

The Mediatization and Culture of the Korean Wave Phenomenon among Malay Female Youth

<http://dx.doi.org/10.25008/jkiski.v7i2.741>

Nurul Akqmie Badrul Hisham¹, Abdul Latiff Ahmad², Chang Peng Kee³

¹Xiamen University Malaysia

Jl. Sunsuria, Bandar Sunsuria, 43900 Sepang, Selangor - Malaysia

²Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

43600 Bangi, Selangor - Malaysia

³Taylor's University

1, Lrg DK Senza, 47500 Subang Jaya, Selangor - Malaysia

*Corresponding author: nurulakqmie.hisham@xmu.edu.my

Submitted: October 29, 2022, **Revised:** December 05, 2022, **Accepted:** December 07, 2022

Accredited by Kemristekdikti No. 28/E/KPT/2019

Abstract

The development of media technology became a key element in constructing social realities. This study analyses the process of mediatization in contemporary youth culture and how social media has played a role in creating the mediated world. Aiming to explore the mediated world of Korean Wave female fans in Malaysia using the perspective mediatization and culture. This study was conducted using qualitative research and a netnography was conducted due to the movement control orders or locked downs that took place in many countries due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The study was conducted on events that took place on the Internet. This study shows that social media serve as a catalyst in connecting fans with the social phenomenon and it has allowed fans to create their own mediated world and online community. The mediatization process brings fans and celebrities closer to each other with information on the Korean Wave obtained without interruption and filtering. Social media had led to negotiation creations of social reality, the empowerment of groups involved and these groups participation in the evolution of the Korean Wave becomes an essential part of the phenomenon.

Keywords: Mediatization; Korea Wave; Female; Youth; Malaysia

Introduction

Social media are known to bring various changes in Malaysia. In terms of media and technology, society is now in an era where all information can be accessed through the Internet with any devices and from various locations. According to Couldry and Hepp (2017), society currently is in the mediatization world and the development of media and communication technology brings forth the changes in how society communicates. Deuze (2012) stated that media for humans is akin to water for the fish, whether we like it or not, every aspect of our life is media. Media is no

longer just a type of technology but has become a part of our world.

Looking at the relationship between media and youth, especially in understanding the role of social media in youth socio-cultural, researchers feel the significance of the Korean Wave phenomenon that needed to be studied. Nor Hasimah Jalaluddin and Zaharani Ahmad (2011) explain media and other social systems are interdependent to achieve their respective goals. They also added a structured system can position music as an industry to support the country's economy when used in transmitting a

message that can assist in social development (ibid). Korean Wave is an example that uses the entertainment industry as a country commodity for export that does not only involves drama and music but also encompasses the language and culture.

The Korean Wave phenomenon in Malaysia begins as early as 2003 with the introduction of the drama, *Winter Sonata* which at first focused on middle-aged women as the target audience. It is only in 2008, the influence of *K-pop* (*Korean Pop*) music was introduced through the *Youtube* platform globally and this is the start where the target audience is youth (Jung & Shim 2014). It shows that this Korean cultural product was going through a phase change from a traditional medium to a digital medium. According to Nor Hasimah Jalaluddin and Zaharani Ahmad (2011), apart from television, the internet became the main alternative in getting information on drama and pop songs. Nowadays, teens are shifting towards the internet as the main source of information whether, on drama or song, even other information on Korean cultural product is obtained through the internet. Md Azalanshah Md Syed (2019) also explained that *K-pop* is very popular among Malay female especially the younger generation because of the widespread accessibility through social media such as *Youtube*, *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Furthermore, social media mediation such as *Whats App*, *Telegram*, *Line* and also *Kakao Talk* are popular among youth.

The discussion on the Korean Wave phenomenon and Malay female youth must be conducted to obtain a deeper knowledge of this phenomenon. This study aims to explore the mediated world of Korean Wave female fan in Malaysia using the perspective mediatization and culture.

