

The Effects of Actor Popularity on Audience's Desire to Watch Korean Dramas

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Abstract

The globalization of Korean culture, introduced to Asia from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, has been prominently reflected in Korean drama series and pop music, which have become favored media genres, particularly among Malaysian audiences. This study examines the factors influencing Malaysian audiences' motivation to watch Korean dramas, focusing on the impact of actors' popularity and other dramatic elements. Data collected from 189 participants were analyzed using SPSS version 27 and the Sobel Test, employing regression and descriptive analyses. The findings reveal a positive correlation between actor influence and audience viewing desire, with good-looking actors significantly enhancing the appeal of Korean dramas. However, Malaysian audiences prioritize compelling storytelling and plot over physical appearances. By analyzing factors such as actor appeal and narrative quality, this research highlights strategies to promote responsible media consumption, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12). Through its insights, the study encourages audience awareness of sustainable media consumption and advocates for the entertainment industry to adopt practices that balance cultural influence with sustainable production. These efforts aim to foster a more conscious and equitable media ecosystem, contributing to long-term sustainability in global entertainment.

Keywords

Korean dramas, Actor popularity, Audience motivation, Sustainable media consumption

Introduction

Culture can be defined in many ways, which mostly relate to the way of thinking, behavior, and material that make up the way people live. Popular culture, better known as 'pop culture', broadly refers to the traditional and material culture of a given society that is consumed by the majority of the population in society. This directly streamlines towards the elements of art, music, dance, television, radio, and film, among others. In its essence, pop culture is the type of media that has mass appeal and accessibility. British media specialist John Storey in his book "Cultural Theory and Popular Culture" (Storey, 2021), proposed six different definitions of popular culture. In the

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last definition he discusses that in the postmodern world, in today's world, postmodern culture is a culture that no longer recognizes the distinction between high culture and popular culture. Postmodernism blurs the distinction between "authentic" and "commercial" culture. In today's pop culture, consumers are free to accept certain manufactured content, change it for their use, or reject it entirely and create their content.

From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000, Korean dramas and pop music were very popular in Asian countries such as China and Japan. In 1997, the Korean drama "What Is Love" aired on China Central Television (CCTV) and became an instant hit, ranking second in China's all-time imported video content and this is the first appearance of "Hallyu". "Korean Wave" or "Hallyu" refers to the international craze of Korean culture that began in East Asia within the 1990s and has recently continued to spread across the U.S., the center East, and parts of Europe (Ravina, 2009). The wave mainly includes two forms of media, there are TV series (K-drama) and popular music (K-pop). Later in 2003, Hallyu landed in Japan with the drama "Winter Sonata" produced by Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) and aired on NHK. The drama set off a Korean drama craze among Japanese audiences, and the shooting location of Nami Island in Chuncheon has also become a must-visit place for Japanese tourists (<https://www.korea.net/aboutkorea/culture-and-the-arts/hallyu>, n.d.). The Bae et al., 2017 study, they found that Hallyu had a significant impact on tourism demand, and the results were similar to those of the existing Hallyu study as found by Oh, 2005. Furthermore, according to a survey conducted by NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute in 2004, after watching "Winter Sonata", most people's perception of Korean culture has changed, and their interest in Korea has also increased.

In recent years, South Korea has continuously exported various film and television works. Hit TV series such as Sweet Home, All of us are Dead, Itaewon Class, Vincenzo, Squid Game and others make Korean dramas the most consumed online video content category in Southeast Asia in 2021. According to the newest report from Media Partners Asia (MPA), Southeast Asia Online Video Consumer Insights & Analytics, Korean dramas are the most popular, followed by local content, mainly Thai and Indonesian, with American content falling to third place in some regions (Variety.com, 2022). Through cooperating with local television stations in Malaysia and major media streaming platforms such as Netflix, iQiyi, Disney+Hotstar, Iflix, etc., to make it easier for Malaysian audiences to watch Korean dramas.

