

## Korean Wave and Malaysian Young Adults: Attitudes, Intention and Behaviour

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### *Abstract*

#### 1.0 Introduction

“Chinese government warns of Korean drama dangers as *Descendants of the Sun* hits 440 million views on online video platform iQiyi” (*The Star Newspaper*, 2016, March 14)

“SBS Korean drama *Doctors* becomes the highest rated Korean drama across all Korean channels in Malaysia ...rating to-date (episode 8) is 93% higher than the average *PPali PPali*...also 1.5 times highest against the average of ONE prime time rating” (Hellokpop website, 2016, July 26)

“*Scarlet Heart* being named the top-rated and no.1 South Korean drama series in Singapore and Malaysia. It has also surpassed the ratings of *Descendants of the Sun*, *Doctors* and *Moonlight Drawn by Clouds!*” (Hellokpop website, 2016, October 27)

Coined by Chinese journalist in 1990s to describe the wave of Korean pop culture, Korean Wave or *Hallyu* refers to “a surge in the international visibility of Korean culture, beginning in East Asia in the 1990s and continuing more recently in the United States, Latin America, the Middle East, and parts of Europe” (Ravina, 2009, p. 3; Yang, 2012). The recent meaning of *Hallyu* has expanded to include food, fashion and sports (Korean Parliamentary Culture and Tourism Research Groups, 2005).

The export performance of Korean culture products was impressive. The Asian continents accounted for almost 95 per cent of these exports, including Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and the Indo-Chinas (Lee, 2015). Korean drama, the largest

component of the Korean culture exports, enjoys a consistent and steady growth, from \$105million in 2008, to \$107million in 2009, and \$133million in 2010 (Kwon & Lee, 2012). In 2013, the total income of Korean drama reached \$167million, which is four times more than a decade ago (Donga, 2013). The board casting rights of top Korean dramas such as *The Moon Embracing the Sun* was sold to several Asian countries and recorded 200 billion won sales and the other drama, *Love Rain*, sold for 115 billion won (Kwon & Lee, 2012).

Korean wave catches the attention of millions, including researchers. There is an extensive study of Korean Wave, especially in the field of cultural and political studies (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Howard, 2006; Cho, 2010; Lim, 2015; Jang & Paik, 2012). Marketing researchers, mostly in the field of hospitality and tourism, studied Korean culture as a product and examining how Korean wave influences tourist perceptions and their choices of a destination (Cho & Kang, 2005; Han & Lee, 2008; Kim et al., 2008; Lee, Scott & Kim, 2008). The earlier researchers are wondering “why and how Korean pop culture was received so enthusiastically abroad” (Ravina, 2009, p. 4; Yang, 2012), while the later researchers start to pay attention to how Korean wave influences the decisions of people, including consumers. This is consistent with Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA)’s study in 84 countries. Consumers nowadays are paying more attention to what their Korean stars eat, wear and use (Lee, 2015). Product placement, a frequently used marketing communication tool in Korean dramas and movies, was said to generate a staggering 3 billion won through the *Descendants of the Sun* in 2016 (Tay, 2016). Marketing communication in Korean drama is also said to improve consumer awareness, store traffic and sales, online search, and even open opportunities for cross-regional collaboration.

## **2.0 Korean Wave and Related Studies in Malaysia**

Korea wave in Southeast Asia started with Vietnam in the late 1990s and spread to other countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia (Suh, Cho & Kwon, n.d.). The entry of Korean wave to Malaysia is rather late compared to other countries, and the initial response was rather unfavorable (Suh et al., n.d.). After that, “Malaysia has accepted the Korean wave faster and more aggressively” (Cho, 2010, p. 9). Korean drama is the first Korean Wave product to enter Malaysia, followed by movies and popular music. In fact, Korean popular music (KPop) has “entered the country in association with the Korean dramas” (Suh et al., n.d.). Hazami, a local Malaysian young singer sold 100,00 copies of album and won his new singer award besides nominated for the best album award by introducing the song “Sonata Musim Salju” (Winter Sonata in Malay) in Malaysia. A rough calculation of the KPop related concerts and fan meetings in Malaysia reached 28 in 2015 (Noona Meroyan, 2015).

