

The Effect of the Korean Wave on Malaysian University Students' Perception

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempted to understand the university students' perception on the Korean Wave in Malaysia. Six Malaysian students were involved in this study and three research questions guided the entire study. The first question explored Malaysian university students' perception about the Korean Wave in general; the second involved how the media influences the perception of the Korean Wave; and third question looked into the economic effects that would influence students' perception of the Korean Wave. Among the six students, all of them had positive perception of the Korean Wave and were heavily influenced through the media. Thus, it can be said that it brought positive feedback to the Korean Wave. The awareness of the Korean Wave was found to be increasingly popular due to media development. This study helped understand the Korean Wave from Malaysian students' perception.

Keywords: *Hallyu*, Korean wave, K-Pop

INTRODUCTION

In late 2012, 'Gangnam Style' became a worldwide hit on YouTube. The artist responsible for this global phenomenon was Psy, who is in fact, a South Korean artist. The song's music video exceeded YouTube's view limit, surpassing Justin Bieber's 'Baby' to become the first YouTube video with over two billion views as of December 2014 (BBC News, 2014). As music video spread like wildfire across the worldwide web, the Korean Wave itself boomed with great speed across Asia, and 'Gangnam style' has played an important role in K-Pop's (otherwise known as *Hallyu*) sustained success. Established in 1993, K-Pop was ranked as 33rd largest music market in the world in 2005, which has accelerated greatly to 12th in rankings by 2012 (Kim, 2012). Furthermore, its effect on the media such as YouTube, Social Network Service (SNS), and the Television has been incomparable.

Additionally, many TV drama series, Korean pop music, movies and online games have infiltrated to other Asian coun-

tries since the late 1990s (Segers, 2000). These exported Korean media contents have obtained extraordinary popularity and greater market share throughout Asia given the broader Asian audiences, and even America (Shin, 2009). This ultimately contributes not only to South Korea's economy but also nation's image (Lee, 2011). More particularly, previous studies have shown that the Korean Wave has a great impact on youths, especially students (Siriuyvasak & Hy unjoon, 2007). Hence, prompting the primary purpose of the current study to investigate the perception of Korean Wave among students from Malaysia. In addition, the present study also aims to understand the economic effect that influences the perception Korean Wave. Thus, thus following research questions were formed:

- (1) What are Malaysia university students' perception on the Korean Wave?
- (2) How does the media influence the perception of Malaysian Students' on the Korean Wave?

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- (3) How does the economic effect influence of the perception of Malaysian Students' on the Korean Wave?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Characteristics of University Students

University students are highly sensitive to the effects of different societies and cultures. As a result, the Korean Wave has a dramatic effect upon them (Shim, 2006). The Korean Wave presents advantages and disadvantages to the university students. Its prevalence is heavily noticeable across Asia, which started in the late 1990s in China, through popular television programs (Heo, 2002). In light of this, various other Korean boy group such as *TVXQ* or Super Junior have emerged to gain a lot of fame and popularity among the Asian youths. After that, Korean music, Korean drama and Korean culture spread like wildfire across Asia. As the younger generation felt the effects of the Korean influence and as the Korean culture became well-known to them, the term 'Korean Wave' was created.

Media Impacts and the Effects of the Economy

Korean Wave sustained great success through media technology. The Korean Wave started in 1999 and since then, Asia has seen a hit in Korean influence ranging from television dramas, films, music, food to fashion (Yang, 2012). These effects were also prevalent in Greater China (which includes the Chinese mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong), Japan, Southeast Asia, India and even Turkey. In a short period of time Korean wave has be spread to Asian countries. The main reason for this is to expand by means of media. Media is one of the most important tools in spreading Korean wave to other countries. The rise of the Korean Wave has started with the development of digital media forms. Media content have been meaningful among nations, most importantly how media content is distributed to local viewers. In fact, the Korean wave has experienced a tremendous change with the development in social media and digital technologies.

