

CO-CREATING KOREAN CULTURE IN EUROPE THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA

The Rise of the Transculturator

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Abstract

Over the past decade, Korean pop culture (including K-pop and K-drama series) has conquered the world and left its mark on the European market. Today, the number of fans of Korean culture exceeds 225 million. This study examines this fan phenomenon through a European sample. It focuses on fans who are not only consumers but also content creators, producers, and shapers of culture in digital media. The study is based on a multi-country dataset from Europe. The authors' primary survey, conducted in 2024, targeted fans of Korean culture in twelve European countries. The research explores fans' interest in Korean entertainment content, including their favorite genres, the digital platforms they use (e.g., *YouTube*, *Instagram*), and the diversity of their creative activities (e.g., fanfiction, fan art, dance covers, blogging). The study concludes that cultural identities are not a barrier to fansumers but are a new level of Hallyu, a process of co-creation. In the fandom, the fan's own culture and the culture that is the object of their fanhood are intertwined, creating a new phenomenon. This phenomenon transcends the category of fansumer and requires a new concept named the "transculturator." The transculturator, as a mediating and recreating individual, can place the cultural values of Hallyu in a new context and combine them with local cultural contents.

Keywords

European fans, fan community creation, fansumer, Hallyu, platform usage, transculturator

About the Authors

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INTRODUCTION

Hallyu (“Korean Wave”) is one of the most fascinating cultural phenomenon of recent decades. The term Hallyu refers to the global spread and rise of Korean culture (Shim 26). Korean arts, including films, dramas, K-pop, and fashion, have gained worldwide popularity. Hallyu is not merely a product of the Korean entertainment industry; it is also a complex cultural movement that shapes the world from cultural, economic, and social perspectives (Gibson). Additionally, the Korean Wave represents a form of soft power (Nye 95). Its impact is felt not only in culture but also in the economy.

Korean creative and cultural industry (CCI) companies, such as K-pop management agencies, consciously build on fan activity and aim to enhance fan engagement through management and marketing methods. According to the latest trends, they also involve the fanbase in content creation. The Hallyu fandom system is based on digital activism (Perez), which includes a new direction for the development of Hallyu but also raises concerns about globalization and the amalgamation of cultural heritage. The phenomenon of fandom indirectly contributes to the homogenization of local cultures.

Our research examines the European fan phenomenon, measuring the preferences and consumption habits of those who appreciate Korean culture. The study also addresses fans’ participation in online media and social media platforms, as well as an analysis of those platforms. The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of fans who actively participate in the transmission of cultures, articulate the concept of the transculturator, and lay the groundwork for future research on the phenomenon of transculturation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Culture and the Cultural and Creative Industries

The CCI encompasses activities that arise from the creativity, skills, and talents of individuals (Comunian et al. 7) and use this creativity and culture to produce a functional outcome, product, or service of a company or organization (European Commission 2). CCIs can include architecture, design, graphics, fashion, advertising, or music and film industries. This sector plays a significant role in the world economy, especially in trade and employment. According to the UNCTAD

Data Hub, CCI imports represented 2.61% of the total world merchandise, \$618,626 million in 2023 (“Creative Goods”). The exports in the same year of CCI products and services exceeded this ratio, reaching 3.06% and \$707,468 million.

The global importance of CCIs and, thus, the value of cultural content and commodities, such as pop music, films, and TV series, have been increasing significantly. During the last decades, this sector’s global revenue constantly expanded, reaching “\$2.250 billion in 2017. This amount represents about 10% of global GDP (IFCD 6).

In the European Union, employment in CCIs exceeded 7.930 million people in 2024, and more than 2.02 million companies have been operating in this sector (“Culture: Database”). The net turnover of these businesses reached €520 986.73 million. Thus, CCI is compelling not only in culture but in the global economy too.

The Relationship Between Art and Cultural Diversity

Cultural influences in a globalized world increasingly ensure permeability between cultures. This is reflected in fan artistic creations. Whether it is a musical piece, a mix, or a visual recreation, fans tell their stories beyond linguistic barriers on digital platforms. Thus, art transforms with the help of fans and becomes a mediating language that allows for reinterpretation and creative processes. Fan art, fanfiction, and video montages are not only intended to convey Korean culture but also have the ability to reinterpret the cultural context of the fans. Moving from passive reception to becoming active content creators, fans engage in the artistic process.

Art, as an economic factor in various forms, such as music, dance, and sculpture (co-creation), enables people to connect in a neutral space on emotional and aesthetic grounds (Keresztes 39-41). In the context of K-pop and K-dramas, phenomena can be observed at a world-class level that reduce cultural distance and evoke identification. These experienced processes and states (Keresztes and Komlósi 54–55) empower fan artists to create artistic values: by reinterpreting the creation, they engage in a truly culturally sensitive artistic activity. They imbue cultural significances with new meanings. A superb tool for this is digital platforms and virtual spaces, which quickly facilitates intercultural dialogue.

