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**POPULAR CULTURE AS A TOOL OF SOFT POWER:
KOREAN WAVE IN ESTONIA**

Master's Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of this thesis is the Korean Wave and its soft power influence. Korean Wave is the massive global growth in interest for Korea in recent years and can be defined in multiple ways regarding the composition of the Wave itself. Initially, the Korean Wave was made up of Korean dramas, music, and movies. However, as this wave has spread and grown, it can now include everything about Korea from products, popular culture to traditional culture and the Korean way of life. In the context of this thesis, the Korean Wave is defined only by its popular culture components as that is the most widespread and long-used definition of this term, as well as most likely the most influential aspect of the Korean Wave that brought Korea to international attention.

This thesis will focus on analyzing the soft power of the Korean Wave in Estonia as in recent years there has been a quite significant increase in the number of communities interested in Korea, the number of Korean products offered in Estonian stores, increased participation in Korean language classes, as well as increased travel to Korea. In 2015, for example, Korea established King Sejong language institute in Estonia, whose student count grew 5x by 2020, and the number of cultural events the institute organizes grew almost 8x. The University of Tartu has also provided classes on Korea since 2016 by a visiting professor from Korea (sent by Korea Foundation), according to whom the interest for Korean classes is indeed rising.

Communities focused on engaging with Korea popped up in Estonia as well - from culture clubs to K-pop fandoms, garnering around 3,000 members on the Facebook platform alone. Popular online stores that sell only Korean cosmetics on Facebook and Instagram platforms have in total around 37,000 people interested purely in Korean cosmetics. These numbers are not small for Estonia, even if considering that some of these members might overlap.

On top of that, the number of Estonian citizens traveling to Korea in 2019 was 360 people. The number of people traveling on a visa (meaning non-tourist purposes) has also doubled from 10 people in 2015 to 20 people during pre-pandemic times in 2019. Although these numbers might seem small, it is crucial to keep in mind the size of Estonia and the popularity of Korea in Estonia. For a country where Korea has not been a popular destination for tourism, let alone long-term purposeful travel, it is surprising that this

number doubled. Moreover, through all these years, most people entering Korea on a visa have been increasingly students signaling perhaps an institutional influence as all classes about Korea are offered in universities, and King Sejong Institute (KSI) is also connected to a university.

These numbers prompt a question - what sparked this interest for Korea in Estonia? On a person-to-person level, what made people in Estonia interested in Korea, and is this interest connected to the global Korean Wave? If the increased interest is the result of the global Korean Wave, what aspect of this wave has been the most influential? Is it possible to claim that Korea became more popular not because of its traditional culture (e.g., taekwondo or language) or the country's political image, but because of popular culture? These questions are the main focus of this thesis - establishing a link between Korean Wave and growing interest in Korea in Estonia.

To explore the link between the global Korean Wave and the increased interest for Korea in Estonia, the author questioned different communities in Estonia who were in some manner interested in Korea to find out how they became interested in Korea and how this interest had changed over time and affected their perception of Korea. The author reached out to mainly three different communities: Popular culture fans, traditional culture fans, and people interested in living, studying, or working in Korea, to get more varied responses.

This thesis will argue that the growing interest for Korea in Estonia is connected to the soft power of Korean popular culture, as well as that the global Korean Wave is not simply a result of the accidental discovery of Korean culture but a deliberate attempt of the Korean Government and the Korean Ministry of Culture at growing Korean soft power abroad to gain economic benefits and attempt nation branding. The thesis argues that Korean Wave is used as a tool for reaching these goals through establishing various organizations (e.g., KSI and Korea Foundation) and strategically guiding and supporting the growth of Korean soft power through the Korean Wave. Thus, the spread of the Korean Wave abroad is not accidental and serves a deeper purpose. The thesis will also assess whether people in Estonia are interested in traveling and buying Korean products - signaling economic benefits for Korea, and whether their perception of Korea has become more positive due to Korean Wave - signaling effective nation branding.

This topic is important to research because soft power changes the power dynamics of states. Through the power of attraction, the engagement of Estonians with Korea, and the demand for Korean products on the Estonian market might grow more. As

soft power is more "sneaky," so to say, its effects might not be noticeable right away. If there is an indication of its growth, it can prepare Estonia better for future changes. On top of that, even on an official level, the importance of Estonia's relations with Korea has grown as Estonia is at the time of writing this thesis actively in the process of establishing an embassy of Estonia in Korea. Although the focus of both countries is currently on economic cooperation and IT with cybersecurity, the growing interest for Korea in Estonia might also indicate the increasing importance of cultural diplomacy between Estonia and Korea in the near future.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter focuses on Korean Wave and its connection with soft power. The first subchapter aims to define the term "popular culture" in the context of this work and explain the emergence and development of the Korean Wave from the 1990s. The second subchapter of the first chapter aims to explain the different approaches to soft power and demonstrate how Korea has used Korean Wave as a strategic soft power tool since the emergence of Hallyu in the 1990s.

The second main chapter focuses on explaining the research type and methodological structure of this work. This work is done as a single case qualitative research. The method used for data collection is a randomized anonymous questionnaire sent to the three groups mentioned above.

The third chapter of this thesis focuses on the case of the Korean Wave in Estonia. The introduction to the chapter begins with an overview of the current situation in Estonia (e.g., number of communities interested in Korea, availability of Korean products on the market, etc.). The first subchapter then focuses on establishing the importance of Korean popular culture among the respondents. How many consume pop culture? Is pop culture what got them interested in Korea, and have their interests changed over time?

The second subchapter focuses on determining how tightly Estonians engage with Korea - how often they consume Hallyu, how they came in contact with Korean culture, how often they travel to Korea? The third subchapter aims to assess how consumption of Korean popular culture has affected participants' perception of Korea. Conclusions are made based on the 166 responses given to a 32-question questionnaire filled out by respondents from April to May 2021.

1. KOREAN WAVE AND SOFT POWER

As an introduction to this topic, it is important to first explain the usage of certain terminology in the context of this work to maintain clarity. Expressions like Korean Wave and Hallyu will be used interchangeably to mean the same thing. This is done to make the text a bit less repetitive and easier to read. Occasionally K-Wave, a shortened version of Korean Wave, is used.

Single K is occasionally used with another word to shorten spelling out Korea in full, e.g., K-drama, K-movies, etc. The term K-pop however, has a specific meaning. K-pop used to be a term previously used only when referring to Korean pop music, but nowadays, this term has come to encompass all the aspects of Korean popular culture.¹ However, in the context of this work, the shortened version "K-pop" will be used only to refer to Korean pop songs.

1.1. Popular Culture and Korean Wave

The focus of this first subchapter is to define what Korean Wave is, especially in the context of this work, and explain how the Korean Wave developed and spread. The aim is to establish which aspects of Hallyu will be considered as part of popular culture during this research. Thus, to begin this chapter, it is first necessary to define culture and pop culture. There are many different ways to define culture since this concept encompasses many aspects. Oxford Dictionary considers culture to be a way of life and social organization of a particular country or group, set of customs and beliefs, and art.

¹ Shin Dong Kim, *The Korean Wave. Why it Swept the World* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2019), p. 156.

Another explanation describes culture as a "set of values and practices that create meaning for a society. It has many manifestations. It is common to distinguish between high culture such as literature, art, and education, which appeals to elites, and popular culture, which focuses on mass entertainment."²

The definition of popular culture stems from this understanding. According to John Storey, popular culture can be anything that is not considered to be a part of high culture.³ Popular culture is content that is produced according to audiences' desires, targeted at mass audiences, and consumed for the purpose of entertainment.⁴ It usually reflects the practices, tastes, and values of 'ordinary people,' not of elites or high culture.⁵

This division into high and low culture has also left a negative mark on the perception of popular culture. The term "popular culture" was often used in reference to inferior types of work (e.g., popular press\literature as an opposite of quality press\literature), or work that was deliberately aiming to win favor (e.g., popular journalism vs. democratic journalism), but nowadays the more simple meaning of this term is just something well-liked by many people.⁶

For many people, the term pop culture is also associated with something created with the aim of earning money, not purely the value of the content itself. John Storey also links popular culture to mass culture due to the significant role of mass media and claims that popular culture is inevitably of commercial nature.⁷ Popular culture can be described as "a set of commodities produced through capitalistic processes driven by a profit motive and sold to consumers."⁸

As a result, pop culture in this thesis will be defined as a low form of culture that is attractive to the masses and not elites. These will be the parts of Korean culture that are made keeping in mind the preferences of the audience and made for entertainment or its commercial value (e.g., K-fashion, K-cosmetics, comics, K-pop)

On the other hand, Korean Wave is the term used to describe the spread of Korean popular culture outside of Korea. This phenomenon is also often referred to as Hallyu

² Joseph Samuel Nye Jr., *Soft Power the Means to Success in World Politics* (Public Affairs, 2004), p. 11.

³ John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Octaedro, 2002).

⁴ Oxford Reference: Popular Culture.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 111.

⁷ John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2002).

⁸ Dustin Kidd, *Popular Culture* (Oxford Bibliography, 2017).

(한류), meaning the Flow of Korea or Wave of Korea. The term Hallyu itself comes originally from the Chinese word *Hanliu* (韩流), which was first used to describe the fast spread of Korean popular culture in China in the 1990s.⁹ Nowadays, the term "Hallyu" symbolizes not just Korean popular culture but also its global popularity.¹⁰

The Korean Wave spread abroad gradually and is often divided into different eras and periods. One way of distinguishing different stages of Hallyu is by simply dividing it into Hallyu and Neo-Hallyu, or Hallyu 1.0 (1990-2007), and Hallyu 2.0 (2007-present).¹¹ Others classify Korean Wave as having four different phases and differentiate them by numbers - Hallyu 1.0, Hallyu 2.0, Hallyu 3.0, and Hallyu 4.0. When focusing on the development of Hallyu in China, the Hallyu can be divided into three eras: Hallyu 1.0 aka. The Analog Media era (1992-2004), Hallyu 2.0 aka. The Pre-mobile Internet era (2005-2012), and Hallyu 3.0 aka. The Mobile Internet era (2013-present).¹²

These divisions signify the different stages of development, the speed, and the areas of the spread of Hallyu. They also show through which means Hallyu spread and which aspects of Korean pop culture became part of the Korean wave. The initial Hallyu wave was based on Korean films, dramas, and music. The second wave of Hallyu is when new cultural products such as digital and online games, Korean cars, mobile phones, fashion, food, cosmetics, and plastic surgery, for example, became popular.¹³

It is also important to briefly mention the background circumstances that allowed Korean Wave to begin when it did. The reason Hallyu started in the 1990s lies in the history of Korea. Prior to the 1990s, Korea was under Japanese colonial rule (1910-45), then divided into two Koreas and fighting in the Korean War (1950-53); after that, Korea suffered from prolonged authoritarian regimes (1961-93). Each of these periods came with its own sets of restrictions on the freedom of cultural and artistic expression.¹⁴

Lack of freedom and finances hindered Korea's ability to develop its own pop culture, and before the 1990s, Korea imported its entertainment from abroad. In the 1980s,

⁹ Gunjoo Jang, Won K. Paik, *Korean Wave as Tool for Korea's New Cultural Diplomacy* (Advances in Applied Sociology, 2012), p. 196.

¹⁰ Hyeri Jung, *Transnational Media Culture and Soft Power of the Korean Wave in the United States* (Lexington books, 2017), p. 225.

¹¹ Mohamed Elaskary, *The Korean Wave in the Middle East: Past and Present* (Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity, 2018), p. 3.

¹² Meicheng Sun, Kai Khiun Liew, *Analog Hallyu: Historicizing K-pop formations in China* (Global Media and China, 2019), p. 420.

¹³ Mohamed Elaskary, *The Korean Wave in the Middle East: Past and Present* (2018), p. 3.

¹⁴ Youna Kim, *Hallyu and North Korea: Soft Power of Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2019).

the influence of foreign entertainment in Korea grew even more as Koreans could finally afford to spend more on entertainment, and with the democratization wave in the late 1980s, the import rules on foreign culture became laxer. Foreign TV shows, music, and movies in theatre became common and popular.¹⁵ However, in the mid-1990s, Koreans suddenly shifted to creating and consuming their own pop culture.

Under the influence of American, European, and Japanese cultures, and due to the presence of foreign allies during the Korean War and Vietnam War, Korea was even more exposed to foreign cultures. Music styles such as American folk, lush ballads, rock, French chansons, Italian canzone, Latin and Cuban music, and Japanese enka became extremely popular, and Korean artists soon began to imitate those styles.¹⁶

Instead of foreign songs, local radios were filled with Korean pop music of diverse genres and high quality. Koreans replaced foreign artists, TV channels began showing mostly Korean dramas, and theatre-goers started preferring Korean films. Korean movies broke records at home, and Korea turned into one of the few countries where people consumed more local entertainment than foreign content.¹⁷

Initially, the Korean domestic pop culture market was poorly developed and low quality, and consequently, Korea was willing to share its content for free for the simple purpose of promoting their nation.¹⁸ Big companies like Samsung and LG helped spread Hallyu in Southeast Asian countries by distributing K-dramas for free while promoting their products.¹⁹

In the 1990s, Korean media began to improve, and cable television was introduced. Production technology and skills improved, the economy grew, and a new generation of consumers and creators laid the foundation for transformation.²⁰

Korean filmmakers were influenced by European and American cinema and started experimenting. New storylines and cinematography techniques and sophisticated

¹⁵ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (KOCIS, 2011), pp. 18-19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Shin Dong Kim, *The Korean Wave. Why it Swept the World* (2019), p. 156.

¹⁹ Yong-jin Won, *Hallyu. Numerous Discourses, One Perspective* (Lexington books, 2017), p. 28.

²⁰ Shin Dong Kim, *The Korean Wave. Why it Swept the World* (2019), p. 156.

visuals and music elevated Korean film quality, making Korean movies stand out.²¹ Now that Korean movies improved, a way to promote them was necessary.

Annual film festivals became a crucial part of the spread of Korean movies. They helped Korean movies reach recognition and attention abroad and allowed Korean filmmakers to enter popular film festivals worldwide (e.g., Cannes, Berlin, Venice, London, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong, etc.).²²

Korean movies started gaining more domestic and international attention. Korean spin on Western movie styles made their films more appealing globally while still preserving unique Korean twists with unexpected story developments, humor, and morals. Hollywood took up an interest in Korean movies, and soon, Korean films were remade by Hollywood, and Korean actors appeared in Hollywood.²³

Nowadays, Korea has become internationally famous for its film industry. The biggest hit in recent years was the Korean movie *Parasite* (>) 생충, 2019), the first South Korean movie to receive the Palme d'Or award and became the first non-English movie to ever win Oscar for Best Picture, alongside three more Oscars. The film grossed \$259 million worldwide.²⁴

The high quality of Korean films makes them successful domestically and abroad. More than half of the Korean domestic movie industry is filled with Korean films, making South Korea one of the few countries in the World where Hollywood movies do not dominate the domestic market. Due to the high-quality technology, good storytelling, acting, marketing, and distribution, Korean films have earned the status of some of the best movies in Asia.²⁵ Despite this, it was not the movies that had the most significant impact on propelling the spread of the Korean Wave.

The Korean Wave started in China with the success of Korean dramas. In 1997 Chinese Central Television (CCTV) aired a drama called *What is Love* (사랑이 뭐길래, 1991) which garnered massive popularity and became the second-highest rating foreign program ever recorded in Chinese television history.²⁶ The story of a married couple with

²¹ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), p. 85.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-84.

²⁴ Box Office Mojo, *Parasite* (IMDb, 2019).

²⁵ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), p. 79.

²⁶ Binh Nguyen, *Hallyu Report IV – The cause* (Voluntary Agency Network of Korea).

drastically different values (conservative\liberal) portrayed the sophisticated lifestyle of modern Koreans and their liberal mindset that was not heard of in socialist China.²⁷

Chinese were excited to consume foreign culture, but American and Japanese pop culture were too explicit in violent and sexual scenes, making Chinese consumers uncomfortable and allowed Korea to provide a safer alternative.²⁸ The family-centered Confucian values made the drama more relatable to Chinese audiences than Western content centered on individualism.²⁹ The success of this drama created further demand and offered Korea an opportunity to supply China with more K-dramas.

Meanwhile, the conditions inside Korea aided the further development of K-dramas. Public television stations like Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) and Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) began turning into big businesses and started to use K-dramas to attract domestic viewers. Competition between the giants for audiences and gaining freedom of expression caused the quality of drama productions to increase fast. A new law was soon passed requiring broadcast stations to outsource a portion of their programs from independent creators, leading to the development of independent production companies. Economic growth, newfound freedom, and governmental support through policies made the cultural industry bloom.³⁰

After China, the subsequent big success of dramas took place in Japan. Korean drama *Winter Sonata* (겨울연가, 2002) aired in 2003 and became a hit among middle-aged Japanese women due to its touching plot. The pure and noble love of the main character brought back nostalgia, girlish sensitivity, and a yearning for emotional connection to the women living in Japan, where emotions have to be restrained, and etiquette strictly followed.³¹

This drama was met with unexpectedly massive success. *Winter Sonata* had multiple encores on Japanese TV. The main actors of this drama became massive stars in Japan, with the lead male actor Bae Youn-joon (배용준) becoming a cultural phenomenon. His popularity became so enormous that he even earned an honorary

²⁷ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), p. 20.

²⁸ Ji-Eun Kim, "Korean Wave" in China : Its Impact on the South Korean-Chinese Relations (University of British Columbia, 2011).

²⁹ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), p. 20.

³⁰ Shin Dong Kim, *The Korean Wave. Why it Swept the World* (2019), p. 157.

³¹ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), pp. 23-26.

nickname Yon-sama. When Bae arrived in Japan, thousands of his fans stormed the airport, making it inoperable, and when the national TV channel decided to cancel one episode of his K-drama, the broadcasting station was flooded with thousands of angry calls. This obsession with Bae received many names in Japan — the Yon-sama Syndrome, the Yon-sama Social Phenomenon, the Yon-sama Religion, the Yon-sama Disease. During elections in 2004, even Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi had said: "I'll make great efforts so that I will be as popular as Yon-sama and be called Jun-sama."³²

The Yon-sama Syndrome changed for the better Japanese people's perception of Korea. In this drama, Korean actors were portrayed as polite men with romantic charisma, and due to his popularity, Koreans started to be seen as polite, generous, and sophisticated, with many Japanese housewives even wishing to emigrate to Korea.³³ After this massive success, many other K-dramas entered the Japanese market.

Although Korean Wave began through the spread of K-dramas in Asia, nowadays, Korean dramas are especially popular outside of Asia, too - the Middle East, Eastern and Western Europe, Africa, and North America. The most significant impact abroad was created through the historical drama *A Jewel in the Palace* (대장금, 2003) that depicted Korean traditional culture. This drama became so popular that it aired in countries like China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Australia, the United States, Sweden, Russia, Turkey, Peru, Colombia, Canada, India, Israel, Romania, Bosnia, Hungary, New Zealand, Nigeria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.³⁴ It was a massive hit and opened the opportunity for Korean dramas to now target a much wider international audience.

After the success of TV dramas, the next area to blossom was Korean music, partly because K-dramas often used Korean songs as soundtracks, sparking interest in Korean music. SM Entertainment, one of the biggest Korean music companies, played a significant role in making Korean singers popular at home and abroad.³⁵

While the spread of dramas abroad was largely accidental and unexpected, the spread of K-pop music was deliberate and planned.³⁶ The founder of SM Entertainment had a very strategic approach to creating new artists. In 1989 he surveyed teenage girls

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13, 29.

³⁵ Luis Antonio Vidal Perez, *POP POWER: Pop Diplomacy for a Global Society* (2014).

³⁶ Youna Kim, *Hallyu and North Korea: Soft Power of Popular Culture* (2019).

directly to figure out what they wanted from their idols and their music, analyzed audition tapes, and picked his artists based on this survey data. A result of his technique was a widely popular boyband H.O.T. that debuted under SM Entertainment in 1996. H.O.T became an instant success and sold over 10 million CDs and record sales in Korea.³⁷

In the 1990s, Hong Kong's Channel V also began including Korean music videos and Korean artists like H.O.T., NRG, Sechs Kies, Shinhwa, Baby V.O.X., and S.E.S. gained major recognition, attracted thousands of fans, and entered the markets of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia.³⁸ These K-pop artists are nowadays referred to as First Generation K-pop idols.³⁹ These artists recorded their songs in multiple languages like Korean, Chinese, and Japanese, and soon they began selling out concerts.⁴⁰

Korean youth that grew up abroad (e.g., New York, Los Angeles, and other Western cities) also introduced hip-hop, rap, and R&B to South Korea, causing a transformation of the Korean music industry.⁴¹ Korean music became more attractive to foreigners, and K-artists began branching out.

Korean Wave spread even faster with the emergence of new generation artists and had massive success in Asia. The Japanese current events weekly reported that K-pop is causing a "Korean invasion," which would lead Korean artists to dominate the Japanese music market.⁴²

Around the same time, somewhere in 2010, Korean Wave began expanding abroad to Europe, North America, South, and Central America. In some ways, Japanese pop culture made it easier for Hallyu to go West - those who seek to find Japanese mangas, animes, dramas, etc., naturally stumbled upon Korean pop culture, which seemed less foreign to them.⁴³

An especially crucial part in this massive expansion outside of Asia was played by the Internet and social media, which changed the speed, impact, and way of spreading

³⁷ Sarah Leung, *Catching the K-Pop Wave: Globality in the Production, Distribution, and Consumption of South Korean Popular Music* (Senior Capstone Projects, 2012), pp. 25-26.

³⁸ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), pp. 22,30-31.

³⁹ Allkpop, *K-Pop Column 'Idology' Lays Out a Timeline of All K-Pop Generations from 1st Through 4th*, (Allkpop, 2020).

⁴⁰ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), pp. 30-31.

⁴¹ Sarah Leung, *Catching the K-Pop Wave: Globality in the Production, Distribution, and Consumption of South Korean Popular Music* (2012), p. 12.

⁴² Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), pp. 35-37.

⁴³ Youna Kim, *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global* (Routledge, 2013).