The examination of the existing literature indicates that consumer studies in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia are insufficient. Most of the earlier research (e.g. Yoo & Lee, 2002; Jung, 2001; Cho, 2002) were based on China scenario. Argued by Suh et al. (n.d.), these studies are important to researchers who focus on Confusion culture but limit the generalization to the Korean Wave scenario in Southeast Asia, where “Muslim cultures also co-exist hence challenging a hypothesis of Confucian culture as the crucial factor of formulating cultural proximity”.

In Malaysia, an earlier survey conducted by Korean Foundation for Asian Cultural Exchange in 2005 indicated 44% of Malaysians watched Korean dramas, and 4.7 per cent listened to Korean pop songs (as cited in *Herald Economics*, 2005, Dec 2 in Cho, 2010). Ha (2006) also conducted another study in the following year and found out that 60 per cent Malaysians watched Korean dramas over the past month and 70% per cent of them were very satisfied with the dramas. Malaysians generally hold positive attitudes towards Korea and Korean culture (Ha, 2006). They liked, interested and wanted to know more about Korea (Ha, 2006). However, these Malaysian studies are conducted in the early 2000s generally focused on big cities such as Kuala Lumpur, whereby consumers are well exposed to updated information and news and Chinese constituted the largest population in Kuala Lumpur (Suh et al., n.d.). Chung et al. argued that Chinese in Malaysia are the earliest Korean Wave fans who sourced Korean cultural products indirectly from overseas Chinese networks. It is argued that the second and third tier cities in Malaysia could draw different findings and conclusions due to different economic backgrounds and racial composition.

As aforementioned, the export statistic of Korean cultural products indicates that Korean Wave leads to greater interest in Korean products. For instance, the export of kimchi to Malaysia has increased 150 per cent in 2005 (*Joongang Daily*, 2005, Nov 10). Nevertheless, it is not clear whether Korean beauty products will enjoy the same spill-over effect in Malaysian context. Tyrimou (2015), a beauty and personal care analyst, posited the Korean beauty products have expanded, riding the Korean Wave. Amore Pacific, the largest Korean beauty player for instance, has looked aggressive expansion into Malaysian market since 2006 by opening more standalone outlets and counters. In a decade, the company now ranked 36th within the overall sales share within beauty and personal care with less than 1% value sales share, and ranked 15th within colour cosmetics and 19th in skin care with 1% brand value sales shares (Euromonitor, 2015).

In addition, Korean drama’s viewers were found to be diverse across countries. In Japan for example, majority of the Korean drama fans are middle-aged women who are mainly housewives, while the young Chinese are more attracted and be a consumer of Korean popular culture (Yang, 2012). Dator and Seo (2004) argued that

the network cohort (1982 to present) is the main consumers of pop culture in Korea and their peers make up the majority of the performers. Different from their parents who grew up under American cultural imperialism and viewed *Hallyu* as a sense of pride, the network cohort focused less on nationality and the origin of a cultural product “as long as they are satisfied with the sensitive and emotions” (p. 39). Nevertheless, due to different political and social settings in Malaysia, it is not clear how Malaysian young adults reacted to the Korean Wave products in terms of their attitudes, intention and behaviour.

### **3.0 Methodology**

To examine how Malaysian young adults reacted to Korean Wave products, this paper employed multi-method analysis. A self-administrated questionnaire survey was carried out among Malaysian young adults. A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed and only 126 were found useful, with response rate of 70%. The results were then cross-validated with a group in-depth interview with 7 people to provide more comprehensive and detailed discussion. Three main categories of Korean Wave products were chosen, namely Korean dramas, Korean Pop groups and Korean beauty products as the focal products.

Brief explanation was given prior to the survey to ensure all respondents understand the concept of Korean drama, Korean Pop (KPop) and Korean beauty products. Only respondents who fulfilled at least one of the three criteria were chosen: *Do you have any experience with Korean drama, KPop or Korean beauty products?* This screening question was asked to ensure the target respondents were representative to the target consumers. It would be less significant to collect data from those who have no idea of or have any experience with Korean drama/KPop and Korean beauty products. The choice of the focus group participants were constituted of both Korean Wave fans and non-fans. The participants were from different ethnicity and gender. Both fans and non-fans were included to the focus group to generate more stimulating and comprehensive discussion of the Korean Wave scenario in Malaysia.