Known as '*Hallyu*' in the Korean language, the Korean Wave has brought success to the South Korean economy. Firstly, the drama series, "My Love from the Stars" has gained huge popularity in China. After that the Korean drama was made known to other parts of Asia. Furthermore, the song "Gang-

nam Style" made a hit in the world in 2012, speeding its penetration rapidly to other countries and bringing *Hallyu* to the golden age. This overall contributes to what can be said as the biggest advantage of the Korean Wave, which is its economic significance (Kim, 2012). Therefore, local Korean governments and the Central government departments are spending a lot of money on the *Hallyu* business to benefit from the economic effects. In 2012, the Korean government declared the "3.0 Hallyu Generation" and promoted "K-Culture" projects to expand the Korean Wave culture. It previously led by dramas (1.0 generation) and pop music (2.0 generation). There are two known purposes of this project: first is to spread the Korean Wave to the rest of the world. Second is in order to reap the benefits from its success. Hyundai Research Institute estimated the economic effects of the Korean Wave star, Bae Yong-joon who has earned approximately 3 trillion won (US\$2.9 billion). This shows how much the Korean Wave brings to the Korean economy and how it helps with the development of the Korean economy. Another example is the *Mnet* which is a Korean TV channel that is responsible for *Mwave* (a global version of *Mnet*). *Mwave* is a digital sound source service provider in Korea. It provides an online chance for fans to watch the *Mwave* channels and sell its songs in MP3s forms. This allows *Mwave* to open up bigger overseas market. As a result, it had led to a positive economic effect.

METHOD

Data Collection

Data was gathered from January, 2016, through the forms of interviews and a demographic survey. The demographic survey included gender, age, education level and race, and whether applicants are interested in Korea and its culture. This face to face encounter interviews were used for this research study. For this research study, university students participated in a focus group study. Essential topics and issues were provided with question outlines to help guide the interview process. Conclusively, the interview was decided by the factors discussed in the literature (university students, economic effect and media). Lastly, a follow-up interview was done after data has been analyzed through several ways such as phone calls, emails and face-to-face conversations.

RESULTS

Malaysia University Students' Perception of the Korean Wave

All six respondents agreed that they have positive perception about the Korean Wave. These factors included the development of media and export of various contents. All six respondents answered that these contents were able to attract their interest, which include drama, entertainment program, music, and fashion. Moreover, these contents led to students' interest towards the Korean culture. As a result, the respondents noted that they have researched about and indulged into these Korean contents, digging into the roots of its widespread and insights. Greater interests were shown towards Korean TV drama series and K-pop due to their ability to easily relate and fun nature. Reinforcing the point, one respondent student stated that "...Korean drama is very special compare with other countries drama because the story is different... it stimulates me so I am very interested". Hence, this suggests that the Korean Wave's contents expressed fresher contents in which provides something overall new and unusual. Following that, two students expressed great interests towards Korean cosmetic and fashion brands such as *ETUDE HOUSE* and *SPAO* respectively. They strongly perceive that these Korean brands have great effect amongst Malaysian students and youth. Likewise, all six respondents noted that they had good perception about the Korean brand in general due to the advertisement and promotions of the Korean brand. In contrast, one student had a negative opinion towards *Idol* (a Korean singer group). This student stated that "...since *Idol* is famous in Malaysia, we lost our original artists ... most students follow them...".

Lastly, as referred to from above, the inflow of information supply through advertisement and promotions were the biggest role players that provided positive perceptions towards the present study's respondents. One students mentioned "...every time we can check new Korean videos in YouTube...". As a result, they became keener on the Korean Wave. In other words, the constant provision of information in various fields such as drama, entertainment channels, music, beauty and fashion have contributed to the positive perception about the Korean Wave.

How Does the Media Influence the Perception of the Korean Wave?

All six students recognised the importance of the media and its effects on the growth of the Korean Wave. One student stated that "...Korean wave has always been so dazzling and glamorous through YouTube...", this implies the significance of social media. Interestingly, it was understood that most respondents (5 out of 6) mentioned that their favourite Korean Wave influence derived from the variety show, *Running Man*. Respondents all agreed that variety shows were the most interesting form of entertainment about the Korean Wave. In addition, many additional Korea celebrities were introduced in the variety show. This ultimately provides greater information about Korean celebrities. As a matter of fact, all six students were big fans of Korean celebrities. Variety shows have advantages of revealing the life styles of these celebrities as variety shows invite the famous Korean celebrities to their shows, and make them act out various activities.

Furthermore, respondents also noted that through these variety programs, they were able to gain various useful information, such as food and culture about the Korean Wave. One student mentioned "...the most interesting thing about watching *Running Man* is that it provides me with a lot of information such as food and culture...". Additionally, three of our respondents noted that they did not know about the historical conflict between North Korea and South Korea until they were exposed to it through these programs. Hence, all six students answered that the media has been a great connecting tool that links them with the Korean Waves. Adding on, fashion and beauty were another great influence towards Malaysian students, especially females. This has influenced them to make up and styling according to the idols since then.

All things considered, our respondents felt excited and gathered information through the media. Ultimately, this brings the distance of the heart of Korea and Malaysia closer through the media. As a matter of fact, two respondents even noted that they have never been more interested in going to Korea than ever.

How Does the Economic Effect Influence of the Perception Korean Wave?

The awareness of the Korean Wave was positive and

posited some noticeable economic effect through the media. All six students answered that they are willing to spend money for Korean products such as CD and concert tickets. Reinforcing the point, one of them stated "...I paid double price to buy Korean singer's concert ticket ... even my friend did...". In fact, the sales of Korean cultural content have seen tremendous increase over the years which were strongly attributed to content export and concerts. Cultural contents from the media are constantly growing up with government policy and its profit generation has been continuous. The present study showed that this was possibly due to the continued spending of students. All respondents noted that they were willing to spend money on Korean products, due to two main reasons. First, respondents denoted that Korean products has high perceived reliability, as one student expressed a strong belief regarding Korean products "...Korean technology is on top of the list and Korean products are a good choice... It is good for us without harm...". Secondly, Korean products can easily be bought and consumed as it is available through a variety of mediums. In addition, two students mentioned that these factors would have positive impacts on South Korea's tourism industry, entertainment industry and ultimately, the economy. One of them answered that if tourism industry improves, the Korean products would sell more. If so, economic effect will progress even more, and so would the aforementioned industries. One of the students even mentioned that "...definitely, Korea has been the biggest entertainment industry producer and big contributor in Asia..." proving that Korean Wave contents are popular to them and it leads economic effects. However, illegal downloads through blogs or illegal sites were highlighted to be a major challenge. As a matter of fact, one respondent admittedly mentioned in partaking in illegal downloads to watch Korean dramas.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of Malaysian students on the Korean Wave. The result of the interview revealed facts, which all six Malaysian students had positive perception about it. Firstly, the result of the first research question provided insights on the positive perceptions towards the Korean Wave, which derived from the develop-

ment of media and the export of various contents. Particular attention was placed on Korean drama series, variety shows, music and fashion, due to their ability to ignite interests and special fun. The Korean Wave was expressed to be well-promoted in various mediums, especially through the worldwide web, making them easily accessible for our respondents. Variety shows were the most popular Korean contents, due to its ability to introduce various famous Korean celebrities. Moreover, they also had the positive perception in economic effects. However, challenges such as illegal downloads through blogs or illegal sites are a standing issue. Despite all these, Korean Wave has brought positive position to both the Malaysian students and Korea. The popularity of the Korean Wave should be maintained for those engaged in them, as it would ultimately contribute to the Korean culture's image.

It's important to note that the present study only investigated a small pool of students from one university, which it cannot be representing all Malaysia students. Moreover, the three research questions only looked into media and the economic areas. Therefore, future studies are suggested to include better exploration such as incorporating in-depth interviews with respondents from different age and race could prove to enhance the significance of future studies. Extending the areas included in our study, or looking into more areas would help broaden the visions of existing literature on the current topic. This may help advance deeper understanding of the various perceptions of Malaysian towards the Korean culture.

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