K-Wave.⁴⁴ The impact of social media benefited the K-pop industry the most compared to other aspects of the Korean Wave.⁴⁵ YouTube made music videos more easily accessible, and instead of relying on TV, radio, or CDs, consumers could suddenly control what music they consume.⁴⁶

This new Korean Wave has been called the “Neo-Korean Wave” due to the more extensive international reach, global access to the Internet, the fast development of mobile devices, and the massive growth of social media like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Websites on K-pop emerged in English - Allkpop.com alone garnered around 70 million views per month, becoming one of the most visited websites in the World.⁴⁷

These developments changed the way the culture was presented, consumed, and distributed. Many fans were now exposed to K-pop and K-dramas for the first time thanks to the internet, and fans from across Europe came to see the performances of Korean artists who were never even promoted in Europe.⁴⁸

In 2011, music videos uploaded on YouTube were analyzed, and it turned out that 229 countries worldwide had viewed K-pop videos, including even North Korea, where internet access is minimal. This spread of K-pop online made promotion costs much cheaper for the artists' management companies, many of whom created their own YouTube channels, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and held live broadcasts to promote their new releases. K-pop artists began hitting millions of views on YouTube in much shorter time frames, and many K-pop idols soon began entering the Billboard Charts.⁴⁹

When Big Bang's album was released in 2011, within one month, it received No. 3 spot on Billboard's World Albums chart, despite being sung in Korean and not being adequately promoted in the U.S. In 2010, just one month after the release of Big Bang Taeyang's solo album, he reached No. 2 on iTunes in the U.S. and No. 1 spot in Canada, and topped the charts in Japan, Canada, and Australia. Prior to this, it took artists like Wonder Girl's, for example, over a year of strategic promotions in the U.S. to even make it to the Billboard's Top 100 list.⁵⁰ All of this shows how fast the K-Wave progressed.

⁴⁴ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), p. 39.

⁴⁵ Tae-jin Yoon, Dal Yong-jin, *The Korean Wave: Evolution, Fandom, and Transnationality* (Lexington books, 2017), introduction.

⁴⁶ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (KOCIS, 2011), pp. 57-58.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-49.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-49.

Another explosion in K-pop's popularity happened with the spread of a viral song. Psy's "Gangnam Style" became the most remarkable global pop sensation of 2012, reached 4 billion views on YouTube, and became the best-selling single in over thirty countries, with countless people recreating his dance.⁵¹ For many people outside of Asia, this was the first song to put Korea on their map of new entertainment sources.

The rapid global growth of K-pop popularity did not go unnoticed. In 2010, CNN World referred to South Korea as "the Hollywood of the East" due to the massive spread and impact of K-pop abroad and a new word was created, naming the South Korean entertainment boom as "Hallyu-wood."⁵²

These days K-pop is massively popular, and many worldwide famous artists have emerged from Korea. Arguably the most popular and influential artists of the current K-Wave era are BTS and Blackpink. Blackpink music videos often hit billions of views on YouTube. They promoted their activities on most popular TV shows worldwide and were the first K-pop group to perform on one of the world's largest music festivals - Coachella.

BTS, on the other hand, has single-handedly conquered music charts all over the world, became the biggest boyband in the world, and has caused a new wave of obsession with Korea. Recently, BTS's new album (Map of the Soul: 7) has reached the No. 1 spot on the album's charts in all of the top five music markets in the world.⁵³ This is the first time an Asian group managed to reach such success, especially considering that they were up against the most prominent artists in the whole world.

The popularity of the Korean Wave and BTS is so strong that Hallyu has managed to reach its influence even into the most secluded area in the world. North Korea, for example, has an influx of South Korean music, dramas, movies, and fashion, even though all of these things are illegal in that country.⁵⁴ According to the testimonies of North Korean defectors, BTS is so popular that not only do all North Koreans know about them, but they even secretly sing along to their songs.⁵⁵ The impact of the current wave is undoubtedly becoming more and more powerful when compared to previous generations.

⁵¹ John Lie, Why Didn't "Gangnam Style" Go Viral in Japan? (Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review, 2013), p. 44.

⁵² Lara Farrar, 'Korean Wave' of Pop Culture Sweeps Across Asia, (CNN World, 2010).

⁵³ Hugh McIntyre, BTS's New Album Has Now Hit No. 1 In The Five Largest Music Markets In The World (Forbes, 2020).

⁵⁴ Youna Kim, South Korean popular Culture and North Korea (Journal of East Asian Studies, 2019).

⁵⁵ Christine Fernandez, North Korean Defectors Explain Just How Popular BTS Is In North Korea (Koreaboo, 2021).

The secret to this massive success lies in the power of attraction created through K-wave. Korean Broadcast Station (KBS) senior manager attributed the success of K-Wave to the high quality of entertainment, its low price, and the fact Korean pop culture was simply more relatable to Asian audiences due to their shared Eastern mentality, societal hierarchy, and Confucianism. This similar cultural background made it easy for Korean Wave to cross over to neighboring countries.⁵⁶

Another key to the success of the Korean Wave was the hybrid mix of different elements. Korean pop culture became fused with attractive modernized Western elements but retained some of their own traditional culture and values, creating a new type of pop culture.⁵⁷ “Korea pop culture is the product of adoption and adaptation, the result of communication among several cultures. It is not simply Korean. In this sense, the Korean Wave allows diverse cultures to converge and communicate.”⁵⁸ This hybridity made the Korean Wave attractive and relatable outside of Asia as well.

According to Marwan Kraidy, today’s market must create culturally non-specific mixed media because hybrid media forms allow reaching large audiences with minimal investment and risk. “Hybridity entails that traces of other cultures exist in every culture, thus offering foreign media and marketers transcultural wedges for forging affective links between their commodities and local communities.”⁵⁹

The success of K-dramas across the world lies in the versatility of Korean dramas. K-dramas tend to evoke strong emotional responses in viewers and usually address universally relatable topics like family, romance, friendship, martial arts, war, and business. K-dramas portray family values and respect for elders, as well as rapid modern development. To many viewers, Korean dramas seem more relatable than, for example, the carefully planned and complicated plots in American TV series.⁶⁰

Anyone and everyone can find something to their taste in K-dramas - Americans find Korean dramas relaxing and cheerful; Europeans enjoy the simple and romantic storylines; Asians find inspiration in their lifestyles and trends. Asian audiences are

⁵⁶ Lara Farrar, 'Korean Wave' of Pop Culture Sweeps Across Asia, (2010).

⁵⁷ Korean Culture and Information Service, The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon (2011), pp. 97-99.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Sarah Leung, Catching the K-Pop Wave: Globality in the Production, Distribution, and Consumption of South Korean PopularMusic (2012), p. 18.

⁶⁰ Korean Culture and Information Service, The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon (2011), pp. 74-75.

attracted by the dramatization of “Asian sensibilities,” including family values and how they express their emotions. For Westerners, the appeal is in the refreshing humor, fancy plots, and sincerity portrayed in the dramas.⁶¹ In Latin America, K-dramas act as a pleasant and comforting alternative to the racy telenovelas that focus on sexual and sensational content.⁶²

Middle Eastern audiences enjoy the subtle expression of feelings and passion with a lack of overt sexualization as K-drama actors wear more decent clothing and showcase moral and religiously neutral values. Sticking to traditional values and avoiding explicit scenes makes Korean dramas more attractive and safe for consumption not only in Muslim majority Middle Eastern countries but also in Confucian, Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian communities alike.⁶³

Aside from K-dramas, K-pop music also managed to break the boundaries and spread abroad. The first key for the success of K-pop was blending appealing melodies with strong beats and often adding short, catchy, and repetitive hooks. This made the songs catchy, memorable, and easy to sing along to even without knowing the language.⁶⁴

Secondly, K-pop is often sampled from global music genres and produced in collaborations with worldwide famous songwriters. Unifying many different musical styles as well as languages in K-pop was done intentionally.⁶⁵ All of this made K-pop sound familiar and attractive to a broader foreign audience.

Thirdly, the dances accompanying music videos are dramatic and practiced to perfection, making the viewers want to follow along and dance to the music. Entertainment agencies hire worldwide famous choreographers to create these eye-catching dances, and new trends of cover dances have emerged online.⁶⁶

The fourth reason for the attractiveness of K-pop is the flawless appearance and fashion taste of these idols. Korean idols are also not just experts in one area of entertainment but go through intense and lengthy training to be able to sing, act, dance,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Mohamed Elaskary, *The Korean Wave in the Middle East: Past and Present* (2018), p. 7.

⁶⁴ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), pp. 58-60.

⁶⁵ Sarah Leung, *Catching the K-Pop Wave: Globality in the Production, Distribution, and Consumption of South Korean Popular Music* (2012), p. 12.

⁶⁶ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), pp. 61-62.

and perform. Artists are expected to look good, work on their voice and dance skills, and study acting, language, and different cultures.⁶⁷ All of this training is usually done before an artist is even allowed to debut.

On top of that, K-pop artists have strategically tailored their content to the regions where they are promoted. For example, groups like Super Junior and EXO created sub-units that sang in Mandarin Chinese and focused on promoting in China. This type of approach allowed the entertainment agencies to release songs in Chinese for Chinese audiences making their music even more personalized, relatable, and attractive in specific regions. Evidently, there is something for everyone in the power of attraction of Hallyu products.

Hallyu is now considered to be in its third stage of development and consists of more than just dramas, music, and films, other aspects of Korean pop culture.⁶⁸ Nowadays, the Korean Wave includes a range of cultural products, including “Korean pop music (K-pop), films, animation, online games, smartphones\tablets, fashion, cosmetics, food and lifestyles.”⁶⁹ Since early 2010, Hallyu began to include all genres of Korean culture.⁷⁰

Not only does Hallyu these days include popular culture, but also traditional culture began to be labeled as part of the Korean wave. The development of Hallyu 2.0 was aimed at extending the range of Hallyu from pop culture into traditional cultures like *hangul* (Korean alphabet), *hansik* (Korean food), *hanok* (traditional Korean house), and the Hallyu 3.0 aimed to expand Korean traditional culture around the world.⁷¹

In this work, traditional aspects of Korean culture like the Korean language and traditional martial arts, for example, won't be considered part of pop culture since they existed long before the emergence Korean Wave and were not created for the masses for entertainment or commercial consumption.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 64.

⁶⁸ Shin Dong Kim, *The Korean Wave. Why it Swept the World* (2019), p. 156.

⁶⁹ Youna Kim, *South Korean popular Culture and North Korea* (2019).

⁷⁰ Bok-rae Kim, *Past, Present and Future of Hallyu (Korean Wave)* (American International Journal of Contemporary Research, 2015), p. 158.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

1.2. Soft Power and Korean Wave

As the focus of this research is to determine the soft power of the Korean Wave in Estonia, it is essential to define and understand the meaning of the term “soft power.” This chapter will explain the approach to soft power used in this thesis and prove that the Korean Wave has been used as a soft power tool by the Korean government and ministry. The emergence of the soft power of Hallyu was deliberate and served, and continues to serve, a fixed purpose.

First, it's important to take a look at where Korea stands in terms of soft power today. In 2009 Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo published an article stating that Korea was ranked as one of the top 10 most powerful nations in the “hard power” category but was weak in its soft power.⁷² Joseph S. Nye then commented on this article, stating that Korean hard power needs to be supported by soft power to lead Korea to growth and prosperity. Nye said that: “South Korea has the resources to produce soft power, and its soft power is not a prisoner to the geographical limitations that have constrained its hard power throughout its history.”⁷³ And he was right in predicting Korea's potential.

Korea put its potential to use, and by 2019, according to the Soft Power 30 index (which also measures cultural soft power), South Korea scored 63.00, ranking South Korea as the 19th country in the World in terms of its soft power influence.⁷⁴ Despite suffering multiple big scandals in the entertainment industry that year, Korean soft power ranking still went up compared to the previous years. When comparing soft power ranking between Asian countries, South Korea ranked second, following behind Japan with 75.71.⁷⁵ Although Japan's score that year was higher, in comparison to previous years, Japan's ranking was in a downward trend while Korean ranking steadily increased in the last four years, moving up one rank per year, even during scandalous periods.

This means that Korea indeed has soft power and is even positioned second in terms of soft power amongst Asian countries. Not only is Korea behind Japan's ranking in terms of soft power in Asia, but according to the trends, it might eventually take over

⁷² The Chosun Ilbo, Korea Ranks 13th in 'National Power' Survey (The Chosun Ilbo, 2009).

⁷³ Joseph Samuel Nye Jr., South Korea's Growing Soft Power (Belfer Center, 2009).

⁷⁴ Jonathan McClory, 2019 The Soft Power 30 Report (Soft Power 30, 2019).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

the number one spot as Korea's ranking keeps steadily rising while Japan's ranking is in decline. This illustrates the changes in power dynamics increasingly in favor of Korea.

Prior to the boom of Hallyu, the international image of Korea had rather negative colors. Korea was seen as full of political issues, divided, associated with the war and demilitarized zone, etc. Now, on the contrary, the image of Korea is becoming associated with trendy entertainers and cutting-edge digital technology.⁷⁶ All of this begs the question - what exactly is soft power, and how Korea got there? To move on to the discussion on the soft power of Hallyu, it is necessary to take a look at the concept and definition of soft power.

According to Joseph Nye, the creator of this concept: "Power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers, and that can be accomplished by coercion, payment, or attraction and persuasion. Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment."⁷⁷ According to him, the soft power of any country depends on three main sources of soft power - culture, political values, and foreign policies. Culture has soft power when it is considered attractive by others, political values come into play when the country lives up to those values at home and abroad, and foreign policies have soft power when others see them as legitimate and having moral authority.⁷⁸ These sources of power arise because the country expresses its values, sets examples for others, and shows how it deals with others, and thus creating a desire.⁷⁹

As Nye elaborated, "When a country's culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction and duty that it creates."⁸⁰ He said, "A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness want to follow it."⁸¹

⁷⁶ Youna Kim, *Hallyu and North Korea: Soft Power of Popular Culture* (2019).

⁷⁷ Joseph Samuel Nye Jr., *Soft Power: the Origins and Political Progress of a Concept* (Palgrave Communications, 2017).

⁷⁸ Joseph Samuel Nye Jr., *The Future of Power* (PublicAffairs, 2011), p. 84.

⁷⁹ Joseph Samuel Nye Jr., Youna Kim, *Soft Power and the Korean Wave* (Routledge, 2013).

⁸⁰ Joseph Samuel Nye Jr., *Soft Power the Means to Success in World Politics* (Public Affairs, 2004), p. 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

One way for a country to spread its influence is through public diplomacy, “But if the content of a country’s culture, values, and policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that “broadcasts” them cannot produce soft power. It may produce just the opposite.”⁸² Evidently, from this, it can be concluded that soft power needs attraction to have an influence.

In terms of effectiveness, “popular culture is more likely to attract people and produce soft power in the sense of preferred outcomes in situations where cultures are somewhat similar rather than widely dissimilar.”⁸³ Moreover, “though soft power sometimes has direct effects on specific goals (...) it is more likely to have an impact on the general goals that a country seeks.”⁸⁴

From Nye’s explanation of soft power, few key points arise about the understanding of soft power of popular culture. Firstly, soft power depends on the force exerted - only non-coercive power can lead to the creation of soft power. Moreover, to have soft power, K-wave needs to be attractive to its consumers. Thirdly, the power of attraction is most likely to spread to countries with somewhat similar cultures than widely dissimilar. Lastly, soft power works on the general goals of the country, not on specific aims.

Apart from Nye, Alexander Luvig also proposes his own definition of soft power.⁸⁵ According to Luvig, soft power can be derived from multiple sources - namely power resources and power currencies. A power currency is a quality trait of a resource or activity that leads to the creation of power. Luvig divides the traits that lead to the creation of soft power into three: benignity, beauty, and brilliance.

In explaining the meaning of these three traits, he said that benignity is often shown through one’s relations with others and the clients of soft power. It is “the positive attitudes that you express when you treat people, especially when you treat the client.”⁸⁶ Benignity triggers in people feelings of gratitude and sympathy, and as a result, creates soft power.

Brilliance, on the other hand, he explains as the relation between the agent and his work, namely its high level of performance. Because people love to learn from others’

⁸² Joseph Samuel Nye Jr., *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power* (Sage Journals, 2008), p. 95.

⁸³ Joseph Samuel Nye Jr., *Soft Power the Means to Success in World Politics* (2004), pp. 15-16.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Alexander L. Luvig, *How Soft Power Works* (Defence Technical Information Center, 2009).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

success, it leads to the emergence of feelings of admiration, which in turn helps to build soft power.

Lastly, Laving explains beauty as the actor's relation with its ideals, values, causes, or visions and the resonance he creates when representing these ideals. He proposes that soft power can be created then due to the people's need for finding like-minded individuals, tendency to unite with others pursuing the same goals, craving for moral support and guidance, as well as the need for aesthetic experience. Beauty arises from inspiration and thus generates soft power.

Laving's explanation of soft power differs from Nye's because of the angle of his approach. When Nye focuses on the resources from which soft power arises, Laving focuses on the traits that create soft power. Because of that, his explanation of the causes of soft power also differs.

According to Laving the "cultural events, exchange programs, broadcasting, or teaching a country's language and promoting the study of a country's culture and society is often seen as a tool of soft power. However, these activities do not produce soft power directly."⁸⁷ In his opinion, all they do is "promote understanding, nurture positive images, and propagate myths in favor of the source country. In doing so, they provide a first but important step in the translation of benignity, beauty, and brilliance into soft power."⁸⁸

He also mentions that incentive programs that governments might direct at young people or foreigners primarily rest on benignity but also create beauty and brilliance. Thus, if we base our interpretation on his explanation, the government incentives will prove to be a source of soft power because they will trigger in people feelings of gratitude (benignity), feelings of admiration (brilliance), and inspiration (beauty).

Laving says that the states can showcase their benignity, for example, through listening to other states at international forums or engaging in bilateral or multilateral dialogues with foreign states. Promoting peace, offering humanitarian assistance, diplomatic support, and economic aid can also be another way a country can show these traits.

He also elaborated that in comparison, diplomatic support can act as a more direct channel of soft power. As an example, he mentioned how China voted in favor of

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

authoritarian regimes in international organizations, which in turn then made it easier for China to enter their foreign markets and use their natural resources.

Laving concluded that while Nye proposes culture, values, policies, institutions, and attraction as his main power currencies, Laving proposes benignity, brilliance, and beauty as his power currencies. Laving's approach shows that soft power can be more complex and multifaceted than it can seem at first.

Based on Luvig's approach, it becomes apparent that soft power can also depend on emotions evoked in the consumer as he focuses on exploring the traits of soft power. Luvig's three traits are benignity (gratitude), beauty (admiration), and brilliance (inspiration). If these feelings are triggered by Korean Wave, then it can be said, according to Luvig, that Korean Wave has a soft power influence.

Geun Lee also criticized the definition of soft power by Nye since he only listed the distinction between two types of power - hard and soft, but did not provide a theoretical framework to understand the mechanism of power translation from soft power resources into soft power. Because of that, Lee proposed his own approach to soft power.⁸⁹

Firstly, he categorized the different types of power in international relations into five categories. His first category is soft power to improve the external security environment by projecting peaceful and attractive images of a country. In this case, countries will use soft power resources like national slogans, policy proposals, and public diplomacies to appear more peaceful and less threatening. As an example, he mentions how Japan used its Peace Constitution as one of the ways to repair its image after the war.

His second category is soft power to mobilize other countries to support one's foreign and security policies. This is necessary in order to maintain efficient leadership and mobilize other countries' support when needed and requires the country's leadership to be justified by rationality and just causes. A negative example of this was the US war with terrorism in Iraq, where the US failed to justify its actions and create soft power.

Lee's third category of power is soft power to manipulate other countries' way of thinking and preferences. In order to achieve this, ideational resources are used, such as theories or concepts, for example, through which new ways of thinking can spread. The

⁸⁹ Geun Lee, A Theory of Soft Power and Korea's Soft Power Strategy (Korean Journal of Defence Analysis, 2009).

idea of “Globalization” spread by Anglo-American powers is an example of that. Lee says that international celebrities play an important role in disseminating new theories and discourses. Thus, having internationally famous celebrities is a big advantage in creating soft power.

His fourth category is soft power to maintain the unity of a community or community of countries. As Lee mentions, it would be too costly for a state to attempt to prevent or suppress with violence all defectors. On top of that, it would not be feasible as a long-term solution. Thus, if people maintain their position in a community of their free will, it is an indication of loyalty and soft power. The EU’s attempt to create a common European Constitution was used as an example of this.

Lee’s last category of power is soft power to increase approval ratings of a leader or domestic support of the government. Here he mentions invoking feelings of patriotism through international sports competitions, creating national heroes, as well as showcasing the leader’s successful participation internationally in order to make the leader more popular back home. Although he said this power affects more domestic audiences, it requires the presence of an international dimension.

Secondly, he drew a clear line between his and Nye’s definition of soft power by dividing the resources of soft power into hard and soft resources. The five above-mentioned categories of power are based, according to Lee, on “soft resources” or symbolic resources. Other examples of soft resources are culture, traditions, national symbols, education, ideas, etc. “Hard resources,” on the other hand, are weapons or finances, for example.

When Lee compares his definition of soft power to Nye’s definition, he claims that Nye’s definition alone is too limiting. Nye’s concept of soft power focuses on the nature of the power exerted and not on the resources used. Because of that, if the nature of the power used was co-optive, attractive, and non-violent, that power is considered soft despite the fact that hard resources might have been used to achieve that. If hard sources cause attraction or soft sources coerce, Nye’s definition can lack clarity in which type of power is applicable then.

As a result, Lee’s definition considers only the resource used as a means for differentiating between hard and soft power. Because of that, soft and hard power can both be coercive and co-optive. He did this in order to allow countries that don’t have hard resources to still generate power.

Thirdly, Lee focuses on soft power diversions from soft resources. Lee goes on to say: “Presence or possession of soft resources per se, however, does not automatically mean the exertion of soft power. For example, having attractive culture cannot be a country’s soft power unless that attractive culture is used and manipulated to move others in specific directions. Until soft resources are diverted into an influence, soft power is not exerted. Being soft is not soft power!”⁹⁰

Lee develops the theory further by dividing the diversion from soft resource to soft power into three stages. The first stage is the application of soft resources. The second stage is the cognitive processes of the recipients, and the third stage is soft power production. Intention also plays an important role - those who use soft resources must have a goal to change the emotions, preferences, or something else in recipients as a result of this application. It is a must for this use of soft resources to result in a new way of thinking or either attraction or fear in those who are targeted.

As a conclusion from Lee’s approach, it can be said that Korean Wave can have soft power due to its source of power. Lee lists culture as a soft source of power regardless of its application method. He also mentions the power to manipulate other’s preferences or thinking as soft power, as well as maintaining communities. Thus. If respondents in the empirical part change their way of thinking or preferences due to Hallyu or prefer to stay in Korea or travel there, it can be a sign of voluntarily maintaining communities, and as a result, a proof of soft power presence.

When talking about soft power, public diplomacy is one way through which soft power can arise. Jian Wang gives a definition of public diplomacy, saying it can be defined as engagement and communication of a country with outsiders or as “the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented.”⁹¹ This communication can be done through one-sided monologues, engaging in dialogues, or collaborating. The aim of this communication is to share news, communicate strategically, and build relationships.⁹²

Nation branding is also an important source of soft power. Wang also described nation branding as simply something that tries to establish an identity and reputation of

⁹⁰ Geun Lee, *A Theory of Soft Power and Korea’s Soft Power Strategy* (2009), p. 8.

