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THE RISE OF KOREAN CULTURE IN EUROPE BASED ON A SURVEY OF K-CULTURE FANS IN HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, South Korean creative and cultural content has garnered significant global interest, commonly known as the Korean Wave or Hallyu. While this phenomenon has been studied extensively in many countries, its impact on Central Europe, particularly Hungary, remains largely unexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the diffusion of Korean culture in Hungary, a strategic economic partner of South Korea since the 1990s. Despite this long-standing partnership, Korean pop culture only gained traction in Hungary in 2008. The reception of Hallyu in Hungary has given rise to a unique fandom, which is characterized by diverse interests in Korean culture and the economy. Drawing on a literature review, expert interviews, and surveys of fan groups in Hungary, this paper analyzes the characteristics of Hallyu fans and market trends in Hungary.

Keywords: Hallyu ▪ Korean Wave ▪ Korean culture ▪ Hungary ▪ Central Europe

1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of creative and cultural industries (CCIs) to national economies is on the rise, as evidenced by the global success of pop music, cinema, and TV series. Despite economic crises around the world, this sector achieved an impressive annual average growth rate of 7.34% globally between 2003 and 2015 (UNCTAD 2018). Notably, South Korean (hereafter referred to as Korean) cultural content has gained increasing global recognition in recent years (Choe 2021). The success of *Parasite* (2019), which won the Best Picture award and three other prizes at the 92nd Academy Awards in 2020, and the growing popularity of K-pop acts in global music scenes have led commentators to suggest that the Korean Wave phenomenon, or Hallyu (Brody 2020), is now being observed worldwide. Hallyu is a term that fuses the Korean words “Han” and “lyu,” literally translating to “Korean Wave,” and refers to the overseas popularity of Korean culture (Shim 2020)."

A decade ago, Hallyu was primarily confined to Asian countries as most Korean media and music production companies targeted markets in China, Japan, and South-east Asia (Anderson and Shim 2015). However, the emergence and widespread use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, has facilitated global access to foreign cultural products, thus expanding the focus of Korean media content exports to global markets (Capistrano 2020). Notably, K-pop has played a pivotal role in disseminating Korean creative and cultural content worldwide. The viral success of "Gangnam Style" by Psy, for instance, broke records by becoming the first music video on YouTube to reach one billion views within just 161 days, propelling Hallyu onto the global stage (Berg 2015; Yum and Shim 2016).

At present, K-pop groups such as BTS are dominating the music charts in various countries, including the US Billboard charts. The BBC has dubbed them as "the Beatles for the 21st century," as BTS has achieved three No. 1 albums on the Billboard 200 Chart within a year, a feat that has not been accomplished since the Beatles (Jackson & Browne 2018). In 2020, BTS's popularity became evident in Hungary, with a commercial TV channel featuring song covers of BTS's "Dynamite" in its music program.¹ The popularity of BTS in Europe and Hungary is reflected in the fact that 20% of the respondents to our Hallyu fan surveys conducted in Hungary are members of the A.R.M.Y., the official fan club of BTS. Not only are BTS and A.R.M.Y. well-known among music listeners, but they are also gaining attention from academia, ranging from cultural studies to economics (Smith 2021). For instance, in January 2020, a research group at Kingston University in London hosted an academic conference solely focused on the BTS phenomenon, with over 150 presentations from around the world.²

Hungary, often referred to as the "Crossroads of Europe" or as a "Gateway to the East," became the first among all Eastern European countries to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea, opening the country's embassy in Budapest on February 1, 1989 (Kim and Marinescu 2015; Rac 2014). As middle powers, South Korea and Hungary have made efforts to strengthen their bilateral, cooperative relations, with South Korea being the biggest foreign direct investor in Hungary (Sass, Gubik, and Szunomár 2019). As of 2020, the direct investments of five South Korean companies in Hungary have established more than 2,900 workplaces, surpassing Germany's position as the largest employer in the Hungarian labor market.³ Hungary is known for its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, which has contributed to its historical significance as a center for trade and cultural exchange. According to the 2018 Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) report, South Korea was the third-biggest export and fifth-biggest import partner of Hungary (Sonline, 2019). Against this

1 The music program titled *Sztárban sztár* (Star in star) of the channel RTL was aired on 1 November 2020. https://tv2.hu/sztarban_sztar/349710_sztarban-sztar-kozos-produkcio-d.html

2 One of the authors of this article gave two presentations at this conference. <https://www.kingston.ac.uk/events/item/3428/04-jan-2020-bts-a-global-interdisciplinary-conference-project/>

3 <https://www.vg.hu/gazdasag/gazdasagi-hirek/mar-del-korea-a-legnagyobb-beruhazo-2-1782852/>

backdrop, the Korean Wave has had a major impact on Hungary, with more and more people becoming fans of K-pop music, consuming Korean content, and attending events related to Korean culture.

While the Korean Wave has been the focus of significant academic research in global contexts (Anderson and Shim 2015; Chua and Iwabuchi 2008; Kim and Marinescu 2015), there has been a lack of attention given to its reception in Hungary. As highlighted by Shim (2019), exploring the Korean Wave's interaction with different localities can provide new insights into globalization in the 21st century. It is important to note that the Korean Wave is not a one-way flow, but rather a reciprocal interaction between Korean cultural industries and consumers in host countries. Questions arise in this context about how cultures equipped with new media technologies communicate with foreign recipients, what meaning and effect recipients derive from the Korean Wave, and what new possibilities emerge for countries like Hungary and South Korea through their engagement with the Korean Wave. Therefore, this paper aims to contextualize the Korean Wave research across Europe, examine relevant literature on Hallyu in Hungary, conduct interviews with cultural experts, and perform surveys on Korean Wave fans in Hungary to present the history, fan characteristics, and market trends of the Korean Wave in Hungary, thereby expanding the horizons of Hallyu research in the world.

2. KOREAN WAVE RESEARCH IN EUROPE

The emergence of the Korean Wave can be traced back to the late 1990s when Korean popular culture, specifically television dramas and pop music, began to be broadcast on local media channels in China, Vietnam, and Taiwan (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008). The widespread exposure of Korean cultural products to these regions fueled the growth of Hallyu's global fanbase (Anderson and Shim 2015). Subsequently, the popularity of not only Korean audio-visual products but also general Korean culture and consumer goods soared, garnering attention from scholars seeking to explain the phenomenon's evolution and diffusion. This led to an increase in research on Hallyu, both at the European and global levels. For example, Marinescu (2014_b) examined the cultural impact of Hallyu worldwide, including its presence in many European countries. However, Sung (2014) notes that research on Hallyu in European countries is relatively sparse compared to other regions, possibly due to a smaller fanbase and slower growth of interest in Korean culture in Europe.

