felt that even though they did not understand the language spoken by the people on the show, texts and graphics provided them the context and helped them navigate through the show. It allowed them to have the same reactions any Korean who understands the language would have simultaneously as the one who knew the language. It put them in a way on par with the Korean audience. These visual cues greatly helped them to make sense of the shows when subtitles weren't available. Therefore, when they watched a show without subtitles and later with a subtitle, about eighty percent of their prediction about what happened on the show was correct. So, when the question about whether texts and graphics made them feel like an insider in culture by virtue of giving them the context of what was happening on the show, participants strongly agreed to this statement. They said that even though texts and graphics did not exactly give them the object of the conversation, it gave them enough to understand the subject, which made them feel welcomed and like an insider into the Korean culture by virtue of understanding the content. And this was one of the reasons why they kept watching more and more content because even though they were watching things mindlessly, they did not have to put much effort into understanding the

content; they were still able to interpret and understand what was being talked about. It wasn't too heavy or difficult for people to grasp. This created a sense of cultural affinity to content and the culture of a different place.

When asked whether these texts and graphics told viewers about the culture, most participants agreed, while some said it gives them a hint of the culture. These texts and graphics played a big role in making the participants feel closer to the Korean culture. They said that there were able to learn the language because of the constant texts appearing on screen. They learned the language and how to write it because Korean is a phonetic language, and seeing the texts on screen enabled them to learn more and more through these texts and graphics. They also mentioned how texts and graphics increased their vocabulary because the word said on the show was immediately matched with the written texts plus the graphic that accompanied it; this allowed the viewers to learn and memorize the words. This way, they could learn a language, which is the key to feeling a sense of belonging in a culture. One of the greatest reasons for watching Korean shows was because it gave the context and because this context came to a lot of texts, the colors used, the effects on the show, it tells us about how the participants latched on to the semantic cues provided by the shows to help the viewers understand. All of these shows had two codes simultaneously running: semantic codes such as the colors and the effects, which were elements that viewers from different countries universally shared. The red color font meant anger, a glowing pink font meant something cute was being talked about. However, these shows also used a lot of referential codes. This meant that the texts and the graphics had certain codes of cultural references in Korea that only Koreans knew about. However, making them available on the screen allowed participants to know the culture and feel like an insider. One of the participants mentioned how she learned Korean slang because the texts appeared on the screen, while another said that on a trip to Korea, she understood the visual cues for transportation because she had seen them graphically represented on Korean shows. Giving exposure to these referential codes allowed the viewers to get the hang of what is happening in Korea, how people communicated, and thereby making them a part of the way Koreans communicated.

This brings the research to the next step in understanding these visual elements, where a lot of denotations and connotations were contained within these texts and graphics. As the graphics and texts appeared on the screen, participants understood the context because they understood the shared and universal semantic codes. Still, at the same time, they were able to grasp the intangible cultural codes and value system in Korea. This gave an insight into the hybridity of Korean texts and graphics and the codes used within them. This presented a coexistence of both universal semantic codes and culture-specific referential codes. For example, most participants were able to relate to the example where when there is a fire graphic between a senior artist and a junior artist, it meant that the senior artist was probably disappointed or angry (a semantic code) but also allowed the viewer to assume and interpret that hierarchy, ranks and respecting elders (a referential code) were greatly valued in Korea. In most cases, texts and graphics provided an anchorage to the content being watched so that people perceive and understand exactly what the editor of the show wanted them to understand. But sometimes, participants were able to make their own interpretation despite that not being the conscious effort of the editor himself/herself. For example, a participant made a remark saying that the blush graphic on a male idol told her that being feminine was not a problem in Korea. It was accepted that if a man in Korea took care of his skin, applied to make up, dressed up was a very common thing and that it was a more accepting culture than, say in India where men are required or expected to be masculine or macho. This gave her a cultural cue, the pink blush had its own connotation of Korean culture being accepting of effeminate men. This tells us that our earlier assumption of the audience not being a part of the meaning-making process of texts and graphics is now not applicable because, despite the efforts of the designers and editors to guide the audience to certain connotations from a pool of connotations, viewers still had their own interpretations of the cultures probed by the visual cues on screen that caused greater liking for Korean culture. This is furthered by the fact that every graphic image or text was a lexicon, it had multiple meanings and connotations. And people choose which one they wanted to understand and interpret depending upon the background and culture they came from. So, an acceptance of feminine men validated their own struggle where they had to constantly defend their liking for an idol or artist in their own country where they were criticized or made fun of because these men did not look masculine enough. A space to find such acceptance caused cultural affinity to Korea.