⁹¹ Jian Wang, *Soft Power in China: Public Diplomacy through Communication* (Springer, 2011).

⁹² *Ibid.*

the country through the use of persons, symbols, colors, and slogans.⁹³ Branding creates a “personality” for the country, and as a result, it attracts tourism and buyers and internally creates a sense of belonging and confidence in their state. In nation branding, as Wang says, image and reputation are always at least partly influenced by the culture, political ideals, and policies of the state.

Keith Dinnie also said: “Nation brand is the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences; and nation branding, game as any other types of branding, can enhance a country’s image and global awareness and also give it the impetus to gain competitive advantage over its competitors.”⁹⁴

Dinnie also separates image and identity, stating that the identity of a state is what a state really is, and an image of a state rests on the way the state is being perceived, whether these two match or not. He also mentions that the nation’s brand identity is made up of key components such as the country’s history, language, territory, political regime, art, religion, icons, for example. The way a country can communicate its identity is through branded exports, sports achievements, brand ambassadors, cultural artifacts, government, tourism, etc. The audiences of this branded image are domestic and external consumers, domestic and external firms, inward investors, governments, and media. He also says that the aim of nation branding is often to attract tourists, promote incoming investments, boost exports, and attract talented people.

Wang brought up China as an example of using culture to create soft power as well as improving its national image. The president of China in 2007, Hu Jintao, said China should use culture as the means of creating soft power. From his speech, it seemed that for China, cultural soft power had two goals - promote national cohesion through which minorities in China can identify themselves as Chinese, as well as make China more competitive internationally. Chinese domestic policies focused on the improvement

⁹³ Nation branding can also be explored in more detailed ways. The studies of nation branding can be approached from four different angles: country of origin as a source of branding (Papadopoulos and Heslop), branding with the focus on place or destination (Kotler, et al), public diplomacy as a branding source (van Ham, Melissen), and national identity as a base for branding (Smith and Bond, et al.). Other definitions of nation branding rely on the focus, purpose, or the outcome of branding - remolding national identities (Olins), enhancing nation’s ability to compete (Anholt), embracing political, cultural, business and sport activities (Jefte and Nebenzahl), promoting economic and political interests at home and abroad (Rendon, Szondi), altering, improving or enhancing a nation’s image or reputation (Gudjosson, Fan).

⁹⁴ Kieth Dinnie, *Repositioning the Korea Brand to a Global Audience: Challenges, Pitfalls, and Current Strategy* (Korea Economic Institute, 2009).

of social justice, moral standards, anti-corruption measures, and developing innovative scientific research as a way to boost China's ability to compete internationally.

Wang went on to give examples of how China implemented such ideas as "Peaceful Rise," "Peaceful development," and "Harmonious Society" to help build their image. Chinese also focused on working with cultural soft power and applied said power domestically and abroad. Their global goals were to gain political influence, become more competitive economically, make China's image more appealing, and become morally inspiring.⁹⁵

Wang mentioned that in order to help build a new image, China tried to host big events like the Olympics, for example, since they attracted a lot of attention and created opportunities for sharing their culture abroad. China also expanded its state-owned media outlets abroad, like China Central Television, The People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, and others, to make it more accessible and understandable to foreigners. On top of hosting big events, China also established Confucius Institutes all over the world, pushed for student and researcher exchange, and collaborated with Hollywood and online games to produce soft power.⁹⁶

China also used the Shanghai Expo and a series of promotional films as an attempt at nation branding. The 2010 Expo served as an opportunity to portray China as the future of global finance. Such events can leave an emotional imprint on participants and their memories, creating the possibility for those feelings to later reflect positively on their perception of the country as a whole.⁹⁷

Wang also mentions how China created national publicity films targeted at the U.S. and aired them on CNN in 2009. These films showed China's teamwork with other countries during the production of their goods. One of those movies showed an MP3 player with the words "Made in China with software from Silicon Valley" and clothes with the tag "Made in China with French design." and the clip ended with the final message: "When it says 'Made in China', it really means 'Made in China, made with the world.'" ⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Jian Wang, *Soft Power in China: Public Diplomacy through Communication* (2011).

⁹⁶ Saifur Rahman, *China's Foreign Policy and its Choice for Cultural SOft Power: The Tools* (Social Change Review 17, 2020).

⁹⁷ Jian Wang, *Soft Power in China: Public Diplomacy through Communication* (2011).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Japan is also another example of attaining soft power through culture and nation branding. Japan was becoming popular in China for its anime and manga, and the state used it strategically to its advantage. Although the demand for manga and anime was not created by the state, the state of Japan used the popularity of these elements to improve the international image of Tokyo.⁹⁹ Primarily Japan focused on using its music, poetry, martial arts, and sports as a way to create soft power (e.g., Haiku, sushi, anime, manga, video games, etc.) and promoted them through cultural export, as well as by hosting cosplay or origami craft events and offering Japanese language classes worldwide.¹⁰⁰

In East Asia, especially Japan's reputation was tarnished by the war crimes and the way Japan handled the arising issues after. Despite this negativity, suddenly, East Asian countries began consuming Japanese sushi, J-pop, J-fashion, games (e.g., PlayStation), dramas, mangas, anime, etc. The reason for the success of these aspects of culture lies in their duality - the fact that they are simultaneously distinctively Japanese in style and also universally appealing.¹⁰¹

However, it was also the Japanese government that helped this positive image arise through its strategic policy decisions. Tokyo's Diplomatic Bluebook of 2006 said that: "In order to increase interest in Japan and further heighten the image of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) is working with the private sector through overseas diplomatic establishments and the Japan Foundation to promote cultural exchanges while taking into consideration the characteristics of each foreign country."¹⁰²

Then foreign minister Aso decided to use Japanese pop culture as a diplomatic tool to attract China and other countries even more to Japan. In his speech in 2007, Aso said: "What is important is to be able to induce other countries to listen to Japan. If the use of pop culture or various subcultures can be useful in this process, we certainly should make the most of them". As a result, through popular culture, Japan's voice began to be heard louder on the international level.¹⁰³

Before pop culture became a source of soft power, Japan already used the power of attraction through other institutions such as the Japan Foundation, The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program, Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer program, and Official

⁹⁹ Pang Er Lam, Japan's Quest for "Soft Power": Attraction and Limitation (East Asia 24, 2007)

¹⁰⁰ Zafar Alam Bhuiyan, The Image of Japanese Soft Power (ResearchGate, 2020).

¹⁰¹ Pang Er Lam, Japan's Quest for "Soft Power": Attraction and Limitation (2007)

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Developmental Assistance. Attracting international students to come to Japan was a way for Japan to invest in a younger generation who might return to their own countries and become cultural ambassadors for Japan and aid Japan in forming friendships with their countries.¹⁰⁴ Lam also mentioned that Japan's "soft power" has some limitations. Because of the lack of historical reconciliation with China and South Korea, in those countries, Japan might not have the power of attraction through any other means than just pop culture. Even that attraction can be easily undermined if Japan shows insensitive statements and behavior in politically sensitive issues regarding Japan's past.

Just like China and Japan, Korea is also using its culture strategically to gain economic benefits and soft power. Not only is Korea participating in international events to gain recognition, but the effect of K-Wave has also been a result of strategic policies adopted by the Korean government, as well as due to the establishment of various supportive institutions. Korea exercised its interests through soft power many times before the Hallyu even began. One example of this was Taekwondo. In order to make their national sport Taekwondo popular, Korea held a state-sponsored campaign to promote the sport abroad, and as a result of this campaign, Taekwondo participated in the Opening Ceremony of the 1988 Seoul Olympics and gained the status of full medal sport in the 2000 Sydney Games.¹⁰⁵

After the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, the Korean government realized the importance of culture in the era of globalization, and the same year, the government began an official globalization plan to respond to external pressures imposed by the U.S. actively and to survive in the new global competition era.¹⁰⁶ Seung-Ho Kwon and Joseph Kim, in their work, give a very detailed overview of Korea's approach to the Korean Wave in the first 20 years since realizing its importance, as well as the policy approaches, goals, and tools Korea used in securing the success of the global Korean Wave.¹⁰⁷ Kwon and Kim argue that approaches of other scholars when evaluating the reasons for the success of the Korean Wave leave out an important factor of said success - roles of agents.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Alistair MacDonald, *Soft Power Superpowers. Global Trends in Cultural Engagement and Influence* (British Council, 2018), pp. 27-29.

¹⁰⁶ Tae Young Kim, Dal Young Kim, *Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave: An Analysis of Cultural Diplomacy Embedded in Presidential Speeches* (International Journal of Communication, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Seung-Ho Kwon, Joseph Kim, *The cultural industry policies of the Korean government and the Korean Wave* (International Journal of Cultural Policy, 2013).

Other scholars tend to focus on the opinion that the Korean Wave was successful because of geo-cultural proximity to other Asian markets, but this fails to explain why K-Wave became popular outside of Asia. Some have claimed that cultural hybridity as an alternative to the cultural imperialism is the factor behind the broad reach of Hallyu products to the markets outside of Asia. Kwon and Kim point out that this disregards the influence of agents, such as firms and governments, especially the influence of government policies.

Kwon and Kim stress that especially in the case of Korea, the governments across the span of 20 years (the period they study - by 2021 it's been already 30 years) constantly created development-oriented policies for cultural industries, and understanding how these industries grew is crucial for studying the case of Hallyu. The way the government got engaged was mostly by nurturing industries through different policy measures like prioritizing the growth of strategically important industries, creating developmental plans, providing financial assistance, and controlling labor supply.

The development and growth of cultural industries like filming, broadcasting, online gaming, and music industries cannot be explained without the presence of support from the government. However, Kwon and Kim stress that Korea did not support those industries separately but implemented an integrated approach that led to the growth of multiple industries simultaneously. Korea combined cultural industries with other industries like electronics, mobile communication, and multimedia industries, with the aim of aiding national economic development.

In 1997, during the Asian financial crisis, Korea made a deliberate decision to switch from manufacturing to using the export of popular culture as one of its tools for modernization.¹⁰⁸ “Perhaps, the thinking seemed to be at the time, if South Korea was at an inherent disadvantage economically or militarily, it could leverage its cultural resources to leverage influence to reach desired foreign policy outcomes.”¹⁰⁹

Reports were made comparing the profit of Jurassic Park and the sales of 1,5 million Korean Hyundai cars - the entertainment industry was proven to be more profitable than car production and more likely to improve the image of Korea abroad.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Youna Kim, *Hallyu and North Korea: Soft Power of Popular Culture* (2019).

¹⁰⁹ James Barden, *A Superpower Between Superpowers: How Post-Cold War South Korea Leveraged Pop Culture Into Soft Power* (Harvard Extension School, 2019).

¹¹⁰ Luis Antonio Vidal Perez, *POP POWER: Pop Diplomacy for a Global Society* (2014).

In 1999, a new law called “Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion” was adapted, mandating that the government must be more active in supporting and promoting the development of cultural industries.¹¹¹ As a result, this led to changes in the government’s policies.

Korea began providing national support for the export of popular culture the same way it had previously supported electronics and cars.¹¹² The government allocated a budget 500x bigger than in the previous years for the cultural industries and provided them with systematic support.¹¹³ Every government in Korea since 1993 has put more emphasis on promoting the cultural industries and, over time, involved and created more and more government departments for promoting Hallyu.

Specific policy tools a government might use to promote and develop its cultural industries can be, for example, supporting a market-oriented system, enacting copyright laws, as well as monitoring or financially supporting private sector activities, as Kwon and Kim mention. Through policies, governments can also intervene in the cultural industries, as well as their production, dissemination, marketing, and consumption.¹¹⁴ Korea got involved in all of it.

Different leaders of Korea had new ideas of how Hallyu should be approached. President Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003) focused on Hallyu’s economic potential; Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) brought into discussion the potential for cultural exchange and sharing diversities through Hallyu; Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) focused on sharing traditional culture and heritage, and put emphasis on using Hallyu to improve Korea’s national image; Park Geun-hye (2013-2017) focused on “cultural enrichment” as one of her top four priorities during her presidency, and focused on promoting industrial gains and soft power of Hallyu.¹¹⁵

Korean governments began implementing new programs for the promotion of the cultural industries. Kim Young-sam’s government (1993–1997) began the shift in policy priorities towards culture. He abolished the strict censorship rules implemented by

¹¹¹ James Barden, *A Superpower Between Superpowers: How Post-Cold War South Korea Leveraged Pop Culture Into Soft Power* (2019).

¹¹² Youna Kim, *Hallyu and North Korea: Soft Power of Popular Culture* (2019).

¹¹³ Yong-jin Won, *Hallyu. Numerous Discourses, One Perspective* (2017), p. 34.

¹¹⁴ Seung-Ho Kwon, Joseph Kim, *The cultural industry policies of the Korean government and the Korean Wave* (*International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2013).

¹¹⁵ Tae Young Kim, Dal Young Kim, *Cultural Policy in the Korean Wave: An Analysis of Cultural Diplomacy Embedded in Presidential Speeches* (*International Journal of Communication*, 2016).

authoritarian regimes and allowed foreign multinational corporations and family-owned domestic conglomerates to enter the cultural industries.¹¹⁶

Kim Dae-jung's government (1998–2002) supported the growth and development of local firms by providing financial support to multiple cultural sectors. He named himself the 'President of Culture' and helped the digitalization and the global expansion of Korean cultural products, especially dramas, films, music, and online games.¹¹⁷

During Roh Moo-hyun's time (2003–2007), specific plans and policies were created aimed at helping Korean products enter global markets. He selected ten key industries for focused development and highlighted the importance of public participation and freedom of expression.¹¹⁸

Lee Myung-bak's government (2008–2012) continued to implement policies that ensured the ability of Korean products to compete on global markets. After the global financial crisis of 2008, his government promoted exports to generate a foreign trade surplus using these industries. He established the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) that oversees and coordinates the promotion of the Korean content industry.¹¹⁹

Lee also formed a Presidential Council on Nation Branding (PCNB), whose job was to adopt a 'Korean wave' program¹²⁰, and he also implemented the 10-step nation branding plan.¹²¹ He used the slogan "Global Korea" in 2008 as a way to brand South Korea as a developed country and move away from the perception of Korea as a poor post-civil war country.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Seung-Ho Kwon, Joseph Kim, The cultural industry policies of the Korean government and the Korean Wave (International Journal of Cultural Policy, 2013)

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Established in May 2009 by integrating five related organizations, including the Korean Broadcasting Institute, the Korea Culture & Content Agency, and the Korea Game Agency.

¹²⁰ Sofia Trisni, Putiviola Elian Nasir, Rika Isnarti, Ferdian, South Korean Government's Role in Public Diplomacy: A Case Study of the Korean Wave Boom (Andalas Journal of International Studies, 2019), p. 35.

¹²¹ In 2009, the Lee Administration came up with Brand Korea 10-point action plan, aimed at changing Korea's reputation through mainly "For a Global Korea." policy. The action plan consisted of promoting Taekwondo; dispatching volunteers abroad each year; adopting a "Korean Wave" program; introducing the Global Korea scholarship; adopting a campus Asia program; increasing external aid; developing state-of art technologies; nurturing the culture and tourism industries; treating foreigners and multicultural families better; and helping Koreans become "global citizens."

¹²² Sofia Trisni, Putiviola Elian Nasir, Rika Isnarti, Ferdian, South Korean Government's Role in Public Diplomacy: A Case Study of the Korean Wave Boom (2019), p. 35.

In 2013, President Park Geun-Hye said in her inauguration speech that “In the 21st century, culture is power” and during her state visits abroad promoted Korean Culture by personally attending and organizing cultural events that promoted K-Pop.¹²³ In 2014, during the sudden craze and demand for Korean clothing amongst Chinese K-drama fans, Park Geun-hye gave orders to reorganize the whole shopping system of Korea just so the Chinese K-drama fans could finally shop from Korea.¹²⁴

Evidently, the role of the Korean government in the success of Korea has been very influential. Not only did the government initiate the shift from industries to culture, but it also controlled, guided, and supported the implementation of new goals. As a result, multiple industries began collaborating and grew at the same time, speeding up the process further. Korea used Hallyu strategically and with the aim of initiating changes. Because of that, Hallyu can be called a tool in the hands of the Korean government through which Korea built and spread its soft power.

Aside from the Korean government, another key actor influenced the power of Hallyu - the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Culture was responsible for coordinating and implementing these new government policies. The Ministry’s role became even more crucial as Hallyu began bringing in more economic values. The new approach to the economy made culture the center of it, and the Ministry of Culture was responsible for coordinating the amount of support given to different government agencies that engage with cultural industries.¹²⁵

During Kim Young-sam’s government, the goal shifted from regulation to promotion, and the government created the institutional foundation for the promotion of Hallyu through the Ministry of Culture. In 1994, the Cultural Industry Division was established in the Ministry of Culture, and within it, the Cultural Industry Planning Department aimed at promoting Hallyu. Kim Dae-jung’s government focused on improving the competitiveness and productivity of economically promising sectors and developed the infrastructure of the ministry further - the Ministry founded the Game and Music Records Department, for example, and used Korean technology to help promote it and, as a result, personal computer ownership became more common, alongside the

¹²³ James Barden, *A Superpower Between Superpowers: How Post-Cold War South Korea Leveraged Pop Culture Into Soft Power* (2019), pp. 22-23.

¹²⁴ Yong-jin Won, *Hallyu. Numerous Discourses, One Perspective* (2017), p. 24.

¹²⁵ Seung-Ho Kwon, Joseph Kim, *The cultural industry policies of the Korean government and the Korean Wave* (2013).

heightened access to broadband.¹²⁶ Kim's government also delegated some of the government's former functions to specialized organizations like Korea Cultural Contents Agency, the Korea Broadcasting Institute (KBI), and the KOFIC, who were not under the control of the government and thus were more autonomous.

Roh Moo-hyun's administration expanded and changed the structure of the ministry even further. Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE) was established in 2003 aimed at "breaking down barriers between nations and promoting mutual understanding, exchange, and coexistence across the globe."¹²⁷ In 2005 also ministry created a plan called "Culture Strong Nation (C-Korea)" that stated that the government's goal is to reach a "top 5 cultural content nation" status by 2010, meaning that Korea should become equal with the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, and France as a leading global exporter of culture.¹²⁸ In 2007 they founded the Game Industry Team - an independent division created only for the sake of promoting the gaming industry at home and abroad. They also created the New Media Team, the Cultural Technology Workforce Team, and the Copyright Industry Team, which aimed at protecting local businesses' financial interests.

Lee Myung-bak's government established the Cultural Product Trade Division, whose aim was to expand K-films abroad and help them navigate the Free Trade Agreements and Rules of the World Trade Organisation as well as that they also focused more on copyright protection and protection of Korean producers commercial rights. With each subsequent year, the funding allocated to Ministries was multiplying, signifying the rising importance of the functions of the Ministry of Culture. But aside from the Ministry of Culture, the crucial part in promoting Hallyu was also played by the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

MOFA aimed to establish public diplomacy as the third pillar of its foreign policy, next to politics and economy.¹²⁹ It is stated explicitly on its webpage that Hallyu plays a vital role in South Korea's public diplomacy.¹³⁰ For MOFA, Hallyu is an important

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ KOFICE homepage: http://eng.kofice.or.kr/about/about_1.asp

¹²⁸ James Barden, *A Superpower Between Superpowers: How Post-Cold War South Korea Leveraged Pop Culture Into Soft Power* (2019), p. 21.

¹²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), *Enhancing Korea's Role and Prestige in the International Community* (Diplomatic White Paper, 2015), p. 357.

¹³⁰ Sofia Trisni, Putiviola Elian Nasir, Rika Isnarti, Ferdian, *South Korean Government's Role in Public Diplomacy: A Case Study of the Korean Wave Boom* (), p. 35.

medium for public diplomacy through which they can assist and nurture ‘pro-Korea’ people in different countries.¹³¹ This importance is also evident in the government’s budget. In 2016, MOFA was allocated \$16.18 million, and this number keeps increasing with each year.¹³²

Although the Korean government put a lot of effort into helping Hallyu spread, Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism Kim Jongdeok said in 2016: “It’s the working people, I mean, film makers or singers, who take the lead in actually promoting the Korean wave outside South Korea. The government is just putting a little bit of stepping stones so that they can jump up and move forward. That’s all we do.”¹³³ Though the government stimulates, regulates, and facilitates the development of the cultural industry, it’s important to remember that the success of Hallyu could not have happened without the work of non-state actors.

In 1991 another important organization was established - the Korea Foundation, a public diplomacy organization that works to promote global friendship through the exchange.¹³⁴ Also, in order to improve the international relations in 2009, Korea started establishing Cultural Centres to raise interest for Korea abroad and introduce the country, and by 2016 Korea opened 31 Korean Cultural Centres in 28 countries, whose aim is hosting events and courses on the topics of Korean art, music, literature, language, film, and cuisine.¹³⁵

Consumption of Korean pop culture has also caused a significant increase in the interest in learning the Korean language and led to the opening of Korean language courses at universities all over the world.¹³⁶ In order to promote the Korean language further, King Sejong Institutes were established worldwide, and by 2020, 213 Korean language institutes were opened in 76 countries.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), *Enhancing Korea’s Role and Prestige in the International Community* (2015), p. 359.

¹³² Sofia Trisni, Putiviola Elian Nasir, Rika Isnarti, Ferdian, *South Korean Government’s Role in Public Diplomacy: A Case Study of the Korean Wave Boom* (2019), p. 35.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹³⁴ Has its offices in Washington DC, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Beijing, Moscow, Berlin and Hanoi, which are places of higher priority for Korean diplomacy.

¹³⁵ Alistair MacDonald, *Soft Power Superpowers. Global Trends in Cultural Engagement and Influence* (2018), pp. 27-29.

¹³⁶ Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Korean Wave : A New Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), p. 14.

¹³⁷ Alistair MacDonald, *Soft Power Superpowers. Global Trends in Cultural Engagement and Influence* (2018), pp. 27-29.

The Korea International Broadcasting Foundation also began opening TV channels in English aimed at promoting Korea abroad. Arirang TV and Radio is also run worldwide 24h a day and is also focused on promoting K-culture and art. The aim of these mediums was to build Korea's image abroad and to improve relationships with foreign countries by cooperation opportunities between broadcasting companies overseas. Arirang's mission is showing to the World Korea's assets, telling its story, introducing its culture, promoting tourism, and it's a deliberate and strategic attempt by the Korean government at nation branding.¹³⁸

As this information has shown, the success of K-Wave has been greatly influenced by the decisions taken by the Korean Government, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the institutions they created. Rather than support it in many ways, it can be said that they initiated the Hallyu wave as we know it now and created a fertile soil and support system for its growth. Moreover, as Lee mentioned, soft power can only be applied deliberately, and Korea consciously made the decision to use Hallyu as its economic strategy as well as improve its national image through it. Thus, Hallyu is a deliberate tool used for reaching economic prosperity and improving reputation.

The popularity of the Korean Wave brought a lot of positive attention to Korea, and the state reaped massive economic benefits from its efforts. For example, in 2019, K-pop exports brought in \$533 million, while tourism brought in \$2.65 billion, and cosmetics \$969 million.¹³⁹ Korean gaming industry exports also grew from \$182 million to \$2.1 billion between 2003 to 2011.¹⁴⁰ "Export of cultural goods and services has grown exponentially; between 1998 and 2019, it chalked up a forty time increase from \$188.9 million to \$12.3 billion in 2019. According to the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange's (KOFICE) Hallyu Impact Research Report 2020, Korean Wave exports rose 22.4% in 2019 from the previous year."¹⁴¹

The number of foreign tourists visiting Korea also dramatically skyrocketed. In 1998 only 300,000 tourists visited Korea.¹⁴² By 2019 this number reached 17,5 million.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 27-29.

¹³⁹ Seow Ting Lee, *Film as cultural diplomacy: South Korea's nation branding through Parasite* (2019) (Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, 2021).

¹⁴⁰ Youna Kim, *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global* (2013).

¹⁴¹ Seow Ting Lee, *Film as cultural diplomacy: South Korea's nation branding through Parasite* (2019) (2021).

¹⁴² Eun-song Bae, Meehyang Chang, Eung-suk Park, Dae-cheol Kim, *The Effect of Hallyu on Tourism in Korea* (2017), p. 2.

¹⁴³ Korea Tourism Organization webpage: <https://kto.visitkorea.or.kr/eng>

Research conducted on the connection between Hallyu and increased tourism concluded that aspects of the Korean Wave like Korean TV dramas, songs, movies, and performances had a strong influence on tourists' decision to travel to Korea.¹⁴⁴ Other aspects like increased interest in Hallyu-related tourism programs such as sightseeing, concerts, fan clubs, etc., also were key factors in increased interest in travel.¹⁴⁵

Hallyu also served to improve Korea's national image abroad. "K-Pop, K-Dramas, and K-Cosmetics serve more narrowly as a state branding effort that seems to behave more classically as a soft power tool in that their exportation is associated with changing perceptions of the cultural state of the Korean peninsula."¹⁴⁶

Evidently, Hallyu has all the aspects necessary to be defined as the source of soft power, and the role of the state of Korea proves that Hallyu was a planned and controlled source of power strategically applied to areas of interest. Consequences of the Korean Wave also prove that the goals set by Korea are being reached - Korea is reaping massive economic benefits through tourism and exports, as well as managed to turn around the way modern Korea is perceived nowadays. Thus, Hallyu is a successful soft power tool for Korea. The next main chapter will aim to analyze if the soft power of Hallyu has also reached Estonia by assessing the reasons for increased interest in Korea and its connection to Korean popular culture.

¹⁴⁴ Eun-song Bae, Meehyang Chang, Eung-suk Park, Dae-cheol Kim, *The Effect of Hallyu on Tourism in Korea* (2017), p. 8.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ James Barden, *A Superpower Between Superpowers: How Post-Cold War South Korea Leveraged Pop Culture Into Soft Power* (2019). pp. 24-25.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Type

The aim of this research is to establish why people in Estonia are more interested in Korea nowadays and how that interest is connected to popular culture and Hallyu. As a result, this research is a single case qualitative study. The qualitative approach creates a better ground for interpretation of collected data in a deeper, more complex manner than a more rigid quantitative research would allow. Qualitative research is more suitable for analyzing subjective data and personal experiences that are oftentimes hard to measure in numbers. Thus, with the aim of gaining deeper insight into the research questions posed, a qualitative approach was selected.

The single case study was settled on due to the fact that the focus of this research is specifically on the case of Estonia, as well as due to the set limits for this research. Analyzing multiple cases would deviate from the initial aim of this research and limit the depth of case analysis. The case selection is thus strategic and focused solely on the Korean Wave example in Estonia.

2.2. Data Collection Methods

For the theoretical chapter on this topic, academic sources and previous research works were used to demonstrate what soft power is and how the Korean Wave has been

used as a soft power tool. This information aids in creating the background knowledge about Korean Wave as a soft power tool, as well as setting the frame for empirical research.

The methodological approach selected for data collection in the empirical part of this research was surveys, and the method used for data collection was questionnaires. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, conducting in-person interviews was not feasible. Thus, the main way of collecting data had to rely on sending out questionnaire links to possible respondents.

The sampling of people for surveys was purposeful in order to pick applicable cases with the best variety of data. The author reached out to people in Estonia who have shown interest in any aspect of Korea by dividing them into three main groups - people engaged in learning the Korean language and traditional culture; Hallyu fans; and those who left Estonia to study, live, or work in Korea. Different groups were chosen to avoid bias in the collected data and interpretation.

In order to contact these people, the author first reached out to the University of Tartu and Tallinn King Sejong Institute online Facebook groups¹⁴⁷ where the survey link was shared. These selections were made due to the fact these institutions are one of the only places in Estonia that offer courses about the Korean language and culture and are thus more likely to have the respondents needed for this research.

The author also reached out to the Korean Culture Clubs in Estonia, as well as other online communities interested in Korean culture.¹⁴⁸ In order to include people interested in purely traditional aspects of Korean culture, clubs focused on Taekwondo and Korean traditional dance were also contacted.¹⁴⁹

On top of these groups, the author also reached out to the community of Estonians who are currently living in Korea, have lived in Korea in the past, or are currently planning\wishing to be in Korea in the future. The questionnaire link was posted on their

¹⁴⁷ Degree Students of the University of Tartu; King Sejong Institute, Tallinn.

¹⁴⁸ Korean Stuff Estonia, Korean Culture Club, UT Korean Culture Club, Hallyu Estonia, Kpop Eesti.

¹⁴⁹ Tartu Taekwondo Alfa+, Korean Traditional Dance Group "Arirang", Eesti Taekwondo.

Facebook community page,¹⁵⁰ as well as shared with other Estonians living in Korea through the author's personal connections and mutual acquaintances of those connections.

The author also reached out to students who take classes about Korean culture at the University of Tartu through private Facebook groups¹⁵¹ created specifically for students in these classes. On top of that, the author also included foreigners residing in Estonia¹⁵² to ensure that they could also share their opinion about their exposure and participation in Hallyu communities in Estonia.

The main platform for finding most of the respondents was Facebook due to the fact that this platform is most popular and most commonly used in Estonia, as well as due to the fact that posting there would allow the author to reach out to a big pool of respondents outside of personal connections and do that without any face-to-face contact. Moreover, posting on Facebook allowed members of these communities to forward the questionnaire link to other people they know who happen to be outside of these communities, which brought in more variety of respondents.

All of the responses were collected online through an anonymous, randomized survey. Anonymity was provided to ensure an honest sharing of personal opinions and experiences. Since this questionnaire aimed to find out changes in perception of Korea, which for some people has become worse due to their personal experiences, the author considered it essential to provide respondents with a sense of safety in sharing their honest and raw opinion.

For the above-mentioned reason, the detailed background and exact community each respondent belongs to (e.g., Tartu, Tallinn, TSKI, etc.) was not highlighted, and instead, the accent was made on their area of exposure, interest, and engagement with Korea and its culture. In total, 166 people from different communities responded to this questionnaire.

¹⁵⁰ Eestlased Koreas.

¹⁵¹ Korean language and Korean History students.

¹⁵² Expats & Foreigners in Estonia, Foreigners in Tartu.

3. KOREAN WAVE IN ESTONIA

The aim of this work is to assess why people in Estonia have become more engaged with Korea and how much that interest was influenced by K-popular culture - what part of Korea became attractive and how it affected their perception of Korea? At the beginning of this chapter, the author would like to give an overview of the current situation in Estonia - indications of growing interest and influence of the Korean Wave. It is important to start with official institutions as part of Korean public diplomacy.

Just like China and Japan, Korea opted for establishing its language institution. In 2015 King Sejong Institute (KSI) was opened in Estonia for the first time. There are, as of 2020, 213 King Sejong Institutes in 76 countries worldwide, and one of them is located in Tallinn. According to the official page of this institute, King Sejong Institute Foundation is controlled by the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and established with the aim of distributing Korean culture and language abroad. The institute aims to grow foreigners' interest and understanding of Korea, and through that, grow Korea's national status. Thus, it's a strategic tool used by the ministry to grow Korea's soft power, just the same way it was used by Japan and China.

At the opening year of Tallinn King Sejong Institute (TKSI), 31 students graduated from their courses, and the institute had only one teacher and one administrative worker. By the following year, the number of students more than tripled (99), and TKSI hired one additional teacher. The following year (2017), the number of students rose to 153, and TKSI already had four teachers employed. In 2020 TKSI had 164 students, signifying a constantly growing interest.

On top of language classes, TKSI also works on promoting Korean culture in Estonia through cultural events. These events often include watching Korean movies, wearing Korean clothes, playing Korean games, handcrafting lessons, and other cultural experiences. During the opening year (2015), only three cultural events were held. In the following years, those numbers rose further (8 and then 11), and by 2018 cultural events were hosted 23 times in a single year. Even in 2020, during the global pandemic, TKSI

managed to host 19 cultural events. As becomes evident, the aim of the institution is to introduce Korean culture from a wider angle.

According to the contact person from TKSI (Inhyuk Suh), Tallinn was selected as the place for opening this institute due to the presence of demand for Korean language classes already before the existence of TKSI. Due to that demand, the institute managed to survive despite the fact that their contract with Tallinn Technical University was terminated in 2019, and TKSI was forced to relocate. In the opinion of the contact person, TKSI had indeed contributed to the growing interest toward Korea in Estonia, but K-pop and K-dramas had contributed much more, and that is the main reason he thinks TKSI had managed to survive in Estonia. This confirms that although the approach to Korean Wave is often institutionalized, many people become interested in Korea through the pop culture first.

Aside from TKSI, since 2016 University of Tartu (UT) also has a visiting professor from Korea sent by Korea Foundation who teaches classes on Korean language, culture, society, literature, and history. On top of these classes, a University of Tartu Korean Culture Club was also established where events are held on introducing Korean culture, e.g., cooking together, presentations on Korean culture, sharing experiences of students who have visited or studied in Korea, and many more. Facebook group of UT Korean Culture Club currently has 748 members at the time of writing this research (2021).

According to JungRan Park (visiting professor at UT through Korea Foundation), she has noticed a growing interest in the Korean language and Korean Studies amongst her students. Not only are they interested in popular culture like K-pop music and dramas, but the range of their academic interests has also grown wider. She also mentioned that the level of knowledge and understanding of Korea varies from student to student, but even those students who have never been to Korea have surprised her with the depth and diversity of their knowledge about Korea. According to her observations, the number of students enrolling in her classes is constantly increasing due to the growing motivation to learn more about Korea.

JungRan Park also revealed that Korean Studies professors are dispatched abroad by Korea Foundation with the aim of promoting sustainable and intimate relations between countries as part of public diplomacy. Due to this factor, her efforts in Estonia

are focused on broadening the scope of academic discussions on Korea through an objective and comparative approach. By helping Estonia and Korea build a deeper understanding of each other, she hopes that Koreans and Estonians can build sincere and lasting friendships. Thus, Korean teachers in Estonia are not simply there to teach language or culture but are part of Korea's public diplomacy and aim to foster building closer diplomatic ties and relations with Korea.

Another way to learn more about Korea in Estonia is through online communities. The Facebook platform has many groups focused on multiple aspects of Korean culture in Estonia. TKSİ Facebook group, for example (853 members), UT Korean Culture Club (748), Kpop Eesti (398), Korean Culture Club (285), Korean Stuff Estonia (262), Hallyu Estonia (240), and Eestlased Koreas (Estonians in Korea) (189). In total, these groups have almost 3000 members (2975). Although some of the members of these groups might overlap, this still shows that these groups do attract attention.

Other groups can also be found on Facebook that target aspects of Korean traditional culture - e.g., Korean Traditional Dance Group "Arirang" (69), Tartu Taekwondoklubi Alfa+ (500), Eesti Taekwondo (1481), and many more. Unlike previously mentioned communities, these groups usually focus on hobbies and promoting their own services and are thus not communities for interacting between members directly.

Other categories of Facebook groups are Estonian sellers of Korean cosmetics. Premium Korea Kosmeetika (Premium Korean Cosmetics) page, for example, has 6085 followers, KoreaCosmetics.eu has 3993 followers, Meon - Korea Kosmeetika Eestis (Meon - Korean Cosmetics in Estonia) 3929, RoseFranklin - Ilu Kõigile (RoseFranklin - Beauty for Everyone) 2857, The Skin House Eesti 2422, It's SKIN Estonia 2287, just to name a few. There are many more groups, but the ones listed previously are the most popular ones that focus purely on Korean cosmetics (no other brands offered).

In total, these mentioned Facebook pages have more than 21 000 members (21 573), which is impressive for a small country. These members are following stores that focus only on selling Korean products. Many more groups exist where Korean products are sold alongside other brands with an even bigger following. However, for illustrative purposes, only purely Korean stores were counted.

Instagram is another online platform for introducing and selling Korean cosmetics in Estonia that is becoming gradually more popular. At the moment of writing this research, the author easily found at least 10 Korean cosmetics stores on Instagram¹⁵³ with a following of more than 300 people. In total, these Instagram pages have a following of almost 16 000 people (15 935), and that is not taking into account smaller stores on Instagram. Combined, the most popular pages on Facebook and Instagram have more than 37 000 (37 508) followers signifying noticeable interest amongst consumers.

Korean cosmetics have also become easier to purchase in Estonia thanks to not only these online communities but also physical stores. Many stores have opened in recent years, focusing on offering solely Korean brands, such as Holika Holika, Mizon, Missha, It's Skin, and many more.¹⁵⁴ Other popular cosmetics stores in Estonia¹⁵⁵ have also widened the range of their products to include on top of Western brands more Korean brands. Quick Google search showed at least 16 online stores where Korean cosmetics can be bought in Estonia, many of which also have physical stores (sometimes multiple stores in different cities).

Aside from cosmetics, Korean food has also become more easily accessible in Estonia. A simple Google search reveals that there are at least six restaurants and bars in Estonia that focus solely on Korean cuisine.¹⁵⁶ Many other Asian restaurants in Estonia now also feature Korean dishes on their menu. On top of that, in many other restaurants, fusion dishes have emerged with the addition of Korean famous side dish Kimchi (e.g., Kimchi burgers, Kimchi french fries, Kimchi sushi, etc.), showing the increased awareness and interest in Korean cuisine.

Korean food has also become more accessible through stores and online market platforms. Korean cooking ingredients are readily available in stores like Nori, Umami, and Piprapood,¹⁵⁷ which also have physical stores in Tallinn and Tartu. On Facebook, one

¹⁵³ KoreaShop.ee (4230); MelioraBeautyShop (2553); Koco_eu (1532); RoseFranklinEstonia (1368); NicolesShop (1211); ItsSkin_Official_Estonia (1119); TheSkinHouse_Eesti (839); Korea_Kosmeetika (716); Mizon_Eesti (660); SkinProfEU (464); Korean_Beauty_Estonia (429); M.Cosmetic_Beauty (423); and Hayejin_Estonia (391).

¹⁵⁴ e.g. HolikaHolika.ee, Mizon.ee, Meon.ee, RoseFranklin.ee, KoreaCosmetics.eu, TheSkinHouse.ee, MelioraBeautyShop.ee, SkinProf.eu, etc.

¹⁵⁵ e.g. Kaubamaja.ee, Loverte.com, Douglas.ee, KehaPood.ee, TradeHouse.ee, ApothekeBeauty.ee, KlipShop.ee, TopBeauty.ee, etc.

¹⁵⁶ Gotsu (Tallinn), Ariran (Tallinn), Hanköök (Tallinn), Annön (Tallinn), Panchan (Tallinn), Horan Korea Bar (Valga).

¹⁵⁷ Nori.ee, Umami.ee, Piprapood.ee.

can also find a store specialized in preparing and selling traditional Korean homemade Kimchi.¹⁵⁸ Kimchi and Korean noodles (ramyun) have also started to appear in regular grocery stores.

When it comes to Estonians traveling to Korea, according to Korean Statistical Information Service¹⁵⁹ (KOSIS) database, from 2015 to 2019, the number of Estonian citizens entering Korea on a visa doubled (Figure 1.). It is interesting to note that most Estonians traveling to Korea with a visa enter the country most commonly on a student visa. Each year Korean Government Scholarship Program (KGSP) also sends out one student from Estonia on a fully-funded scholarship to Korea for graduate studies. Scholarships and fostering exchange studies are also one of the tactics used for growing the number of people abroad interested in Korea and securing their potential interest in working for the benefit of Korea (e.g., building diplomatic ties).

Estonians in Korea

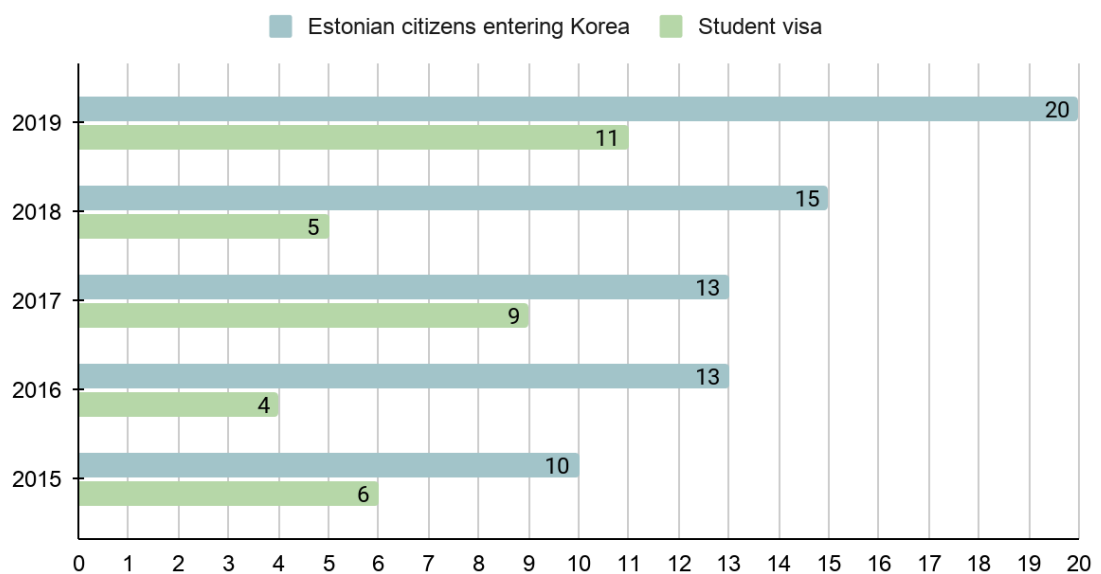


Figure 1. Estonians in Korea.

This growing number of Estonian students entering Korea could be an indicator that Korean classes are having a growing effect on students' desires to study in Korea since most likely, the majority of these students are exchange students from Estonian

¹⁵⁸ Tibu Kimchi.

¹⁵⁹ Korean Statistical Information Service: <https://kosis.kr/eng/>

universities as most Korean classes in Estonia are offered in universities. Studying in Korea as a degree student without the support of scholarships is really expensive. Especially for Estonians when education in Estonia is free. Thus, it can be speculated that the probability of exchange studies (often supported by scholarships) is more likely than degree-seeking visas. Unfortunately, details on specific categories of student visas used were not possible to obtain to confirm such a theory.

Despite the global pandemic and strict restrictions, KOSIS data from August to September 2020 (only available data from 2020 by KOSIS) shows that in these two months, 14 Estonians entered Korea on a visa. The purpose of their entrance has not been specified. However, due to the fact that Korea was in lockdown for most of 2020, it is impressive that in mere two months, 14 Estonian citizens were admitted into the country. As tourism to Korea was restricted, it can be expected that most of these people were also entering on student or work visas.

Regarding pure tourism numbers, Korean Tourism Knowledge & Information System¹⁶⁰ database shows that in 2019 Korea received 360 Estonian citizens in total. Out of these 360, 262 (73%) entered Korea as tourists. The other visitors either entered Korea on a visa or had a different purpose of entrance (e.g., crew members). Entrance data from the year 2020 is not an accurate indicator of tourism to Korea due to the imposed restrictions because of COVID-19. The total number of visitors to Korea from Estonia in 2020 is shown as 93 visitors; however, many of these visits were connected to official visits and most likely related to Estonia preparing to open its embassy in Korea that year. Thus, data from 2019 (prior to set restrictions) is a better indicator of interest for travel to Korea in normal (non-pandemic) circumstances.

As some of these numbers indicate, the interest for Korea in Estonia cannot be called insignificant. Although the signs of the Korean Wave in Estonia are not as drastic as in many other countries, it has to be taken into account the size of Estonia and its exposure to Korean culture, and the number of opportunities to learn and engage with Korea. In a smaller country, these opportunities are also severely limited. Despite this, the

¹⁶⁰ Tourism Knowledge and Information System
<https://know.tour.go.kr/customer/engboard/engboardlist.do?searchCondition=title&pageIndex=5&searchKeyword=>

interest in Korean culture and products is evidently present, and it is growing, signifying the presence of soft power attraction.

The rest of this chapter will aim to analyze when people in Estonia became interested in Korea and what part of Korean culture attracted them, how much they engage with Korea now, and how exposure to Korean culture has affected their future plans and perception of Korea. Based on survey results, the author will try to establish whether the growing interest in Korean culture and products in Estonia is connected to the global spread of the Korean Wave and the influence of Korean pop culture.

3.1. Importance of Korean Wave in Different Communities

These survey results are based on 166 responses collected from people in Estonia who engage in any manner with Korea. The aim of this chapter is to establish how much the Korean Wave and especially popular culture has impacted participants' interest in Korea and their attraction to Hallyu. Mostly respondents were divided into three main categories: people who love Hallyu; those who love Korean traditional culture; and those who either live, work, or study in Korea. The first aim of the questionnaire was to find out when those people became interested in Korea, what attracted them, and how their interests have changed over the years.

Out of 166 respondents, more than half (100 respondents, ~60%) became interested in Korea after 2015, as was expected prior to conducting the survey (Figure 2.). In 2015 TKSI language school began operating in Tallinn, and Korean Embassy to Estonia and Finland hosted their 1st Korean Language Speech Contest in Estonia. Thus, it was expected that most people would be exposed to Korean culture after 2015, when Korea took official steps to promote its culture in Estonia. However, an already present interest in studying the Korean language prior to 2015 is what prompted the opening of TKSI in Estonia in the first place. Thus, it is natural that certain interest was present prior

to 2015 and developed even further after. It can be concluded that signs of the Korean Wave became more prominent in Estonia in 2015.

Year of Exposure to Hallyu

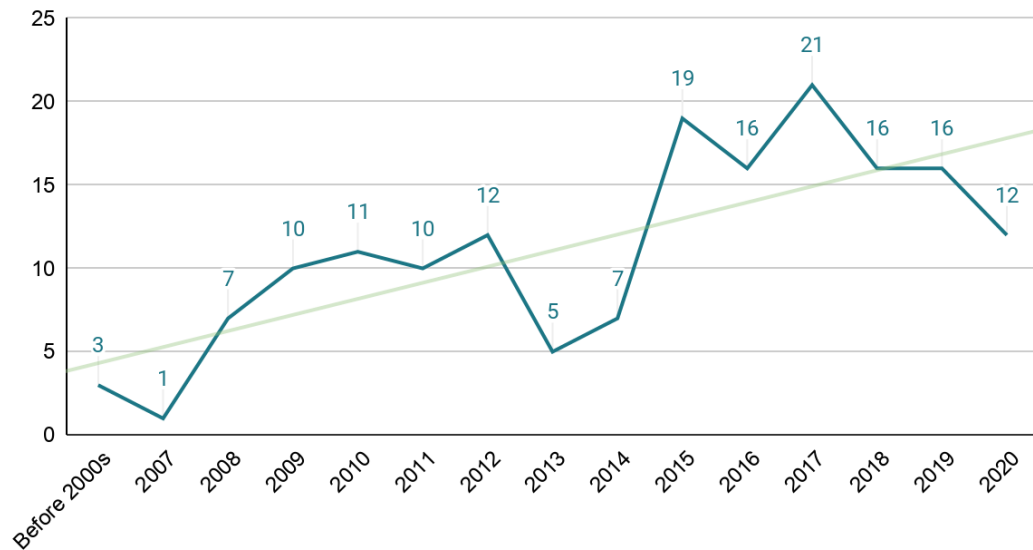


Figure 2. Year of Exposure to Hallyu.

The next goal of this survey was to determine what three groups (Hally fans, traditional culture lovers, or those interested in travelling\living\working) these people position themselves into at the beginning of their journey and what exactly served as the trigger point for their attraction to Korean culture. 129 respondents (78%) noted that it was indeed Korean pop culture that sparked their interest (Figure 3.). Traditional culture attracted only 11 respondents (7%), and working, living, or traveling in Korea made 18 respondents (11%) become interested. Five respondents were interested in all aspects of Korean culture, and three respondents said they were interested in either Korean history, politics, or Korean people. Evidently, the large majority (78%) was attracted to Korea under the influence of Hallyu and fell into the category of pop culture fans. This shows that the most significant soft power source was, as expected, K-popular culture.

Point of Attraction

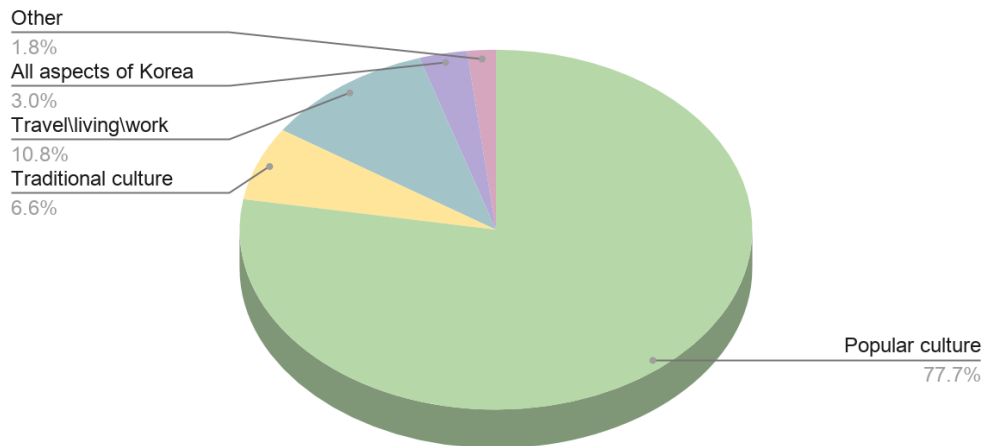


Figure 3. Point of Attraction.

When asked to specify exactly how they first became exposed to Korean culture, the overwhelming majority (132 respondents) replied that their interest grew in response to hearing Korean music; seeing Korean dramas, movies, or TV shows; and often through the influence of social media or friends. Many respondents mentioned that they first encountered K-pop on accident through a YouTube recommendation page or heard K-pop played in the background of other videos like ice-skating, for example. Some said they first heard K-pop through their friends who took part in dance classes or dance competitions and used K-pop music.

K-dramas and TV shows were also often found on accident and clicked due to the attractive posters with beautiful actors. Some said they stumbled upon K-dramas when looking for Japanese content or using their friends' Netflix accounts. As with songs, K-dramas were also often recommended by friends who already were interested in Korea. Although most responses fell into these above mentioned categories, there were some outliers too.

Few respondents mentioned that they either traveled to Korea first to work (e.g., modeling) or visit friends. Some had relations that lived in Korea or were ethnically partly Korean. A small number of respondents credited exchange studies abroad as their first exposure to Korea. Some also mentioned that they made penpals from Korea or ended up in a relationship with a Korean person. One respondent said they were interested initially in the Seoul Olympics of 1988 and the North Korean famine of the 90s.

Two answers also showed that attraction to Korea happened actually not in Korea or home country but in a completely different environment altogether. One respondent shared his story of traveling to Toronto, where he\she encountered Korean food and Korean karaoke culture and, as a result, developed further interest in Korean culture. The second respondent shared the story from his\her time living in Vietnam with Korean neighbors whose language and lifestyle became attractive to him\her.

Few examples were also given on the attraction through Korean cosmetics. One respondent mentioned how she\he first found out about Korea through receiving Korean cosmetics as a present. Another respondent recalled seeing a video on Korean cosmetics and being attracted by the beautiful packaging. Aside from cosmetics, one respondent mentioned that they found pictures of Korean nature and traditional architecture beautiful, and that started their discovery of Korea. One respondent also mentioned meeting Korean celebrities, and another one mentioned hearing about Korea in university class focused on studies on Asia.

In general, except for a few illustrative stories mentioned above, the general mechanism of exposure to Korea has been relatively uniform. Most respondents found interest in Korea through social media (e.g., YouTube, TikTok) or friends, and mainly the interest grew due to pop culture. Most commonly, people credited their attraction to exposure to K-pop or K-dramas. As a chain reaction, other people in their circle then got further influenced by their recommendations.

Above mentioned information shows that the attraction to popular culture happened naturally through acquaintances or online, not so much at events or in a controlled manner. Rather, it can be said that although Korean Wave is in many ways controlled by the government, that control mainly refers to behind-the-curtain activities such as financially or institutionally supporting pop culture industries. When it comes to specific exposure, it happens by chance or through online promotion, but on a larger scale, the emergence of the whole Korean pop industry was due to the initial support of the government.

In conclusion, 11 people did not specify what grabbed their attention at first, 139 (84%) credited some aspect of pop culture to their attraction, and only 16 people were attracted purely by something else (e.g., architecture, travel, etc.). This shows that in the case of Korea, pop culture is the main driver of the Korean Wave and thus the primary source of attraction. Unlike cases like Japan and China, for example, where traditional

culture and other aspects might also play a significant role in attracting people to their country, in the case of Korea, at least in the initial stages, popular culture is significantly more influential than any other aspect and has the most soft power attraction.

In another question, people were asked to name what they consumed the most after their initial attraction to Korean culture. As expected, without a doubt, the biggest attraction was caused by K-pop. K-pop was mentioned 89 times, making more than half of the respondents' initial interest in Korea result in consumption of K-pop. Language also played a big role and was mentioned 37 times. Many respondents mentioned that language was their second source of attraction, a result of consuming pop culture. Dramas were also influential as they were mentioned by 29 people as their biggest area of interest in the beginning. Evidently, for the majority, consumption of popular culture followed after the initial exposure meaning that attraction was successful.

Aside from these three categories (music, language, dramas), culture was mentioned 14 times; food 12 times; and fashion, TV shows, and dramas nine times each. Cosmetics were the leading interest for six people, video games to 5 respondents, and dance and K-pop choreographies to 4. Few respondents mentioned miscellaneous areas of interest like martial arts, books, history, nature, costumes, etc. This shows that aspects of “high culture” have less soft power in the beginning as they attract fewer people.

Following the questions on initial exposure and initial areas of interest, the next question was posed to determine if and how the interest has developed and spread over time. Initially, all participants were divided into three groups: Hallyu fans, people interested in traditional culture, and those interested in Korean life, work opportunities, or travel to Korea. In the beginning, 78% of people fell into the first category - pop culture fans. As time went on, according to the answers, 54% (89) respondents consider themselves now to be members of all three groups (interested in pop culture, traditional culture, and life\work\travel in Korea) (Figure 4.). This shows that pop culture not only attracted them to popular culture only but made the area of their interest widen as a result as well.

Areas of Interest Initially vs. Now



Figure 4. Areas of Interest Initially vs. Now.

When analyzing the responses in detail, 141 respondents out of 166 (85%) marked themselves as now interested in Korean pop culture. These numbers show a 7% (12) increase in interest in pop culture. When it comes to traditional culture, however, now 79% (131) of people marked themselves as interested in it. At the stage of initial attraction, that number was only 7% (11), meaning that after the attraction of Hallyu, the interest in traditional culture grew by 72% (120). When it came to interest in traveling, working, or living in Korea, 77% (128) of respondents marked themselves as interested in doing that. During the initial attraction, only 11% (18) of participants were interested in travel, work, or life in Korea. Evidently, the interest grew by 66% (110), and once again, it becomes clear that the longer people consume Korean culture, the wider their areas of interest become.

This is a significant indication that Hallyu not only attracts people the most but also widens their areas of interest after exposure. Thus, it appears that Hallyu serves as the first loop in a chain reaction, leading people to explore Korea deeper in all areas over time. Perhaps this could also be the result of a hybrid approach to Hallyu where multiple industries are mixed, and thus interests for different areas develop almost simultaneously after the initial trigger.

As popular culture had the most significant effect during the initial attraction stage, as well as remained the most consumed part of Korean culture after the initial exposure too, it can be concluded that the significant growth of interest towards Korea

and its culture can be credited to the influence of pop culture and its attraction, and thus the soft power attributes are also due to Hallyu.

To analyze these trends even further, more detailed questions were asked to determine how much Korean culture respondents already experienced and if they are interested in experiencing more of Korea in the future. In order to find out exactly what aspects of Korean culture participants have already explored, the author gave respondents a long list of (51) activities connected to experiences of Korean pop culture, traditional culture, and traveling, working, or living in Korea. Answers reveal which activities are the most popular and attractive.

The most popular pop culture activities more than half of the respondents (50% and up) have already done at least once are following: listened to K-pop (97%|161) and watched K-pop music videos (94%|156); watched Korean dramas (95%|158), movies (92%|153), and TV shows (83%|137); used or bought Korean cosmetics (86%|143); followed or watched Korean influencers online (75%|124); searched to buy Korean products in Estonia (73%|121); searched or bought Korean products abroad (57%|94); studied Korean fashion style (63%|105); tried to sing Korean songs (71%|118) or dance K-pop choreography (58%|97); bought K-pop merchandise (54%|90). These activities were done by the majority of respondents garnering the most attraction and having more soft power influence.

At least one-third of the respondents (33% and up) have also: joined Korean fan clubs or fan pages (49%|82); bought Korean style clothes (46%|76); attempted to imitate Korean fashion style (38%|63); played Korean mobile or computer games (37%|61); read Korean comics (36%| 59); attended Korean festivals (33%|54). At least one-fourth of the respondents (25% and up) have also read Korean comics (36%|59); watched Korean animations (30%|50); and attended Korean artists concert (29%|48), making these activities also quite attractive to consumers.

Less popular activities were: reading modern literature, meeting K-celebrities, researching, or getting Korean plastic surgery. This can be explained by the fact two of these activities would require traveling, as well as the fact that modern Korean literature is not as popular as other aspects of K-Wave. Korean literature is also not as easily accessible as it is rarely translated and hard to find in stores in Estonia.

The following list of activities was focused on traditional culture to compare the popularity of pop culture and traditional culture. Traditional culture activities more than

half of the respondents (50% and up) have tried at least once are: learning the Korean language (92%|152); eating Korean food (90%| 150); and cooking Korean food (75%|124). These activities might be high in number because they are often easy to do on your own, making them more accessible.

Activities at least one-third of respondents (33% and up) have done are: watch Korean traditional dance performance (48%|79); play traditional Korean games (34%|57); wear Korean traditional clothes (34%|56); visit Korean art exhibition (33%|54). At least one-fourth of the respondents (25% and up) have also studied Korean art (28%|46) and tried Korean traditional crafts (26%|43). These activities would often require participating in classes or events, which might explain why they were done less.

Activities that were less common are: reading Korean traditional literature, staying in a traditional Korean house (hanok), trying Korean traditional dance, and trying Korean martial arts. Evidently, these activities were less popular among the respondents despite the fact that Estonia has quite a lot of Taekwondo schools and even a traditional Korean dance group. This can be credited either to the lack of interest or lack of awareness about the existence of such opportunities.

In general, this question shows that on a large scale, the respondents have pretty significant exposure to Korea and have participated in multiple aspects of Korean popular and traditional culture. Although, as the answers show, pop culture activities were the most engaging despite the growing importance of traditional culture. Thus, popular culture still remains the primary source of soft power.

The next category consisted of questions aimed at evaluating people's interest in traveling, working, studying, or living in Korea, as well as some miscellaneous questions that do not fall into pop culture or traditional culture categories. The first set of questions showed that only one-third of the respondents have actually traveled to Korea (34%|56), signaling a lower level of engagement, which is to be expected considering the fact that traveling is expensive and new fans, especially those who joined after 2019, haven't had opportunities to travel yet. Even fewer people have lived (21%|35), studied (20%|33), or worked in Korea (7%|11). When it came to questions on people's wishes, the answers were a bit more colorful.

Questions that asked respondents if they have ever wished or planned to live, work, study, or travel to Korea, the overwhelming majority (82%|136) replied that they were interested in traveling. More than half of the respondents were also interested in

studying (54%|90) and living in Korea (50%|83). Less than half were interested in working in Korea (47%|78), and only one-fifth considered marrying a Korean person (21%|35).

These answers show that most people, despite never being in Korea, are definitely interested in not only visiting Korea but even staying there long-term as more than half said they would love to study or live there. This is a good indication of the strength of the soft power produced by Hallyu. Not only are they curious about Korea, but this curiosity is strong enough to make most of them want to go to Korea and even stay long-term. Although as less than half said they considered working there, and less than one-fifth of respondents said they have thought of marrying a Korean, perhaps it could be an indication that Korea is not seen as a place to settle down permanently.

Few additional indicators were used to see how much contact with Korea Estonian people have. As results show, more than half of the respondents have also: met a Korean person (71%|117); attended classes on Korea (67%|111); made Korean friends (60%|99); and searched for other like-minded people also interested in Korea (55%|92). This shows that many respondents are looking for communities of people also interested in Korean culture, and most are also interested in learning more as 67% have already attended classes about Korea. Thus, the type of engagement is varied, and most people are interested in making deeper connections with Korea and Koreans. On top of that, the interest in Korean classes shows that the institutionalized approach to Hallyu is working too.

The next question of this survey was similar to the previous question but served a different purpose. The same list of activities was given to respondents, but this time instead of focusing on what they have done out of that list, respondents were asked to mark activities they would like to try for the first time or repeat if they have done it before. The aim of this question was to see if most respondents' engagement with Korea is deliberate, meaning they seek out these activities themselves and are interested in participating and if any of these Korean culture aspects are still seen as attractive by respondents.

When analyzing the responses, the author compared the responses from previous questions to answers to this question in order to see the changes in trends¹⁶¹ - which

¹⁶¹ e.g. X number of people who have watched K-drama at least once (158 = 95% of all respondents) - Y number of people who still want to watch K-dramas (121 = 73% of all respondents) = Z change in interest (37 = 22% of all respondents). All of the respondents (166) = 100%.

activities became less popular and for which activities the demand grew. In the list of popular culture activities, 14 activities out of 24 became less popular, and ten activities became more popular as more respondents marked their interest (Figure 5.).

Although it became noticeable that interest in activities related to Korean pop culture was becoming slightly less popular as people learn more about Korea, pop culture was still consumed to a large extent, with some areas garnering even more interest than before. More than half of the pop culture activities listed (14 out of 24) have dropped in popularity, 10 of which have dropped by 10-20%. Only four activities dropped more than 20% but still remained under the 30% mark - these were K-pop music videos (-27%|44), K-influencers (-25%|41), K-dramas (-22%|37), and K-cosmetics (-21%|34). Ten activities out of 24 became more popular, and the areas with most growth were: meeting K-celebrities (+41%|68); attending K-concerts (+37%|61) and K-festivals (+33%|54); modern literature (+32%|53); wearing K-fashion (+17%|29); watching K-anime (+11%|18). Small growth was also noticed in the desire to buy K-fashion (+4%|7); read K-comics (+2%|3); get plastic surgery in Korea (+1%|1); buy K-products abroad (+1%|1). This signifies that pop culture manages to maintain its attraction even years later after initial exposure.

Areas with signified growth can be indicators that lack of opportunities might play a role in the lower level of engagement in these activities, rather than lack of interest. Activities like meeting K-celebrities or attending K-concerts and festivals often require traveling, which can explain why more people would want to do it than have already done it. On the whole, what this shows is that even if interest in pop culture became lower, it still remained almost where it was, meaning that even as many years pass, most people still remain interested in K-pop culture. This shows once again that popular culture manages to stay on top as the main source of soft power even as time goes on. It just connects more cultural layers to it and broadens the areas of interest.

This means that the difference between two responses is - 22%, as 22% (37 people) of all respondents changed their preference (watched K-dramas before but do not want to watch anymore). Number of people interested decreased by 22% (out of all the responses).

Popular Culture Experience

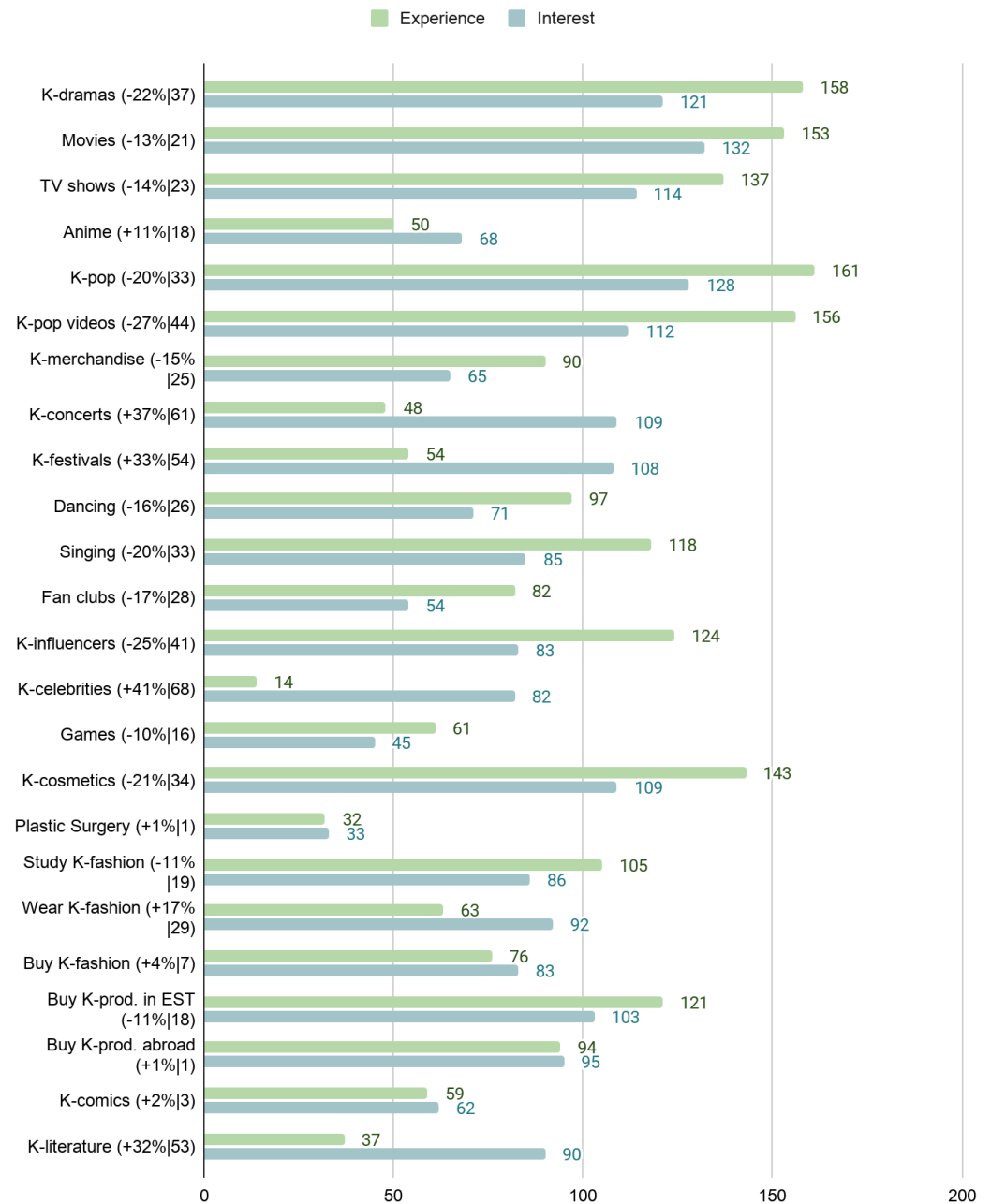


Figure 5. Popular Culture Experience.

When comparing the number of people who have tried traditional cultural activities and the number of people interested in trying, there is a more noticeable gap as more people wish to partake in cultural activities and the demand surges. Out of 13 traditional cultural activities listed, only four dropped in popularity by less than 15%: Korean language studies (-14%|23); K-food (-13%|21); watching traditional dance

performances (-2%|3); cooking K-food (-1%|2) (Figure 6.). This means that fewer people were interested in repeating these four activities after trying them.

Traditional Culture Experience

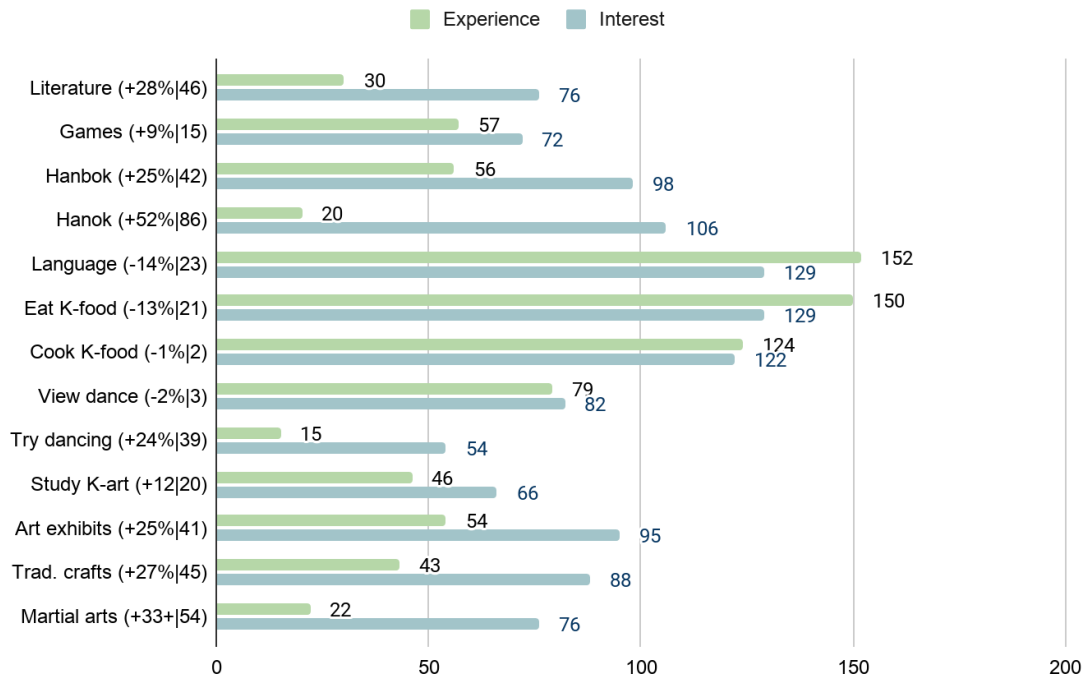


Figure 6. Traditional Culture Experience.

Nine out of 13 activities, however, showed that demand for cultural activities is higher and growing. Interest for experiencing Korean traditional house Hanok grew by 52% (+86); martial arts by 33% (+54); traditional literature by 28% (+46); crafts by 27% (+45); traditional Korean dress Hanbok experience and visiting art exhibitions both grew by 25% (+42;41); learning traditional dance by 24% (39); studying traditional art by 12% (+20); and playing traditional games by 9% (15). This shows that if given an opportunity, many of the participants would be interested in engaging further with Korean culture and that the soft power comes from Korean traditional culture as well, although at a later time (after exposure through pop culture).

If with pop culture, the interest gradually lowered a little, then with traditional culture, the demand is higher than the amount of actual experience. This signifies that the interest for Korea does not die down but somewhat changes direction gradually from simply popular to traditional aspects of culture. Popular culture definitely worked as a

trigger of attraction for most of the participants, and the fact that now more people are interested in traditional culture as well might be an indication that institutions focused on traditional culture (e.g., TKSI) are doing a good job at promoting those aspects of Korean culture in Estonia and also end up becoming points of attraction. Perhaps it can be said that popular culture acts as the first point of exposure and a first stepping stone that opens up a way to discover the culture deeper. After the initial attraction, the institutionalized approach can help to deepen and solidify the interest in Korea through a more stable traditional culture.

On top of that, popular culture is easy to experience on your own since it is easy to find K-Wave content online and easy to order Korean products. However, to experience traditional culture can require the presence of a guide and culturally specific tools or ingredients. That could also be the reason why traditional culture is harder to discover without institutions, and as it is more rare, it can become more attractive to people - more exciting than easily accessible pop culture.

The next part of the assessment was made by comparing how many people would love to build a deeper connection with Korea through direct engagement with the country and its people. 87% (145) of respondents said they would love to travel to Korea, which is 53% (89) more than the number of people who already went to Korea. 58% (96) also answered that they are interested in living in Korea (+37%|61); 52% (87) were also interested in working in Korea (45%|76); 49% (81) were also interested in studying in Korea (+29%|48); marrying a Korean person (+22%|36) (Figure 7).

Real Korea Experience

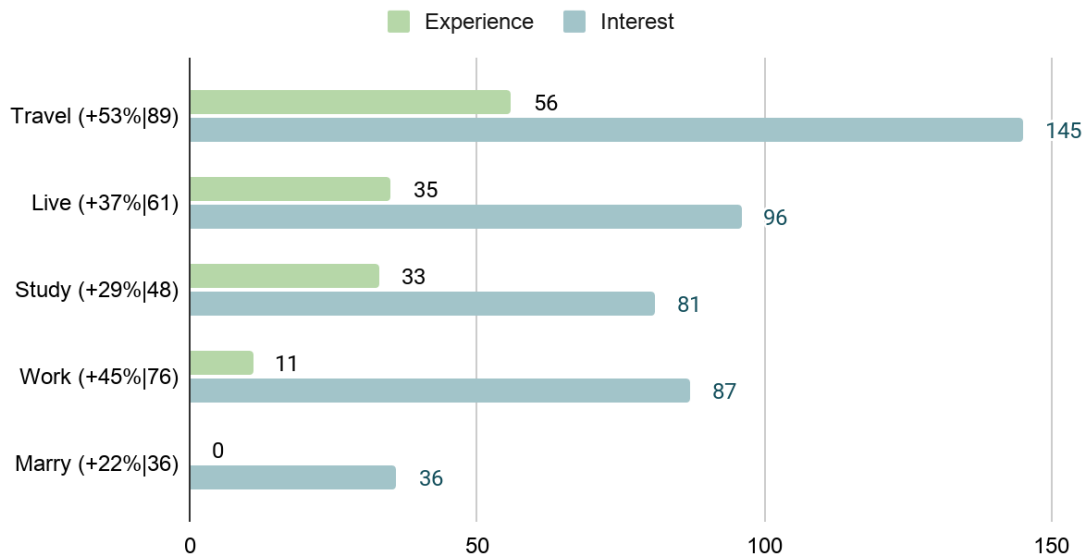


Figure 7. Real Korea Experience.

In the initial stages of respondents' interest in Korea, only 11% (18) started off their interest through living, traveling, working, or studying in Korea. Now, at a later stage, 87% of them are eager to travel to Korea, and more than half are interested in living (58%|96) and working (52%|87) in Korea. Under the influence of Hallyu, people become more interested in making serious long-term decisions and engaging with Korea on a deeper, more profound level of commitment. This can indicate not only the interest in pop culture but the change in perception of the country as a whole as a result of pop culture consumption and its soft influence. As Lee mentioned, soft power is changing people's preferences deliberately. These responses show that the preferences of respondents have changed indeed.

Supporting questions also showed that 61% (102) of respondents are interested in meeting people from Korea, and 73% (121) of them would love to make a friend from Korea. 54% (90) of the respondents also admitted that they are looking to find other people around them who also share their interest in Korea. Interestingly, 67% (111) of participants have also attended some form of classes on the topic of Korea, and 61% (102) said they would love to repeat the experience and continue learning. Once again, this further proves their eagerness and interest in engaging more with Korea voluntarily.

In order to assess how much Korean pop culture has influenced their interest in Korea, respondents were asked to share whether they think they would still be interested in Korea if they were never exposed to Korean pop culture. As a result, 60% (100) replied that they think they would still be interested, and 40% (66) replied no. However, from additional comments given by respondents, it became apparent that many people had a different understanding of what pop culture is, and some respondents did not think that movies, comics, literature, or even K-dramas count as pop culture. For this reason, it can be suspected that the replies to this question are somewhat inaccurate due to possible misunderstandings. Still, even as the responses stand now, it shows that at least $\frac{2}{3}$ respondents would not be interested in Korea without the effect of popular culture, which gives a clear indication that Hallyu has been crucial in creating this attraction.

Additional comments also revealed that even those who were interested in Korea before thought that without Korean pop culture, their interest in Korea would not have been as strong. Some comments said that it was pop culture through which they learned more about Korea, and without it, they might have never become aware of Korea. One person mentioned that even though they had Korean friends and were interested in Korean food prior to consuming pop culture, they would still not have found Korea as interesting if it wasn't for Hallyu. This shows the traditional culture on its own is not so strong at creating attraction.

Although 60% replied that they think their interests would have remained the same, above mentioned data showed that 78% became interested in Korea because of pop culture and Korean pop culture was not only the most significant point of attraction but also remained the most consumed part of Korean culture amongst the respondents to this day. When taking into account also the probable difference in the definition of pop culture, the actual responses might have been slightly different. Thus, there is a reason to suspect that although 40% replied they would not have been interested in Korea without exposure to Hallyu, the actual number might be higher, especially since comments showed that even those who knew about Korea before Hallyu did not find it as attractive back then. On top of that, being overly interested in “low culture” can come with its own set of stigmas, so it's possible that some respondents were (likely subconsciously) reluctant to admit the whole scale of popular culture influence on their interest in Korea.

As this chapter showed, most people who took part in this survey became interested in Korea after 2015, as was expected due to the opening of TKSI that year and

the hosting of a first Korean speech contest in Estonia. It became apparent that for the majority Korea became attractive because of the soft power of attraction of popular culture. As in other countries, in Estonia, too, the most consumed aspects of the Korean Wave are K-pop, K-dramas, and the Korean language. On top of that, if initially people were attracted by Hallyu, then by the time of answering the survey, most respondents considered themselves interested in multiple, if not all, areas of Korean culture, and many credited the Korean Wave for their initial attraction and the growing interest in Korea.

Evidently, for the majority of the respondents, Korea is still very much on their radar, and they continue to show interest in learning new things and continuing their acquaintance with Korea on a deeper and more serious level. Korea seems to be very attractive to people since most people, based on the survey results, voluntarily engage with Korea and have varied interests outside of pop culture too, despite the fact that pop culture is what got 78% of all respondents to gain interest in Korea in the first place.

Pop culture is the biggest driver of the Korean Wave, and the effects of pop culture are evident in this research too. Korean Wave, especially the pop culture side of it, has not only attracted people in Estonia but also made them significantly more interested in other areas of Korean culture as a result. Although Estonia might not be very rich in institutions where Korean culture can be taught or experienced, the global Korean Wave is having an effect in Estonia, too, since most respondents were initially exposed to Korean culture through the internet or through friends and people in close circles, who then passed on their interest to others around them. It's evident that the attraction of Korean culture in the case of Estonia is a result of pop culture influence and attraction.

3.2. Korean Wave and Engagement With Korea

One of the aims of this research was also to find out how and how much people in Estonia engage with Korea. To begin this exploration, it was important to ask respondents how often they engage with Korea, Korean culture, or Korean products. Answers to this

question help to establish the frequency of their interaction with Korea and indicate their level of interest in Korean culture.

The overwhelming majority (70%|166) of respondents revealed that they encounter some aspects of Korea on a daily basis (Figure 8.). This means that most people are actively engaged with Korea daily. 17% (29) of participants said they engage with Korea on a weekly basis, 5% (9) a few times a month, and another 5% (8) once in a few months, 2% every other week. These numbers show that the frequency of encountering Korean culture is relatively high in Estonia amongst the surveyed communities indicating high levels of interest in Korea.

Frequency of Engagement with Korea

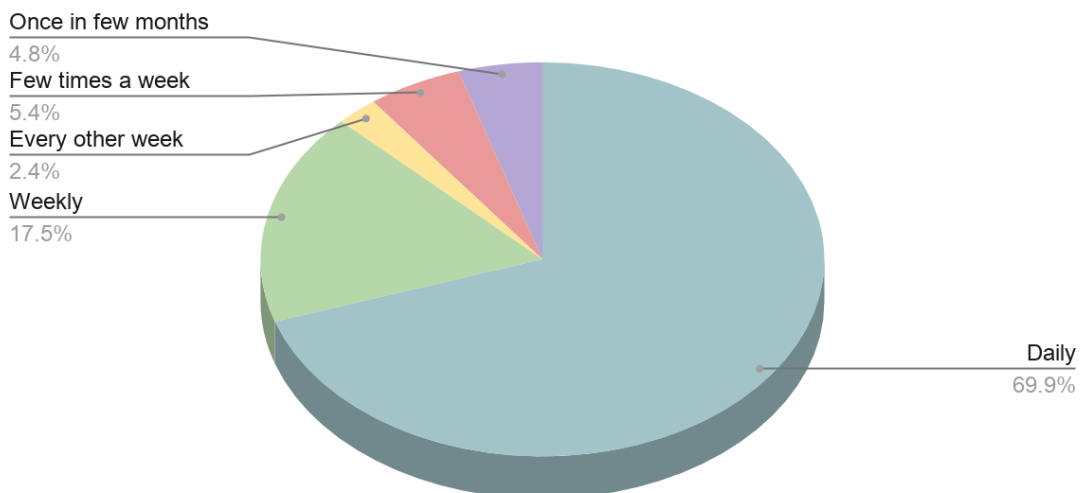


Figure 8. Frequency of Engagement with Korea.

The next question targeted their engagement methods - how are they exposed to Korean culture? Answers can show which channels have the most impact in making Korea attractive and enabling people to explore Korea further. Results showed that 97% of people (161) engage with Korea most often through internet platforms (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Webtoons, etc.); 32% (53) through online groups (e.g., Facebook fan clubs, etc.); 29% (48) through education environment (study groups or attending classes); 13% (21) through family or friends; 9% (15) through in-person groups (e.g., hobby clubs, etc.); and 5% (8) through work or colleagues (Figure 9.). Two respondents positioned

themselves outside of the previously mentioned groups. They engage with Korea through simply living in Korea or reading Korean books.

Means of Engagement with Korea

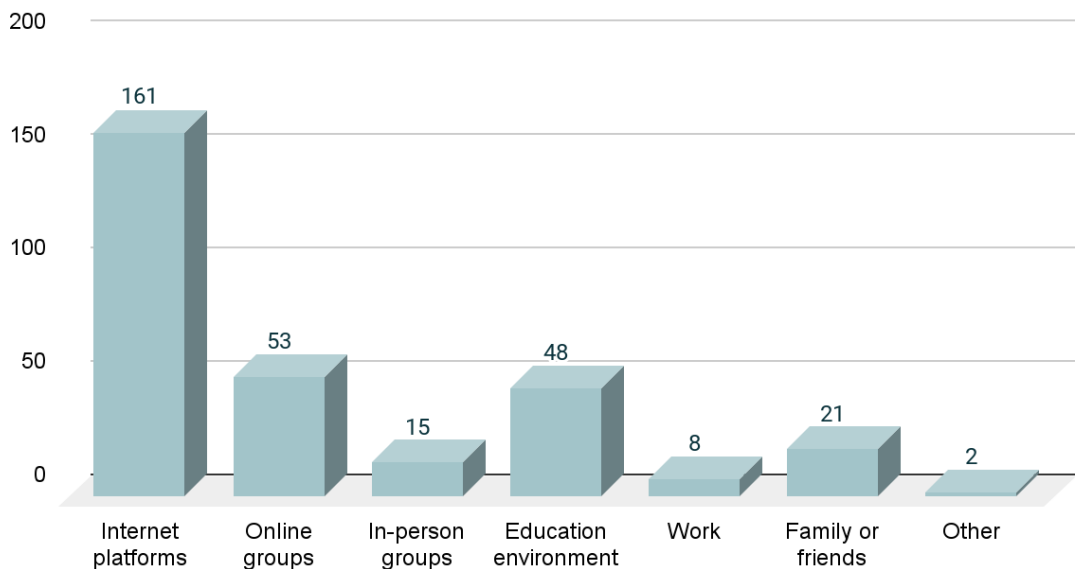


Figure 9. Means of Engagement with Korea.

Evidently, the most efficient way to engage with Korea is through the internet. As Estonia is a small country, it is logical that people have more variety of experiences to choose from online than in-person. On top of that, the global COVID-19 pandemic has also limited our options as traveling is restricted and meeting in-person discouraged. For this reason, it is natural that during the time of conducting this research, the answers are even more in favor of online communities.

As evidence suggests, online platforms provide more opportunities to engage with Korea and attract the most amount of people. The internet is shown to have the most power in securing engagement. This shows that unlike other examples of cultural soft power (e.g., China and Japan), Hallyu popular culture spreads primarily through online communities, not so much through established institutions. Rather, the established institutions serve as a support system to attraction created by Hallyu, not necessarily as a separate source of an initial attraction themselves.

The next part of the questionnaire focused on those respondents who have already been to Korea. The aim was to find out how many participants have been to Korea, how many times they traveled, how long was the duration of their stay, and what was the

purpose of their visit. These questions give clarity on what attracts respondents to Korea and how frequently they come into contact with Korea as a country.

In terms of visiting Korea, 36% (59) of respondents have already been to Korea before, and 54% (32) of them visited Korea only once. 24% (14) of them went to Korea twice. Two respondents went to Korea six times, one five times, and another ten times. 9% (5) of them have been to Korea more than ten times (Figure 10.). This indicates that people either travel rarely or quite often, with few options in-between. This could be an indicator that those who travel more often most likely are in Korea for a purpose more serious than simply tourism.

Frequency of Travel Korea

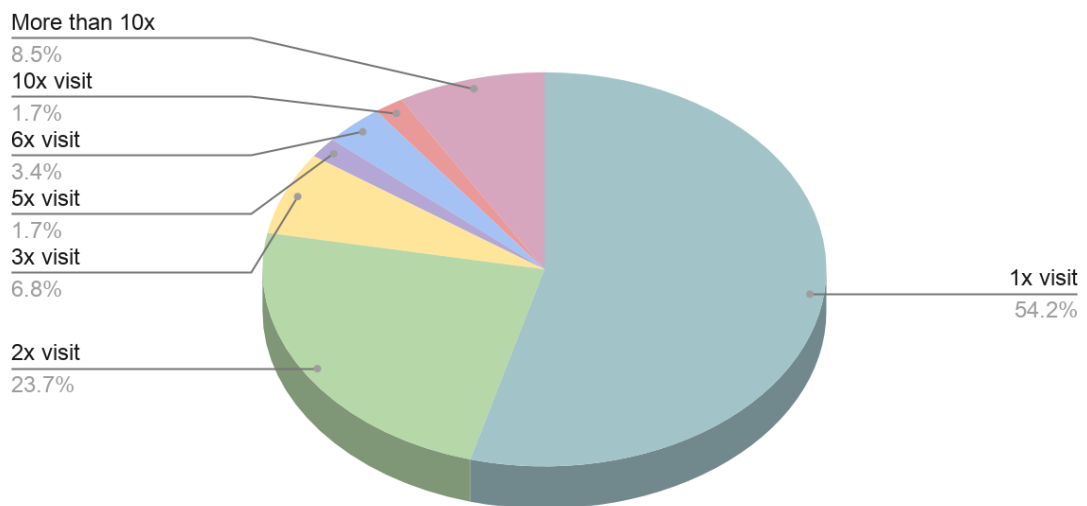


Figure 10. Frequency of Travel to Korea.

In order to better understand the nature of their travels to Korea, a question was asked about the longest duration of their stay in Korea. 11 people out of 59 (19%) have stayed in Korea at once for one year or longer - three people stayed for one year, five stayed for two years, one for three, one for four years, and another person for 26 years. 27 (46%) respondents stayed in Korea between a month and a year the longest - nine (15%) of them stayed for less than six months, and 18 of them (31%) stayed for longer - six months or more. 21 people (36%) stayed in Korea for less than a month, and only five (8%) of them stayed for less than two weeks, meaning 16 (27%) of them stayed for longer than two weeks (Figure 11.).

Longest Duration of Stay in Korea

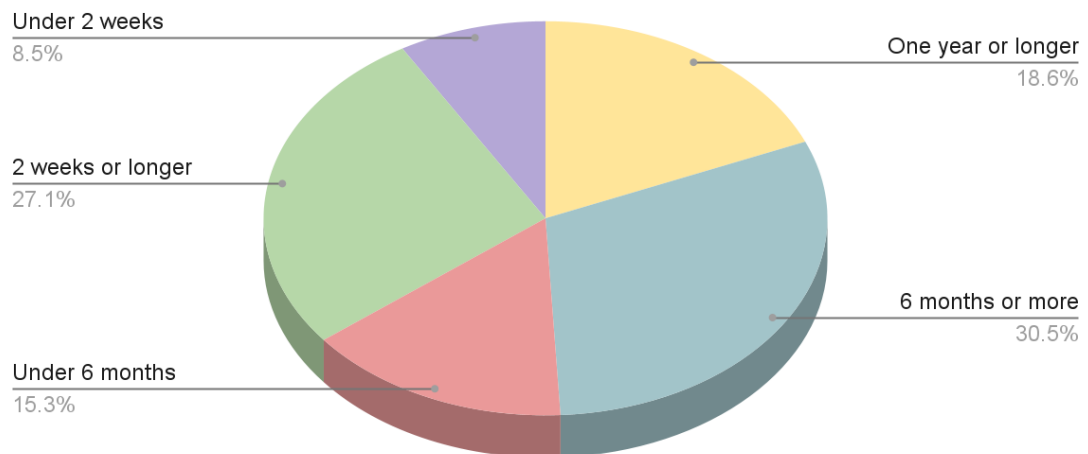


Figure 11. Longest Duration of Stay in Korea.

In total, around half of the respondents (49%|29) have stayed in Korea for more than six months in one single visit, and 56% (22) of them stayed for at least four months, which is equivalent to the period of exchange studies abroad. This indicates that more than half of the people who travel to Korea stay for long periods of time, many even for years. This shows that they more likely have a more serious motive for visiting the country than just traveling, which in turn signifies the extent of Korean soft power - powerful enough to pull people away from Estonia for longer than half a year at a time

The previous question answered how long people have stayed in Korea without leaving. The next question was aimed at finding out how much time they have spent in Korea in total if all of their visits are summed up. This gives a better overview of how much time people spend in Korea over the course of many years and multiple visits. Almost half of the respondents (47%|28) stayed in Korea for at least one month but less than a year. 20% (12) stayed in Korea under six months and 27% (16) over six months (Figure 12.). Over a quarter of respondents (27%|16) have stayed in Korea in total less than a month: 5% (3) stayed less than two weeks, and 13% (13) stayed over two weeks.

Total Time Spent in Korea

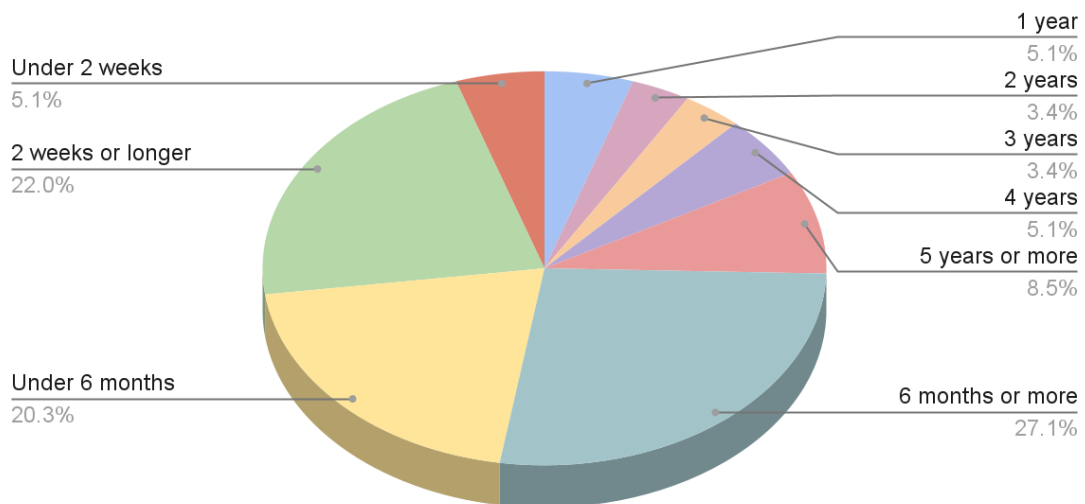


Figure 12. Total Time Spent in Korea.

One-quarter of the respondents (25%|15) have also lived in Korea longer than a year. Three respondents stayed for around one year, and 12 stayed for two years or more. Out of those who stayed in Korea for at least one year, more than half of them (8 out of 15) stayed in Korea longer than three years, and one-third of them (5 out of 15) stayed longer than five years. One respondent even spent 26 years in Korea. Once again, this shows that people go to Korea for long periods of time and with a set purpose, and all of this, in most cases, was initiated by their exposure to pop culture.

To find out why people travel to Korea, the next question focused on the purpose of their visit. More than half of the respondents (63%|37) said they visited Korea for tourism purposes (Figure 13.). The following popular reason for travel was experiencing traditional culture (46%|27) and exchange studies in Korea (36%|21). Language studies (31%|18) and visiting friends (20%|12) were also popular reasons. 24% (14) also traveled to Korea for the purpose of shopping there. Other reasons for travel also appeared but were less common. As this shows, most people who travel are interested in more of the traditional cultural aspects of the country like language studies, experiencing culture, etc. Once again, this confirms the thought that while the popular culture works as the primary source of attraction supported by high interest in tourism, the popular culture builds a firmer foundation for deepening interest in Korea, as is evident from the interest in traditional culture and studying in Korea.

Purpose of Travel to Korea

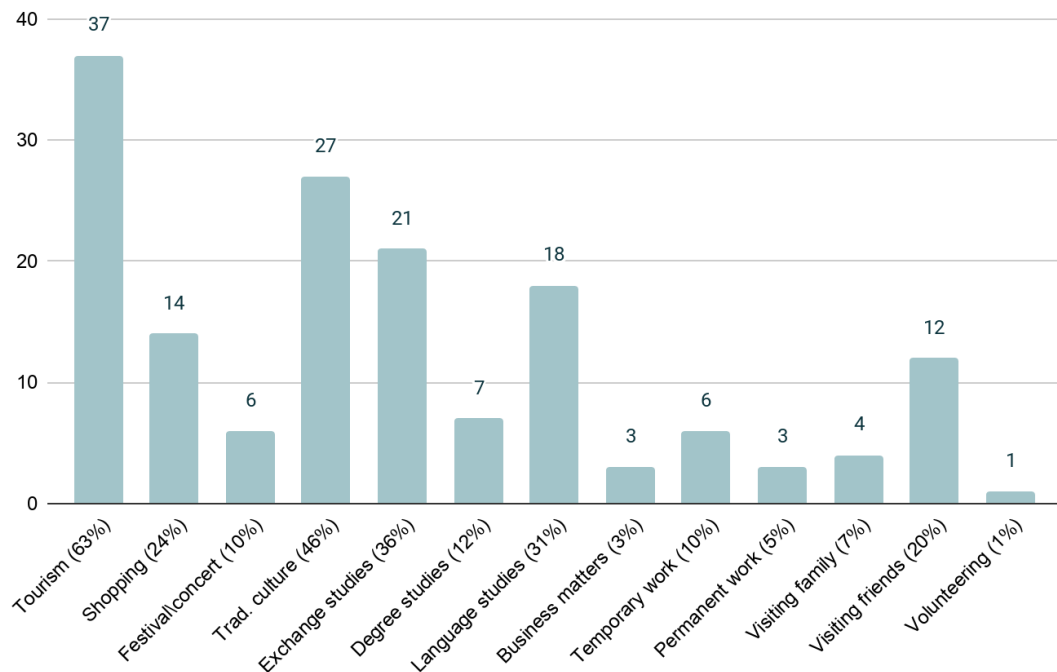


Figure 13. Purpose of Travel to Korea.

Participants who have traveled to Korea were also asked to share whether, in their opinion, they would have visited Korea if they never came into contact with Korean pop culture. Interestingly 61% (36) replied that they think they would have still wanted to travel to Korea, and 39% (23) replied they would not have gone to Korea without the influence of Korean popular culture. The author expected most people to reply that they would not have gone to Korea otherwise as 78% (129) of respondents said they first became interested in Korea, particularly due to the influence of K-popular culture. Some respondents commented on their answers, saying that they had previously been interested in Asian countries in general but did not have a strong inclination towards Korea before. Others said they would have loved to travel to Korea if given a chance but would not have gone out of their way to do it. This shows that even for those who might have had some interest in Asia before it was K-wave that solidified their focus on Korea and made their interest in the country grow bigger, once again confirming the power of attraction of Hallyu even amongst those who had some interest in Korea prior to the Hallyu boom.

Another factor to consider why many people might have replied that they would have still gone to Korea even if they never encountered Korean pop culture (despite the fact that most respondents learned about Korea first through Korean pop culture) is once

again a different understanding of what popular culture consists of. Through the additional comments given by respondents in the questionnaire, it became clear that many people have a different definition of popular culture and what it consists of. Some people did not consider modern literature, animations, comics, cosmetics, or videogames, for example, as a part of pop culture. Oftentimes when it comes to Korean pop culture, many people understand it to mean simply K-pop music and K-dramas, not realizing that pop culture includes much more. Perhaps that is another reason why the responses to this question might not reflect the real influence of Korean pop culture. Nonetheless, almost 40% agree that without Hallyu, they would not have gone to Korea, which once again proves the role of Hallyu in this growing interest.

Few respondents also gave comments on why they think they would have still gone to Korea even without the influence of Hallyu. One person commented that they became interested in pop culture through their Korean friends and thus would have still most likely gone to visit those friends in Korea even if they never became interested in Hallyu. Another person mentioned that they discovered Korea through language, and the interest in Hallyu was not present at first.

Another question all 166 respondents were asked was whether they would like to revisit Korea if they have been before or visit Korea for the first time. 99% (165) of respondents replied that they would love to visit Korea. Only one person replied that they are not interested in going to Korea. Evidently, people are not only interested in consuming aspects of Korean culture but interested in going all the way to Korea and engaging with the country. This indicates that the image of Korea portrayed through pop culture is seen as attractive and has made Korea an attractive destination.

As a follow-up, another question was posed, asking them to list the reasons why they would want to travel to Korea. Most popular reasons for wishing to go to Korea were: tourism (96%|159); traditional culture experience (80%|133); attending festivals or K-pop concerts (63%|104); shopping (60%|100); language studies (60%|99); exchange studies (50%|83); temporary work (49%|82); visiting friends (40%|66); degree studies in Korea (39%|65); permanent work (29%|48); business matters (22%|36); marriage (15%|25); immigration (13%|22); medical tourism (11%|18); and visiting family (4%|6) (Figure 14.). Once again, cultural activities were near to the top of the list, showing that the reasons for travel are also largely connected to the attractiveness of Korean culture, not any other aspect of Korea.

Reasons for Wishing to Go to Korea

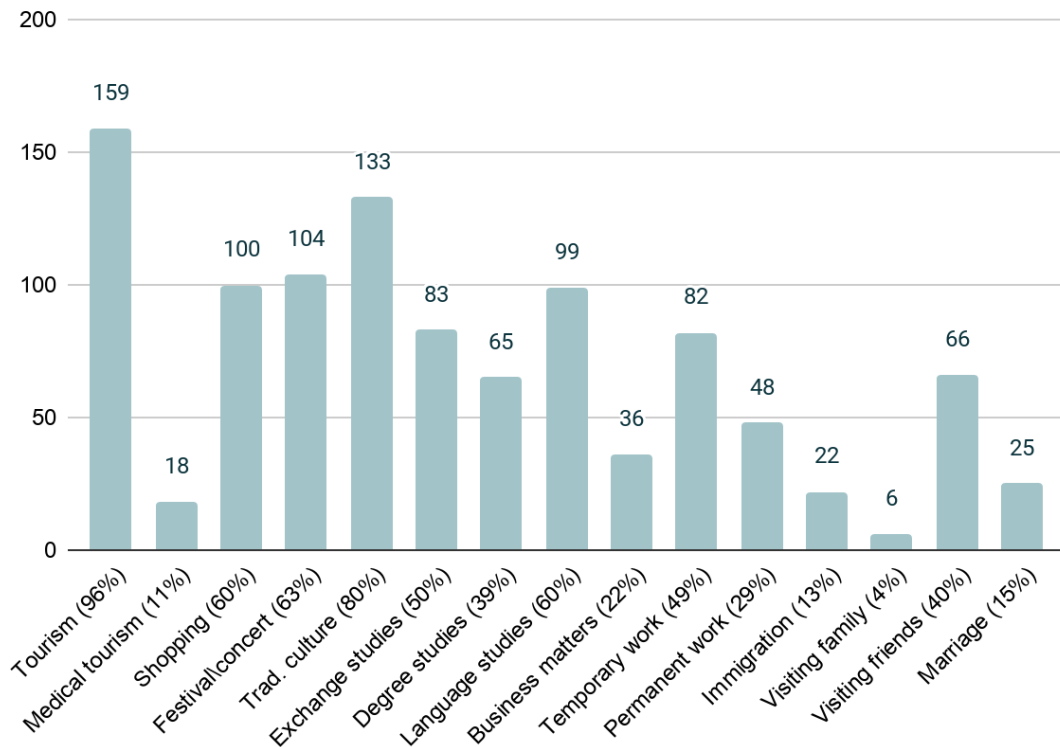


Figure 14. Reasons for Wishing to Go to Korea.

Lastly, respondents who have been to Korea were asked to share if and how their future plans changed after experiencing real life in Korea. The majority of the respondents said that after their visit, Korea became more important to them and affected their future plans in a way that made them want to engage more often with Korea, signifying a growing level of commitment and soft power for Korea as a country, too.

Many stated that after their travels, they wanted to return to Korea and find a way to stay for longer. One person said: “It definitely made me want to go back and find a profession related to Korea,” and another person added: “After returning from student exchange, I started Asian studies at Tallinn University.” Another person said: “After visiting Korea and doing extra research, I want to go on a study abroad program to try and experience the country again.”

Another person shared their story: “Spending one month in a summer school made me want to return to Korea later as an exchange student. While doing an exchange student program, I realized I want to work in a Korean company. After quitting it to finish my

studies in Estonia and getting work experience in an Estonian company, I plan to move back to Korea for work.” Some respondents shared that they wish to stay in Korea for more than five years and others said they have already settled down in Korea or plan to stay long-term through working or studying.

One more person said: “I now want to include Korea in my future (live and work, perhaps periodically),” and another person matched that by saying: “I probably won't consider working in Korea for more than two years in a row because the local lifestyle is just too stressful and unhealthy” but still indicating interest in staying for long periods at a time.

Others shared that their plans changed away from Korea. One person said: “I found out that I like living in my home country and do not wish to stay abroad (in Korea) for a long time.” and another said: “Korea is fascinating and great to visit and produces great entertainment, but it is a very competitive society.”

One of the respondents elaborated deeper on this point: “Wanted to study in Korea, but decided not to because I have been more exposed to how draining and competitive university life there is. Also very expensive. I would still consider doing an exchange semester or two, though. At first, I also wanted to work in Korea, but I have learned that the job market is very oversaturated, and it is difficult for young people to find employment. It's also difficult to find a job as a foreigner unless your first language is English and you come from an English-speaking country.”

One person said: “I intended to study in Korea, but after my exchange year I have changed my mind.” and another shared their view: “I found that I enjoyed living in Korea a lot more than I thought I would and even though I still don't know if I ever would settle down there because the Korean immigration policy concerning foreigners is quite tough, I think I have an urge to go back more now than I had an urge to visit before I had been there.”

Out of 32 people who commented on the change of their future plans, 28 (88%) said their plans became more connected to Korea, and 4 (12%) said they decided not to pursue their interest in Korea after the visit. This shows a significant influence as many of them seriously changed their plans due to experiencing Korea. As was mentioned in the theoretical chapter, one of the signs of soft power is maintaining communities where people don't want to leave. In a way, this is happening because those interested in Korea seem to associate themselves with the community of Korea as that is where they want to

be voluntarily, which is another indication of soft power and shows how strongly the attraction of Korea affects the consumers.

As this chapter has shown, most respondents engage with Korea on a daily basis, primarily through online communities. Over one-third of all respondents have already traveled to Korea, and around half of those who travel to Korea stay for six months or more at a time. Most popular (>50%) reasons for visiting Korea were tourism, cultural experiences, and studying in Korea. Respondents almost unanimously agreed that they would want to go to Korea (again), and many of those who visited Korea seriously consider tying their future in some way to Korea.

This data shows that those interested in Korea are in contact with Korean culture constantly, and when they go to Korea, it is often for long periods of time. This shows how deep their level of engagement is and that their interest in Korea is not trivial. It also shows the strength of attraction of popular culture since the majority of respondents began their journey of exploring Korea under the influence of Hallyu. As well as that, it shows that the power of attraction does not stop at Hallyu but instead grows wider and builds a solid foundation for a deeper interest in Korea.

3.3. Perception of Korea Across Communities

In this chapter, the aim was to find out what the respondents think of Korea. Whether to them Korea is an attractive country and seen in a positive light or not, and how that perception might differ amongst those who have actually lived in Korea and experienced the real country. As Dinnie mentioned, the identity and the image of a state are different - one is the real state, and another is simply the perception of the state. The author wished to find out if people who stayed in Korea think the real Korean identity matches the image the country has built abroad and how their experience in Korea affected their perception of the country. Positive perception of Korea, especially amongst those

who never visited Korea, can be an indication that the nation branding goals of Korea are being achieved in Estonia too.

To start this assessment, participants were given a list of 32 statements and asked to evaluate (agree, somewhat agree, not sure, somewhat disagree, disagree) how much they agree or disagree with those statements. These 32 statements aimed to gauge respondents' perception of Korea in terms of their opinion leaning towards positive or negative, not at evaluating the actual factual correctness of these statements. Part of these statements were based on the national image of Korea prior to Hallyu (e.g., memories of wartime, poverty, low level of development), as well as how Korea is portrayed through Hallyu nowadays (e.g., modern, rich, high quality produce, etc.), and other possible indicators of respondents' level of attraction to Korea.

More than 50% (83 or more) of the respondents agreed with 28 statements out of 32. Only three statements had less clear-cut answers - the rest of the statements were agreed to by the overwhelming majority. 100-90% agreed that Korea is a highly developed, rich, and attractive country; they considered Koreans as hardworking; to them, South Korea and North Korea have little in common; they also hoped that Estonia would offer more Korean products and food options in the future, and stated that they would travel to Korea more often if it were financially more affordable.

90-80% of respondents stated that they would like to spend some part of their future in Korea; they consider Korean people highly educated and beautiful, and Korean products to be of high quality; they also wished ordering products online from Korea was easier in Estonia, and that Korea would organize more cultural events in Estonia; they also think that Estonia should put more effort into further developing diplomatic relations with Korea; and that studying Korean language and culture is important to them and they wish they could learn more about Korea in Estonia. 80-70% also consider Korean people to be inviting and friendly and consider Korea to be one of the safest countries in the world.

70-60% think Korea is strong in terms of military power; that Korean people are multi-talented and the Korean medical system really advanced; to them, Korean entertainment is more attractive than any other countries entertainment; and they prefer to purchase Korean products as well as trust the quality of products with "made in Korea" labels more than other products. 60-50% also considered Koreans to be wealthy and Korea to be welcoming to foreigners.

Less than 50% of the respondents agreed that living in Korea as a foreigner would be enjoyable (48%); 45% replied that they would love to spend the rest of their life in Korea; 34% rated the Korean social system as good, and 33% said they think life in Korea is better than in Estonia. As these results show, all of these statements were agreed to 30-100%, with the majority strongly agreeing with such assessment of Korea.

Evidently, based on these criteria, Korea is seen rather strongly in a positive light, and the perception of Korea has moved away from the old image of the country. Moreover, this positive image also causes a rise in demand for Korean products as people are eager to have more Korean brands enter the market and offer wider selections. These answers also show that people in Estonia are not satisfied with the number of opportunities to study and experience Korea in Estonia, and they think both Korea and Estonia should work harder on further developing their mutual relations. This proves that the image of Korea nowadays has mainly become positive, and the nation branding attempts have been successful. Interest in tourism and Korean products also indicates that Korea can gain economic benefits from the respondents' interest in Korea, which was one of the main goals of strategic use of Hallyu by the Korean Government.

Next, respondents were asked to share what exactly, in their opinion, makes Korea attractive. Most respondents, of course, credited pop culture and traditional culture for the power of attraction. Others shared some more profound insights. Many mentioned that Korea is attractive because it's so different from Estonia, and even if those differences might sometimes be negative, it is still interesting to explore them.

Many people also say that it's the exoticism that attracts people to Korea. Koreans and their culture looks different and unique to Europeans, and since the Korean language is also an isolated language, it's more interesting to learn. Comparing Korea to Europe, Korean traditional and modern culture seems so different and refreshing and unlike Estonia. "The Korean wave, the developments the nation has had to go through in history, the deep culture. It's so different from Western culture."

Some said they think the key of attraction might also be in the different way of thinking and their "Completely different world perception. It is eye-opening to realize how big and different the world is." Another person also said: "People mentality is somewhat same with Estonians. People still honor traditions and traditional culture and history. " This shows that Nye's theory on culture spreading easier in similar environments is not entirely applicable here as, to many, Estonia is different from Korea, and yet the culture of Korea is seen as attractive despite the said differences.

One participant called Korea a curious hybrid - something so distinctly Asian from a Westerners point of view but also not so foreign. Despite the differences with Europe, Korea is still seen as somewhat familiar and understandable. One person said Korea could be called: "The same concept as Estonia but in an Asian form. Feels like a new and interesting home." Approaching from the point of view of similarities, it can be said that perhaps Nye was right after all as some respondents also saw Estonia as not that different from Korea, which would make the acceptance of Korean culture in Estonia easier.

Other points of similarities between Estonia and Korea can also be found in the "underdog story" of Korean history and how Korea managed to preserve its culture. This person elaborated: "There is a sense of strength that comes from the cultural memory in terms of being annexed. I think Estonians share some of that understanding of the importance of their own culture, rapid growth, but also sharing and being open about the culture, work opportunities, and customs so that it creates options for foreigners to join in that celebration and build strength in solidarity." The applicability of Nye's approach can be argued based on whether Estonia is considered similar or different from Korea.

Many also admired the rich history of Korea and the way Korea tries to show the world the richness of their culture without allowing their culture to be easily influenced and changed. This rich culture makes Korea versatile in terms of attracting people with different interests. "It's a developed country with an interesting culture that can attract both older generation (for example, food and traditions) and the younger generation (e.g., music, fashion, plastic surgery)." Moreover, not only did they admire the beauty of Korean culture but also the strategic approach is taken to disseminate their influence globally - "I like the way their government has pulled off the Korean Wave in order to boost their economy." and: "I think the Hallyu wave does an amazing job at getting younger people interested in Korea, which is beneficial to the country in the future since those young people might grow up to go and work as someone related to Korea." This respondent hit the nail on the head as, based on this survey data, many people interested in Korea were also interested in changing their profession and focusing on Korea.

One respondent said Hallyu is influential because: "They show people in TV shows and in Korean dramas as good people, so this is the one point - they know how to sell." Another person said Korea is "Keeping their culture and spreading in all over the world as a package so you can live "Korean way" even if you are not Korean." This makes Korea reach its influence outside.

They also added that the high level of product development and design combined with skilled marketing, as well as a wide variety of high-quality content readily available for consumption, is what makes Korea more attractive. On top of that, Korea is highly developed in terms of economy and technology, has attractive career possibilities, is safe, and has many wealthy corporations. The country is also well known for its high-quality medical system and expertise in plastic surgery.

Some also commented on the great internet in Korea, the strong education system, and the high level of life. According to one respondent, Korea is so well developed that: “They are ahead of the world about 3~4 years or so.” On top of that, Korea offers many scholarships for foreigners, and the cities in Korea are very well developed. All of the above-mentioned reasons for Korea's attraction are indications of the national image Korea has built abroad as these are the factors many respondents felt describe Korea well. Thus, the Korean image is mainly positive, signifying Korea to be a highly developed and advanced country, which differs from the perception of Korea prior to Hallyu. Once again, this signifies the success of nation branding through Korean Wave.

Another respondent said they were attracted to Korea precisely because of the city infrastructure. Seoul city is described as lively with many things to do and many places to go. Restaurants and bars have great atmospheres, public transportation is cheap, and the infrastructure for pedestrians is also great (e.g., Han river bicycle roads). Public bathrooms everywhere, free parks and entertainment (e.g., cafes, events, clubs, museums), and freedom to dress how you like are also factors that make Korea inviting. On top of that, the small size of Korea makes traveling within Korea relatively cheap, and discovering new regions is exciting since many places have their own regional food and differences.

At the same time, Korean cities are full of easily accessible seas and mountains, making hiking and being active easy even when living in the city. Multiple people mentioned that although Korea modernized fast, they maintained a balance and respect for nature, especially mountains, national parks, and islands. This love for nature also attracts many.

The night views of the city are described as gorgeous and the weather better than in Estonia. The autumn and spring in Korea are long, while the winter is short, and most days, Korea is sunny. The lifestyle of Korea, such as busy daily life full of events, 24h open stores, stylish people, recycling culture, floor heating, and other forms of comfort in daily life (e.g., excellent food delivery services, easy bill payment system), are also seen

as positive features. One respondent described Korea as a “country for people” with “availability of everything you need for a comfortable life.” Another said they like Korea because its “Modern life is in close relationship with very traditional lifestyle and customs. Food is healthy.”

Other aspects like the qualities of Korean people were also credited. Some described Koreans as good people who seem very open. Some respondents liked the hard-working nature of Koreans and “how professional everyone is or how ready to work hard for a good result” they are. One person also mentioned that they like how hard-working Koreans are, but at the same time, they see it as also unattractive because of the problems overworking causes.

One person added: “ I like how Koreans are somehow polite and respectful but on the other hand loud.” Korean etiquette, the culture of bowing, hygiene rules, and a culture of respect are seen as inviting. Some said they like Korean values as the family is essential to them, and they seem really caring. Some of those people who traveled to Korea also shared that they found Korean people to be very similar to Estonians and were taken aback by it since they did not expect to have so much in common.

One respondent compared Korea to Japan and mused that if Korean Wave didn’t exist, Korea would certainly have less to offer for a regular tourist than Japan in comparison. Others also credited Korean Wave calling Korean popular culture unique and of high quality. BTS (Korean boy band group) is also seen as a major force of attraction to Korea. Affordability and excellent quality of Korean cosmetics, as well as the unique Korean aesthetics, were also given a spotlight.

As a result, it became apparent that although the majority agreed that pop culture was the main reason for attraction, the beauty of Korea goes much deeper than just that. The country itself, with its climate, nature, infrastructure, and lifestyle, also attracts people. It’s seen as unique and different and yet so similar too. Similarities in the history of Korea and Estonia allow Estonians to build a common ground for understanding and empathize with Korea more. Because of that, despite the variety of differences between the two countries, Korea seems less foreign.

Based on Laving’s approach to soft power, it can be said that most respondents in Estonia find Korea attractive because of its beauty and brilliance, meaning that Korea evokes feelings of admiration and inspiration through its history and cultural traditions. Benignity, meaning feelings of gratitude, were not so obviously detected. Thus soft power

to respondents seems to be created mainly through the emergence of the two above-mentioned feelings.

To provide some counterbalance and assess how realistic are people's perception of Korea, a question was asked on what makes Korea unattractive. Replies to this question were much longer, and surprisingly respondents had much more negative thoughts to share than positive ones. This was surprising because, based on previous questions, most people are really interested in Korea, and 99% of respondents also replied they would love to go to Korea. Thus, it was unexpected how much people know about the serious issues of modern Korea. High-level corruption (e.g., police, politicians, influential people, elites), abuse of power, a weak justice system, and too lenient punishments were a few of the negative factors mentioned by many. Many also highlighted that the overly conservative society and lack of protection of minority rights (e.g., LGBTQAI+) and women's rights are significant issues to them. Feminism in Korea is only developing, and it's already viewed very negatively.

Societal issues were also mentioned by many, such as high level of poverty amongst the elderly, widespread sexual harassment of women (e.g., spy cams in public places), high wealth gap, toxic online cancel culture, increasing house loans, lack of awareness, and education on foreign cultures, closed attitude towards foreigners (by people and immigration system), judgment towards non-married couples and single mothers, dangerous driving culture, and overpopulation, just to name a few. Health concerns were also mentioned like high level of pollution, heavy drinking culture, stigmatizing of mental health problems, high levels of stress at school and work due to competitive environment, over-working, bullying, high suicide rates, excessive militarism, "draconian Confucian values which discriminate against diversity and force conformist lifestyles," and many more.

Gender inequality is also an issue brought up by many. Sexism is prevalent, and Korea has the worst gender pay gap in economically developed countries. "There's not much of a gender-equality in Korea; men are almost always on the top positions, and women are looked at with prejudice." One respondent mentioned a story of how her friend got pregnant and was fired from her work for that. Some expressed particular concern towards the treatment of foreign women in Korea: "a lot of Korean men are predators and hurt foreign women because a) the image of Korean men is promoted as something positive in foreign media b) they know the police is less likely to help a foreigner, especially if its a woman (especially a woman of color) "

Many also mentioned blatant racism, difficulties of finding a job as a foreigner, and differences in values as negatives. “The hierarchy system with respecting the elders, I get it, but a lot of people just abused their power;” Example of this abuse was shared by another respondent as they shared: “my fiance got hit by his boss, left the company after.” Others said they also struggle with the fact that Koreans rarely share their honest opinions, and they don't communicate in a direct manner like Estonians do, which makes the way Korean people express themselves seem fake.

The inability of Korean people to accept criticism directed at Korea and their poor English skills also caused issues for some. The pressure from social hierarchy (e.g., not being able to refuse a drink from a higher ranking person), expensive housing prices, and general living expenses were also on the mind of many. “The living costs are also quite expensive, so for example, it’s a little too much for me to travel and stay there for longer.”

Many people pointed out that Korean people often care too much about their appearance. They were said to have an unhealthy obsession with their age, beauty, and wearing expensive brands, and following trends in order to impress others. Some felt uncomfortable that people in Korea can easily comment on other people's appearance in a negative manner, point fingers, or discuss people's appearance behind their back. “Visual appearance is important and plastic surgery is a normal part of everyday life, which comes off as superficial.” “Higher and even strict beauty standards are unattractive and dangerous, especially for young people. There seems to be much attention given to appearance, often going overboard. Many social problems are scary to observe and even sad at times.” Another person added that they dislike “How looks are everything and changing their appearance by surgery seems so casual. Their beauty standards aren't even that Korean anymore but more what you should achieve with surgery.”

Others also mentioned the dark sides of the K-pop industry - the amount of control crazy *sasaeng* fans have over Korean idols' lives (e.g., stalking and privacy violations), sexual exploitation of idols, nasty comments left online, and possessive attitudes towards celebrities. The way companies mistreat their artists shows how hierarchy can be abused, making some people aware of these issues lose interest in K-pop.

Many also mentioned that having North Korea and China as neighbors in close proximity does not make Korea more attractive. On top of that, the fact that South Korea is technically still at war with North Korea makes many feel uneasy. Others shared their fears of having a hard time when trying to seek employment or limited access to the healthcare system due to being a foreigner in Korea. Another person shared that Korea is

less inviting because “work in a Korean company is almost like slavery, bureaucracy is really slow, Visa nowadays is hard to get.” Another participant also added insight into foreigners' problems in Korea: “As an Estonian, very hard to get a visa, foreigners have a tough time finding legal work, some Koreans do not like foreigners, the image of being a “koreaboo.”

Evidently, most people who like Korea are also quite well aware of the country's social issues. This shows that they don't perceive Korea as merely the perfectly portrayed image created through popular culture. They see into the deeper levels of real Korea, and yet they still find Korea attractive despite listing more negatives than positives. Few people added that in their opinion, the issues Korea faces on the large are problems of the whole world, not only Korea, and like any other country it has it has negatives because no country is ever perfect. Thus, it seems despite the fact that respondents understand the issues of Korean society, it does not seriously deter them from wanting to visit or consuming Korean culture and content. One person explicitly said: “there are some problems in the society, but they won't keep me from consuming Korean dramas or learning about Korean culture.” This indicates that the soft power of Korea can overpower even the evident negative perceptions and issues of the country - Korea remains attractive despite it all.

To get a more precise answer on how their perception of Korea changed as they become more knowledgeable about Korea, respondents were asked to share whether knowing more about Korea made their opinion of Korea more positive or negative. As a result, 46% (76) said learning more made them think of Korea in a more positive manner (Figure 15.). This shows that the effect of Hallyu and its nation branding efforts are successful as the image of this country is becoming more positive the more respondents learn about it.

Change in Perception of Korea

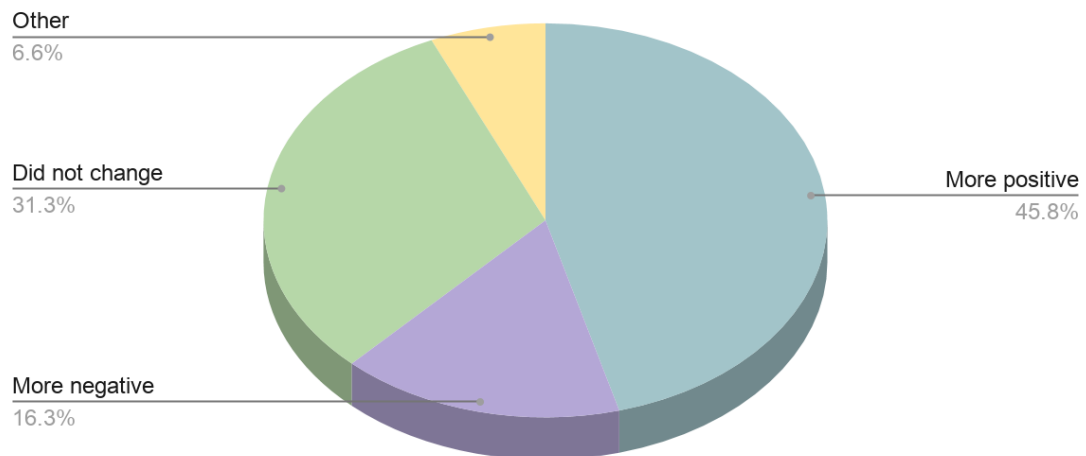


Figure 15. Change in Perception of Korea.

31% (52) said the knowledge did not impact them too strongly, and 16% (27) said the more they learned, the more negative became their perception of Korea. On the other hand, 7% (11) could not easily pick any of the three options and elaborated further on their experience. Most of the respondents who picked the “other” option clarified that their opinion became somewhat realistic and more nuanced than necessarily more negative or positive. One respondent said: “I think it made it more realistic. Corruption and bad government deeds are everywhere, but it’s usually never bad enough to change my opinion about the whole country.”

Another one added that their “Opinion became more balanced. While in some areas became better, then in other areas (mentioned above) became negative. But it doesn’t overall change that I love South Korea; I just acknowledge negative aspects.” One more participant said that although their opinion of Korea has now become “more negative, but an overall opinion still in the positive spectrum.” Another participant said: “I actually don’t know the answer. After I learned about social criticism in Korea, my opinion didn’t definitely go more positive. It changed my opinion, but as I try to be a positive person (and thinking that I can’t change their culture), my opinion is in between (but definitely changed).”

Other respondents also felt that their opinion was mixed - “it is so-so. The more I learned about Korea, the more I became interested in the culture, traditions, food, but on

the other hand, the more I learned about the K-pop industry, the more I have become to despise it". As the responses show, for 46% Korea became more attractive, and only for 16% their opinion of Korea became more negative. From other answers, it is also apparent that although they might have learned something negative about Korea, it did not really affect their overall interest in Korea, rather just changed their understanding of the nuances, and as some mentioned, it got better in some aspects and remained unchanged in others.

Next, respondents were asked to mark what influenced the change in their opinion, and almost equally, respondents chose popular culture, traditional culture, and experiencing real Korea (Figure 16.). A small portion of them said their opinion changed because of the Korean people they met in Estonia, the information they heard on the news or through social media, and other friends' experiences who have been to Korea themselves. From these replies, it can be apparent that no one area is necessarily more unattractive as a general trend; it is all just part of individual experience. However, it does signify that the soft power is not exclusive to popular culture as other parts of Korea and its culture also played a role in the change of perception.

Cause of Change in Perception

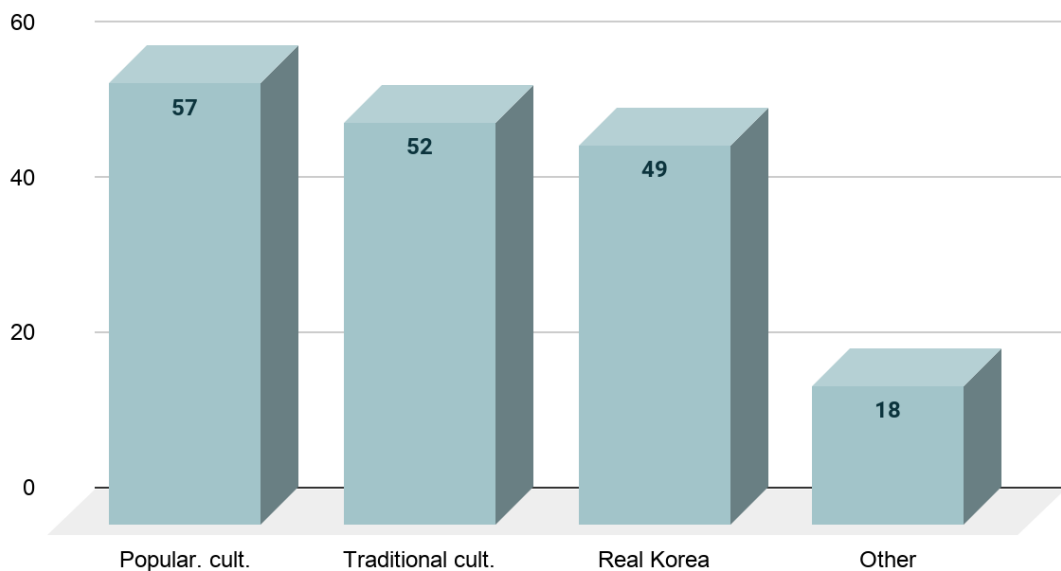


Figure 16. Cause of Change in Perception.

Lastly, it was interesting to ask a few specific questions to those people who have actually been to Korea and can compare the image of Korea to their personal experience. According to them, for only 5% (3 out of 59) of them, their opinion of Korea became

worse after visiting the country. The rest of them, 95% (56), said that their opinion of Korea became much better (61%|36) after visiting or at least stayed the same (34%|20). This proves that upon deeper engagement with Korea, away from the topics of culture, Korea keeps having soft power influence in other areas as well, not just culture.

Next, they were asked if their expectations prior to visiting Korea matched the real Korea they saw, and 75% (44) said yes, 14% (8) said their expectations were not met, and the rest of them (7) said they either had no expectations or that Korea was actually way better than they had anticipated. Only two people out of 59 said that they thought their expectations of Korea were unrealistic. The rest agreed that their expectations of Korea were reasonable. Perhaps that can explain why Korean Wave has been spreading for so long. As was mentioned above, in the case of Japan, the pop-culture image did not fit the perception of Japan in countries like Korea, for example, because of historical disputes. Because of that, the influence of J-popular culture was shorter-lived and limited. Korea does not have the same restrictions and can use multiple aspects of its culture and history as soft power. The fact that the Korean national image for most respondents fits the image of real Korea avoids disappointment and allows the Hallyu wave to keep spreading without negative limitations.

80% (47) of the respondents agreed that their expectations were formed based on the image Korea created of itself through its popular culture. Only 20% considered themselves not influenced by that image of Korea. Despite that, some mentioned that pop culture was not the sole source of their expectations as some of them had their expectations corrected by their Korean friends before coming and others were just a bit more cautious in believing the portrayed image of Korea to the full extent. Thus, for the majority, the image of Korea and their expectations are constructed through popular culture portrayal of Korea, proving pop culture to be the source and tool of soft power and nation branding.

73% (43) of those who traveled to Korea also believe that their perception of Korea is different from those who never experienced real Korea. When asked to elaborate on what could be different in their perception, they said that Korea is not like it is portrayed in K-dramas, and many young people might not realize the extent to which reality differs from that image.

One participant said: "It's no dramaland. While living here, I'm not keeping up with K-dramas or K-pop as much as I did in Estonia. While it is everywhere, so much

other life is going on. Also, not everyone is fashionable all the time. People walk around in pajamas and slides quite often.”

Most respondents mentioned that many people who never saw real Korea only care about Korea because of K-dramas, K-pop, and bands like BTS, which leads to strange rumors and misconceptions about Korea. “I think many people idealize it a little too much. While I still find it amazing, I think others have certain expectations which tend to be unrealistic fueled by mainstream media. All of MY personal expectations were met, but that's because I didn't put it above any other country.”

Another story says: “I've been into it for a while, and there was definitely a moment when I was a fresh fan and imagined everything was going to be like in the dramas. But if you watch more serious movies or follow people who actually live there for a while, you slowly realize how there are also many cons about living in Korea or even being one. Because of this, I know that I wouldn't want to permanently live there or have a family.”

Someone also added that: “Their perspective on Korea is heavily built on other peoples' experiences and views portrayed by soft power promotion. Due to my long stay and first-hand experience, I was able to build my own deeper understanding of certain things. I can predict the negative sides of things compared to those who had no access to Korean culture.”

One participant added: “Korea is recently known in the West mostly for K-pop, Korean dramas, and cosmetics, but there's so much more about it which is often overlooked in comparison to other Asian destinations like Japan when choosing a place to visit. Nature, food, culture, and especially people are fascinating.”

“A lot of people who have not been to Korea think it is the same as other Asian countries and think it is all about makeup, but it's more than that.” Someone added: “Others think that Korea is exactly the same as Japan or China, which it is not.” Moreover, another person said: “When I talk to people who have never been to Korea or maybe not even seen Korea represented a lot in media, they think that Korea is a much less developed country than it actually is.”

Another participant said: “I think it's very difficult to form a realistic opinion on a country if you have never experienced the environment unless maybe you research it thoroughly (which to be fair, most Korean Wave enthusiasts do not) but being in the cultural environment and learning about the country from a historical and sociological point of view (which I did at my exchange university) gives you a much better foundation

to form an opinion. so to put it simply, I think my opinion differs because it is more multi-faceted.”

Another person said: “We see from a distance only prosperous side of South Korea,” while the next person added that: “There's a lot of social issues that people who have never been to Korea don't know about or don't realize the seriousness of them. Especially things like racism, sexual harassment, poverty, intense social pressure to always do your best/look your best, etc.”

One more person shared: “Having talked to Korean friends and having been there for a longer period of time, I think I might have a little more insight about the troubles Korean society is facing (tough job market especially for younger generation, high rent in Seoul, rapidly aging society, discrimination against women, discrimination against sexual minorities, secret cameras in restrooms, motels).”

A deeper insight was shared through another person's experience: “Korea is a very fun country for tourists but super hard country to settle down in. Foreigners are never accepted as real citizens by society, and you always feel like an outcast who is at a much bigger disadvantage than locals when it comes to finding a job or even renting a house. Purely for the fact that we don't look Korean. That's super sad because I love Korea and spent many years learning language and culture. But still, my future in Korea doesn't seem promising despite my efforts. Just because I'm considered an outsider based on my looks.”

An interesting point was also brought up by the next respondent: “Many people are very harsh in critiquing Korea while forgetting where they came from. Korea isn't like the west and shouldn't be seen through said lens. Many, however, push western understandings upon it and ruin the country for themselves through it.” Similarly, another respondent said that those who never saw Korea lack some level of “understanding of all these little nuances in behavior and thinking” and it's also easier for them have “judgemental attitude because it is easier to laugh at or look down on something we do not understand and say that it is wrong rather than try to actually comprehend the different perception.”

Thus, it becomes clear that, especially for those who have stayed in Korea for a while, their perception of Korea is balanced - with positives and negatives. Most respondents had a fascinating insight to share and listed many reasons for thinking carefully about going to Korea. Still, it's incredible that with such good insight, the attraction of Korea does not die down significantly as 99% said they still want to go back

to Korea regardless of all the possible drawbacks. Once again, this proves further the strength of Korean soft power.

SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis was to prove that Korean Wave is a soft power tool in the hands of the Korean government and that the increased interest for Korea in Estonia is connected to the global Korean Wave and the popularity of Korean popular culture. Korean Wave in this thesis was considered to be only pop culture aspects of said wave, and three definitions for soft power were proposed.

From the first chapter of this thesis, it became apparent that Korean Wave developed in the 1990s as a deliberate attempt by the Korean government to switch to cultural industries as new drivers for economic development. Korea has implemented multiple policies since the 1990s and established institutions focused on developing and promoting the Korean Wave. The Government, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs had an essential part to play in growing Korean soft power, alongside specially created departments. Korea laid a foundation for the creation of its own popular culture and took a strategic approach to support the independent companies financially, allowing these companies to bloom and intermingle.

The opening of the Tallinn King Sejong Institute alongside the sending of a Korean professor to the University of Tartu by the Korea Foundation are examples of Korean strategic approach to introducing their language and culture in Estonia with the aim of nurturing in Estonia the people interested in Korea and fostering good relations with Estonia. On top of that, every year Korean government sends one Estonian citizen on a fully-funded scholarship to a degree program in Korea. Korean products have also entered the markets of Estonia on a relatively large scale. These are a few examples of the Korean strategic approach to promoting its culture through attraction and using these tools for securing its interests in Estonia.

Two main aims for using Korean Wave as a tool by the state were gaining economic prosperity and improving Korea's national branding. As it became apparent in recent years, Korean reputation has dramatically improved, and Korea gained massive economic benefits through Korean Wave. In Estonia, too, people became interested in consuming Korean products, and the interest for travel to Korea grew, signifying economic benefits for Korea. On top of that, the perception of Korea in Estonia became more positive, which is a sign of effective nation branding.

As Korea became more popular in Estonia, the goal was to determine whether people in Estonia became interested in Korea under the soft power influence of Hallyu in particular. To find answers, a questionnaire was conducted among 166 respondents from three different communities: Hallyu fans, traditional culture lovers, and people interested in Korea as a country (living, working, studying). As results showed, the overwhelming majority (84%) of respondents became interested in Korea precisely because of Korean popular culture. The most popular aspects of Korean culture became K-pop, K-dramas, and Korean language as most respondents encountered Korean culture initially through friends or online platforms. This shows that institutional influence came at a later stage.

As survey results showed, most respondents came in contact with Korean culture daily, and over time their interest also grew to include all aspects of Korean culture almost equally, showing that although their interest began with the pop culture, it soon grew to be an all-encompassing interest in the country and its lifestyle. While the initial exposure to Korean popular culture often happens accidentally, the further exploration of Korean culture is often supported by the above-mentioned institutions like TKSI or Korea Foundation, for example. Thus, the soft power of Hallyu acts as the initial trigger of attraction but is not the only source of soft power. Instead, it's the first source of power encountered that leads many to explore other sources of Korean soft power like traditional culture or the country itself.

The majority of respondents consumed Korean culture every day and shared that they wish Estonia offered more courses and cultural activities connected to Korea. Many claimed that they do not feel satisfied with the number of Korean products available in Estonia as well, meaning that demand for products and cultural activities is higher than supply. This shows that many respondents' interest in Korea is serious, and their demands are higher than the current circumstances in Estonia offer.

As this research showed, not only are people in Estonia interested in all aspects of Korean culture, but they are also eager to travel and live in Korea for long periods of time, some even planning to settle down there, making Korea a country for possible future relocation. Amongst all the respondents, the ones that have been to Korea on average spend there more than six months at a time, signifying an impressive engagement level with Korea, and despite being perfectly aware of most modern societal problems of Korea, all but one of the respondents answered that they would still love to visit Korea despite all the possible drawbacks. Evidently, the power of attraction in the case of Korea is strong, and the soft power of popular culture has undoubtedly left its mark in Estonia, too.

In conclusion, Hallyu is a tool of soft power creation and control used by the Korean Government strategically to gain economic benefits and improve national image - indications of its success are evident in the case of Estonia too through increased interest and engagement with Korea. The connection between Hallyu and the increased interest in Korea was successfully established in the case of Estonia, and it was proved that Korea became popular in Estonia due to the initial attraction created by Korean popular culture. The evidence presented also proved that Korean institutions played a crucial role in creating Hallyu's soft power, and some of these institutions were implemented in Estonia, too. Thus, the aims of this thesis were fulfilled.

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