Balmain (2016) posits that the emergence of Korean cinema in the UK spearheaded the growth of Hallyu in the country. From 2008 to 2013, Korean movies experienced a surge in popularity in the UK, allowing British fans to engage with and appreciate traditional Korean values, and participate in cultural events organized by various Korea-related institutions, including the Korean Cultural Centre (KCC), the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), the Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS), and the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange

(KOFICE). Under the encouragement of these institutions (Um 2019), K-pop enthusiasts in the UK established cover dance groups, formed K-pop societies at schools, and organized K-pop competitions at the local and national levels, further increasing the demand for Korean cultural products. Through case studies, Um, Sung, and Fuhr (2014) identify the unique demographic attributes of K-pop fans in the UK, who tend to be non-UK-born or short-term residents, with the majority of K-pop events and scenes being centered in London. The growth in the number of concerts and K-pop performances organized in recent years is indicative of the increasing demand for K-pop and Korean culture in the UK. The 2019 BTS concert at Wembley Stadium in London marked a significant milestone for K-pop as the first non-English speaking performers to hold a concert at the UK's largest and most iconic venue, solidifying the mainstream presence of K-pop in the global music industry.

The emergence of Hallyu in France has been documented in relation to the SM Town Live concerts that took place in Paris in 2011, organized by SM Entertainment, one of Korea's largest music producers. The two-day concerts attracted more than 14,000 fans from 14 different countries. However, mainstream French media reported negatively on the Korean Wave, with some newspapers criticizing the "extreme" training methods and limited career longevity of K-pop idols, as noted by Cha and Kim (2011). Despite this, European fans found K-pop's unique visualization concepts and emotional lyrics appealing. Sung (2014) also observed the strong commitment of French K-pop fans to Korean culture through their active participation in live performances, flash mobs, and K-pop concert events.

Fuhr (2014) conducted a study on the spread of Korean culture in Germany and found that K-pop was not well-known in the country until 2012. The popularity of K-pop music was initially hindered by the unresolved copyright conflict between YouTube and GEMA. However, the increasing popularity of K-pop in other countries eventually led to the organization of K-pop cover dance events and flash mobs in Germany. Fuhr noted that K-pop fans in Germany tended to live in major cities with high Asian immigrant population densities. They mainly used Facebook and other online magazines as channels of communication, and offline events were not frequently organized. Two noteworthy online magazines for German-speaking K-pop fans were the *K-Colors of Korea* and the *K-pop Magazin*, which had 12,300 followers as of 2018.

Hübinette (2012) conducted a study on the reception of K-pop, K-drama, Korean films, and manhwa in Sweden. According to him, the introduction of Korean popular culture to Sweden began in 1997 when the Swedish Film Festival screened Kim Ki-duk's films. Since then, the number of Swedish fans of K-culture has gradually increased. In another study, Hübinette (2018) conducted in-depth interviews with Hallyu fans and concluded that K-pop has now become a mainstream genre in Swedish society. He noted that Swedish Hallyu fans could be divided into two groups: non-Western migrants and Swedish-born residents with post-secondary education. Hübinette also found that there was a common, negative perception of Korean male idols in Swedish society, which could potentially limit their acceptance. The spread

of Hallyu content in Sweden was mainly attributed to the Internet and social media platforms. Interestingly, Hübinette also found that the existing J-pop fandom played a role in increasing interest and consumption of Korean content.

Olmedo Señor (2017) identifies two major factors that contributed to the diffusion of Hallyu in Spain: the presence of Asian heritage residents in major cities such as Madrid and Barcelona, and events related to Japanese or Asian cultures, such as film festivals. The Korean Embassy and the Korean Cultural Centre also played crucial roles in organizing events like the K-pop World Festival and the K-pop Academy. Despite the relatively small size of the K-pop following in Spain, the fandom's passion was intense, leading to the organization of the first Spanish K-pop cover dance festival in Madrid and the first official K-pop concert in Barcelona, both in 2011. Escobar and Arias (2020) confirm from their interviews with Spanish fans that K-pop, rather than K-drama or film, is the core element of Hallyu in Spain. Women in their 20s and 30s are the most enthusiastic K-pop fans, and they rely on the Internet, specifically YouTube and VLive, to consume Korean content.

Sung (2014) notes that prior to the "Gangnam Style" craze in 2012, Austrians were generally uninformed about East Asian societies and cultures, and often unable to differentiate between Asian cultures. However, this changed with the rise in popularity of K-pop, which led to the organization of events such as Austria's Next K-pop Star and the K-pop Dance Festival Vienna by a small fan base. The Korean Embassy, as well as various Korean government-affiliated organizations such as the National Centre for South Korean Performance Art, Korean Association of Austria, Korea House of Culture, and Korean companies such as Hyundai and Samsung, played an important role in promoting the diffusion of Korean culture in Austria. Sung (2014) also highlights the connection between K-pop fans in Eastern Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary) and Austria, as these countries share geographical proximity and often organize joint Hallyu events in order to increase the size of their fandoms.

According to Mazaná (2014), in 2013, the number of Hallyu fans in the Czech Republic was reported to be less than 3,000. Similar to Sweden, biased views against Asian men, and thus boybands, were also found to exist within Czech society. Nonetheless, K-pop fans in the country organized themselves into associations and conducted various events, including fan gatherings, flash mobs, and Hallyu contests (Marinescu, 2014_a). As K-dramas were not aired on Czech television channels, K-pop played a significant role in promoting the Korean Wave in the country, leading to an increase in Korean film festivals and screenings throughout the nation (Mazaná, 2014).

Poland established diplomatic relations with Korea in the early 20th century, but during the Cold War era, the country only maintained strong ties with North Korea (Kida, 2014). Nonetheless, the presence of robust Korean studies programs in Polish universities and the continuous translation of Korean books and novels by Kwiaty Orientu, a publishing house, were fundamental in building a solid understanding of

Korean culture in general. The popularity of South Korean pop culture increased after Polish film festivals introduced Korean movies and television stations started airing Korean dramas in 2010 (Szalkowska, 2008). In addition, according to Marinescu (2014_a), the Korean Cultural Centre played a vital role in disseminating Korean culture in Poland.

Before the emergence of Korean cinema, Bulgarians only regarded Korea as a distant and exotic country, as noted by Sotirova (2014). However, the early 2010s saw a growing interest in Korean culture and Korean studies, as described by Borisova (2020) in her study on Korean pop fandom in Bulgaria, which was divided into three periods. The first generation of K-drama and K-pop enthusiasts emerged with the creation of an online community called Eastern Spirit in 2008, which also focused on East and South Asian cultures. Online platforms have remained the primary source for Hallyu content in Bulgaria, especially before Bulgarian National Television (BNT) began airing Korean dramas in 2018. The second Hallyu generation emerged around 2012 when teenagers and young adults were attracted to K-pop songs and dances, leading them to learn the Korean language and buy Korean products. Their efforts to organize flash mobs and K-pop events contributed to the spread of Korean culture. The third generation is linked to the BTS fandom, where many teenagers joined the A.R.M.Y. fan club in the late 2010s.