Table 1 presented the respondents’ profile for 126 respondents. Majority of the respondents were Malay and Bumiputera ( $n = 94$ , 74.6%) female ( $n = 105$ , 83.3%) who aged between 21 and 22 years old ( $n = 75$ , 59.5%). They were mostly Muslims ( $n = 71$ , 56.3%) and had an average experience of 5 years of listening to KPop song or watching Korean drama. In fact, Table 2 indicated that there was a larger portion of the respondents watched Korean drama only ( $n = 56$ , 44.4%) than those listening to KPop songs only ( $n = 25$ , 19.8%) and those who followed both Korean drama and KPop songs ( $n = 45$ , 35.7%). A majority of them ( $n = 91$ ), 72.2%) had never use

Korean beauty products before. A detailed examination showed that the buyers for Korean beauty products were mainly female (88.6%) and the brands they bought were The Body Shop, Etude House, Innisfree, Nature Republic and Laneige.

**Table 1** Respondents' profiles

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Age	18	1	.8
	19	10	7.9
	20	14	11.1
	21	28	22.2
	22	47	37.3
	23	10	7.9
	24	13	10.3
	25	1	.8
	26	1	.8
	28	1	.8
Ethnicity	Malay	48	38.1
	Chinese	31	24.6
	Indian	1	.8
	Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak	46	36.5
Religion	Islam	71	56.3
	Buddhist	20	15.9
	Christian	28	22.2
	No Religion	7	5.6
Experience with KPop and KDrama (Year)	0	4	3.2
	1	11	8.7
	2	14	11.1
	3	11	8.7
	4	17	13.5
	5	1	.8
	5	21	16.7
	6	13	10.3
	7	12	9.5
	8	5	4.0
	9	2	1.6
	10	10	7.9
	11	1	.8
	14	1	.8
	15	2	1.6
	16	1	.8

**Table 2** Choices of Korean Wave products

		Frequency	Per cent
KPop or K Drama	KPop	25	19.8
	KDrama	56	44.4
	Both	45	35.7
	Total	126	100.0

## 4.0 Findings and Discussion

### Young Adults' Attitudes

The survey findings in Table 3 indicated that regardless of the ethnicity and religion backgrounds, Malaysian young adults held rather positive attitudes towards Korean drama and KPop songs, with mean scores of  $M_{KD} = 3.81$  and  $M_{KPOP} = 3.45$  respectively. A similar result was found for their attitudes towards Korean beauty products ( $M_{KB} = 3.37$ ). Though not extremely high, these attitudes towards Korean drama, KPOP songs and Korean beauty products were considered positive.

To compare across gender group, one way ANOVA test results indicated that there were significant differences found between male and female respondents, in terms of their attitudes towards the Korean drama,  $F(1, 125) = 16.734, p = .000$ ; and attitudes toward Korean beauty products  $F(1, 125) = 8.899, p = .03$ . However, there was no significant gender differences found in the case of attitudes toward KPop,  $F(1, 125) = .928, p = .337$ . Refer to Table 3, female respondents consistently held more positive attitudes towards all three types of Korean Wave products compared to their male counterparts. This result is rather consistent with Yang's (2012) findings cross China, Taiwan and Japan whereby female are the main consumers for Korean Wave products. Interestingly, there were no significant differences found across ethnicity and religions. The findings indicated that despite ethnicity or culture differences, Malaysian young adults hold positive attitudes towards Korean Wave, except gender.

The results were also consistent with focus group findings. The Korean Wave fans were showed positive and exciting expressions when they were approached with the question: "Do you like Korean drama/KPop?" Strong verbal expressions such as 'of course', 'I love Korean drama' and smiling facial expressions were showed.

Component	Gender group	N	Mean
Korean Drama	Female	105	3.9048
	Male	21	3.3889
	Total	126	3.8188
KPop	Female	105	3.472
	Male	21	3.3122
	Total	126	3.4453
Korean Beauty	Female	105	3.4516
	Male	21	2.9524
	Total	126	3.3684

The one way ANOVA test results also indicated significant differences between the years of experiences and attitudes towards Korean drama at 10% and 5% significant levels ( $F(4, 121) = 2.162, p = .077$  and KPop ( $F(4, 121) = 3.157, p = .017$ ), except for Korean beauty products ( $F(4, 121) = .930, p = .449$ ). It is difficult to conclude that the more experience the respondents are with a particular entertainment component, the more positive their attitudes will be. Nevertheless, the results indicated the respondents with more than 2 years' experience tended to possess higher attitude scores than those with 2 years or less experiences. Refer to Table 4, a bell-shaped experience curve was observed for Korean dramas; and a wave shaped experience curve was observed for KPop and Korean beauty products.