The media reports that touch on issues related to female youth and the Korean Wave have attracted and encouraged the researchers to explore this issue. Among the reports are, in January 2015, "Rebahlah Sebagai Srikandi Bukan Kerana Ketampanan artis *K-pop*" oleh Utusan Malaysia (Ezaruddin Abd. Rahman, 2015), "Bebas Sampai Lupa Diri dan Apa Sudah Jadi" by *Harian Metro* (Siti Fatimah Hassan, 2015a, 2015b), "Gadis *K-pop*: Jawi Buka Kertas Siasatan" (*Sinar Harian*, 2015) and "Fanatik *K-pop* Makan Diri" (*Kosmo Online*, 2015), where it was reported that a short video of a few Malay female youth wearing

headscarves hugging and doing intimate acts at a fan meeting event by the *K-pop* group B1A4.

At the end of 2017, Malaysia was stunned again by the local newspaper that reported some young Malay female have participated in a ceremony to commemorate the death of singer from *Shinee*, Jong-Hyun. Among them are "Malaysian K-Pop Fans Hold Candlelight Vigil for Jonghyun at Dataran Merdeka" by *News Straits Times* (Aref Omar, 2017), "Ratapan Melampau Peminat Jong-Hyun Ditegur" by *Sinar Harian* (Muhammad Shamsul Abd Ghani, 2017) and "Kematian Jong-hyun: Umat Islam haram ikut aksi berkabung dengan lilin - Mufti Perak" (Wan Syamsul Amly, 2017).

Both of these instances received attention and raising concerns from the local religious institute and were discussed in many youth magazines. Reports from newspaper *Berita Harian* dated October 3, 2016, titled, "The Risk of CWS Due to K-pop Fanaticism", relates the local Korean fans with the *Celebrity Worship Syndrome* (Rashiqah Ilmi Abd Rahim, 2016). This report described that the extreme craze symptom that mostly involves Malay youth because of Korean artists have caused them to suffer from serious psychological problems.

Newspapers and discussion about the youth craze of Korean artists are not something out of the ordinary. The Korean Wave phenomenon is not a new cultural product in Malaysia. Previously, before the popularity of Korean cultural products, there have been other phases of popular source of entertainment from abroad. Before this, the Malaysian society has embraced entertainment product from Hollywood, Latin America, India, China and even entertainment products from neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, they become very well-accepted and loved.

The global phenomenon of accepting Korean cultural product is known as the Korean Wave. Korean Wave is often seen as a light entertainment that was initially liked by housewives and later enjoyed by teenagers. Just as soap opera from Latin America, Indonesia's *Sinetron*, serial drama from Taiwan and Japan to pop music and lively group dances, the public sees this as a new trend in the entertainment world.

This study looks at the Korean Wave as a phenomenon to be studied. In previous

studies, Korean cultural products were also discussed by using other terms. Terms such as Korean Wave or *Kwave* and *Hallyu* refers to the same meaning. According to the previous research, Korean Wave refers to the increase of the visibility and acceptance of Korean culture at the international level, beginning in East Asia in the 1990s and continues recently in United States, Latin America, Middle East and in several parts of Europe.

Korean Wave that has been discussed previously by researchers comprises two forms of media, television series and pop music (*K-pop*), although Korean films and other forms of music are also part of this phenomenon (Bok, Kim, 2015; Doobo Shim, 2017; Jang & Paik, 2012; Kim, 2011; Korean Culture and Information Service, 2011; Nor Hasimah Jalaluddin & Zaharani Ahmad, 2011; Mark Ravina, 2009).

The term Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) was coined by Chinese journalists to describe the Korean pop wave that hit China in the 1990s phenomenon (ibid). Kim (2011) explains that it first appeared in the Chinese magazine (Qingnianbao, published in 1999) and was published in the context of giving warning to Chinese reader to always be wary of the Korean popular culture. Moreover, the word comes from the Chinese characters “*han*” and “*lyu*” which if combined, brings the meaning “sudden cold wave”, it seems to be an apt name for the unexpected sudden popularity of Korea as a mass culture from abroad.