Marinescu and Balica (2013) have observed that Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, began to take root in Romania when local television channels started broadcasting K-dramas in 2009. Since then, Romanian fans of K-dramas have turned to the Internet as the primary means to access more Korean content. The emergence of the K-pop craze in Romania, according to Buja (2016), can be traced back to 2011, when a Romanian music channel aired the music video of BoA. The attractiveness of K-pop idols' appearances and fashion styles, as well as the entertaining quality of K-pop music and dance performances, have contributed to the growing fandom of Korean pop culture in Romania. Buja also points out the easy accessibility of K-culture as a factor in its popularity in the country.

Serbia's historical turmoil, such as the Yugoslav Wars, posed a challenge to the country's appreciation of Korean pop culture, which was further exacerbated by the lack of K-drama broadcasts on national television channels. However, the emergence of online media platforms such as social media and YouTube have played a pivotal role in disseminating K-culture. Despite the relatively small size of the fanbase, K-pop enthusiasts in the country have been actively organizing K-pop video and Korean film screening sessions, K-pop festivals, and cover dance events, as reported by Jokic (2020).

The diffusion of Hallyu in Europe has been slower in comparison to Asia due to geographical distance and lack of cultural proximity. However, with the advent of streaming platform services in recent years, these disparities have been quickly bridged. For instance, the 2021 Korean survival drama series, "Squid Game," aired on Netflix and rapidly became the top-rated show not only in Asia, but globally. As

Netflix's most-watched series, "Squid Game" achieved the status of the most viewed program in 94 countries, attracting more than 142 million-member households and accumulating 1.65 billion viewing hours within its first four weeks of launch. The Korean Wave is spreading rapidly worldwide, not only via YouTube, but also with emerging media platforms. Thus, with this knowledge in mind, we shall now delve more deeply into the historical development of the Korean Wave in Hungary.

3. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE KOREAN WAVE IN HUNGARY

Understanding the spread of Korean pop culture in Hungary requires an examination of Hungary's media landscape. Following media liberalization in 1997, Hungary experienced the emergence of commercial broadcasting, with approximately 80 television channels competing in the market by 2009. Commercial channels have gained more popularity than the four public channels, including M1, M2, Duna TV, and Duna 2, which have only attracted around 12% of the Hungarian TV audience (Urban 2010). The number of commercial channels has continued to grow, with the count increasing to 120 by 2020.⁴

Korean pop culture made its initial breakthrough in Hungary in 2008, when the Hungarian public television channel M1 aired the historical drama *Te Csanggum* (Jewel in the Palace. 대장금), which attained high viewership ratings in many countries. Hungarian television stations only broadcast eight K-dramas between 2008 and 2018, with some being re-run several times (see Table 1). In recent years, only the commercial Izaura TV has aired K-dramas, sparking criticism from fans who contend that Korean serial dramas are more popular in Hungary than the South American telenovelas frequently broadcasted in the country (Szűts and Yoo 2016).

4 In addition to the increase of commercial channels, the public television company MTVA (Médiaszolgáltatás-támogató és Vagyonkezelő Alap. Or, Media Service and Supporting Syndic Fund) in Hungary also expanded the number of public channels to seven, including M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, Duna, and Duna World (Illés 2017). As reported by the Media Committee (NMH 2020), the number of TV subscriptions in Hungary surpassed 3.59 million in approximately 4 million Hungarian households in 2020.

Table 1: Korean TV dramas broadcast in Hungary (2008-2018)

Title	Broadcast Period	Channel
대장금 - <i>Jewel in the Palace - A palota ékköve</i>	March 2008 – May 2008 August 2008 – November 2008 January 2010 – March 2010	M1
	September 2009 – December 2009	M2
	August 2010 – December 2010	Story TV
	July 2011 – September 2011	Story 5
	January 2018 – March 2018 March 2019 – June 2019	M3
	September 2019 - December 2019 September 2020 - November 2020	Izaura TV
	September 2016 - October 2016	Duna TV
선덕여왕 - <i>Queen Seondeok of Silla - A Silla királyság ékköve</i>	October 2010 – January 2011	M1
	October 2010 – January 2011 April 2011 – July 2011	M2
	November 2019 – February 2020 November 2020 – February 2021	Izaura TV
이산 - <i>Lee San, Wind of the Palace - A korona hercege</i>	July 2012 – November 2013	M1
	July 2017 – November 2017 August 2018 – November 2018 March 2019 – June 2019 September 2019 – December 2019 May 2020 – September 2020	Izaura TV
동이 - <i>Dong Yi - A királyi ház titkai</i>	February 2011 – May 2011	M1
	March 2011 – May 2011	M2
	August 2016 – November 2016 November 2017 – July 2018 May 2018 – August 2018 December 2018 – March 2019 May 2019 – September 2019 February 2020 – May 2020	Izaura TV
파스타 - <i>Pasta - Pasta</i>	March 2013 – May 2013	M2
기황후 - <i>Empress Ki - A császárság kincse</i>	November 2016 – February 2017	Duna TV
화정 - <i>Splendid Politics - A fény hercegnője</i>	August 2016 – November 2016	Story 4
7일의 왕비 - <i>Queen for Seven Days - Királynő egy hétre</i>	October 2017 – January 2018	Story 5

The emergence of K-pop culture in Hungary can be traced back to 2012, when Psy's "Gangnam Style" became widely popular on Hungarian radio channels and social media platforms. Despite the initial popularity, there were only a limited number of K-pop concerts held in the country, with few rookie bands performing. This changed when the event organizer, Seoul Mates, was established in Budapest in early 2015. Their first K-pop event, a summer camp in 2016, aimed to promote talented cover

dancers between the ages of 11 and 18. This event was successful, leading to Seoul Mates hosting similar events annually. Additionally, the company also organizes K-pop concerts (see Table 2), though due to the small market size in Hungary, these events are held once every two to three months, rather than monthly as desired (Lucia Sáfrán-Koczúr, personal interview, October 21, 2020).

Table 2: K-pop Music Events in Hungary (2017-2019)

Date	Event
3 March 2017	Blockbuster concert
3 March 2017	Block B concert After Party
7 May 2017	B.A.P World Tour 'Party Baby' Budapest Boom
14-15 July 2017	Kpop World Festival
14 August 2017	24K Fan Meeting Tour
22 October 2017	FT Island [X] concert
13 January 2018 – 12 May 2018	K-Ship Open Stage
25 February 2018	Paint It Rose Tour
27 May 2018	AlphaBAT 2nd European Tour
21 July 2018	2018 Changwon K-Pop World Festival
11 September 2018	Kpop Jamboree - Korean Day
11 November 2018	AlphaBAT Free Fan meeting in Budapest
27 November 2018	South Club "Second European Tour"
20 December 2018	VAV 2018 Meet & Live "Senorita Tour"
31 March 2019	Bang Yongguk concert

The popularity of K-pop in Hungary continued to increase in 2017 and 2018 due to the growing presence of K-pop-related content on social media sites and online blogs. One example is the Facebook page called Dél-Korea, which has around 5,740 followers.⁵ Another example is the K-pop Hungary Facebook page, which had 2,788 followers in November 2018 and increased to 4,788 in November 2019. The BTS Hungary Facebook page also saw a significant increase, with its membership growing from 3,906 in late 2018 to around 13,000 in January 2020. Cultural events organized by the Korean Cultural Centre are also popular among Hungarian audiences, as evidenced by the centre's online site having more than 12,200 followers and continuously increasing visitor numbers, according to its director, Lee Dangkwon (personal interview, November 21, 2018). Lucia Sáfrán-Koczúr, the managing director of Seoul Mates, estimates that there are around 15,000 K-pop fans in Hungary, based on fan meetings, talent shows, and festivals organized by the company (personal interview, October 21, 2020). Furthermore, fan groups and cultural organizations are

5 <https://www.facebook.com/D%C3%A9l-Korea-103060771222777>

expanding beyond Budapest, with new groups emerging in cities like Pécs, Debrecen, and Szeged.