**Table 4** Experiences (in year) with three Korean Wave components

		N	Mean scores
Korean Drama	0 – 2 years	29	3.6552
	3 – 5 years	50	3.7600
	6 – 8 years	30	4.0500
	9 – 11 years	13	3.8846
	More than 12 years	4	3.7917
KPop	0 – 2 years	29	3.2950
	3 – 5 years	50	3.2867
	6 – 8 years	30	3.7222
	9 – 11 years	13	3.5812
	More than 12 years	4	4.0000
Korean beauty products	0 – 2 years	29	3.4109
	3 – 5 years	50	3.3067
	6 – 8 years	30	3.3833
	9 – 11 years	13	3.2821
	More than 12 years	4	4.0000

The Korean Wave fans in the focus group had an average of six years' experience with Korean drama and KPop songs. As for the two beauty product buyers, they have been using Korean beauty products for the past three years.

### **Intention**

The intention to watch Korean drama was measured with five 5-point items, namely "I will continue watching Korean drama"; "I like to share info about Korean drama with others"; "I am willing to try Korean drama related products"; "I am willing to buy Korean drama related products" and "I am interested to visit South Korea because of the Korean drama". The intention to watch Korean drama was measured with five 5-point items, namely "I will continue watching KPop songs"; "I like to share info about KPop songs with others"; "I am willing to try KPop related products"; "I am willing to buy KPop related products" and "I am interested to visit South Korea because of the KPop songs". Lastly, the intention to use Korean beauty products were measured with three 5-point items, namely "I intend to buy Korean beauty products"; "I want to try Korean beauty product" and "I use Korean beauty product due to influences of KPop and Korean drama".

Korean drama possessed highest intention scores ( $M = 3.57$ ), compared to KPop ( $M = 3.38$ ) and Korean beauty product ( $M = 3.19$ ). Refer to Table 5, significant differences were found when the scores were compared across gender. The post hoc tests results showed that female respondents have significantly higher intention to continue to use, share info, try, buy and even visit South Korea due to Korean drama influence ( $F(1, 125) = 11.707, p = 0.001$ ), KPop influence ( $F(1, 125) = 4.584, p = 0.034$ ) and Korean beauty products influence ( $F(1, 125) = 5.253, p = 0.024$ ). This result was consistent with the focus group findings whereby participants, especially the females, showed high interest to visit South Korea and intention to buy Korean Wave related products such as cosmetics, skin care, fashion and accessories. Korean dramas and KPop music video provides them make up and fashion ideas and tips. Interestingly, the male participants indicated they did not follow Korean fashion trend due to different climates and fashion sense in Malaysia.

**Table 5** Korean Wave related behaviour intention

		<i>N</i>	<b>Mean scores</b>
Korean Drama	Female	105	3.6667
	Male	21	3.0571
KPop	Female	105	3.4571
	Male	21	3.0190
Koren beauty products	Female	105	3.2762
	Male	21	2.7778



## Overt Behaviours

The Korean Wave related overt behaviours were represented by using the type of medium that respondents used to access, the frequency to use as well as their media sharing behaviour for Korean drama and KPop. Additional information such as their favourite Korean dramas and KPop groups were identified and the underlying reasons were further examined.

## Medium Used

The examination of the Korean drama audience indicated that Malaysian young adults generally watched Korean drama using laptop (28%) compared to TV (15.6%) or combination of multi-channels (40.6%). The multi-medium users used combination of medium, for instance handphone and laptop, or TV and laptop to watch Korean drama. Laptop was a popular option for drama watching due to its bigger screen compared to handphone; while TV seemed to less attractive to the young adults due to the rigid showing time and frequent advertisement which annoyed them.