Finally, this brings us to the final point of analysis. According to Barthes in his essay 'Rhetoric of the Image', each media text could be divided into three main messages. The linguistic message often has the written text and the captions, the symbolic message, which often came from belonging to a culture, and the literal message. When they saw texts, most participants could not understand the linguistic denoted message because they weren't well-versed with the language or the script. Although Korean shows were educational and allowed people to learn their culture as they weren't reserved or opposed to making their culture widespread, as commented by one participant who also made it less intimidating and more welcoming for people outside of Korea, they still weren't in most cases able to

understand the denoted linguistic message. However, the connoted meaning of the texts on these Korean shows was that it gave them a sense of "Koreaness" just like the name Panzani on the label of the tin cans in the Panzani advertisement connoting the words Panzani as a cue to the "Italianess" of the product in the essay 'Rhetoric of the Image'. The appearance of the script, the whole repetition of texts and graphics were a connoted meanings of "Koreaness" and that this is how Koreans presented their content, that this how their popular culture content looks like. One of the participants early on the interview mentioned that if texts and graphics were removed from the show, she wouldn't know or be able to relate to whether this really was a Korean show and at the same time if she saw similar editing techniques on an Indian show she would immediately associate and relate it to Korean TV shows. Participants very often although able to understand the literal message, which Barthes describes as the basic level of intelligence, in knowing that a red color vegetable is a tomato, a yellow vegetable is a pepper, viewers of Korean content although understand and know the literal message they are immediately transported to the symbolic message. For example, the graphic of a hat on an idol/artist tells the viewer it's a hat. Still, because the content watched is from another language, the processing automatically first happens at the symbolic level, telling the viewer that Korean farmers wear this type of hat. The exposure to cultural texts and contexts happens quite immediately in Korean content, making the viewer easily grasp the cultural codes and nuances, thereby allowing for semantic and referential codes to coexist simultaneously at the same time, giving the audience to step and explore the other culture. Therefore, giving the research the insight that the symbolic message is the strongest when it comes to texts and graphics, allowing the viewers to become a part of a culture much easier than that where one would first have to learn the codes of language to know and understand the linguistic and literal message to process the cultural message later.

This allows the study to point out and reiterate the fact that participants saw texts and graphics on Korean shows as an aspect of "Koreaness." This brings the research to its final objective.

Hallyu movement is largely encouraged through audience participation, i.e., production and re-production of audience generated content. This study aims to know whether texts and graphics enable the audience to create and produce content by virtue of giving them the language skills and understanding of the cultural nuances. To explore the possibility of a communication model that begins from perception and reception of texts and graphics on Korean content to how it aids the audience in reproducing more audience generated content. An underlying communication goal that has led to the undeniable popularity of Hallyu.

Most participants, especially those who fit in the category of producing fan content, took inspiration from a pool of fan content, added their own themes and styles. And finally published their content. And the feedback on those content allowed people to produced more and more. While others, after making their own content, looking for feedback from their peer group who were also K-pop and K-culture enthusiasts and made changes and finally published it, receiving more feedback in the form of appreciation, encouraging them to produce more content. Following this, it is identified that there are two modes of production/communication model for fan content (Fig. 1)

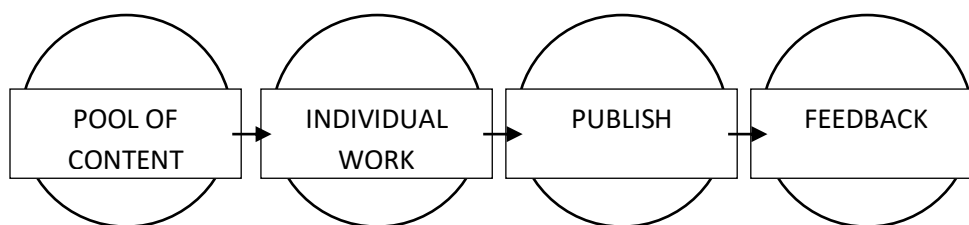


FIGURE 1. First model

In the first model (Figure 1), fans choose from a pool of fan content that also served as inspiration; they incorporated a few ideas from the pool and their own ideas. After creating their own content, they published it. Upon publishing, the feedback was received, and this encouraged them to produce more content.