4. SURVEY RESEARCH INTO THE KOREAN WAVE IN HUNGARY

Our study utilized a multi-method approach, incorporating secondary literature analysis, interviews with Korean culture organization executives, and surveys to gather information about the demographic attributes, fields of interest, and consumer behaviors of Hungarian fans of Korean culture. The study commenced in September 2018 with an analysis of Hallyu fan activity on social media and online fan pages in Hungary. Based on this background research, we designed the questionnaires, which were distributed to research participants between November 14, 2018, and February 28, 2019. During a period of three and a half months, the questionnaires were distributed through three main channels: (i) offline distribution to participants of events organized by the Korean Cultural Centre in Hungary, (ii) online distribution through linked Google Forms questionnaires on the Centre's webpage and Facebook page, and (iii) online distribution through linked Google Forms questionnaires on K-pop and K-drama Facebook pages, with members of these pages sharing the links with their friends. In total, 74 offline and 1,698 online respondents completed the questionnaires, amounting to a total of 1,772 respondents. More than 60% of the online forms were submitted within two weeks of being linked online. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software. The survey results are summarized below in relation to three main topics: i) the characteristics of Hungarian fans, ii) fan preferences, and iii) fans' purchasing power.

5. ATTRIBUTES AND PREFERENCES OF HUNGARIAN FANS

The majority of respondents to the questionnaire (96.4%) were female, which reflects the gender bias among Hungarian Hallyu fans. In terms of age, 42.4% of fans were under 18 years old, and 78.1% were less than 31 years old. Only a small proportion of respondents (8.1%) were above 51 years old (Figure 1, cumulated result of the two age groups). The results showed that 55.8% of respondents had been fans of Hallyu for between 1 to 5 years, while 27.0% had been fans for more than 5 years. There was a direct correlation between age and duration of being a fan, with 45.3% of older fans (above 50 years old) having been interested in Korean culture for more than 5 years, and 73.2% of younger fans (under the age of 18) having been fans for between 1 to 5 years.

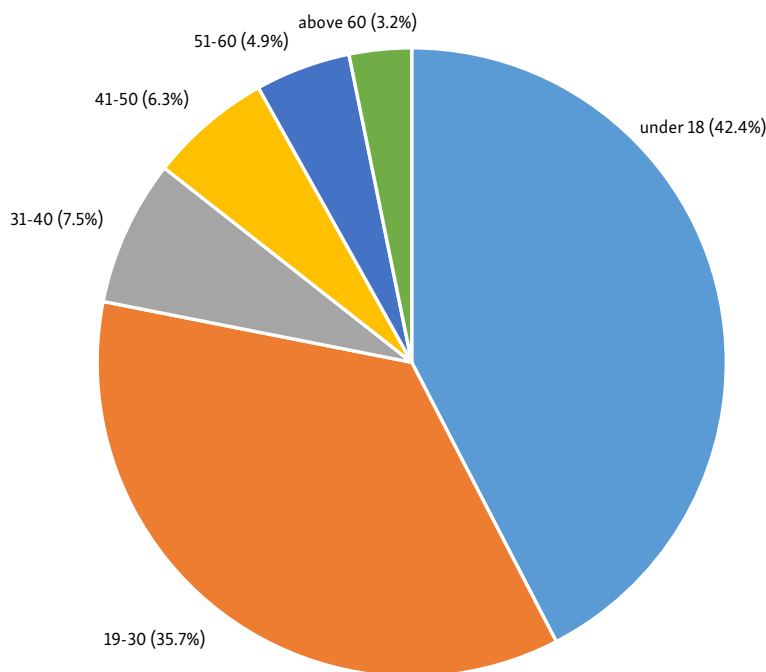


Figure 1: The age categories of the respondents

The survey also aimed to determine the regional distribution of Hallyu fans in Hungary, classifying respondents into three categories based on their place of residence: Budapest, other cities, and villages or farms. It should be noted that Budapest is the only city in Hungary with a population exceeding one million, while the second-largest city, Debrecen, has a population of only 202,000. Our data indicated that 29% of respondents lived in Budapest, which represents 17.9% of the total population of Hungary. On the other hand, only 20% of respondents lived in villages or farm regions, which make up 29.5% of the entire population. These results suggest that the majority of Hallyu fans in Hungary reside in urban areas, as opposed to rural areas (see Table 3).

Table 3: Regional Population vs. Regional Respondents

Region of residence	Population make-up by region (% , 2019)	Respondent make-up by region (%)
Budapest	17.9	29.1
Other cities	52.5	49.8
Village and Farm	29.5	20.6

Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office

The survey examined the respondents' fields of interest within Korean culture. The participants were given multiple-choice questions with the option to choose more than one answer. The results show that the most popular field of interest (87.5%) among the respondents was K-pop, followed by K-drama (80.1%), and surprisingly, the Korean language (72.3%). Korean movies came in fourth place, with 64.9% of fans choosing this category. All the cultural fields presented as options were selected by more than 64% of fans, except for Korean folk dance. The respondents also reported other fields of interest, with 5.8% of participants choosing Korean food as an additional area of interest. Fans also expressed their interest in Korean history, K-beauty, and other types of Korean music, such as rock music (see Figure 2).

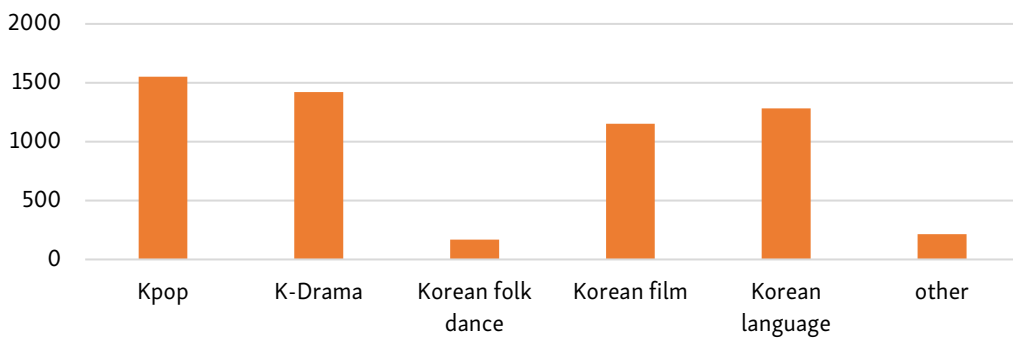


Figure 2: Distribution of fans by their preferred cultural fields

We also conducted an investigation into the reasons behind fans' attraction to Korean culture and its content. An open-ended question was posed, and 63.3% of the respondents provided an answer. Out of these respondents, 36.8% stated that they were drawn to Korean culture because it felt exotic to them. The second most common reason (21.9% of respondents) was that Korean music and dramas were different from those of European or American origin. The third most common reason (14.2% of fans) was that they enjoyed the language, which influenced them to consume more Korean content. In fact, one respondent even expressed that they initially fell in love with the language after watching a Korean drama, which led them to learn it and subsequently become a big fan of K-dramas and K-pop.