Contradictory, majority of the KPop fans usually listened to KPop songs using handphone (25.49%), compared to TV (11.76%), laptop (17.64%) and multi-channel (27.45%). Multi-medium users in the case of KPop fans were those who utilized more than one medium such as handphone and TV, or handphone and laptop. Due to the open-ended format of the questionnaire, those who have ‘no-answer’ or listed other answers such as ‘YouTube’ (a specific type of social media format which can be accessed via handphones or online) and ‘Internet’ (could be inclusive of YouTube and laptop) were excluded to avoid confusion in data interpretation. Nevertheless, the data generally indicated YouTube as a popular social media platform among young adults, especially for the KPop fans to listen to their favourite Korean songs.

## Involvement Frequency and Media Sharing

Refer to Table 6, it is clear that Malaysian young adults generally spent 0 – 3 hours per day to watch Korean drama ( $n = 80$ , 63.5%); and spent 0 – 3 hours listening to KPop songs ( $n = 95$  hours and 75.4%). These results were rather consistent with focus group discussion. Interestingly, there is roughly 8% of them watch Korean drama and also 8% for listening to KPop music more than 9 hours per day. One of the focus participants indicated that “I watch K-drama whenever I am free”. The high frequency of involvement in Korean Wave products implied the importance of Korean Wave products in their daily life.

**Table 6** Involvement frequency in Korean Wave products

Frequency to listen to Korean drama			Frequency to listen to KPOP songs		
	Frequency	Per cent		Frequency	Per cent
0 – 3 hours	80	63.5	0 – 3 hours	95	75.4
3 – 6 hours	30	23.8	3 – 6 hours	15	11.9
6 – 9 hours	6	4.8	6 – 9 hours	6	4.8
More than 9 hours	10	7.9	More than 9 hours	10	7.9
Total	126	100.0	Total	126	100.0

Around 59% ( $n = 75$ ) of the respondents indicated that they share Korean drama info with their friends. The examination of the shared info indicated ‘storyline’ and the ‘actors/actress’ as most frequently shared info. Interestingly, 58.7% ( $N = 74$ ) of the total respondents stated that they did not share info about KPop with their friends. For those who shared info, they normally shared songs, discussed and commented on KPop dance, lyric and singers with their friends.

### Favourite Korean Drama and KPop Groups

Free recall tests were used to examine consumers’ choices of favourite Korean drama and KPop groups. Free recall test is conducted “simply by asking the participants to recall stimuli (e.g. words) or experience experienced earlier in the participant’s life” (Goldstein, 2011, p. 182.). Respondents were asked to list down five Korean drama of their favourite. A total of 141 Korean dramas were dominated by the respondents for the top five choices of favourite dramas, and six were excluded due to inappropriate categorization. Table 7 below listed the top five Korean dramas in term of frequency, namely *Descendants of the Sun* ( $n = 59$ ), *My Love from the Star* ( $n = 38$ ), *Boys over Flower* ( $n = 28$ ), *The Heirs* ( $n = 26$ ) and *Master’s Sun* ( $n = 18$ ).

**Table 7** Favourite Korean drama by frequency

Title of Korean drama	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice
<i>Descendants of the Sun</i>	30	10	8	9	2
<i>My Love from the Star</i>	7	8	7	6	10
<i>Boys over Flower</i>	5	8	3	6	6
<i>The Heirs</i>	6	5	7	3	5
<i>Master’s Sun</i>	7	5	2	2	2

From the total of 141 dramas listed, a number of Korean dramas aired during the early 2000s were named, namely *Autumn in My Heart*, *Winter Sonata*, *Stairways to Heaven*, *All about Eve* and *Dae Jang Geum*. These dramas were made popular by famous Korean actors and actress such as Baek Yong Joon, Song Hye Kyo, Song Seung

Heon, Kwon Sang Woo, Choi Ji Woo, Kim Tae Hee, Lee Young Ae, Chae Rim, Jang Dong Gun and Won Bin. *Winter Sonata* for instance, was extremely popular in Japan in early 2000s, and later spread to China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and later, Southeast Asia. *Winter Sonata* has recorded high viewer ratings and aired for more than three times in Malaysian TV channels. Selling on family values and true love, the drama was reported to record more than 1.5 million viewers whenever each episode of the drama was on (*The Star*, 2003, August 1 in Cho, 2010). Another popular drama, *Dae Jang Geum*, based on 16th century Chosen Korea, told the story of an orphaned girl who managed to fight through all hardship and become King's chief physician also broadcasted as prime time programme in Malaysia (Hannah Press, 2006, March). The hero-themed drama captivated the hearts of millions viewers with Korean's food, culture, values, architecture as well as Korean traditional medicine (The Korean Wave, 2011, in Jang & Paik, 2012).