Kim (2015) claims that *Hallyu* becomes the main agent of popular East Asian culture, in line with Western popular culture. Kim also explained that the other meaning for *Hallyu* can similarly be understood as “the winter wind blowing fiercely over China’s mainland” and “*Hanmi*” is to describe the crazed madness of *K-pop* culture in China wherein English, the word ‘mania’ that resembles the term in Chinese which is “*mi*”. Korean Wave can be understood as all forms of Korean cultural products including pop music, drama, film and video games where the focus lies oftentimes on their celebrity which is individual that is not only popular but also has attractive charms and reputation that can be seen at a level of worshipping. Other than that, a celebrity can be seen as a fan’s main attraction towards Korean

Wave (Lee, 2015; Parc & Moon, 2013). Shim (2017) further expands on the terms by stating that after early 2010, *Hallyu* has also included all genres of Korean culture which includes *Soju*, food, fashion, make-up and others.

Today, fans or target audiences of Korean Wave are often associated with the internet world or as explained by Kim (2015) as *Hallyu 2.0*. The study by Joanne B.Y. Lim (2013) discovers that fans from this community will also arrange an offline meeting through online discussions. They contributed to the increase of youth that is using social media to mobilise other youth that has the same interest and like-minded as them to be involved in their offline events such as *flashmobs*, *street parties* and K-pop dance competitions.

Capili (2014) also explained that celebrity and K-pop group will have their fan club and in the era of internet social networks, it is not surprising that these groups will grow in the virtual world. The internet is the main gathering place where fans from the same *fandom* meet and will either join an existing group or create their own. However, according to this researcher, the Korean Wave fans, or more specifically those who are interested in K-pop, will also integrate their virtual activity officially with the real world. The findings of the study categorised the Korean Wave events into concerts, fan meetings or even fans having their local gathering or meeting.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of mediatization and culture are placed under the big umbrella of the mediatization theory. The study on mediatization can be done by studying the mediation worlds, it enables the process of strengthening this theory. Krotz and Hepp (2011) describe the worlds of social mediation as referring to the smaller world and created with the mediation of media where small fragments of the real-life world that are constructed with specific knowledge, with specific social practices and cultural thickness. This makes Hip-Hop and Black Metal as some of the popular cultures that have its media mediation world.

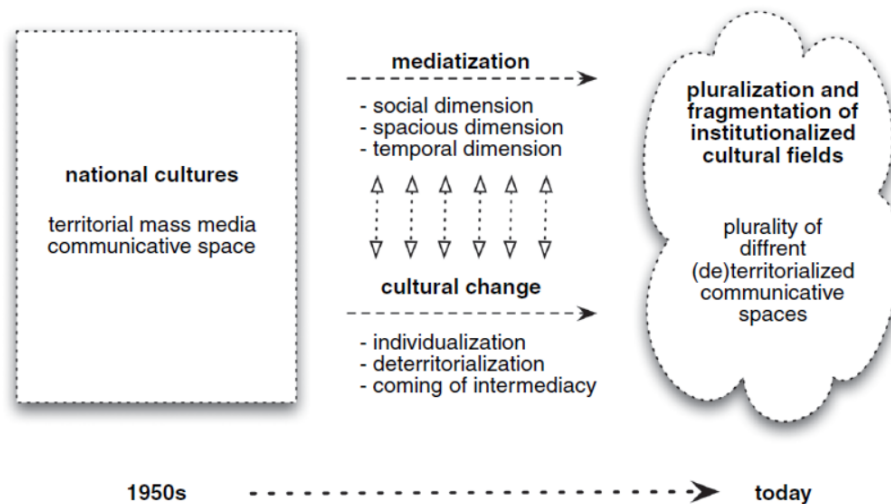


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of the Tendencies for Mediatization and Cultural Change
 Source: (Hepp, 2009. pg. 142)

Research conducted by Döveling et al. (2018) proved that fandom tend to relies heavily on media and mediatization process to disseminate and expand their groups globally. This strengthens the researcher’s argument on using mediatization and culture to seek a deep understanding of Malay female youth and Korean Wave fan culture. Based by the scholars addressing these small worlds, the researcher noticed that fans fit this descriptions, that they have their own small world mediated online where they gathered not only for content and information but also as a sole way to communicate with each other.