The results of the survey suggest that the interests of Hallyu fans are influenced by their age group. Specifically, K-pop appeared to be more popular among respondents under the age of 30, while K-dramas were more popular among those over 31. Meanwhile, Korean films were most popular among respondents over the age of 41. Interestingly, among fans under the age of 18, the Korean language was the second most popular area of interest, after K-pop.

In a separate question, the survey examined the popularity of the Korean language among respondents. The findings revealed that 33.7% of the participants claimed to be able to speak Korean, while 51.6% expressed a keen interest in learning it in the

future. Given that the survey did not assess the fluency level of the respondents, individuals with diverse proficiency levels in the language may have responded positively to the question. Notably, the study demonstrated that younger respondents displayed a stronger inclination toward the Korean language. For instance, 32.2% of the respondents aged below 18 years claimed to be proficient in Korean, while 60.4% of them wished to acquire proficiency in the language. Similarly, 39.2% of the respondents aged between 19 and 30 years reported being able to speak Korean, while 49.5% expressed an interest in learning the language. In contrast, among the respondents aged between 31 and 50 years, only an average of 30.8% claimed proficiency in Korean, while about an average of 45.5% expressed a desire to learn the language.

Many respondents shared their admiration for the Korean language. Some mentioned that they appreciated its euphony, melodiousness, tone, and respectful expressions. Others mentioned that they liked it, or they felt comfortable with its melodiousness, tone, and respectful expressions of the Korean language. For some respondents, their interest in the language served as a pathway to explore other aspects of Hallyu. For example, a middle-aged respondent reported that she “first met Korean culture through K-pop music, which led her to like the language and then K-dramas.” Similar opinions were reflected in the answers stating that “the tunefulness of the language was what caught me first, and it continues to be the greatest source of attraction for me,” and “when I first heard the original language of K-drama I liked it a lot.” In an expression of her visceral connection to the Korean language, a respondent in the age group of 51 to 60 went as far as to say: “For me, it is a specific and engaging world. I might have lived there (read: Korea) in my previous life as the melody of the language is in my ears and the writing of the letters is clear and logical.”

Data on the channels utilized by Hungarian fans to access Korean cultural content was also collected. The results revealed that YouTube was the most frequently used content-sharing platform, with 95.0% of the respondents indicating that they utilized it. Facebook was found to be the second most popular platform, with 68.8% of respondents attesting to its use. Instagram and free sharing websites, such as RakutenViki, Sorozatbarat, or DramaCool, were also used by more than 66.8% of the respondents.⁶ Interestingly, Twitter was a comparatively less popular platform for Hungarian fans, despite its status as a main channel for fans in other countries (Jang 2021; Choi and Meza and Park 2014; Capistrano 2020; Sung 2014).

6 <https://www.viki.com/>, <https://www.sorozatbarat.club/login>, <https://www.dramacool9.co/>

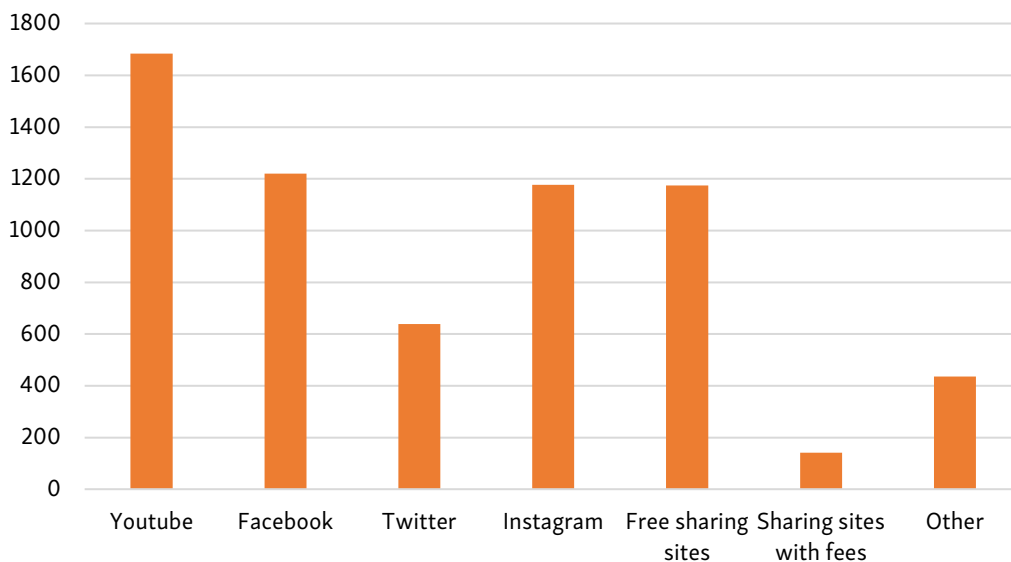


Figure 3: Channels Used to Reach Korean Cultural Content

Based on our survey, YouTube emerged as the most commonly utilized platform for accessing Korean cultural content among fans of all age groups, except for those aged between 51 and 60 who reported a higher frequency of usage of free sharing websites. Instagram, on the other hand, exhibited conspicuous popularity among younger fans, as evidenced by the data presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Channel Preferences by Age Used to Access Korean Cultural Content

Ranking / Age Group	1st	2nd	3rd
under 18	YouTube	Instagram	Facebook
19-30	YouTube	Free Sharing Sites ⁷	Instagram
31-40	YouTube	Free Sharing Sites	Facebook
41-50	YouTube	Free Sharing Sites	Facebook
51-60	Free Sharing Sites	YouTube	Facebook
above 60	YouTube	Free Sharing Sites	Facebook

It seems that a significant percentage of respondents who communicate with other fans use multiple channels for communication. Among those who answered "yes" to the question about communicating with other fans, 65.4% reported using personal communication, 62.9% reported using Facebook, and 33.5% reported using Instagram

⁷ Free sharing sites such as RakutenViki, Sorozatbarat or DramaCool (<https://www.viki.com/>, <https://www.sorozatbarat.club/login>, <https://www.dramacool9.co/>)

as their method of communication (see Figure 4). It is worth noting that respondents were allowed to choose multiple methods of communication. This suggests that fans use a variety of channels to communicate with each other and highlights the importance of understanding how fans engage with content and each other across different platforms.