The latest big hits such as *Descendants of the Sun* and *My Love from the Star* have managed to win the hearts of millions Korean fans in Asia, including Malaysia. Actors and actresses such as Kim Soo Hyun, Song Joong Ki, Song Hye Kyo and Jun Ji Hyun are extremely popular in Malaysia. Aired through the paid channels in Malaysia, subtitles are available in various languages such as English, Chinese and Malay which enable the audience from different backgrounds to enjoy the drama. Lee Min Ho who had acted in both *Boys over Flowers* and *The Heirs* was appointed as the endorser for many popular Korean products in Malaysia, such as 11Street.com.my, LG and Etude House.

Table 8 presented the top five KPop groups from a total of 82 groups/singers listed by respondents. A total of 181 from a total of 630 answer (126 respondents  $\times$  5 choices) were 'no answer' due to the free recall test format in the questionnaire. The list of the top KPop groups indicated that Big Bang was the most popular KPop group among Malaysian young adults ( $n = 59$ ), followed by Girl Generation ( $n = 49$ ). Big Bang is a 5-member boy band under YG Enterprise debuted in 2006. They held concerts and fan meeting in Malaysia on alternate year basis. Founded by SM Entertainment in 2007, Girl Generation is an 8-member girl group and co-held a concert with Shinee in Malaysia in 2015. On the third place was EXO ( $n = 27$ ), followed by 2PM ( $n = 25$ ) and 2NE1 ( $n = 21$ ). CNBLUE and Super Junior were both listed as the 5th most popular KPop groups ( $n = 18$  respectively). The focus group participants were all agreed to the popularity of Big Bang in Malaysia, even the non-fans heard about them. High intention to attend the KPop concert in Malaysia were found among participants, but constrained by both costs and geographical distance.

**Table 8** Favourite KPop groups by frequency

KPOP groups	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice
Big Bang	33	13	3	9	1
EXO	10	7	3	2	5
Girl Generation	12	16	9	6	6
Super Junior	6	3	5	1	3
CNBlue	4	5	3	4	2
2NE1	1	7	8	3	2
2PM	2	6	4	5	8

**Reasons to Like Korean Drama and KPop Groups/Songs**

To understand why Korean dramas were highly popular, not only among the East Asian countries, but also the rest of the world, several reasons were identified. Refer to Table 9, Malaysian Korean drama fans seemed to like Korean drama for three main reasons: the storyline (42.1%), Korean values and culture (20.6%) and individual influences (9.5%). There were a high percentage of respondents who did not indicate any reason (18.3%), which was expected in a free recall test.

A further examination of the reasons stated by respondents indicated terms such as ‘catchy’, ‘complicated’, ‘interesting’, ‘nice’, ‘unique’ and ‘captivating’ were used to describe the ‘storyline’. Majority of the respondents also listed ‘culture and values’ such as ‘family values’, ‘friendship’, ‘love’, ‘sincerity’, ‘culture humanity’, ‘sacrifices’ and ‘patriotism’. The respondents used terms such as ‘handsome’, ‘beautiful’, and ‘my favourite actor/actress’ to describe the actor/actress characteristics. Among the other reasons they like Korean drama were ‘fun’, and ‘nice places/scenery’.

**Table 9** Reasons to like Korean drama

Reasons	Frequency	Per cent
No answer	23	18.3
Individual influences	12	9.5
Storyline	53	42.1
Genre	1	.8
Individual and storyline	2	1.6
Culture and values	26	20.6
Others	9	7.1
Total	126	100.0

These reasons were found rather consistent with findings from other countries. For instance, Americans find Korean drama to be ‘relaxing, cheerful, refreshing, fanciful and sincere’; while the Europeans were attracted by the ‘uncomplicated and

romantic plots'. The Middle East audience find the hero-themed Korean drama and 'subtle repression of emotion and intense romantic passion without overt sexuality' to be attractive. Even Peru people love the romanticism and modern Cinderella storylines. Lastly, the Asian audience enjoy the common tradition and 'against all odds' themes in historical Korean dramas (The Korean Wave, 2011 in Jang & Paik, 2012, p.198).

Interestingly, rather than stressing on 'nostalgic' aspect like the Japanese audience (Yang, 2012), Malaysian young adult audience seemed to stress on the look or physical attractiveness of the actors and actresses, along with storyline and the Korean culture and values in a drama. According to Jung (2009, p. 72), "physical attractiveness of Korean actors and actresses and their modern and glamorous fashion, make-up and hairstyles" are popular discussion topics among Korean Wave fans. The findings of the focus group indicated that even though young adults were well aware of the 'minor facial reconstruction' or plastic surgery issue among Korean Wave stars, they seemed to hold open mind-set with minimum prejudice. Nevertheless, they did express their concerns on the overly done plastic surgery issue among Korean Wave stars. Two of the participants stated that they "miss the earlier Korean drama and singers who look more original and unique than now..." The comparison with their info sharing behaviour indicated that Malaysian young adults stressed on both good look of the actors and actress and storylines.

Based on the high frequency of the 'culture and values' mentioned, it is argued that 'cultural proximity' could be more relevant in Korean drama context; rather than the 'hybrid aspects' which stresses on mixtures of eastern and western cultures. Korean Wave researchers such as Yang (2012), Yoon (2006) and Kim (2007) have argued on the cultural disparity issue in which Malaysian cultural is largely influenced by Islamic culture rather than Confucian teaching, hence shares little cultural elements with Korea. Nevertheless, the findings in this study showed that 'global universalism' which is common in Korean dramas such as family values, respect for elders, kinship and pure love can win the heart of people, regardless of religion and ethnic disparities (Cho, 2010). Two of the focus group participants expressed that "these values are stressed in both the Islamic as well as the Confucian teachings" and "we did not see any problem to it".

Refer to Table 10 below, besides a high frequency of 'no answer' (26.2%), a majority of the respondents indicated 'music/song/genre' as their main reason to like KPop songs (30.2%,  $n = 38$ ). They also liked KPop songs based on 'individual influences' such as body, voice, look and attitudes of the KPop singers. The respondents were also attracted to the 'dance performance' in the video clips, the 'fashion and styles' portrayed in the video clips, with each constituted 7.1% respectively. The others reasoned Korean dramas as 'enjoyable, unique and creative'. The argument for

‘hybrid aspect’ could be more relevant to the acceptance of KPop songs in Malaysia. One of the focus group participants who were a dancer commented the KPop songs had “cleverly combined” the western and eastern music and dancing styles.

**Table 10** Reasons to like KPop songs/ groups

Reasons	Frequency	Per cent
No answer	33	26.2
Individual influences	28	22.2
Dance	9	7.1
MUSIC/Song/Genre	38	30.2
Fashion/Style	9	7.1
Others	9	7.1
Total	126	100.0

### Limitations of Korean Drama and KPop Songs

The examination of the limitations of Korean dramas generated some interesting findings. Different from the Japanese political concern over Yonsama’s appeal to adult Japanese women, the Chinese government who are concerned over influence of *Descendants of the Sun* over their people, and prejudice by the western audience in viewing KPop rappers as “not dark skinned” or “white” hence “can’t do hip hop, dance, sing or rap” (Ravina, 2009), the Malaysian young adult fans were more concerned with their ‘inefficiency in Korean language’ and ‘subtitle availability’. In Malaysia, the latest Korean dramas are available on paid TV channel such as One HD and KBS through Malaysian’s paid TV service provider, ASTRO. Audience may also access to free Korean dramas through internet websites, equipped with English or Mandarin subtitles. Almost 13.5% of the respondents complained about the poor quality of subtitles available on these free internet websites which further limit their enjoyment. Interestingly, the respondents who posted language as their barrier also indicated their intention to ‘learn Korean language’ and not depending on the subtitles. The other 12% of the respondents complained about the technical issues such as availability of Wifi and Internet service in Malaysia. Some also mentioned about the limited free online sources available for them to access to Korean dramas.

