

## FROM HALLYU TO LOCAL HABITUS: KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE AND YOUTH IDENTITY IN INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines how Korean popular culture (Hallyu) shapes lifestyle practices, consumption patterns, and youth identity in Indonesia. Rather than treating cultural flow as simple imitation, the discussion foregrounds meaning negotiation: how fandom practices, media representations, and digitally mediated interactions translate Korean cultural signs into local aspirations, tastes, and everyday conduct. Methodologically, the paper employs a structured narrative review of recent scholarship on Hallyu in Indonesia and Southeast Asia and synthesizes the literature through thematic analysis. The synthesis identifies five recurring clusters of influence: (1) digital platforms accelerate access, cultural learning, and circulation; (2) fandom communities provide affiliation and collective identity; (3) consumer practices and merchandise culture operate as a form of cultural capital; (4) beauty ideals and fashion sensibilities shift through idols and K-drama aesthetics; and (5) cultural hybridity emerges as Korean symbols and values are selectively reinterpreted to fit local norms. The article contributes to cross-cultural studies by offering an integrative framework connecting platformized media, transnational cultural flows, and youth identity work in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: hallyu; korean wave; youth identity; fandom; indonesia

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has moved from a regional entertainment trend to a platformized, transnational cultural industry. In Indonesia, K-pop, K-drama, and Korean lifestyle content circulate daily through YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, streaming services, and fan-managed translation networks, making Korean cultural signs available at a scale and speed that earlier media regimes could not provide (Jin & Yoon, 2016).

Within cultural and literary studies, Indonesian engagements with Hallyu are frequently framed as cultural globalization, soft power, and popular culture diffusion (Glodev, Wijaya, & Ida, 2023). Yet a simple impact narrative can be analytically thin if it assumes that Indonesian youth merely copy what they watch. Consumption is also interpretation: audiences selectively pick, translate, and repurpose cultural material to negotiate identity, belonging, and taste in their own social worlds (Robertson, 1995).

This paper treats Indonesian youth as an interpretive community operating at the intersection of global media and local norms. Academic accounts of Hallyu in Indonesia are scattered across disciplines (cultural studies, communication, sociology, and linguistics), often emphasizing one dimension (e.g., consumerism or fandom) without integrating the mechanisms that connect platformed access to identity work.

Accordingly, the article asks: (1) What recurring forms of influence are reported in recent scholarship on Hallyu and Indonesian youth? (2) Through what mechanisms do digital platforms and fandom practices translate Korean cultural material into everyday identity and lifestyle

practices? And (3) what patterns of cultural hybridity and negotiation are visible across the literature?

By synthesizing recent research, the article offers two contributions. First, it maps a thematic landscape of Hallyu-related influence in Indonesia beyond isolated case studies. Second, it proposes an integrative analytic frame linking platformization and spreadable media, fandom-based affiliation, and cultural capital and hybridity as interlocking processes shaping youth identity.

### 1.1. Literature Review

Conceptually, the Korean Wave can be understood as a form of transnational cultural flow intensified by digital media. The shift from broadcast-era export to platform-era circulation matters: when media travels through participatory networks, audiences do not only receive texts—they circulate, annotate, translate, and remix them. Jin and Yoon (2016) describe this ecology as a social mediascape in which cultural products become spreadable and acquire meaning through user-driven distribution.

To analyse reception in Indonesia, glocalization is a useful starting point. Glocalization rejects the idea that globalization inevitably produces uniform culture. Instead, global forms are localized through selective adoption, reinterpretation, and recombination with existing cultural codes (Robertson, 1995). In Indonesian Hallyu consumption, this is visible in the way fans combine Korean aesthetics with local language practices, religious norms, and social expectations rather than abandoning local identities.

A second lens is cultural hybridity, which highlights the ambivalent, in-between outcomes of cross-cultural encounter. Hybridity foregrounds negotiation and the creation of new cultural meanings. Studies focusing on Indonesia and Malaysia show hybridity not only in fashion or language borrowing but also in discourse about values and identity positioning (Lee, Jung, Nathan, & Chung, 2020; Konradus, Tasuib, Jehamat, & Andung, 2025).