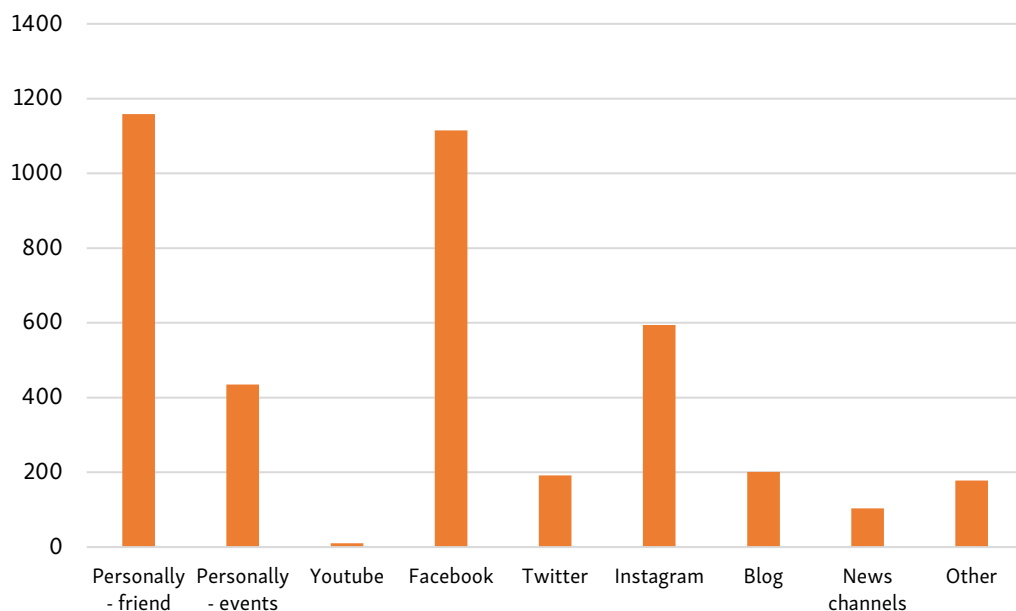


Figure 4: Channels used for communicating with other fans

The results of the survey suggest that a significant percentage of respondents make Korean culture a frequent topic of conversation. Specifically, 49.5% reported conversing about Korean culture more than once a day, 6.0% once a day, 22.1% several times a week, and 5.7% once a month or less frequently. The frequency of communication about Korean culture also varied across different age groups. The highest percentage of respondents who communicated about Korean culture more than once daily was in the "under 18" age group, at 62.9%. The second-highest percentage was in the "51 to 60" age group, at 41.8%. These findings suggest that Korean culture is a topic of significant interest and discussion among fans, with younger fans being particularly engaged in frequent communication about Korean culture.

According to the survey results, 49.2% of respondents reported participating in K-culture-related activities, while 12.9% expressed a desire to participate in the future. The most popular K-pop-related activities among fans were making cover dances and singing, with 34.7% and 32.6% of respondents respectively reporting participation in these activities (see Figure 5). Other popular activities included makeup/beauty (16.4%) and translating songs and films (12.8%). These findings suggest that K-culture has inspired significant levels of fan engagement and participation, with

a range of creative and artistic activities being pursued by fans of different ages and backgrounds.

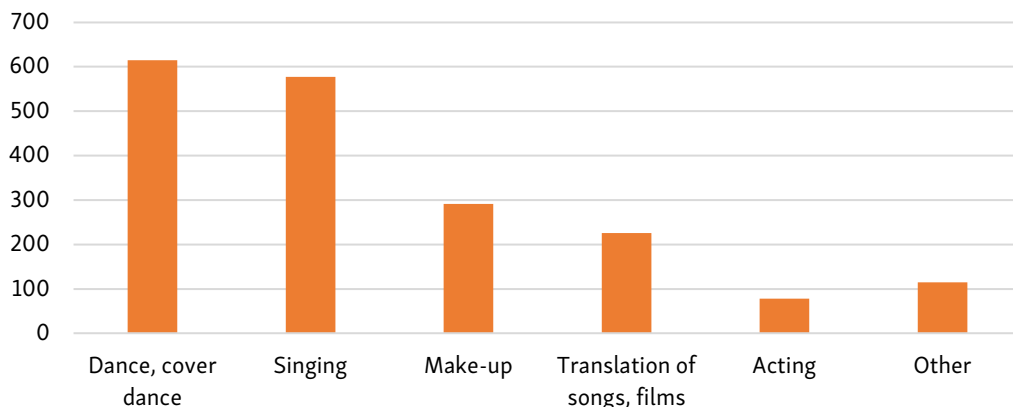


Figure 5: The most popular related activities of Hungarian fans

According to Table 5 below, the preferences for K-culture-related activities varied across different age groups. Making cover dances was particularly popular among younger fans, while singing and translating songs and films were more popular among older fans. These findings suggest that different age groups have distinct preferences for the types of K-culture-related activities they engage in, with younger fans tending towards more performance-based activities and older fans being more interested in creative and intellectual pursuits.

Table 5: Activity Preferences of Fans by Age Groups

Age	1st Popular Activity	2nd Popular Activity	3rd Popular Activity
Under 18	Dance, Cover Dance	Singing	Makeup
19-30	Dance, Cover Dance	Singing	Makeup
31-40	Singing	Other	Translation of Songs, Films
41-50	Singing	Translation of Songs, Films	Makeup
51-60	Singing	Translation of Songs, Films	Makeup
Above 60	Singing	Translation of Songs, Films	Other

According to our research, more than 75.0% of respondents acknowledged themselves as fan group members, with 6.2% expressing a desire to join fan groups in the future. It is important to note that the high percentage of group membership (75%) may be attributed to respondents' understanding of the term 'fan group membership' as encompassing both formal fan groups and casual fan cafes. The research also found that fan group membership was particularly active among age groups under 18 and above 60. Specifically, 94.4% of respondents under 18 years old and 73.26% of

respondents above 60 reported being fan group members or expressing a desire to join a group. These findings suggest that fan groups and fan culture are an important part of K-culture fandom, with a significant proportion of fans actively participating in these communities across different age groups.

The questionnaire contained an open-ended question that asked respondents to name the fan groups they had joined. 47.6% (843) of all respondents provided a response, revealing a total of 407 different fan groups. Among those who joined fan groups, the majority (64.5%) were members of K-pop act fan groups. The remaining respondents reported their membership in fan groups related to K-drama, Korean film, Korean food, travel, and entertainment agency pages. The most popular K-pop fan group was BTS's fan club (A.R.M.Y), with 42% of questionnaire respondents claiming membership, followed by Black Pink's fan group, which was represented by 22.6% of all questionnaire respondents.