These small worlds are reinforced daily by the media community and media culture. This elucidates how those that are involved with Korean Wave seem to live in their world different from other individuals although they live within the same society. Durocher’s writings explained that this theory approaches cultural studies by using “tools” and conceptual material to study the transformation that exists

in the social field (Durocher, 2017). This is consistent with what Krotz and Hepp (2011) have stated as they are at a level where mediatization is strong and can, therefore, empirically analyse.

Krotz (2007) emphasised that the mediatization theory should be more committed to empirical analysis, including the study of specific mediatization processes among different groups in the population. The researcher wants to explain the context of this study and the context field referring to *fan culture* which arises from the interest of youth in the Korean Wave that has also created a world where the media act as their medium and shape not only their identity but also create a community. This is explained by Hepp (2009) that the media provides a unique identity to the community not only at the national level but also at the smaller communication level such as diaspora, religious community, fan culture and other similar to it.

Justification of Mediatization and Culture Theory in the Study of Relationship of Female Youth and the Korean Wave

Based on past researches, the researcher sees the development of media technology playing a role in changing various aspects of society’s lives, especially in the daily lives of individuals. It should be emphasized that youth life is no longer the same as the previous generations. As they were born into a world where media and communication technology

already existed, thus, they are used to having it as part of their lives.

Additionally, the researcher sees the importance of truly pursuing to understand the experiences of the youth involved in the Korean Wave to fully immerse in understanding whether or not the Korean Wave poses a threat to their identity. Although there are many scholars that have explained Korean Wave goes

beyond the boundaries of geography, culture, nationality and religion, the researcher feels that it is important to give focus on one specific subject to study. Wojtkowski (2017) argues that mediatization theory helps to find new ways in order to understand the dynamics of media and communication studies in today's world. By using this, it would provide another perspective on studying the relation of media and society, that is to focus on studying the changes that these communication and media technology brings into the society's sociology (Turner, 2016).

Turner (2016) points out that the reasoning of mediatization and culture is about a concrete concept, in which audiences are now entering a foreign realm. The researcher further explained that in this foreign realm, the mass media and social relation has evolved and changed dramatically (2016). Furthermore, in addition to evolving and changing, the current state of mass media has a much faster disruption before the audiences can assimilate themselves with the changes that have occurred (ibid).

By using this theory of mediatization, it will show a comprehensible way of doing research on something that is essentially trivial (Hjarvard 2008). Hjarvard stated that this trivial culture is linked to the way the local society and media today are in a dominant position as an institution that provides cultural products, as well as the, believes of an audience of a society. This is vital, especially to see and understand aspects of society's lives and also to find an answer to a question where the findings are not sufficient enough by mere numbers.

Material and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to netnography. Netnography is a data collection technique that focuses on online community communication and social media spaces (Costello et al. 2017; Kozinets 2010, 2002, 2015). Moreover, according to Ferreira (2015), this method is also referred to as virtual ethnography which implores the way researchers engage deeply in cyberspace, mediated interactions and most importantly, are sensitive to key features of the internet.

Previously, Kozinet (2002) explained that purchasing and consumption decisions are discussed and debated by the online community hence requires thorough research to collect and interpret data in a more challenging context. In

this study, the researcher found that communication between fans is in line with Kozinet which mentioned the development of the internet in the late '80s and early '90s that has spread a form of communication referred to as "forum community" (2015). Kozinet added that users enjoy similar support and friendship with the community parallel to relationships in neighbourhoods and religious groups. It shows that communication between fans on social media is similar to the atmosphere of face-to-face conversation with friends.