Methodology

This study aims to investigate the influence of Korean actors on the viewing desire of Korean drama viewers living in Malaysia, which uses a quantitative research design, focusing on the relationship between interface design and user consumption levels as shown in Figure 1.

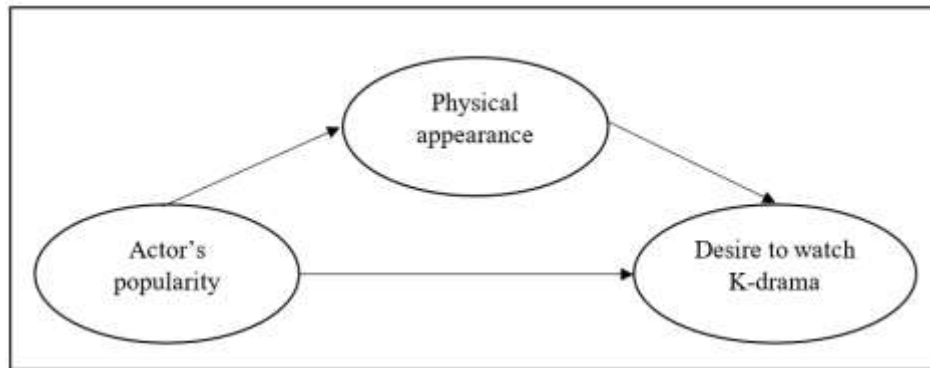


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

With reference to the conceptual model, this study employs the following hypotheses, primarily looking at the relationship between the independent variable (IV), 'Actor's Popularity', to the dependent variable (DV), 'Desire to Watch'. The second hypothesis proposes that there is a mediating variable that portrays the real reason between the relationship from the IV to the DV, which is 'Physical Appearance'. The hypotheses are written as follows:

H_{A1}: The actor's popularity regresses directly with the audience's desire to watch.

H_{A2}: Physical appearance mediates a positive relationship with audience viewing desires.

Both the H_{A1} and H_{A2} function as alternate hypotheses claiming that there is a significant relationship in alignment to the conceptual model as opposed to the null hypothesis (H₀) that signifies that there is no relationship for the mentioned variables.

This study executes the convenience sampling method as a sort of nonprobability sampling in which participants are randomly selected because participants are chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate, which fits the nature of this research. This involves data collected through an online questionnaire using the Google Forms platform and consists of 4 sections. Section 1 covers the general demographics, followed by Sections 2 through 4 that focus on each of the respective unobserved variables from the conceptual model. The respondents for this study included subjects aged 18 to 39 living in Malaysia, experienced or fans of Korean drama. However, this study did not include participants who watched dramas from other countries except Korean dramas, as well as people under the age of 18 and over the age of 39 living outside Malaysia. The characteristics of the respondents in this study include (1) gender; (2) race; and (3) age group.

For the validity test, this study utilises the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27 to analyse the data collected in this study. The analytics reports the descriptive statistics in presenting the target audience demographics followed by an inferential statistics using Regression Data Analysis in evaluating the data collected from the survey. The output from the inferential statistics is measured through the Sobel test in finalizing the effect size and significance of the relationships, thus confirming the hypotheses of this study.

Results and Discussion

A total of 189 responses were received, of which 53 were excluded because the respondents had no experience in watching Korean dramas, and 7 were not included in the data due to insufficient information.

Table 1 contains demographic data as well as descriptive statistics. The sample consisted mainly of Malaysian Chinese who participated in this survey. 88 Malaysian Chinese aged 21 to 23 participated in the survey. Furthermore, 110 respondents (making up the 85.27%) are women, which indicates that the majority of Korean drama fans are women. This means that Malaysian women are more vulnerable to Korean cultural products. This finding is highly correlated to previous studies carried out in 2018 by Ing et al., which also found that Malaysian women have more positive attitudes towards Hallyu.

Table 1. Demographics of respondents

Gender		1 0.00% 20.00% 40.00% 60.00% 80.00% 100.00% ■ Male (14.73%) ■ Female (85.27%)							
Race		Chinese		Malays		Indians		Others	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Age	18-20	24	20.0%	1	25.0%	0 ^a	0.0%	0 ^a	0.0%
	21-23	88	73.3%	3	75.0%	2 ^a	100.0%	3 ^a	100.0%
	24-26	5	4.2%	0 ^a	0.0%	0 ^a	0.0%	0 ^a	0.0%
	27-29	0 ^a	0.0%	0 ^a	0.0%	0 ^a	0.0%	0 ^a	0.0%
	30 and above	3	2.5%	0 ^a	0.0%	0 ^a	0.0%	0 ^a	0.0%

The following section reports the inferential statistics results based on the regression analysis, primarily to confirm the significant relationship of the unobserved variables stated in the conceptual model. This is done by transforming the conceptual model into a statistical model for SPSS calculations. Firstly, the converted item for the IV and the DV are extracted to be measured, as shown in Figure 2.

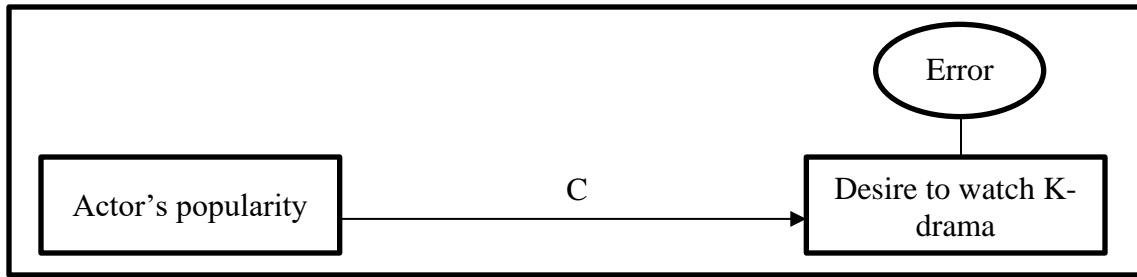


Figure 1. Statistical Model for direct relationship (IV > DV)

The connection between the independent variable and the dependent variable is denoted by C. This is highly important to be significant before continuing to measure the mediation relationships.

Table 2 Regression analysis result for C

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	2.114	.237	8.929	.000	
	AP_AVG	.397	.069	.455	5.755	.000

In the regression analysis, the IV and DV were directly measured. The unstandardized beta wave result was 0.397, the standard error coefficient was 0.069, and the significance value also called the p-value was 0.000, which was less than 0.05, so it is significant. Since the results showed a significant relationship between the actor's popularity toward the audience's desire to watch, the researchers will proceed to the next step, the mediation model, and calculate the values A, B, and C'.

The statistical model in Figure 3 is fully converted into the statistical model shown in Figure 4.3. The connection from independent variable to the mediator is denoted A, mediator to dependent variable denoted B, and independent variable to dependent variable denoted as C'.

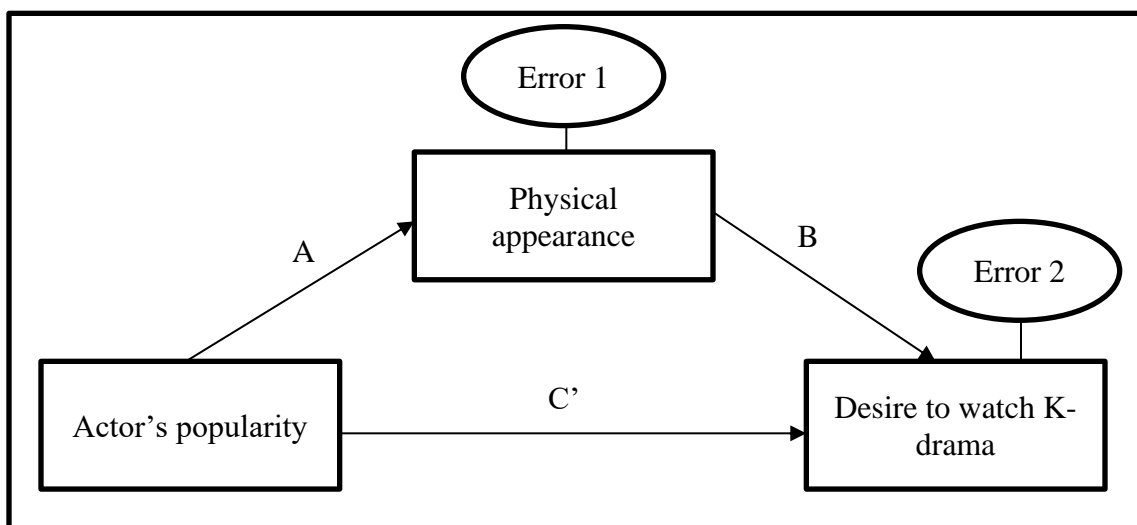


Figure 2 Statistical Model for indirect relationship (IV > Mediator > DV)

Table 3 Regression analysis for independent variable and mediator

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.331	.223		10.449	.000
	AP_AVG	.374	.065	.455	5.756	.000

Regression analysis of direct measurements of the independent variable to mediator showed an unstandardized beta wave of 0.374, a standard error coefficient of 0.065, and a significance value of 0.000. Since the p-value is also less than 0.05, the result of this regression analysis is significant.

Table 4. Regression analysis of independent variable and mediator on the dependent variable

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.407	.311		4.530	.000
	AP_AVG	.284	.075	.325	3.804	.000
	MD_AVG	.303	.091	.286	3.348	.001

The unstandardized beta wave for the independent variable was 0.284, the coefficient standard error was 0.75, and the p-value was 0.000. In addition, the unstandardized beta wave of the mediator was 0.303, the standard error of the coefficient was 0.91, and the p-value was 0.001. In this regression analysis in the presence of mediating variable the direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable remained significant because the p-value in the analysis was less than 0.05. It was seen that there were significant effects of the actor's popularity, the physical appearance of the actor or actress, as well as the desire of audiences to watch. This means they had partial rather than full mediation.

To calculate the weight of the relationship based on the values of 0.374 and 0.303, the researchers used the Sobel test to calculate it. The Sobel test is used to calculate the mediator carries the influence of an independent variable to a dependent variable, it is only available for large samples. A carriable can be thought of as a mediator, the degree to which transmits the influence of a given independent variable to a given dependent variable.

The Sobel test has three main forms: the (Aroian, 1947) version includes the third denominator term, which Baron and Kenny popularised as the Sobel test, The (Goodman, 1960) version, which subtracts the third denominator term, and one that omits it entirely.

By using Sobel's test, the test statistic was 2.882 and the p-value was 0.004. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, it is significant and can be considered a good model. This indicates that the

mediator played an effective relationship in this study, and the researcher can move on to the next step to calculate the effect size.

Since the model is partially mediated, both direct and mediated have their weights, and by multiplying the A value by the B value, the effect size has a value of 0.113.

The result of this study found that the popularity of actors was related to the audience's desire to watch, so the H01 was rejected in this study. Additionally, the hypotheses of H02, H03, H04, and H05 were all rejected because the p-value of the mediator was less than 0.05, also showing significant values.

In conclusion, every individual has preferences when it comes to other people's physical attributes, particularly when it comes to facial features and body proportions. Certain facets of these preferences seem to be unlearned, while others seem to be arbitrarily derived from constantly shifting societal norms (Ellis et al., 2019). Along with the plot and the Korean culture and values in a drama, the Malaysian young adult audience seems to place a strong emphasis on the appearance or physical attractiveness of the actors and actresses (Ing et al., 2018). Public media use and behavior are related, claim Fortunata et al., 2021. As a result, the concept of viewing addiction can be used to quantify and define the link between media and viewers to explain watching addiction. According to cultivation theory, there are two distinct categories of television viewers: (1) light viewers or regular viewers who watch TV for no more than two hours a day. (2) heavy viewers, who watch for at least four hours each day (Fortunata et al., 2021). In this study, most respondents are still considered light viewers, as 60.5% of viewers spend about an hour to two watching Korean dramas per-day.

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