Lee Dangkweon, director of the Korean Cultural Centre of Hungary, has observed that the fervor of Hungarian fans surpasses that of other countries. To exemplify, Hungarian supporters established the Hungary-Korea Society, a Hungarian-Korean civil society organization, entirely on their own in 2004,⁸ pre-dating the government-backed Korean Cultural Centre's opening in 2012.⁹ Hungarian fans have also energetically arranged cultural events without assistance from Korea-related entities, demonstrating their resolute commitment and strong camaraderie. Interviews with Hungarian A.R.M.Y. leaders and the event organizer company's representative (Seoul Mates) acknowledged the fans' tight-knit community. Both interviews cited Hungarian fans' countless commemorations following the Danube boat accident in 2019, a testament to their deep connection with Korea. Fans congregated on the Danube shore, sang Korean songs, and tossed flowers into the river. Active members of the Hungarian-Korean Community Facebook page, Dél-Korea, also orchestrated some of the tributes.¹⁰

According to some scholars (Hübinette 2012; Mazaná 2014), European fans of K-pop and K-drama show a keen interest in Japanese culture. For instance, Mazaná's (2014) research revealed that 73% of Czech fans were already interested in Japanese culture before they became Hallyu fans. Therefore, Japanese culture, such as J-pop, serves as a bridge for European fans to become exposed to South Korean culture. This bridge function of Japanese culture is also evident in Hungary's K-Culture context, where 76.0% of the survey respondents reported being fans of Japanese or Chinese films, music, or other cultural content. Among the non-Korean cultural content mentioned, Japanese manga and anime were the most popular, with over 62.6% of fans indicating their interest in them, followed by Japanese and Chinese drama series, J-pop, Chinese pop, and other genres (see Figure 6).

8 <http://hukor.hu/>

9 <http://hungary.korean-culture.org/hu/7/contents/723>

10 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/delkorea/?fref=nf>

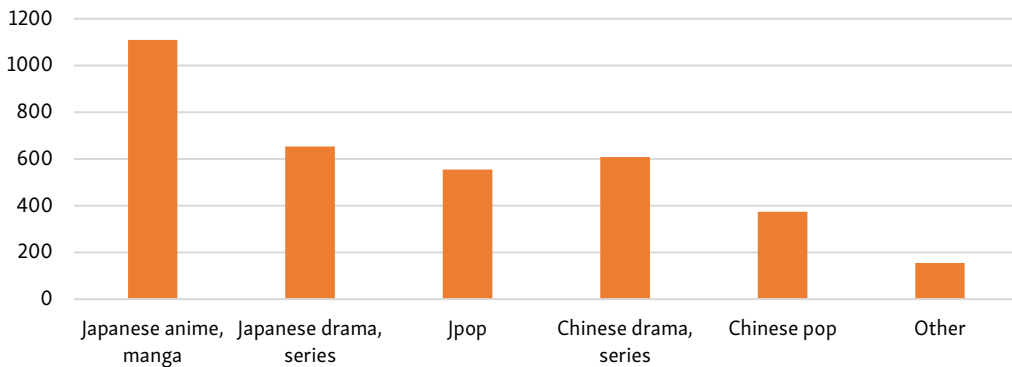


Figure 6: Hungarian K-culture fans' interest in other East Asian cultural content

According to the authors' crosstab analysis, there was a significant correlation between being a fan of K-culture and being a fan of Japanese or Chinese cultural content. Specifically, 88% and 92% of K-pop fans were also fans of Japanese and Chinese cultural content, respectively. This trend was also observed among fans of K-dramas (83% Japanese, 93% Chinese), Korean language (76% Japanese, 88% Chinese), and Korean film (70% Japanese, 80% Chinese). The analysis indicated that the correlation between K-culture and Japanese or Chinese cultural content was consistently high across different forms of K-culture. However, Korean folk dance did not reflect this correlation. This finding is reminiscent of what occurred in Southeast Asia when Taiwanese drama "Meteor Garden" (2000) gained immense popularity in Indonesia and the Philippines before Korean dramas did in the early 2000s. Taiwanese dramas helped cultivate a taste for Northeast Asian male actors among fans, paving the way for the subsequent rise of Korean dramas in these countries (Shim 2013). This illustrates how similar cultures, such as Japan and Taiwan, played a bridging role in the success of the Korean Wave, highlighting the ongoing flow of cultures that shape international cultural exchange.

6. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND PURCHASING POWER OF FANS

One of the main objectives of this research was to uncover the desires and requirements of Hungarian consumers for Korean cultural and non-cultural products and services. The findings indicated that cultural products associated with K-pop and K-dramas (e.g., music and video CDs, DVDs, accessories, merchandise, and printed materials featuring stars) were particularly sought after by Hungarian fans. Over 63.5% of respondents reported purchasing such items, and an additional 18.3% expressed interest in doing so in the future. Age was a significant factor in purchase behavior, with older respondents (over 51) less likely to buy these products, while

younger fans were more likely to do so. Furthermore, younger age groups demonstrated a greater intention to purchase K-pop and K-drama merchandise in the future.

Our research aimed to identify the particular K-pop and K-drama-related products and services that Hungarian fans were interested in purchasing. Results revealed that accessories (such as earrings and necklaces), fashion products, and clothing were the most popular items purchased by respondents. Food and merchandise products were also popular, whereas only 4.8% of respondents reported purchasing glasses and contact lenses (see Figure 7). Notably, unlike in Western countries, CD and DVD formats remain significant in the consumption of cultural content in Hungary.

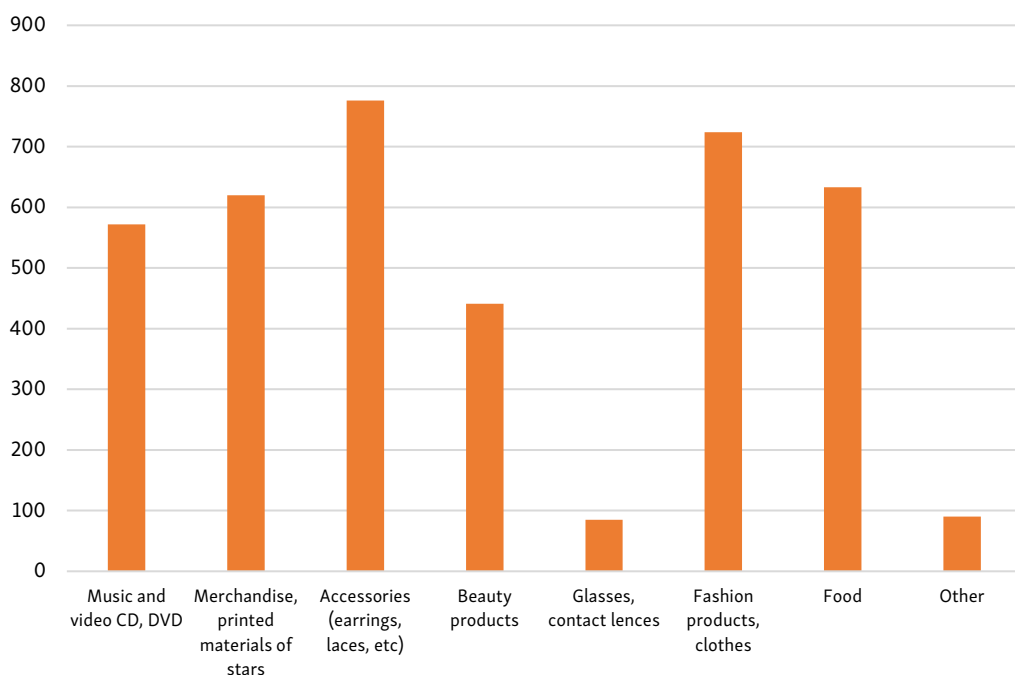


Figure 7: K-pop and K-drama product Interest among Hungarian fans

The gender of the respondents had a significant correlation with the purchase of beauty products and accessories, with a higher percentage of women indicating an interest in these products. However, there was no such correlation observed for fashion products, with both male and female respondents showing similar patterns in purchasing these products. There was a difference in the types of K-pop and K-drama products purchased by fans based on age (see Table 7). Accessories were the most popular product among younger fans (under 18 and between 19-30), while older respondents (above 31) showed a preference for Korean food.

Table 6: Product Preferences by Age Groups

Age	1st Popular	2nd Popular	3rd Popular
Under 18	Accessories (earrings, laces, etc.)	Fashion Products, Clothes	Merchandise, Printed Materials of Stars
19-30	Accessories (earrings, laces, etc.)	Music and Video CD, DVD	Fashion Products, Clothes
31-40	Food	Accessories (earrings, laces, etc.)	Beauty Products
41-50	Food	Music and Video CD, DVD	Accessories (earrings, laces, etc.)
51-60	Food	Music and Video CD, DVD	Beauty Products
Above 60	Food	Beauty Products	Music and Video CD, DVD

In addition to cultural products, the research also investigated the demand for non-cultural Korean products and services among Hungarian fans (as shown in Figure 8). The results revealed that a majority of respondents (85.6%) expressed interest in non-cultural Korean products. However, it was found that respondents over the age of 40 were less likely to be interested in these products. Among the non-cultural products, beauty products, and tourist services were the most popular choices. On the other hand, Korean IT products and software were less popular among respondents, while Korean cars were the least popular. It is worth noting that the questionnaire did not mention any specific Korean car or fashion brands.

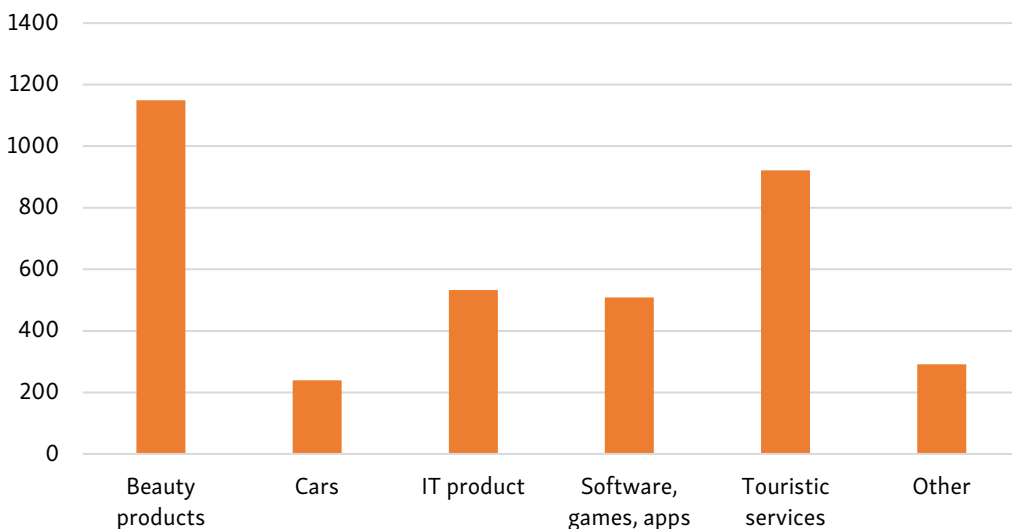


Figure 8: Interest of Respondents in Non-Cultural Korean Products and Services

The majority of the non-cultural products and services listed in the study showed a noticeable correlation with the gender of the respondents, as outlined in Table 7.

Table 7: Non-cultural Product Preferences of Respondents by Gender

Place/Gender	Women	Men
1st place	beauty products	IT products
2nd place	touristic services	software, games, and apps
3rd place	IT products	touristic services

Overall, Hungarian K-pop and K-drama fans displayed a strong demand and inclination to purchase both cultural and non-cultural Korean products, according to the research. Out of the 1,772 respondents, 67.2% reported purchasing Korean products. Of these respondents, 41.6% spent less than 5,000 HUF per month, while 20.7% spent between 5,000 and 10,000 HUF.¹¹ Only 0.2% of respondents spent between 50,001 and 100,000 HUF per month. Table 8 provides further details.

Table 8: Hungarian Fans' Monthly Spending on Korean Cultural and Non-Cultural Products

Payment categories	Number of respondents	Percentage
Less than 5,000 HUF	738	41.6%
5,000 – 10,000 HUF	367	20.7%
10,001 – 50,000 HUF	81	4.6%
50,001 – 100,000 HUF	4	0.2%
More than 100,001 HUF	1	0.06%
No reports on spending	581	32.8%
Total	1772	100.00%

7. CONCLUSION

The diffusion of Korean cultural products and services in Europe has been increasing, and in Hungary, the Korean Wave has been attracting fans since 2008, which has contributed to the yearly growth of the Korean market size. While Hungarian K-culture fandom shares similarities with other countries, our research has revealed unique characteristics of Hungarian fans. Firstly, they are particularly drawn to Korean culture due to the appeal of the Korean language. With 85.3% of Hungarian respondents either speaking or wishing to learn Korean, many fans consider it a gateway to explore other aspects of Korean culture. Secondly, the rise of Korean culture fandom in Hungary is closely linked to other Asian cultural content, such as Japanese manga/anime and Chinese movies. More than 76% of fans stated that they were fans of Japanese or Chinese cultural content before they became Hallyu fans.

Previous studies have overlooked the purchasing power of K-culture fans, but

¹¹ 1 Hungarian Forint (HUF) is roughly 3.8 Korean Won (KRW).

our research highlights that Hungarian fans primarily purchase accessories, fashion items, and K-pop idol merchandise. In addition, the tendency to buy beauty products and tourist services is also high in Hungary, with older fans showing a preference for purchasing tourist services. However, in contrast to the global trends study (Zero2Turbo 2013), Hungarian K-pop and K-drama fans did not express significant interest in Korean cars.

The aim of this paper was to investigate the Korean Wave and the consumption of Korean commodities in Hungary. Since the implementation of our research, the diffusion of Hallyu has been significantly influenced by the development of new communication channels such as Netflix and mobile apps and web platforms created by Korean Hallyu companies like Dear U Bubble and Weverse. Hungarian fans, particularly the younger generation, tend to utilize these modern assets instead of traditional channels like TV. Moreover, Hungarian national TV channels no longer feature Korean TV series in their programs. Nonetheless, we hope that the information about the preferences and attributes of fans and consumers in this paper can serve as a reference for public and private organizations seeking to understand the Hungarian market. Moving forward, we intend to continue our research on the Korean Wave and involve more European academics in Korean studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of K-culture fandom in Europe.

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¹² <https://www.obic-bbs.hu/en/>

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