Approximately 10% of the respondents mentioned ‘storyline’ and ‘plot’ as the main limitations for Korean dramas. Among the issues mentioned were numbers of drama episode, illogical endings and similar endings. Averagely, a Korean drama contains 12 – 24 episodes, with each episode last for 45 minutes – 1 hour, which are comparatively longer than average Japanese dramas (e.g. range from 8 – 12 episodes and 30 – 60 minutes per episode). One of the respondents also mentioned about the similar ending in Korean dramas (e.g. ‘they live happily ever after’) as rather

‘boring’ and ‘illogical’. One of the non-fan focus group participants criticized the poor acting skills in which “they sometimes over doing it”. Nevertheless, the Korean fans counter-argued that the recent storylines for Korean dramas were rather diversified and presented variety of themes, such as romance, family, comedy, thriller, fantasy, investigation, medical, and *sageuk* (historical) etc. to cater for the preferences of different market segments.

Interestingly, there are roughly 8% of the survey respondents complained about the ‘explicit sex scenes’ in Korean dramas. Even though Korean dramas have been perceived as having “intense romantic passion without overt sexuality” and “delicate way of representing love and other emotions” and “desexualized romanticism” (Ravina, 2009, p.7), Malaysian young adults, especially the Muslim viewers, still perceived the storyline to contain rather ‘erotic scenes’. The ‘explicit sex scene’ issue was discussed in the focus group and several participants commented that they have notice the increase in sex or intimate scenes. However, this issue was more prominent for certain genre of dramas and mostly in music videos.

**Table 11** Limitations for Korean drama

	Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative per cent
Language problem and subtitles	17	13.5	13.5
Sex scene	10	7.9	21.4
Availability	15	11.9	33.3
Storyline and plots	12	9.5	42.9
Others	5	4.0	46.8
No limitation and no comment	67	53.2	100.0
Total	126	100.0	100.0

The main limitation identified for KPop were ‘language’ (18.3%), ‘lyrics’ and ‘production’ (8.7%), ‘sexual content’ (6.3%) and ‘availability’ (5.6%). Survey respondents claimed to encounter problem in understanding the meaning of the songs, which they normally compensated with the good looking artists, enjoying their dancing and the rhythm, similar to the focus group participants. In rare occasion they will check the subtitles of the songs, especially their favourite singers or groups. In other words, they liked KPop songs even without understand the meaning of the songs.

Other survey respondents criticized KPop songs as ‘too similar’, ‘no creativity’, ‘meaningless’, ‘music is louder than the voice’, ‘too erotic’ and ‘too focus on dancing and look’. Nevertheless, there were a large number of respondents who indicated their willingness and intention to learn Korean language in order to have better understanding of the Korean songs. The findings were rather consistent with focus group findings which ‘explicit sex scenes’ and ‘similar music and group’ were mentioned.

**Table 12** Limitations for KPop songs/ groups

	Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Language constrain	23	18.3	18.3
Sexual content	8	6.3	24.6
Availability	7	5.6	30.2
Lyrics and production	11	8.7	38.9
Others	2	1.6	40.5
No comment or no limitation	75	59.5	100.0
Total	126	100.0	100.0

## 5.0 Conclusion

Despite the ‘anti-*Hallyu*’ sentiments by a few local intellectuals, popular industries and mass media in some of the East Asia countries (Yang, 2012), this paper found positive attitudes towards Korean Wave among Malaysian young adults. Positive intention to use, buy, share info and even visit South Korea were also found. Importantly, overt behaviours implied by the hours spent on Korean Wave products, info-sharing behaviour as well as choice of medium was also found. Among the three Korean Wave products, Korean drama is the most influential products of all, especially among the female audience. Despite the low penetration rate of Korean beauty products, consumer loyalty towards Korean dramas and KPop groups could further lead to the buying of Korean beauty products.

In other words, Korean Wave in Malaysia “is not a short term phenomenon, but a long term tendency” (Cho, 2010). Korea Trade-Investment Promotion (KOTRA) expects Malaysia to contribute to the forming of “Korean Wave belt”, bridging the Islamic world to Central Asia (Yonhap News, 2005, May 7 in Cho, 2010). The future would turn these Malaysian young adults into loyal customers of Korean products and even later the ‘spokesperson’ for Korean Wave among Muslim countries is crucial to the expansion of Korean Wave. The Korean government and industry practitioners should pay close attention to current issues such as the relative sexual perception differences among audience in different culture settings.



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