Third, the literature suggests that fandom should be treated as a social institution rather than a hobby. Fandom organizes participation through rules, rituals, and affective attachments. In Indonesian contexts, fan communities are sustained through unpaid digital labor—translation, archiving, streaming coordination—which allows global content to become locally usable and socially meaningful (Maros & Basek, 2022).

Finally, consumption practices need interpretation. Research on consumerism and merchandise culture indicates that spending is structurally embedded in the industry's business model and is amplified by social media visibility (Arriyuka & Yumitro, 2024). For Indonesian youth, purchasing official goods can be experienced as personal pleasure and as moral support

for idols, but it can also generate pressure and inequality when authenticity is measured by purchasing power.

Indonesia offers a particularly rich site for cross-cultural analysis because it is culturally diverse, religiously plural, and socioeconomically stratified. These conditions shape how transnational pop culture is received: the same Korean text may be read as aspirational modernity by one audience and as cultural threat by another. Any serious cross-cultural comprehension study must therefore avoid universal claims and instead specify the mechanisms and contexts through which meaning is produced.

Moreover, the Korean Wave in Indonesia is not confined to entertainment. Korean brands, food trends, language courses, and tourist imaginaries circulate alongside music and drama, blurring the boundary between media text and lifestyle practice. This blurring matters analytically because identity is not only narrated but also enacted through consumption, style, and routine.

Digital mediation changes the temporality of cultural encounter. Binge-watching, algorithmic recommendation, and constant fan updates intensify exposure and compress the time between discovery and deep fandom. In previous eras, intercultural learning often required slower, institutionally mediated channels; today, it can occur through repeated micro-encounters with subtitled scenes, memes, and commentary threads.

Although Hallyu is often studied in communication research, it also intersects with English literature and cultural studies through questions of narrative consumption, translation, and intercultural comprehension. Indonesian viewers commonly access K-drama through subtitles and fan translations; this makes reading practices—how viewers interpret dialogue, humor, honorifics, and cultural references—central to cross-cultural understanding.

## 2. METHOD

This study adopts a structured narrative review design. The approach is appropriate for consolidating an emerging, interdisciplinary body of literature in which methods, sites, and theoretical lenses vary across studies.

Relevant publications were identified through keyword searches in academic indexing services and journal portals accessible to the author (e.g., Google Scholar and Indonesian journal platforms), using combinations of terms such as “Hallyu”, “Korean Wave”, “K-pop”, “K-drama”, “Indonesia”, “youth”, “fandom”, “identity”, “consumerism”, and “social media”.

Inclusion criteria were: (a) peer-reviewed journal articles or conference papers; (b) a substantive focus on Indonesia (or comparative Southeast Asian contexts with explicit Indonesian discussion); (c) publication primarily within the last decade to capture contemporary

platform dynamics; and (d) relevance to youth cultural practices, identity, language, or consumption.

After screening for relevance, selected studies were read and coded using thematic analysis. Coding focused on (1) reported forms of influence (behavioral, aesthetic, linguistic, relational); (2) mechanisms (platform affordances, translation practices, community norms); and (3) interpretive outcomes (identity positioning, hybridity, negotiation with local values).

To increase transparency, the review followed three iterative steps: (1) mapping the field by identifying key terms and frequently cited studies; (2) focusing the corpus by prioritizing Indonesian cases and peer-reviewed publications; and (3) synthesizing claims through cross-comparison to identify convergence and divergence among findings. Where possible, the review privileges studies that offer clear methodological descriptions and data sources (e.g., interview-based ethnographies, discourse analysis of social media, and survey-based audience research).

Quality appraisal was conducted informally by checking whether each study specifies its data (participants, platforms, texts), analytic procedure (coding, thematic analysis, discourse analysis), and conceptual framing. Studies that make strong claims without clear evidence are treated cautiously in the synthesis.

Ethically, this article does not reproduce identifiable social media content or personal data. All examples are presented at the level of analytic categories reported by prior studies.

Limitations of the review include potential publication bias (studies with dramatic findings may be overrepresented) and uneven quality across outlets. These limitations are addressed by triangulating themes across multiple sources rather than relying on a single study.

Because the article is a literature synthesis rather than primary fieldwork, it does not claim statistical generalization. Instead, it aims for analytic generalization by identifying cross-study patterns and conceptual linkages.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. Platformized Access and Spreadable Media**

Hallyu's contemporary circulation is inseparable from platform infrastructures. Indonesian audiences encounter Korean content through a mix of formal distribution (streaming catalogues) and informal circulation (clips, edits, reaction videos, fan translations, and algorithmic recommendations). This shift from scheduled broadcasting to on-demand, algorithmically curated viewing changes how audiences learn and remember cultural material because repeated exposure is organized by platform attention economies (Jin & Yoon, 2016).

Short-form platforms allow users to sample Korean music and drama through highlights, dance challenges, and meme templates that function as gateways to longer-form consumption. In

recent work on K-pop's global impact, social media is consistently identified as the infrastructure sustaining transnational fan communities and accelerating diffusion (Gutierrez-Jauregi et al., 2025).

In Indonesian reception, subtitling is a key mechanism of cross-cultural comprehension. Subtitles are not only technical aids but also cultural mediators: they translate humor, address terms, and social cues, while comment sections and fan explainers provide additional context. Oktavia (2025) argues that subtitles contribute to cultural learning and identity negotiation, enabling viewers to interpret Korean narratives while reflecting on their own values.

Platforms also introduce unevenness. Access is shaped by the digital divide—differences in connectivity, region, and device ownership—so the intensity and style of Hallyu engagement can vary between urban and peripheral contexts (Oktavia, 2025).

Platform logics shape what becomes visible. Recommendations tend to privilege highly engaging content—romance highlights, dramatic conflicts, and idol performance—while less sensational cultural materials remain marginal. As a result, Indonesian viewers may build cultural knowledge around entertainment-driven images. Recognizing this bias is important for cross-cultural comprehension: it reminds us that platform exposure is curated, not neutral.

### **3.2. Fandom Communities and Collective Identity**

Across studies, fandom appears as a central social mechanism. Indonesian K-pop fans rarely consume as isolated individuals; they operate through communities that set norms, organize events, coordinate streaming campaigns, and produce digital labor (translation, archiving, promotion). Maros and Basek (2022) show how K-pop fans build online social identity through Twitter practices, where identity is performed via hashtags, collective projects, and ongoing interaction.

Fandom participation supplies a vocabulary for belonging. Fans learn insider terms, adopt collective identities, and gain recognition through contribution. For many young people, fandom offers a social world with its own prestige system—being active, knowledgeable, and helpful counts as symbolic value and can compensate for limited recognition in offline environments (Maros & Basek, 2022; Simarmata, Hernawan, & Pienrasmi, 2025).

Indonesian studies also show that fandom is a site of discipline. Streaming goals, voting schedules, and rules about online conduct require time and emotional labor. This discipline can be interpreted ambivalently: it may train organizational skills and teamwork, yet it can also intensify obligation and burnout (Maharani, Juliansyah, & Purnama, 2025).

Fandom identities are negotiated within broader social expectations. In more conservative settings, intense fandom can be perceived as frivolous or morally suspect. Widiyanti, Zulkarnain,

and Ramadhani (2025) describe how youth negotiate legitimacy by framing fandom as community, creativity, and social contribution (e.g., charity projects), thereby aligning fandom with socially acceptable values.

Fandom does not automatically create intercultural understanding. It can also create echo chambers in which Korean culture is idealized. Cross-cultural comprehension improves when fans move beyond admiration toward contextual knowledge—history, social norms, and language use—and when they critically evaluate stereotypes and commercial narratives.

### **3.3. Consumption, Merchandise Culture, and Cultural Capital**

Studies repeatedly describe the entanglement of fandom with consumption. Merchandise, albums, photo cards, concert tickets, and brand collaborations become symbolic goods that signal taste and status within fan communities. Research on Indonesian teenagers' consumerism around brand collaborations illustrates how affective idol attachment can be mobilized into purchases (Fitriani, Moekahar, & Oktalisa, 2024).

Bibliometric work indicates that consumerism is a dominant focus in K-pop scholarship, suggesting that consumption is structurally embedded in the industry's business model and amplified by social media visibility (Arriyuka & Yumitro, 2024). For Indonesian youth, buying official goods can be interpreted as personal pleasure and as moral support for idols (a form of loyalty).

From a cultural studies perspective, these practices are not reducible to irrational spending. Within fan worlds, consumption can operate as symbolic capital: owning rare items or attending events can increase one's standing in the community. However, this prestige system can reproduce inequality when participation depends on disposable income.

Indonesian fans often adapt global merchandise culture to local economic constraints. Practices such as group orders, installment payments, collective fundraising, and item trading enable participation at lower cost. These adaptations demonstrate glocalization at the level of economic practice: global fandom norms are localized through pragmatic strategies.

The literature also warns about problematic outcomes: financial pressure, compulsive spending, and the normalization of consumer identity as a measure of authentic fandom. For cross-cultural comprehension, this is significant because culture is experienced through commodified objects; understanding Hallyu therefore requires attention to how capitalism shapes cultural meaning.

### **3.4. Beauty Ideals, Fashion, and Embodied Identity**

Studies frequently report shifts in aesthetic aspirations. Korean idol imagery and K-drama styling circulate as reference points for make-up, skincare routines, fashion silhouettes, and

bodily presentation (Rosidi, 2022; Novianty, 2024). These aesthetics carry social meanings about modernity, cleanliness, romance, and professional success.

Beauty influence operates through repetition and narrative attachment. When standards are embedded in stories—romance plots, ‘successful’ characters, transformation arcs—they become emotionally persuasive and aspirational. In this sense, K-drama can function as a narrative pedagogy of taste, teaching viewers what is considered desirable and socially rewarded (Oktavia, 2025).

Adoption is selective and contested. In Indonesian contexts, modesty norms and religious prescriptions often shape what can be adopted publicly. This creates hybrid fashion practices: Korean-inspired looks may be combined with local modest fashion, or adopted in private and online spaces while presenting a different identity offline.

Embodied influence is also linked to consumer markets. Skincare products, cosmetic routines, and fashion items connect aesthetic desire to consumption circuits. Here, cross-cultural influence becomes materially grounded: cultural signs translate into market behavior and self-management practices.

A critical issue is the potential for beauty anxiety and homogenized standards. While some accounts emphasize empowerment and self-expression, others note the risk of narrowing acceptable appearance norms. A balanced analysis should treat beauty influence as a site where agency and constraint coexist.

### **3.5. Language Borrowing and Everyday Cultural Literacy**

Fans commonly pick up Korean lexical items (basic greetings, address terms, honorifics) and fandom jargon; some pursue formal Korean language learning as a pathway to deeper participation. Work on linguistic diplomacy argues that Korean language education has expanded in Indonesia alongside Hallyu, creating new forms of cultural contact and opportunity (Darmanto, 2025).

Language practices serve practical goals (understanding lyrics, variety shows, or live streams) and symbolic ones (displaying affiliation and cultural competence). In online spaces, code-mixing indexes group membership and shared affect, functioning as a badge of identity (Maros & Basek, 2022).

Subtitles and fan translations function as literacy infrastructures. They shape how Indonesian audiences interpret humor, politeness, and social hierarchy in Korean dialogue. Because translation is interpretive, subtitles can guide comprehension by choosing equivalents, simplifying cultural references, or adding explanatory notes.

Yet language borrowing is often fragmentary. Knowing a set of phrases does not automatically produce deep cultural understanding; it can remain a set of performative tokens. Cross-cultural comprehension improves when language learning includes pragmatic knowledge (when and why terms are used) and awareness of cultural context.

For English literature students, this is theoretically relevant: it demonstrates how reading across cultures is mediated by translation, paratext (comments, explainers), and interpretive communities. Meaning travels through layers of text and commentary, not through the original text alone.

### 3.6. Cultural Hybridity and Negotiation with Local Values

Hybridity is a productive lens for Indonesian Hallyu reception: Korean cultural signs are not transplanted intact but domesticated through local meaning systems. Konradus et al. (2025), studying adolescent girls in Kupang, describe how Korean lifestyle influence extends beyond fashion to social behavior and communication patterns, while local cultural elements are retained and integrated into everyday life.

Comparative work supports this view. Lee et al. (2020) examine social media discourse in Indonesia and Malaysia and argue that perceptions of the Korean Wave are entangled with cultural hybridity, suggesting that audiences negotiate global culture through locally grounded interpretation rather than total acceptance.

Hybridity is visible in moral filtering. Indonesian youth may adopt Korean aesthetics and entertainment routines while resisting or reinterpreting values perceived as incompatible (e.g., certain dating scripts). This selective appropriation is practical identity work across value systems.

Hybridity is also visible in re-signification. Some signs (food, fashion, language fragments) can become local through repeated use and social recognition, while other signs remain exotic markers used for style and distinction. This uneven domestication indicates that cultural flow is structured by what resonates with local aspirations and constraints.

Hybridity is neither pure homogenization nor pure resistance. It is an ongoing negotiation in which global popular culture becomes a resource for self-fashioning, community formation, and the articulation of modern identity within Indonesian social worlds.

Hybridity can also be strategic. For some youth, adopting Korean styles can be a way to claim cosmopolitan identity and distinction within local peer cultures, while still signaling loyalty to local and religious identities. This demonstrates that global pop culture can be used to negotiate social mobility and modern selfhood rather than to reject local belonging.

Taken together, the themes above point to a multi-layered mechanism of cross-cultural influence. Platform infrastructures make Korean content accessible and spreadable; fandom

communities transform access into affiliation; and consumption practices translate affiliation into visible cultural capital. These layers converge in embodied and linguistic practices through which Indonesian youth experiment with identity.

This integrative view helps clarify why Hallyu influence can look contradictory in public debate. The same cultural flow may produce empowerment (community, creative labor, intercultural literacy) and pressure (consumerist competition, beauty anxiety, time conflicts). Both outcomes emerge from the same platform–fandom–consumption circuit.

Cross-cultural comprehension is therefore best understood as a mediated process. Indonesian audiences learn about Korea through selective genres (romance, youth narratives, idol performance) and through translations and platform discourse. This can produce a culturally meaningful but incomplete image shaped by entertainment and commercial logics. A careful analysis distinguishes between cultural understanding and curated cultural fantasy.

At the same time, partial knowledge is not the same as misunderstanding. Engagement with subtitles, fan explanations, and comparative discussion can cultivate intercultural empathy and reflective distance. Viewers may evaluate their own norms by contrast, becoming more aware of cultural specificity. This is why media literacy and critical viewing are central to a humanities-based analysis of Hallyu.

Several Indonesian studies connect Hallyu to cultural diplomacy and soft power. Pramadya and Oktaviani (2016), for instance, link Hallyu to South Korea's cultural diplomacy and cultural hybridity in Indonesia. For this paper, soft power is not treated as a top-down manipulation but as one layer of an ecosystem: state promotion, corporate strategy, and fan participation interact.

Methodologically, a cross-cultural comprehension paper can be credible without interviews if it is explicit about its evidence base. The safest route is either a structured literature review (as here) or a transparent textual/discourse analysis of publicly available materials (episodes, lyrics, subtitles, official promotional content, and anonymized comment-level patterns). The key is to avoid inventing findings and instead derive claims from identifiable texts or published research.

Indonesian youth are not only consumers but also cultural intermediaries who participate in producing Hallyu's transnational visibility through translation labor, online trends, and market demand. This feedback loop shows that cross-cultural influence is not one-way: local audiences can shape the global circuit.

### **3.7. Implications for English Literature Studies and Cross-Cultural Comprehension**

Positioning Hallyu within English literature and humanities scholarship may seem indirect, but it becomes coherent once we treat K-pop and K-drama as cultural texts that are read, interpreted, and circulated through translingual mediation. Viewers in Indonesia often encounter

Korean narratives through subtitles, summaries, and commentary; these are paratexts that shape interpretation in ways comparable to translation, adaptation, and reception history in literary studies.

First, K-drama offers a useful laboratory for studying narrative comprehension across cultures. Romance plots, family conflict, and moral dilemmas can feel universal while still being structured by culturally specific norms (politeness hierarchies, workplace seniority, and expectations of filial duty). A cross-cultural paper can therefore analyse how Indonesian viewers interpret these norms: which elements are taken as relatable, which are read as exotic, and which are rejected or rewritten.

Second, subtitling and fan translation raise questions of meaning loss and meaning gain. Subtitles compress speech, choose equivalents for honorifics, and sometimes domesticate culture-specific references. Fan communities then add explanations and interpretive frames. This is a concrete case of how translation is never purely linguistic—it is cultural interpretation (Oktavia, 2025).

Third, cross-cultural comprehension requires critical literacy about representation. Korean entertainment industries package national culture through selective images (city modernity, romance ideals, beauty standards). A humanities-informed approach asks: what version of Korea is represented, for whom, and with what commercial logic? This prevents the analysis from romanticizing Hallyu as pure cultural exchange.

An additional angle relevant to English studies is language ideology and code-switching. K-pop lyrics frequently include English phrases, and Indonesian fan discourse mixes Indonesian, English, and Korean fragments. This multilingual texture can be analysed as symbolic modernity: English can index global coolness, Korean can index fandom authenticity, and Indonesian can index intimacy and locality.

Intertextuality is central to how Hallyu is understood. Fans interpret new releases through prior narratives (tropes, idol lore, genre expectations) and through global meme culture. When Indonesian fans create edits and fan fiction, they produce new texts that respond to and reinterpret the original. Studying these derivative practices moves beyond impact and toward meaning production.

From a pedagogical perspective, Hallyu can function as an entry point for teaching cross-cultural comprehension. Students can practice close reading by comparing a scene with multiple subtitle versions (official vs. fansub), analysing how translation choices change character portrayal, humor, or social hierarchy. This trains critical awareness that culture is mediated and interpretation depends on linguistic and contextual framing.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article has reviewed recent scholarship on the Korean Wave in Indonesia to map dominant patterns of influence on youth identity and everyday practices. The synthesis highlights five recurring clusters: platformized access and cultural learning, fandom-based affiliation, consumption as cultural capital, aesthetic shifts in beauty and fashion, and hybridity through selective reinterpretation of Korean cultural signs.

The main implication is that cross-cultural influence operates through mechanisms, not mere exposure. Future research could combine platform analytics (how content travels) with humanities-oriented reading of narratives, subtitles, and fan discourse, while paying attention to social class, gender, and religiosity within Indonesian youth communities.

Practically, the framework proposed here can guide student research without interviews by focusing on documented, publicly available materials: published studies, platform discourse, fan translation practices, and textual analysis of K-drama/K-pop narratives. Such designs can remain ethical and methodologically transparent while still engaging questions of identity and cross-cultural comprehension.

Limitations should be stated clearly. As a review-based article, this paper depends on the quality and scope of existing research and cannot determine prevalence or causal magnitude of effects. The synthesis highlights patterns reported across studies, not universal outcomes for all Indonesian youth.

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