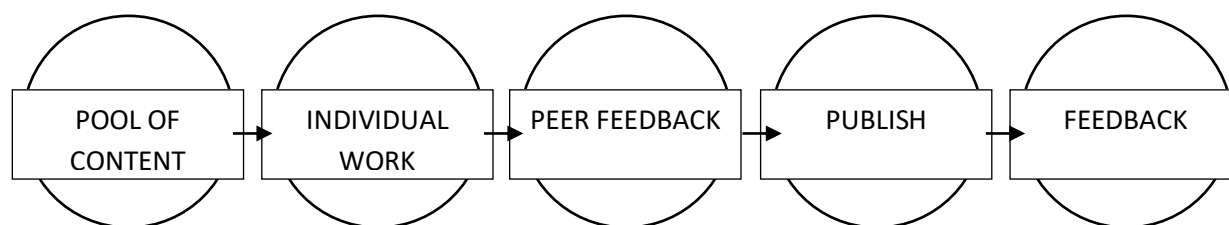
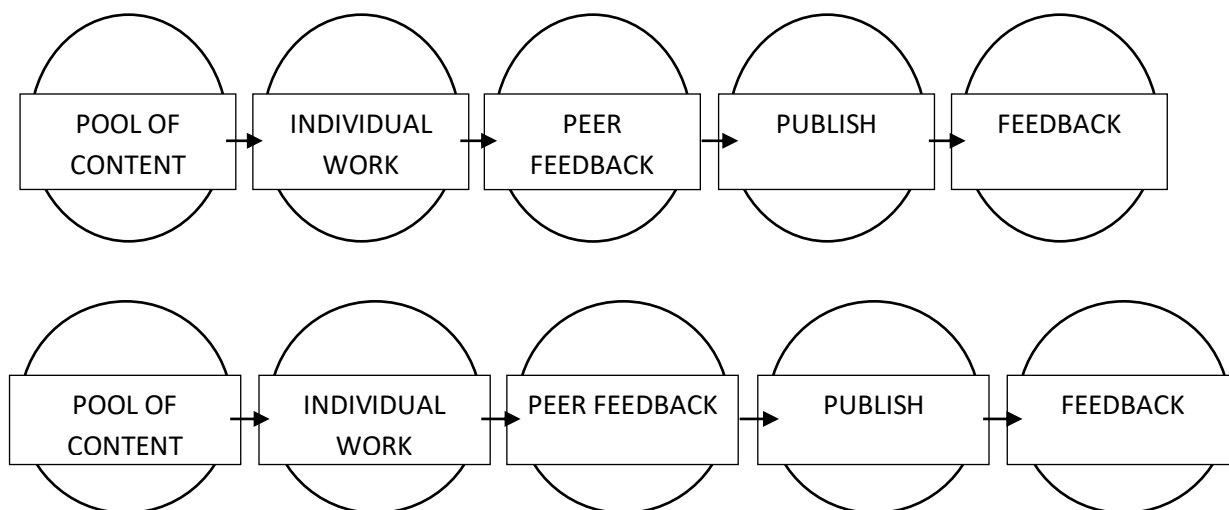


FIGURE 2. Second model

In the second model (Figure 2), fans choose from a pool of fan content, used inspirations from the same, and produced their own content. Once they produced it, they made changes as suggested by the peer K-pop enthusiasts and then published it and received feedback. After feedback, fans continued to produce more content.

However, a discovery was made during the interviews. As mentioned earlier, the texts and graphics in Korean show connoted the meaning of "Koreaness" that participants felt. It was a new language: the language of editing style and content presentation in Korean popular culture. The participants felt it was interactive and gave a very immersive experience, as one of them quoted. This new editing and presentation were then decoded and recoded that is understood and reproduced like any other fan content but used in the content that the Korean cultural products' fan participants were producing. They wanted to use this new editing language, completely symbolic of a different culture, a culture different from their own that they began to use or at least wanted to learn how to use in their own content. This helped them emulate or imbibe the Korean culture, putting them right in place of how Koreans create their popular culture, thereby putting them at the center of Korean popular culture and giving them the power to replicate and emulate the same. So, unlike any other fan participation where fans often collect objects from the films like a Harry Potter t-shirt or a Marvel costume to making explainer videos about possible easter eggs in these movies to making fan art, nobody has been given such power to replicate the exact or at least in parts how content from a different culture can be their own. Fans cannot copy the editing and camera tricks of the movies to the extent that Korean shows give them the power to by making the editing styles so easily available. And because Korea is an actual place that one could visit and is not a fictional place like Hogwarts or the Marvel universe, being able to transfer the whole popular culture universe into their work and attracting more audience to their content, which is also the reason why people watch Korean content because of the texts and graphics, it gives so much more power to the fan to become a part of Korea and the possible ability to imitate their culture and also to be as close to Korea as possible.

Therefore, it wasn't just the object of fandom that a fan interpreted and was an active prosumer of; it was also about how the content was put out and how having the ability to do the same, they could feel a cultural affinity. Therefore, the research that was done previously that states there must be some connection between the transcultural texts of Korean media that relates to people and eventually becomes a part of their lived lives; this research exactly proves this statement. The fandom for Kop keeps growing because it's not just language that the participants can learn or the cultural nuances; having the power and the access to emulate a popular culture of another country gives them, for lack of a better word, homogenous identity within the fandom, where everyone mirrors one another in the way they present their content, and at the end of the day mirroring the mighty content, that is the content of the culture of Korea itself. Thereby making them feel closer.



CONCLUSION

For any country to have such power to make others feel a part of their own culture is a commendable effort. This is attributed to the exceptional visual power of Korean popular culture. Giving access to fans through visual cues is the greatest technique not just to create attraction but to make any program educational and entertaining. It's not just the language that gives an insight into a culture as a lot of fans use it to communicate with their idols or to know the culture idols belong to or communicate with other fans across the globe. Still, it's the amount of power and agency that culture gives people of various other cultures to be part and feel like they could have fluid identities, if not completely, but at least of a resemblance of proximity to the culture from where the popular culture originates. This is the story of texts and graphics, which began with an assumption of providing the audience of Korean shows to learn more about Korean to a discovery where it in itself is a quite powerful tool of replication and, in other words, an agency to assume and belong to a new culture. This brings us to a full circle, yet leaving room for more research and knowledge that goes beyond the obvious questions of what makes the Hallyu movement so well accepted and popular to examine the questions of the many whys and how's of this incredible and remarkable movement in the history of entertainment and media.

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