Theoretical Framework of Participatory Culture and Transculturalism

The term “participatory culture” is popularized from the definition provided by Henry Jenkins et al. et al. (8). They interpret it as a cultural environment in which members actively participate in creative processes through artistic expression and mentor each other across various platforms. Thus, consumers of participatory culture belong to communities where learning, cultivation, and participation are accepted and accessible to everyone. In these cases, communal values are crucial and arise from mutual collaborations. This means that it involves a grassroots collaboration that is open to technological platforms, accessible to anyone, and not dependent on technological interactivity. Convergent culture places culture in a context where media content is recirculated in a decentralized, self-organizing manner, supporting one another (Jenkins et al. 5–6). Remixing plays an important role since the collective narrative allows fans to reinterpret their identities and engage in social roles.

Transculturalism articulates the mixing of cultures, where transformation is ongoing. According to Néstor García Canclini, cultures are never identical; they mix with one another (2–4). Benjamin Barber considers this phenomenon in the poles of consumer culture and national resistance (17). However, transculturalism transcends this duality and does not think in binaries but provides permeability. By using culture as a hybrid form, it endows it with new, unique meanings and creates distinctive cultural content. The process itself is not an act of violence, allowing it to integrate into the local context and generate new, localized recordings. Participants not only actively engage but also actively reinterpret global cultural content. This means that global influences can also transform local traditions. As Fernando Ortiz explains, cultural mixing is no longer a linear assimilation but a variable, dynamic interaction (97–103). Although the concept of transculturation was first interpreted in 1940 as a counterpoint to the logic of colonization, its scientific description of the mixed form of cultures remains relevant.

Our study, therefore, interprets the term “transculturator” within this scientific framework as a contemporary concept, where the designation represents the recorded, active participants (fans, content creators, influencers, and enthusiasts).

ABOUT HALLYU

Since the 1990s, some sub-sectors of CCIs, such as South Korean (hereafter Korean) pop music (hereafter K-pop), films and TV series (hereafter K-dramas), gained worldwide popularity. In 2012, Psy’s “Gangnam Style” became a global hit, and within a few decades, K-pop groups such as BTS had conquered international music charts. In 2020, the South Korean film *Parasite* won an Academy Award along with several other major prizes. This global cultural expansion, known as Hallyu, refers to the rise and growing international recognition of South Korean popular culture (Shim 26). This phenomenon has also had a positive impact on other sectors of the national economy, boosting demand for related products and services, such as tourism, gastronomy, and beauty industries (Gajzágó 126). People became aware of Korean cultural contents, engaged with it, thus Hallyu developed into a “soft power” (Nye 95). This soft power has contributed to Korea’s economic growth by spreading the “Korean dream” internationally (Min et al. 608) and helping fans of Korean culture purchase Korean products globally (Shim 30).

THE DIGITAL SPACE AND ACTIVISM OF HALLYU FANS

Fans of Hallyu are a committed community expressed in digital activism (Park et al. 25). For them, art (e.g., K-pop, K-dramas, drawing, writing, etc.) isn’t just something they feel; it’s what they do together, on an emotional, social, and moral level, which has community norms that they must follow. Arts, like the theater, film, music, and painting, work through co-creation processes in a neutral place well suited to the creation of connections that link individuals and enable the characters to originate within the group (Keresztes 40).

Things like fan art, K-pop cover dances, or works of fanfiction exemplify acts of creative participation that, in their communal form, can afford Korean cultural content with interpretive dimensions hailing from local cultural pasts. They could, in this way, serve as a “transcultural” carrier and transfer a variety of cultural traits. In this way, art can be used as a medium for re-imagining social conformity.

Fans of Korean culture become activists through the power of new media, where social, political, or environmental interests are brought to the foreground (Chin and Morimoto 98). Platforms of global communities (*TikTok*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*) enable exchange and also speed up the production process. They make these fan projects visible, and they are illustrations of how fan communities can produce real social changes. Such digital activism campaigns not only consolidate

the community's identity but also demonstrate that Korean culture fans are not only purchasing produced cultural content, but also invest in social visions.

In this aspect, Korean culture fan communities exist within translocal spaces (Anderson 282-288), where global and local cultural forces coexist. This is evident especially when fans re-signify Korean cultural products to conform to their local norms and values.

THE HYBRIDIZATION OF KOREAN CULTURE

Hallyu allows Korean culture to be flexibly adapted. It transforms it according to local cultural needs, aligning it with local traditions and preferences. This process allows for cultural hybridization, enabling fans to reinterpret Hallyu content by transferring it from the real world to the virtual space. For example, in Israel, Korean culture is perceived as exotic and distant. Nevertheless, through online discussions, fan art, and cultural events, fans connect with each other, creating a kind of "third space" where they mediate between their own identities and the "otherness" of Korean culture (Lyan 3,774-75). Similarly, in South Asia, Hallyu combines traditional values with modern aspirations. This duality manifests itself as fans in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal draw parallels between the world of Korean pop and dramas and local cultural narratives (Roy 3-4). The characters in these dramas face moral dilemmas or social stratification issues that are familiar to the viewers, encountering similar patterns but in different contexts, which encourages reinterpretation.

The phenomenon of Hallyu and fandom not only exists alongside each other but also builds an organic relationship, amplifying each other's effects. Art, as a tool, creates a new type of "product" in the lives of fans, associating new values with local cultural traditions (Jung). The cultural mediating element reconsiders social norms, and identification becomes an organic part of society. The dynamics of this relationship is still an area for further research.

Considering hybridity, characteristics of Korean culture fans, and fandom culture, the authors aim to introduce a new expression representing fans participating in content creation. This group of fans represents the fandom-based cultural mechanism that imbues global content (e.g., K-pop, K-dramas) with local layers of meaning, creating new identities, creative forms, and cultural dynamics. They do not only mediate but also recode, resulting in a hybrid cultural form. This group is, as the authors name them, the group of transculturators, which we define in the chapter following the introduction of our research results.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research results introduced in this article were concluded from a complex research project, examining the fandom of Korean culture in Europe. This complex research consisted of the following main phases: (1) a secondary data analysis, (2) a series of preliminary professional interviews involving European Hallyu experts, (3) a primary online questionnaire research, and (4) another phase of professional interviews with Korean company representatives. In this paper, the authors introduce the results of the secondary analysis and the questionnaires (first and third parts).

Before primary research, the researchers studied related literature and previous research results published in journals and official databases, such as KOFICE, or the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, and KOCCA, Korea, or the Creative Content Agency, about the Korean culture fandom in Europe.

The third phase of the research used an online questionnaire targeting only Korean culture fans in twelve countries in Europe. This phase of the research was implemented in 2024 between June and October. The questionnaire was spread through social media channels, such as the personal channels of the Hallyu researchers involved in the first interview phase, Korean institutions's (such as Korean Cultural Centers) platforms, or specific Korea-related channels. The research resulted in 2,208 responses. In this paper, we focus on content creator fans; therefore, we filtered the database, and selected and analyzed only the answers of respondents who create Korean culture–related content. The selection criteria are explained in the next section.

During the primary research sampling, the researchers faced some hindering factors. For instance, as the number of questionnaire respondents does not correspond to the estimated size of the fandom, the research results are not representative. This problem originated from the lack of information about the size of the fandom in the examined countries. During secondary research we found that the official data from the Korea Foundation is solely based on fans' social media membership. The multiple representations of fans in social media platforms have not been considered in this database; therefore, we were not able to use this source. Besides, no other publications about the fandom size are available. (Here, we wish to note that Korean companies might have proper data about their customers; however, these sources are not available for researchers.)

The questionnaire of the primary research phase was targeted and distributed only to the fans of Korean culture, and, therefore, the research does not fully represent the opinions or the preferences within countries and wider society.

The original questionnaire contained several types of questions measuring the preferences, online and digital media usage, and purchasing patterns of Korean culture fans. Most of the questions were true or false and multiple-choice questions; no metric scales were used to measure the opinion of the fandom. Unfortunately, the lack of metric scales prevented the researchers from carrying out a factor or cluster analysis. The results presented in this article are derived from regression and frequency analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

About the Respondents

The questionnaires spread over twelve countries resulted in 2,208 responses. In this paper, we sorted out answers and selected only those respondents who participated in any creation and creative process. The questionnaire contained two main questions containing elements about creation: (1) how the fans support their favorite K-pop group (e.g., they participate in community events by creating a hashtag or streaming party, engage with the group on social media by commenting or posting, create fan content), and (2) what kind of additional activities do the fans do (e.g., practice traditional Korean arts, engage with Korean culture online communities or forums, collect traditional Korean items or artifacts, practice cover dance or folk dance, sing or perform cover songs, translate movies and dramas, write blogs or manage vlogs related to Korean culture, manage a social media site dedicated to Korean culture and write fanfiction based on Korean artists or dramas). The total number of creators (the number of those respondents who are engaged in the previously mentioned activities) was 706. The answers of these 706 respondents were analyzed in this paper.

During the analysis, we described these creators by studying frequencies and regression. We also summarized the most frequent answers to create a buyer persona characterizing these respondents. Most of the respondents (226 persons) live in Hungary; the second and third countries where the highest number of respondents live are the Czech Republic (118 persons) and Romania (93 respondents). The rate of women respondents is overrepresented (92.8%); however, other research and databases had similar results (Um 16; Escolar and Arias 44). Most of the respondents (45.5%) were born between 1997 and 2012 (they represent Gen Z), and 29.6% belong to the age group of millennials, who were born between 1981 and 1996. Older age groups, Gen X and boomers, are also represented in the

group of respondents: Boomers II (1955-1964), 3.0%, and Gen X (1965-1980), 16.3%. Boomers I (1946-1954), and Alpha generations are underrepresented (below 1%). 39.5% of the respondents live in big cities (with more than 1 million inhabitants), and most of them, 42.6% have a place of living in a smaller city. The highest rate of the respondents (42.4%) has a full-time job, and 39.0% are still studying. 62.5% are single, and 20.1% are married or live in a partnership.

Creator Preferences

The research examined the respondents' preferred cultural fields with a multiple-choice question. The most popular fields were Korean movies and the Korean language (both were chosen by 87.0%), K-dramas (85.3%), and K-pop (84.7%). Another multiple-choice question examined the reason why fans like Korean culture. 81.3% chose to like the culture because of the language, 69.3% liked the history and traditions, and the third most popular reason (57.5%) was that Korean culture is different from the respondent's culture. The answers prove that Hallyu reached its fourth stage in which fans are not only engaged with the culture but dive more into it and connect the culture with their own lifestyles as they follow the K-style (Jin 4,153).

Platform Usage and Engagement

The questionnaire included three topics related to platform usage: it first examined how the fans use platforms to consume K-drama and related contents, the second group of questions then focused on K-pop listening platforms and K-pop related content consumption, and finally, the third group of questions explored the platform usage for communication between fans.

The creators in the examined countries mainly prefer *Netflix* (79.7%), *Rakuten Viki* (56.2%), and *Disney+* (38.0%) to watch K-dramas. The most popular platforms where fans reach and consume K-drama-related content, such as posts, teasers, and edits, are *Instagram* (69.8%), *YouTube* (69.4%), and *TikTok* (49.9%). When we asked the fans on which channel they listen to K-pop, the most preferred answers were *Spotify* (70.7%), *YouTube* (68.6%), and *SoundCloud* (22.9%). For consuming K-pop-related content (like edits, shorts, practice videos, etc.), creators prefer to use *YouTube* (84.3%), *Instagram* (77.8%), and *TikTok* (56.8%). 67.1% of the respondents communicate and are in touch with other Korean culture fans. When

communicating with each other, examined fans mainly use *Instagram* (49.7%), personal communication during personal meetings (47.0%), and *Facebook* (42.6%).

Table 1 shows that the most popular platform that fans use is *Instagram*; they use it for almost every activity. Fans use *Facebook* to participate in communities or to communicate with other fans. *YouTube* is used for content consumption or following influencers. To reach influencers, fans mentioned *TikTok* too.

Table 1
Platforms Used by Fans for Specific Activities and their Ranking

Activity of platform usage	Popularity rank of the platforms		
	First	Second	Third
Consuming content (e.g., reading posts, watching videos)	YouTube	Instagram	TikTok
Creating and posting content (e.g., photos, texts, videos)	Instagram	Facebook	TikTok
Interacting with content (e.g., liking, commenting, sharing)	Instagram	YouTube	Facebook
Communicating with others (e.g., private messaging, commenting)	Instagram	Facebook	TikTok
Following brands and influencers	Instagram	TikTok	YouTube
Seeking information or news	Instagram	YouTube	Facebook
Participating in groups or communities	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter

The research examined how the fans support their favorite stars and K-pop groups. Most of the respondents (71.2%) chose that they follow the idols and engage with them on social media, while the second most popular (70.3%) activity was to purchase the albums (physically or online) of the groups. The third most chosen answer (60.8%) was to support the groups by streaming their music videos and songs to increase views. In this question, the respondents could also choose answers related to their creative activity engagement, such as participating in online voting for music awards and competitions (53.5%), engaging in community organizations (e.g., hashtag parties, streaming parties) (16.0%), and creating or sharing fan content (33.7%). The three options show that fans are creative and eager

to create new content related to their biases. Being a fan can influence them to be engaged in creative creation.

Content Creators among Korean Culture Fans

During the research, respondents were asked about their additional activities related to Korean culture (fig. 1). Most of them indicated that they learn the Korean language (58.1%), eat or cook Korean food (51.4%), and plan a trip or travel to Korea (37.7%).

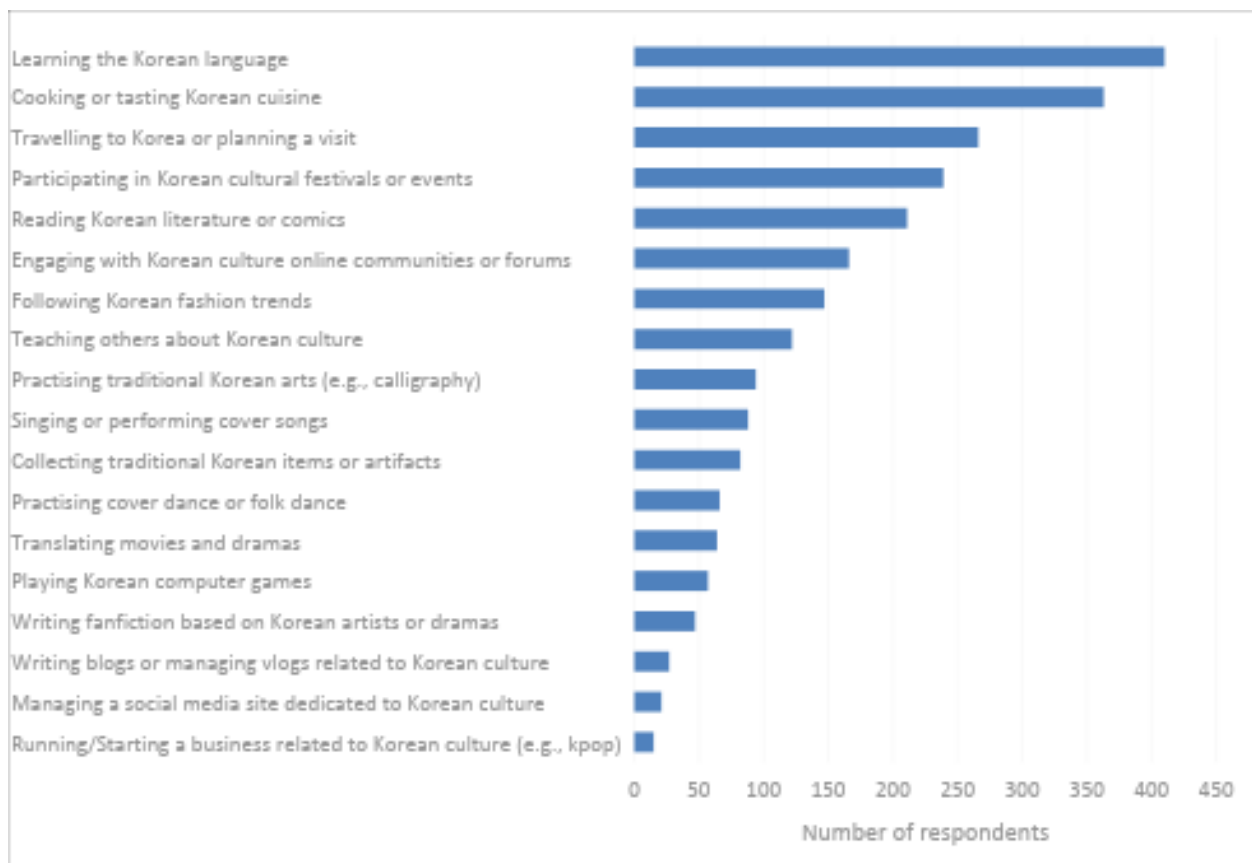


Fig 1. Number of respondents participating in activities related to Korean culture.

The authors focused on the respondents who can be considered creators as they participate in art-related activities based on the above research results (fig. 1). When fans indicate that they regularly do such activities, create content, or manage

content creation, we can assume that their engagement to the culture has reached a higher level.

13.3% of the respondents are connected to Korean art in their practice of calligraphy, among other arts. Others sing or perform cover songs (12.5%), practice cover dance or folk dance (9.3%), translate movies and dramas (9.1%), write fanfiction based on Korean culture or dramas (6.7%), or write blogs or manage vlogs (3.8%) related to Korean culture. We describe their attributes and preferences in the succeeding sections by studying these creator fans and comparing their additional activities to other demographic and culture-specific variables of the questionnaire.

Attributes of Korean Culture Fans Who Practice Traditional Korean Arts (e.g., calligraphy)

The practice of traditional Korean arts, such as calligraphy, among Korean culture fans reveals significant demographic and cultural patterns.

Geographically, Hungary and Romania show the highest proportions of traditional Korean art practitioners, while 87.5% of Bulgarian creators and 50% of Italians practice traditional Korean arts. In contrast, the proportion of practitioners among Hungarian, Romanian, and Austrian fans remains at approximately 20%. The chi-square test indicates a statistically significant relation between geographical location and engagement in traditional Korean arts, while the Phi and Cramer's V coefficients show that this association is strong.

The findings demonstrate notable demographic patterns in participation in traditional Korean arts, particularly across generational and gender groups. For example, 16.8% of female content creators are engaged in traditional Korean arts. Generationally, 56.2% of practitioners belong to Gen Z, followed by 24.7% from the millennial age group. A striking 100% of respondents categorized as Boomer I practice traditional Korean arts, whereas only 31.3% of Boomer II participants do so. Urban residence appears to correlate with higher participation, as 58.5% of practitioners live in large cities and 24.5% in smaller urban areas. In terms of occupational status, half of the traditional art practitioners are students, and 38.3% are full-time workers. A significant majority (73.4%) of traditional artists are single.

Most practitioners have been Korean culture fans for either three to five years or six to ten years. Cultural preferences also indicate strong alignment with K-dramas, with the majority of practitioners watching four to ten hours of K-drama content weekly. These artists also tend to appreciate other Asian cultures, and 14.8% express

this broader cultural interest. Media consumption of traditional Korean art creators reveals a slight connection (the Cramer's V indicators show a very weak correlation of the variables) with digital platforms: *Netflix* and *Rakuten Viki* are most used for K-drama viewing, while *YouTube* and *Instagram* serve as primary platforms for engaging with related content. In the context of K-pop, *YouTube* and *Spotify* are the main audio platforms, while related content is predominantly consumed via *YouTube* and *Instagram*.

Attributes of Korean Culture Fans Who Sing or Perform K-pop Cover Songs

Fans who sing or perform K-pop cover songs represent a distinct subgroup within the broader Korean culture fandom in the examined countries. National representation of them is the highest among Polish (27.3%), Hungarian (21.6%), and Romanian (18.2%) respondents.

Other patterns emerge: the gender distribution shows interesting patterns (however, the relation of the variables, Cramer's V indicator, is weak); 27.3% of respondents identifying themselves as "another gender" sing, a proportion notably higher than among women (15.6%) and men (14.8%). In addition, Gen Z dominates this creator group, as 67.5% of singers belong to this age group. Notably, there are no respondents from the Boomer I or Alpha generations engaging in this practice. Most singers reside in urban areas and are students (61.4%), while only 29.5% hold full-time jobs. The majority (71.6%) are single.

The typical fan who sings K-pop cover songs has been engaged with Korean culture for three to five years, while the new fans show less inclination toward this activity. Only 15.9% of K-pop fans overall participate in cover singing. In terms of media consumption, most singers listen to K-pop for two to four hours or more than six hours daily. However, K-pop content consumption (such as vlogs, news, cover songs, etc.) is more moderate, with most singers engaging in one to two hours per day. Additionally, 68.2% of singers express interest in other Asian cultures. Similarly to the previous traditional art creator group, media platforms play a central role in the cultural engagement of the singers: they primarily use *Netflix* and *Rakuten Viki* for K-drama viewing, while *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and *TikTok* are the main sources for related content. For K-pop listening, *Spotify* and *YouTube* are dominant, with *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and *TikTok* serving as key platforms for accessing K-pop-related media.

Attributes of Korean Culture, Fans Who Practice K-pop Cover Dance or Korean Folk Dance

Fans who engage in K-pop cover dance or Korean folk dance display distinct demographic and behavioral characteristics, and geographically, the majority of dancers reside in Hungary (39.4%) and the Czech Republic (21.2%). The practice is also overwhelmingly female-dominated, with 90.9% of dancers identifying as women; however, 14.8% of male creator respondents also indicated dancing.

Generationally, dancers are primarily members of Gen Z (54.7%), Gen X (25%), and the millennial age group (20.3%), while no respondents from the oldest or youngest generations report participation in this activity. Most dancers live in urban areas and are either students or employed in full-time positions. A significant proportion (59.1%) is single.

The majority of these individuals have been fans of Korean culture for three to five years. Most dancers watch K-dramas for four to six hours daily. K-pop is also central to their cultural interest: 86.4% of dancers are K-pop fans, although only 10.9% of all K-pop fans engage in dancing. Most dancers listen to K-pop for two to four hours per day and consume an additional thirty minutes to one hour of K-pop-related content. Moreover, 69.7% of dancers express appreciation for other Asian cultures. Regarding media platforms, these respondents predominantly use *Netflix*, *Rakuten Viki*, or *Videa* to watch K-dramas, and *Instagram* to engage with related content. For K-pop music consumption, *Spotify* and *YouTube* are preferred, while *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and *TikTok* are the primary platforms for accessing K-pop-related visual and interactive media.

Attributes of Korean Culture Fans Who Write Fanfiction Based on Korean Artists or Dramas

Fanfiction writing among Korean culture fans is a creative form of cultural engagement that shows clear demographic and behavioral trends. Most fanfiction writers are Hungarian or Romanian. There is an especially high participation rate among Italian creator fans (75%), who engage in writing fanfiction.

The vast majority of fanfiction writers (91.5%) identify as women, although 18.2% of those who identify as belonging to the “other” category also participate in this activity. Fanfiction writing is most prevalent among members of Gen Z, while individuals from the Boomer I and Alpha generations do not indicate any of this activity. Most writers reside in small towns and are either students or full-time

employees. Interestingly, 12.5% of retired respondents also engage in fanfiction writing, suggesting that the practice is not exclusive to younger groups. A significant proportion of writers are single.

The majority have been fans of Korean culture for three to five years or longer. Nearly all fanfiction writers (97.9%) are fans of K-dramas, and the majority watch K-drama content for four to six hours daily. Additionally, 85.1% of fanfiction writers are K-pop fans, typically listening to K-pop music for one to two or two to four hours per day, and consuming related content for a further one to two hours. A strong interest in other Asian cultures is also apparent, with 73.3% of writers expressing such a preference. In terms of media usage, *Netflix* and *Rakuten Viki* are the primary platforms for their K-drama consumption, while *Instagram*, *YouTube*, *TikTok*, and *Facebook* are used for engaging with related content. For music, *YouTube* and *Spotify* dominate, with K-pop-related content most often accessed via *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and *TikTok*.

Attributes of creator fans who write blogs or managing vlogs related to Korean culture

Fans who engage in blogging or vlogging activities related to Korean culture constitute a dedicated subgroup within the fan community. Romanian respondents represent nearly half (48.1%) of this category. The majority of vloggers are members of Gen Z (54.2%), followed by millennials (20.8%). Geographically, most vlog writers reside in urban environments, either in large or smaller cities, and most are employed full-time, although 12.5% of pensioners also contribute to blog or vlog content creation. A majority of these individuals are single.

In terms of fandom longevity, most have been engaged with Korean culture for over a decade. A substantial 92.6% of blog and vlog writers are K-drama fans, watching four to six hours of K-drama content daily. K-pop is also popular among this group: 88.9% of vloggers are K-pop fans. Vloggers typically listen to K-pop for one to two or two to four hours each day and consume an additional one to two hours of related content. Interest in broader Asian cultures is also prevalent, with 77.8% expressing such affinity. The most common platforms for K-drama viewing among this group include *Netflix*, official TV network websites, and *Rakuten Viki*. For K-drama-related content, *YouTube* and *Instagram* are the most used platforms, while K-pop music is mainly accessed via *YouTube* and *Spotify*, with related content consumption centered around *YouTube* and *Instagram*.

THE TRANSCULTURATOR

Based on the above data analyses, we can define a “transculturator” as a person responsible for the crossing of cultures, actively participating in their shaping and transmission. The transculturator uses various platforms to express their creative activities. In doing so, they actively recode and elicit activity from their followers. Their choices are not random; they are influenced by the context of their expression (what language they wish to use: music, visuals, imagery) and the cultural background of the adaptation. Research indicates that being a transculturator is not age-dependent but rather tied to personal attachment, involvement, and attitude. The recoding occurs based on generational patterns, but in every case, it mediates and reinterprets similarly.

According to the respondents’ data, we can conclude that they engage in various artistic activities (cooking, translating, dancing, writing, painting). Thus, the transculturator not only recreates their experience but also shapes their identity, building a new community and identity along with it. This type of cultural attitude advances fans from passive to active roles, distinguishing them from passive content consumers. In a society where culture can be utilized as a tool, social relationships are also strengthened (Magyari-Beck 345–46). The social space created in this way is characterized not only by Korean culture but also by personal and European cultural complexity. In this space, every activity can be interpreted as a kind of sign (hashtag parties), as the community establishes its own behavioral patterns, forms, and norms. The data and tables clearly show that the transculturator works with a multimodal interpretation that combines visual, linguistic, bodily, and symbolic codes, thus actively contributing to the creation of new cultural norms.

The Transculturator’s Persona

Based on our research results, we described the “ideal” transculturator in Europe, who represents the fans of Korean culture who are engaged in creative content creation or artistic activities. This transculturator persona has been a fan of Korean culture for at least three to five years, most likely a woman in her twenties or thirties. She likes watching K-dramas, and if she writes blogs or fanfiction, she presumably watches K-dramas at least four to six hours a day and consumes more K-drama and K-pop-related content online. She probably lives in a big city similar to Hungary, Romania, or the Czech Republic, and is a student or works in a full-time job. The transculturator enjoys other Asian cultures too.

The platform usage of the active creators can be characterized by using *Netflix*, *Rakuten Viki*, or in some cases, official TV network sites, to watch K-dramas, and *YouTube* or *Spotify* to listen to K-pop. The creators also consume K-drama and K-pop-related content, for which they use *YouTube*, *Instagram*, or *TikTok*.

The Transculturator as a Digital Actor

The distinction between influencers and fans is articulated by Maanya Tewatia and Sramana Majumdar in that influencers' self-presentation supports their careers and serves as a tool for attention, while the identity of fans transforms (54–56). Referring to this concept as the “attention economy,” Angèle Christin and Yingdan Lu explain in detail how influencers face the challenges of digital capitalism, racing against time and attention (4147–4164). In contrast, a fan's behavioral patterns grow along the lines of community values. Fans do not treat online culture unilaterally: they not only mediate culture but also regulate content with their opinions, therefore shaping norms. They enter the market as a “regulatory force” known as the “follower's gaze.” Their co-creative role on digital platforms emerges as a new identity, interpretable as a kind of linguistic code (Tewatia and Majumdar 56, 68). In this new framework, they influence not only the type of content but also its tone. They are capable of creating new structures of cultural meaning, stepping into the role of actors in society. From this perspective, the transculturator emerges as a social and political activist whose actions extend beyond identity formation and influence broader cultural norms and discourses. The transculturator, through community knowledge sharing and mentoring, also plays a role as a knowledge mediator (Dávida 10).

The Transculturator as a Value Creator in the Fandom Economy

Often, individuals from traditionally lower-status groups (such as young women) play a central role within fandom communities. These groups are also more active in consumption. Content consumption does not stop here. Fan creations, such as remixes or reinterpreted works, create new opportunities for creative industries. More than 38% of our respondents spend over seven hours a week watching K-dramas or consuming related content, generating significant demand for official products. Thus, the activity of transculturators contributes to the growth of the cultural industry.

According to European creative industry statistics, approximately 3.95% of the EU GDP goes to CCI, which employs around eight million people (“Internal Market”). Given this, we can assume that CCIs are key players in sustainable innovation and social transformation, therefore supporting sustainable development (Wang et al. 01). Qingnian Wang et al. discussed that these creative communities, along with their fans, are capable of changing the direction of communication between their idols (1). Thus, they simultaneously influence two directions, becoming both content producers and consumers.

Research indicates that members of online fan communities report significantly higher feelings of belonging and social capital than those in traditional communities (Smyth 12–13). Thus, the passion for Korean culture not only provides entertainment but also generates positive emotional experiences. Listening to music has been shown to stimulate dopamine release in the brain, contributing to the formation of emotionally rewarding memories (Health 360). The content created by transculturators reinforces this positive experience, as the audience actively participates in cultural discourse.

Creativity, as interpreted by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996), manifests when an individual presents a novel idea to the “expert” community, and that group, in this case, the fandom, recognizes it (27). Thus, the novelty is validated. The creative process can be interpreted based on the “domain–field–individual” model, where innovations are validated by the community. John Fiske (1992) views this creative process as the manifestation of surplus meaning, where fandoms create new meanings from elements of popular culture, as if filling the “void” that the original works have consciously constructed (30–33). Through fan contributions, a new cultural heritage emerges, which begins to influence economic processes.

Therefore, the activities of transculturators not only advance Korean culture but also promote dialogue between global cultures. There is empirical evidence that the fandom engages in measurable creative activities on digital platforms. They create new cultural elements that have a community-building and societal impact. Thus, the concept of the transculturator explicitly appears and becomes a reality. Its impact is measurable and requires further investigation and analysis.

Based on the European scope of our study, we can conclude that the activities of fandoms are much more diverse as they function as cultural recreators, hybrid artistic mediators, culture–community organizers, tradition mediators, content managers, and multicultural transculturators. These groups and their activities, based on our patterns, gain new structured meanings that not only affect the specific culture but also the generational patterns and the transcultural roles of

the platforms, including the interpretation and quality of the transculturator. This typology raises further questions that will be the focus of our future research.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE AND DISCUSSION

The Authenticity of Hallyu Products

The question of preserving authenticity arises concerning Hallyu, specifically regarding the nature of Korean cultural products. Entering the global market may mean that not only products but also cultures are transformed to meet international tastes and expectations. This kind of homogenization could threaten the original elements of Korean culture. The true essence of culture is reflected in traditions, not in the demands of a global audience. Thus, the new economic and cultural model may present obstacles.

Globalization and Cultural Appropriation

South Korean films, series, music, and fashion products have become globally popular, with Hallyu not only exporting Korean culture but also shaping the global cultural landscape. Through globalization, various cultural boundaries blur, accelerating the pace of cultural products, which may also lead to cultural decline (Magyari-Beck 348–50). Dominant cultures selectively use elements of minority cultures, often stripping them of their original context or failing to respect them. In the case of Hallyu, this phenomenon can be concerning, as elements of Korean traditions may appear in an alienated manner before non-Korean audiences. This kind of appropriation can lead not only to the loss of cultural identity but also to the alteration of the meanings of cultural products, distorting their original significance and value. Thus, the globalization of Hallyu is not just a matter of cultural interactions. It raises serious questions regarding social ethics, prompting us to consider the direction that future cultural products will take.

Technological and Economic Constraints

Hallyu relies not only on cultural appeal but also on the technological and economic environment. These two factors directly impact the accessibility of Hallyu products in the international market (Jenkins et al. 9–10). The availability of Korean products is not evenly distributed across different parts of the world. In economically developed countries, Korean products are more easily accessible, while in developing countries, their popularity is often hindered by economic limitations and deficiencies in technological infrastructure. This situation not only leads to inequalities in the consumption of cultural products but also results in different experiences of cultural identities and encounters. Therefore, the global spread of Korean culture is not just a cultural phenomenon; it is surrounded by complex economic and technological issues that, when taken into account, can help us better understand the true impacts and challenges of the phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

The concept of Korean culture transculturators emerged through analyzing the fans who participated in the creation process related to Korean culture. Transculturators are not merely cultural consumers; they are active cultural agents who reinterpret, recode, and convey Korean cultural content within their own local contexts. They represent a well-described group in the fandom and have specific preferences, media consumption traits, and usage patterns.

The role reflects the expression of cultural hybridity and mirrors the dynamic interaction occurring between global and local values. Transculturators are new identities that facilitate the emergence of digital community spaces and cultural understandings. In doing so, they raise questions about the new rules of creation, authenticity, and the ownership of cultural values. The spreading of cultures due to globalization, the hybridity of cultures, and the intensive communication among fans can influence the development of intercultural processes and the interaction between cultures. Therefore, examining transculturators is essential, as they act as mediating agents who actively facilitate intercultural exchange, intensify these processes, and contribute to the strategic development of soft power.

Future research topics may include the examination of the role of transculturators in offline spaces, as well as how they influence generational, gender, and social identities within these cultural forms. It could also be interesting to investigate the cultural-political role of transculturators, as well as their role in the field of education.

With the blurring of cultural boundaries, new systems of meaning may emerge, positioning transculturators at the forefront of cultural transformations in the twenty-first century.

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