Internet is an important driving force element among Korean Wave fans. This research examines online communities such as *fandoms* and Malay youth Korean Wave fans on the social networks, Instagram and Twitter especially the social media accounts of the informants. Researchers did face some struggles getting informants, because the influencers felt like their identity needed to be hidden at the same time, they were worried they will be framed in a negative way as reactions towards K-pop fans by the public, local media and authority. This, contributed to snowball sampling and for the researcher to be able to collect some data via interviews. It is proven as mentioned by Jensen (2020) the initial contact with an informant generates further contact and for the researcher to be able to contact a more informed choice of informants.

The initial sample consisted of 20 social media influencers, 14 of whom did not agree to take part in the interviews. Among the observed official online supporters in this research are Hangul_Saranghae, Zywxwj852, Trip Oppa Bob, Koreastuffss, Alam Anuar and others. Only those who agreed to do the interview permitted their content to be used. They are Hangul_Saranghae, Zywxwj852, MySwagArmyMalaysia, Dida, Elzara, who is also th rson behind Trip Oppa Bob and the official website of Korean Tourism Malaysia. Apart from that, observations were also conducted by following specific *hashtags* related to certain events or Korean Wave celebrities.

Result and Discussion

Mediated World of Korean Wave Fans

Social media has become an important space for *fandoms* or any individual that consumes Korean Wave products. It can be used widely whether to share personal opinions or feelings on any content or to search

information by easily typing any keyword related to their interest, be it an event, K-Drama, K-Pop group or celebrities. Social media become a platform for them to share information on any upcoming activities as well as to communicate with each other quickly. It can be seen that the relationships between fans in social media are very broad and they span the sphere of friends, borders, religion, culture and time.

These research findings support what was argued by Döveling et al. (2018) that fandoms are highly dependent on the media and mediatization process. These elements are visible in the observation of some fan discussions. For instance, the researcher can follow and track down discussions and fandoms by simply following a keyword or hashtags. In addition, abundant information about details of Korean Wave cultural products are shared on social media especially on Twitter and Instagram.

This situation strengthens the argument of how these fandoms form their small world via social media. This small world is enough for them to satisfy any needs of information and for them to seek support and relief from each other. This small mediated world becomes sufficient for fans to the extent that they might no longer need the physical world especially in getting information and news. The presence of those who shared the same interest as them is likely to make them feel happier and welcoming dismissing the need to be wary of judgement when compared to the society outside of their interest. The Korean Wave phenomenon has developed and operated entirely online thus supports Hepp (2020) argument, on how society is increasingly dependent on digital media.

In addition, the growth of online communities has also opens up their functional systems within this small world. As mentioned before, these fandoms do not need any support from the outside world and this created a unique system that enables them to access information from the sources and they also can interact with the information instantly in real-time. For example, fans can access the official accounts of entertainment agencies, celebrities, or even their personal accounts for press releases and news. Fans emphasised that they often learn about their favourite artists' news through Twitter and Instagram such as the release of a new album, concert dates or even magazine

interviews and many more. By following the artist's management agencies social media account for example YG, SM, BIGHIT, JYP and many more they received authentic information quickly. Besides that, the functional systems have also been introduced to the unique aspect of supporters account, where fans are supported by other fans becomes a source of information.

One of the examples of supporter account is the fans translators. This refers to the fans that have the knowledge of the Korean language and acted as the translators and bridge the gap of the language barriers between other fans. Each fandom tends to have its own fans translators. This minimised the misinformation regarding their favourite celebrities and shows. Some fandoms have their fans subbing translators for Television shows. The Korean Wave fans have built a world that complemented their own needs and social media is the access to this world where they even have their gatekeepers that control the right information.

By having social media as the primary source for not only the Korean culture product but also to connect and communicate with other fans, the fans of the Korean Wave that the researcher has met often explain that this community is huge without any regard for race, colour, religion or even boundary. The shared common interest has opened the friendship door between them that goes beyond the physical barriers. Most informants mentioned that they have friends from abroad and often would meet when they attend concerts or fan events. They also admitted that they do not know the real name of their friends but rather the name of their social media accounts. They are known mostly based on their online identity or persona.

Furthermore, through social media, Korean Wave fans that share common interests often come together to create special projects for their favourite artists. This special project is often referred to as a *fan project*. They might have a long discussion and planning before a certain event, combine their online discussion with physical world's activity such as attending a concert, fan meeting or even conducting a fan gathering among themselves. It is seen as a symbol of unity among the fans and done to collectively show their support and appreciation towards their favourite artists. Now, the media is not only a space to compete

in terms of economy but also in choosing the right and truthful way in society. Media for the Korean Wave fans may be different from media for those who are not interested in it. This is what Krotz and Hepp (2011) have stated about the small world and created with the media as mediation for each other based on certain knowledge, practices and culture.

This study focuses on a culture that is considered trivial in everyday life. (Hjarvard 2008). Hjarvard says that this type of culture is linked to the way of life of the local community and the media today are in a dominant position as institutions that provide cultural products and also trust to the public of certain society. This is important to understand the aspect of the community by looking for answers to questions that could not be simply quantified.

At the same time, relating to the understanding of the culture of everyday life is in line with the argument by Fiske (1992) that, the culture of everyday life is built on the history and social environment of the individual. Thus, this study relates the culture of everyday life of the Malay fans who have adapted certain element of the popular culture into their daily lives. The changes and adaptation process are done due to the convenience of social media that exists enable them to share content and information regarding the cultural products.

For the fans, social media is not just for saying hello or updating information of daily life. To them, social media is their world where the relationship they built within the mediated world is equivalent to the physical world we are living in. Friendships built over fandoms will remain and last thanks to the existence of WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram. Their connection and daily narrative that was built in among their fandoms via social media is the norm for them. This is coherent with the discussion of Hjarvard (2008) regarding trivial culture among them. Their norm was shaped by the media culture they consumed thus, shape the meaning and belief among them. This also supports the previous argument of Fiske (1992) on how daily life is built to the social environment of individuals and at a particular time, the culture is represented by popular culture.

Social Influencer

As past scholars have pointed out, teenagers or youth are now more comfortable

using the internet to access Korean cultural products as a source of entertainment. Consistent with the development of technology and IT in Korea and also in Malaysia, target audiences will gain access through YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Dal Yong Jin, 2012, Kim, 2015, Min, Soo et al. 2013, Md. Azalanshah Md Syed, 2019). The researcher found that aside from having alternative media websites such as Kmania, Malaysian K-POP Fans, Gok-pop Malaysia, K-popped, Holl K-pop, K-Variety Malaysia and many more, they also have social media influencers.

The influencer program was an initiative from the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Malaysia since 2006 and their sole aim is to introduce Korean culture to Malaysians. These influencers will post news related to Korean culture, news, celebrity news, stories regarding dramas or films or anything related to Korea. The Embassy of the Republic of Korea also officially recruits social influencers each year. They will be known as *Korean Online Supporters in Malaysia*. These supporters comprise social influencers who have their own YouTube channel, blog writers and even Instagram influencers, that are interested in creating content to promote and introduce Korean cultural products to their followers on their social site. These social influencers are active and often are quick in updating and sharing news. They mostly operate for free and are usually done only by fans of Korean cultural products. They are a huge influence among youth who are passionately interested in Korean cultural products. Among the official online supporters are Hangul_sarang, Zywxj852, Trip Oppa Bob, Koreastuffss, Alam Anuar and others.

Korean Wave Bracing the Covid-19 Pandemic

As part of the researcher PhD thesis, the researcher has done ethnography observation in the Korean Wave scene in Malaysia. This allows the researcher to attend and observe the last physical K-Pop concert held in Malaysia which is the Winner Cross Tour Live in Kuala Lumpur on January 18, 2020. After this date due to the Covid-19 pandemic all scheduled concerts, events and filming were cancelled all over the world including in Malaysia. As with everything else, this pandemic has also affected Korean Wave fans. However, fandoms in the mediated world continue to remain unaffected and were even growing.

Due to the global pandemic, the scheduled event was cancelled and the management company is forced to announce the cancellation and begin the process of refunding tickets and event payment. Social media became the focal point with discussion and reactions from fans and celebrities all over the world who are saddened by the turn of events. It leaves many disappointments not only for those who have bought tickets but also for celebrities and companies that had to go through many processes to ensure the event preparation went smoothly.

In the case of the Winner Cross Tour, they still have two more scheduled concerts in their tour in Singapore and also the encore concert which was to be held in South Korea. Fans have been waiting patiently for Winner to come to their country and see them live and have participated in online discussion when their friends from other countries shared their memories from the concert held in their country. This has created anticipation for the upcoming concert and the cancellation brings forth frustration. As seen below, the netnographic note on Winner's concert discussion,

"Fans expressed frustration using the official hashtag on Twitter #WinnerCrossTour, #WINNERCROSSTOURINSG. Some say they come from far away and cannot get compensation for hotel rooms and also, for planes." (Netnographic note February 2020).

Due to this reaction, various measures were taken by the celebrities' management agencies to control the situation and the respective fandoms. Fans started expressing dissatisfaction on social media, especially on Twitter. These posts of frustration received the attention of the artist and the management. The various measures taken included streaming sessions and replaying old concerts to personal video calls. K-Pop has grown faster and has never been seen in the industry before the spread of the global pandemic (Yoon, 2020).

As for Winner, on February 14, 2020, the group held a free online concert using the VLive app. This group substitute the cancelled concert with an online concert called "Winner Cross Special Live" (<https://www.vlive.tv/video/175019/Replay-WINNER-CROSS-SPECIAL-LIVE>). The

concert lasted for almost two hours and served as their Winner Cross Tour concert. The online concert took place according to the actual concert format and was sung live. The VLive app is a South Korean developed app used by many South Korean artists to connect with fans. The highly interactive app lets celebrities talk with fans or share about their developments and schedules. Celebrities on VLive have their channels and function like a private space. The channel is more intimate and personal between fans and their favourite celebrities. The app offers two approaches for fans namely a free account and a paid account. For fans that subscribed to the paid accounts, they will get to access more dedicated personal videos from the celebrities.

Other than Winner, the popular duo TVXQ also chose to hold their Beyond the T concert via VLive on May 24, 2020. Their performance garnered over 200 million hearts on the app, showing strong support among their fans (<https://www.vlive.tv/video/190574>). The Korean artist agency or management company began to build new approaches to generate revenue such as by using a specific currency for many of their product. For example, SM Entertainment held a SuperM concert, Beyond The Future Live on April 26, 2020 (<https://www.vlive.tv/video/186081>) where fans have to pay 1500 VLive coins which are equivalent to 27USD to watch the concert. The existence of this online currency provides a new experience in the process of buying and selling concert tickets among Korean Wave fans.

Aside from paid platform, a more general approach is by utilising YouTube as a free platform to show appreciation towards fans. For example, hip-hop artists from AOMG held the AOMG Quarantine Nonstop Live (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20vZMEKKmM0https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrk8WhCP8Ns>) on April 12, 2020, where some of the AOMG artists shared it in their own Instagram Live. Also, the management company Big Hit Entertainment aired all previous BTS concerts for free on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/BANGTANTV>). The screening took place for two consecutive days on 18 and 19 April 2020 and was named Bang Bang Con. YouTube was also the option for YG Entertainment to feature the documentary White Night by Taeyang from the group BigBang on May 18, 2020 (

C7fNfs018R1FzIKnlaA). The YouTube platform was also the chosen option for airing South Korean reality shows such as The Return of Superman (<https://www.youtube.com/hashtag/thereturnofsuperman>), K-Pop Lyric Helper (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww3zrbY5pII>) and more.

As the pandemic continues, more application was used to hold live events online, this included the famous TikTok app. For example, the TikTok Stage concert with HipHopPlaya on May 27, 2020 (<https://www.tiktok.com/@hiphopplaya?lang=en>) and the Baeksang Arts Awards ceremony held on 5 June 2020. The Baeksang Arts Awards is one of the most prestigious award ceremonies, it is to celebrate excellence in South Korean film and drama. The awards ceremony was also broadcast on the VLive app as well as the official website on the JTBC channel.

Due to the pandemic, concerts and official events are not the only ones that were affected. The pandemic has also disrupted the special bonding session between celebrities and their respective fandoms such as the long-awaited moment of starting and ending the military training by male celebrities, film premier and fan gathering. Most choose to substitute by holding a small and brief event on VLive, while film such as Time to Hunt and Alive was turned into an exclusive with Netflix.

The Covid-19 pandemic brings about a change in how physical events turns into online events at a cheaper price while it also manages to broaden the targeted audience and most importantly, is how these celebrities are still able to interact with fans using the chatbox and also video calls.

Some things are left unchanged in the middle of a pandemic which are product marketing and fan wars. Fan wars seem to have only intensified as most events shifted to online and this had indeed made such social media platform as Twitter become its prime space. Other than that, Twitter was also used by fans to show their unyielding support especially when it comes to award season. This is when fandoms showcase their creative wordplay in catchy hashtags that can replace the signage or posters to be seen by their favourite celebrities.

Interestingly, during the pandemic, the social influencers have now played a role in maintaining the public interest towards the

Korean Wave cultural product. The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Malaysia used the services of social influencers to disseminate extensive information on how South Korea dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic. Information about awareness campaigns in South Korea was also shared by the influencers. The researcher thinks that this is an effort to preserve South Korea's image to tourists. Going by the comments on the influencer's account, fans are always interested to know about the situation in South Korea even though no travel is allowed yet.

Conclusions

This has proven that social media is a crucial aspect of a fan's life and the mediatization process existed in Malay female youth in the Korean Wave phenomena. The interactive nature of social media attracted the youth attention and thus was able to replace physical activities and also deepen the meaning of media in their everyday life. These traits strengthen the online small worlds of fans and increased the dependency on media in their daily life. As fans spend more time in the online world, participating in activities virtually and reducing face to face communication proved that there is an increase in the use of mediation communication. It shows that the mediatization process of fans empowered Korean Wave with immunity despite the world still facing the Covid-19 pandemic.

References

- Aref, O. (2017). Malaysian K-Pop fans hold candlelight vigil for Jonghyun at Dataran Merdeka. *NST Online*. <https://www.nst.com.my/lifestyle/groove/2017/12/317270/showbiz-malaysian-k-pop-fans-hold-candlelight-vigil-jonghyun-dataran>
- Berger, A. A. (2011). *Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (2nd ed.). California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Kim, Bok-Rae. (2015). Past, Present and Future of Hallyu (Korean Wave). *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 5(5).
- Capili, P. M. L. (2014). Painting the Scenario of Filipino K-pop Fan Culture (p. 35). <https://www.ateneo.edu/sites/default/files/attached-files/Hallyu>

- Proceedings_Draft1b_2014-Sept-25.pdf#page=47
- Chua, B.H. (2012). Doing Pop Culture Studies in East Asia. Dlm. Zawawi Ibrahim (pnyt.). *Social Science and Knowledge in a Globalising World* (1st ed). Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.
- Crestwell, J. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Deuze, M. (2012). *Media life*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Doobo, S. (2017). Riding the Korean Wave in Southeast Asia. https://www.fairobservers.com/region/asia_pacific/korean-wave-k-pop-culture-southeast-asia-news-45109/
- Döveling, K., