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*The Causes and Effects of Korean Pop Culture on
Vietnamese Consumer Behavior*

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Ms. Dihn Thuy Anh

Abstract

This study aims to explain the influence of Korean Wave on Vietnamese consumer behavior, as well as demonstrate the role of Korean government to help promote and make this phenomenon popular worldwide. The scope of the study is limited to two aspects of Korean Wave, which are dramas and music, and to consuming behavior of Korean cosmetic and language courses. It would like to examine the difference of expenditure on these products among various groups of consumer.

By applying the theoretical framework of Pop Culture and Consumer Behavior, the research will analyze the spending patterns among students of two universities through a questionnaire that was conducted July 2016 in Hanoi – the capital of Vietnam. The major findings of the study indicated that, overall, different groups of respondents, such as age, gender, major in university, time of living in Hanoi, and time of exposure to Korean Wave, will spend differently on Korean cosmetic. In addition to survey, interviews also were organized with two lecturers majoring in Korean Studies to give opinions about Korean government policies and its impact in Vietnam. Other sources are secondary data.

This study has 5 chapters. Chapter 1 is introduction including statement of problem, scope and objectives. Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical framework and literature on previous studies on this topic, the development of Korean Wave in Vietnam as well as Korean promotion policies. Chapter 3, which is methodology part, describes the process of giving questionnaires and interviews. Findings and analysis are presented in chapter 4 and everything is concluded in chapter 5.

To sum up, this paper concluded that Korean governments' policy is one of the most important factors that make the Korean Wave popular not only in the region but also worldwide. Survey showed that students of different groups such as age, gender, universities, family conditions or experience of the Korean Wave will have different expenditure on Korean cosmetic; and the desire to study Korean language will not affect much to their spending on this product.

Keywords: *Korean Wave, consumer behavior, culture, Vietnam, cosmetic, policy.*

Introduction

After the financial crisis in 1997, Korea needed to find a safe method to help improve its economy, as well as mark its own identity in order to gain notice. Thus, the government decided to pay more attention to exporting Korean pop culture with the goals of enhancing international political and diplomatic power; and enlarging Korean footprint in the region and in the world. So far, Korean pop culture, as known as Korean Wave or *Hallyu*, has become famous not only in Asia but also worldwide. Everything Korean, from food, to fashion and make-up style, is welcomed in many regional countries and has created huge demand.

Vietnam, as a country in the Asia – Pacific region who has always looked up to Korea because of the successful recovery, has found it easy to get to know their Eastern neighbor. Under similar Confucian influences, both countries have common traditions and customs. Also, both have experienced years of colonization, thus, Vietnamese society could easily accept the flow of culture from Korea. Thanks to the motivation of media exchange developed by the Innovation process of the Vietnamese government since the early 2000s, the Korean Wave has successfully accessed Vietnam through movies, dramas and music. Through these media, Korean life style began to have an impact on the Vietnamese population, thus they try to do like Korean such as listening to K-pop song, eating foods with Korean brands, following Korean fashion and so on.

This study would like to explain the impact of Korean Wave on Vietnamese consumer behavior, particularly Vietnamese expenditure on cosmetics and study Korean language.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Consumer behavior theory

Consumer behavior theory can be listed as four categories: (1) economic theories, (2) psychological theories, (3) psycho-analytical theories and (4) socio-cultural theories (Ushadevi, 2013). All of these behaviors are grounded in a basic rule of consumption, which is that income affects the buying decision making. This means that excluding savings, when

your income increases, you tend to purchase more. By looking into these theories, we can know what are factors affecting consumer behavior.

Consumer decision-making models are useful for specifying the causes and effects relating to consumer behavior (Walters, 1978, 43). In the 1960s, many researchers introduced the earliest theories of decision-making of consumer behavior, the “grand models”, and nowadays they are still be used widely to explain the process of purchasing products and services. Grand models are based on a theory which illustrates consumer decision-making as a multi-staged and complex process involves five main stages: (1) problem recognition, (2) information search, (3) alternative evaluation and selection, (4) outlet selection and purchase, and (5) post-purchase processes (Mohammadi & Mohamed, 2011). Consumer choices are influenced by socio-psychological factors like attitudes, motives, values, personal characteristics and also non-psychological factors like product design, price and advertising (Sirakayaa and Woodsideb, 2005).

1.2. Pop culture theory

Pop culture is generally acknowledged as *people’s* culture that dominates the society at a point of time, because it involves all aspects of social life, and is determined by the interactions among people’s daily activities: styles of dress, the use of slang, greeting rituals and the foods they consume (Brummett, 2004). Thus, it reflects all standards and beliefs that influence our life. Moreover, is liable to change rapidly, especially in a high-tech world, due to the influence of mass media.

The Southeast Asia region has experienced a huge wave of cultural exchange thanks to the rapid growth of its economies and booming urbanization. Consumerism has become common with great awareness given to purchasing goods and services to fulfill one’s living conditions. This paves the way for massive circulation of pop culture products, such as movies, pop music, fashion magazines and so on. Particularly, the most powerful sources of pop culture from China, Japan and South Korea have not only intensified in recent decades, crossing different national and linguistic boundaries, but also have substantially decentralized regional culture market. As a result, we can find imported popular cultural products in every big city in Southeast Asia, which are regularly hybridized and consumed.

2. Research Methodology

With the purpose of examining the effect of Korean Wave on younger Vietnamese students in terms of their expenditure on Korean cosmetics and studying Korean language, the study conducted a sociological survey among students from two universities, Hanoi Foreign Trade University and Hanoi Banking Academy. The survey asked the respondents about their exposure to Korean dramas and music, as well as their spending on cosmetics and study Korean language. Responses were summarized by graphs, diagrams with percentages, and tables.

3. Results

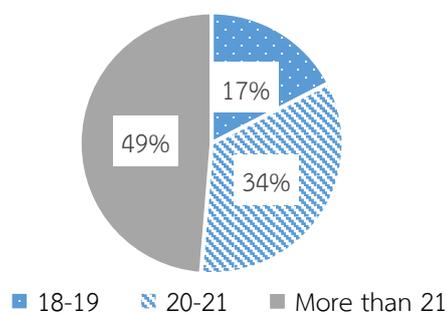
3.1. Characteristics of respondents

Findings have been summarized from survey results, and the characteristics of respondents including age, their period of residence in Hanoi, as well as duration of exposure to Korean Wave will be described below.

3.1.1. Age

The respondents of the survey are at the age of 18 to 22, who are first-year to fourth-year students of two universities. They are divided into three groups according to their year of education.

Figure 4.1: Age of respondents



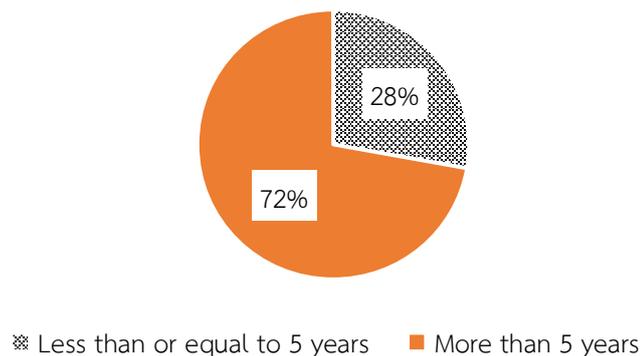
Source: from the author's findings

Nearly a half of respondents take interest in the Korean Wave is seniors (49%). They are enthusiastic about experiencing new things, and their hobbies are not completely fixed, so they can be influenced by their friends. Thus these groups of students tend to be keen on the popularity of Korean

3.1.2. *Period of residence in Hanoi*

Not all the students surveyed were born in Hanoi, many of them come from outside the city, and the rural areas. Since normally public universities are located in big cities, the extramural students have to move to the capital for their studies, resulting in another way of dividing the respondents, with 28% of them living in Hanoi less than or equal to 5 years and 72% having stayed more than that.

Figure 4.2: Years of experience of urban lifestyle

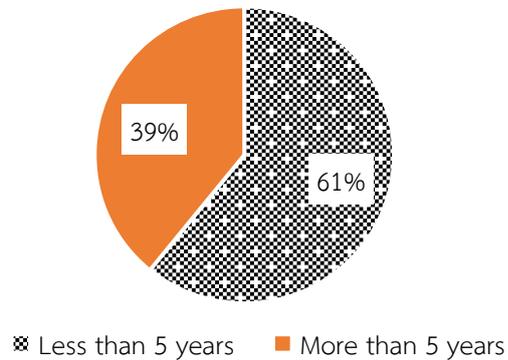


Source: from the author's findings

3.1.3. *Duration of exposure to Korean Wave*

In response to the question: How long have you been interested in Korean Wave? 39% of the respondents said that more than 5 years some of them have nearly 10 years of exposure, having started to watch Korean dramas from secondary school.

Figure 4.3: Years of experience of K-Wave



Source: from the author's findings

Meanwhile 61% of responses replied that they had less than or equal to 5 years, which means Korean Wave is quite new to them. This might be in accordance with the time they have been living in Hanoi. Being a college student and staying in big city brings more opportunity to access to modern life through the internet, thus they can explore new things including foreign culture like Korean showbiz. The survey also pointed out that 52% of respondents first exposed to Korean Wave through Internet and Social network, which proves the power of online network in spreading news.

3.2. Consumer behavior on Korean cosmetics

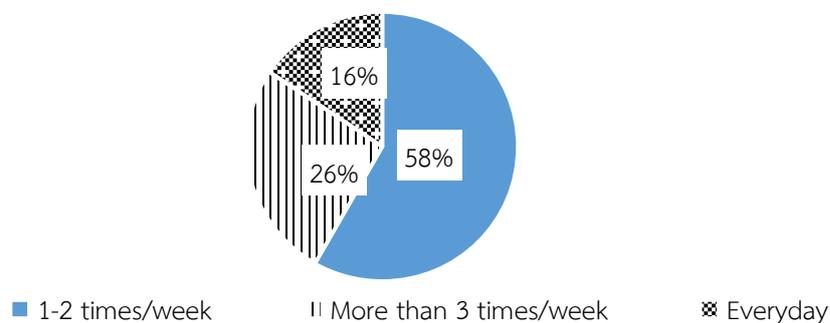
3.2.1. Frequency of exposure to Korean Wave

Dramas and music seem to be the major factors that brought Korean Wave to young Vietnamese students. For more than fifteen years, the Korean film industry has been continuously strengthening its position in Vietnamese viewers' hearts with many unforgettable dramas such as *Winter Sonata*, *Autumn in my Heart*, *Boys Over Flower* and so on. After that, the music industry, or K-pop, quickly became well accepted and Korean idols gradually attracted Vietnamese fans.

Korean dramas and music can expose more students to Korean Wave and influence them to purchase more Korean Wave related products. Thus, this survey examined the frequency of students watching K-dramas and listening to K-music, as well as the reasons why these two components are so popular among them.

Firstly, the question regarding the frequency of viewing Korean dramas shows that 58% of the respondents watch once or twice a week, those watching every day make up 16%. Korean dramas are showed frequently on TV at "golden" time frame such as after lunch or dinner. Currently Vietnam has 65 television stations and broadcast over 20 Korean dramas on average every day.¹

Figure 4.4: Frequency of viewing K-drama



Source: from the author's findings

¹ Assoc. Professor, Dr. Le Dinh Chinh, Oriental Study.

The reasons Vietnamese students like K-drama varies widely, but most of them were watched because of good-looking actors/actresses (34% of responses). The unpredictable scripts are also considered a main factor by 28% of respondents. Moreover, 21% of respondents think the strength of Korean dramas is in the acting skills. Last but not least, 17% of respondents like K-dramas because of their sophisticated cinematography. These are considered differences from domestic films, and help Korean dramas attract many Vietnamese viewers.

Secondly, dramas contain original soundtracks, paving the way for Korean music industry to attract drama viewers. Most of the respondents know but do not listen much. Average 30% of them listen to K-pop 1-2 hours per day.

Figure 4.5: Frequency of listening to K-pop



Source: from the author's findings

There are also many reasons for the popularity of K-pop, mainly due to catchy melodies (32%). Korean music has many different types but they focus on the so called “popular music” based on market orientation, with the most well-known kind being EDM (Electronic Dance Music). In addition, the most special feature of K-pop is uniform dances moves, thus many people find the perfection of these moves very enticing (26%). Those being attracted by singers' appearances and fancy music videos account for 25% and 17% respectively.

The frequency of exposing to Korea dramas and music affects the expenditure of Vietnamese consumers on Korean cosmetics.

Table 4.1: Monthly expenditure on cosmetics between different frequency of exposing to Korean Wave

Group		Monthly average expenditure on cosmetics (USD)
Frequency of watching Korean drama	1-2 times/week	15.14
	More than 3 times/week	21.36
	Everyday	34.6
Frequency of listening to Korean music	Less than 1 hour/day	13.75
	1-2 hours/day	15.57
	More than 2 hours/day	37.21

Source: from the author's findings

The findings showed that there is a high correlation between the amount of time Vietnamese people spend watching Korea dramas or listening to K-pop music. Those who only watch dramas one to two times per week spend around USD 15 to buy cosmetics, this amount doubled for those who watch every day, reaching to more than USD 34. Similarly, people listening to Korean music less than 1 hour per day only spend average about USD 14 on cosmetics, but those K-pop fan who listen more than two hours per day are willing to pay above USD 37 for cosmetics. Thus we can see that the more you expose to Korean Wave, the bigger amount you would like to spend on Korean cosmetics.

3.2.2. Groups of respondents

According to the survey, respondents are exposed pretty regularly to Korean music and dramas, and the desire to use the same products as their idols encourage these people to use Korean products particularly cosmetics. Korean cosmetics are famous among with 70% of respondents. The main channels bringing information about Korean cosmetics to them are TV and Internet (accounting for more than 50%); other respondents followed friends' suggestions.

This study focuses on the expenditure of respondents on Korean cosmetics among different groups including age, gender, major in university, time living in Hanoi and years of experience of Korean Wave. Some have quite big difference while others are only slightly diverse.

Table 4.2: Monthly expenditure on cosmetics among groups of respondents

Group		Monthly Expenditure on cosmetics (USD)
Gender	Male	6.9
	Female	26.7
Age	18-19	10.2
	20-21	14.4
	More than 21	27.3
Years living in Hanoi	Less than or equal to 5 years	17
	More than 5 years	20
Years of experience with Korean Wave	Less than or equal to 4 years	11.5
	More than 4 years	27.4
Duration of studying Korean language	Less than or equal to 6 months	19.7
	More than 6 months	20.2

Source: from the author's findings

There is a huge gap (almost USD 20) between expenditure on cosmetics by male and female students. This is actually understandable since female students should have higher demand on cosmetics. It cannot be denied that Korean Wave, which brought along trending fashion and fancy looks, have a strong impact and encourage girls to buy more cosmetics. Meanwhile, male customers have less need.

The group aged 18-19 spend only USD 10.2 each month to buy cosmetics, this number increases among groups and reaches USD 27.3 for those who are older than 21. This big gap might be due to their monthly income, since most of the first year students only receive allowance from their parents, while senior students could get additional wages from part-time job or internship. Hence, the demand and capability to spend on cosmetics are

different between these groups, older students tend to buy more cosmetics than younger ones.

From the survey findings, cross-tab results can also be used to see the difference expenditure on cosmetics according to years of experience with Korean Wave, among different groups: for example, age, gender, and years of living in Hanoi.

Table 4.3: Monthly expenditure of different groups according to experience with Korean Wave

Groups	Years of experience of Korean Wave	Monthly expenditure on cosmetics (USD)
Age		
18-19	Less than or equal to 4 years	12.87
	More than 4 years	23.4
20-21	Less than or equal to 4 years	7.44
	More than 4 years	26.85
>21	Less than or equal to 4 years	10.98
	More than 4 years	30.09
Gender		
Male	Less than or equal to 4 years	5.39
	More than 4 years	10.42
Female	Less than or equal to 4 years	17.65
	More than 4 years	31.87
Years of living in Hanoi		
Less than or equal to 5 years	Less than or equal to 4 years	11.94
	More than 4 years	24.51
More than 5 years	Less than or equal to 4 years	11.29
	More than 4 years	28.31

Students living in Hanoi for more than 5 years pay around USD 20 monthly on cosmetics compared with USD 17 of those just have come to city in the last 5 years. Staying in the

capital of Vietnam with rapid economic growth and dynamic routines will provide students the access to modern lifestyle. Extramural students now have more chances to learn about new things, including beauty products to develop their new social relationships, so that we can say the exposure to Korean pop culture have positive influence on their decision to buy cosmetics.

To explain the influence of Korean Wave exposure, there are some reasons. According to one principle of behavioral economics indicating that people's self-expectations influence how they behave (Dawnay & Shah, 2005), the fans who want to use the same products and expect to be as beautiful as their idols, will try to purchase more. Those respondents who were influenced by Korean dramas account for totally 38%, others decide to use Korean cosmetics because of its quality, nice designs and reasonable prices. In general the satisfaction of customers is high, most of them are willing to introduce these products to their friends.

4.3 Consumer behavior on studying Korean language

Being interested in foreign culture is not only includes consuming it, the desire to put effort into learning its language takes hobby to higher level. Thus the study would like to examine the expenditure on study Korean language.

Table 4.4: Monthly expenditure on studying Korean language among different groups according to experience of Korean Wave

Groups	Years of experience of Korean Wave	Monthly expenditure on Korean language (USD)
Gender		
Male	Less than or equal to 4 years	94.15
	More than 4 years	116.29
Female	Less than or equal to 4 years	73.43
	More than 4 years	100.79
Years of living in Hanoi		
Less than or equal to 5 years	Less than or equal to 4 years	78.78
	More than 4 years	81.81
More than 5 years	Less than or equal to 4 years	84.52
	More than 4 years	112.15

The time of experience of Korean Wave also affects the desire to study Korean language. In general, male students spend more on this than female ones, no matter how long have they been exposing to K-pop. And over time, the more money they pay for Korean language courses. The time living in Hanoi also reveals the same trend, in which in fee paid increased according to longer time of staying in urban area. Good conditions and facilities in big city enabled these students to fulfill their dreams of studying new language.

4. Conclusion

The findings of the study show the difference of expenditure on Korean cosmetics among groups of respondents. Vietnamese students' behavior Korean cosmetics differ among age, gender, the time they have lived in Hanoi, and the length of exposure to Korean Wave. The findings show that obviously female students will buy more cosmetics, but male demands are increasing. Senior students tend to purchase more. The time they have lived in Hanoi and taken interest in Korean Wave also has influence, as longer residence yields higher expenditure.

At first, the study suggested that the duration of studying Korean language would have positive impact over the expenditure on Korean cosmetics. However according to table 4.2, there is not much difference between the group studying Korean less than or equal to 3 months, and the rest. Thus the duration of studying language might not be the main reason to determine the amount of expenditure on Korean cosmetics.

Moreover, the study also pointed out that the length of exposure to Korean Wave will have positive effects to consumer behavior on Korean cosmetics and studying Korean language. The more they have known about Korean Wave, the more they are willing to purchase related product.

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Thammasat Institute of Area Studies as one of the most active institute in Thammasat University has a long history of academic excellence. Starting out as an institute named Thai APEC Study Centre, the institute focus basically on conducting research and to advise the government in the matter of policy making. One of such example is research and training collaborations with the Office of National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC). Later on, the institute grown to accommodate another Institute namely Australian Study Centre (ASC) and renamed to Thammasat Institute for Study of International Cooperation (TISIC). With this new structure, the Institute expands its research base to include that of Australia and New Zealand. Master of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies (MAPS) coming up as a result of years of experience in conducting research and academic exchanges through the above mention institutes. The Master program was officially launched in 2015 with its first batch already producing some of the best works for the institute.

In line with the University wide restructuring, in 2015, the Institute underwent a major revamp to include 3 more area studies institutes namely Indian Studies Centre, Russian and CIS Studies Centre and ASEAN Studies Centre. With the consolidation of these 3 new area study centres, the institute therefore renames Thammasat Institute of Area Study (TIARA). The institute will continue what it do best, to continue producing high quality academic excellence and hope with the new restructuring, the institute will be able to achieve more in the coming years.

For more information on TIARA, you can visit our website at <http://www.apecthai.org/>

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Our students will also have the chance to familiarise with the academic settings in a sense that through their thesis course, student will be exposed to all kinds of academic scrutiny such as thesis defend and comprehensive thesis writing course. Nearing to the end of the program, student will be given a chance to showcase their hard labour at an International Conference held specially to facilitate the students learning curve. In the end, the works that they put their heart and soul into will become the pride of the program as each one of them, despite their different backgrounds; can come up with a thorough and deep analysis of particular research program concentrated on Asia Pacific and finally contribute to the literature on Asia Pacific Studies.

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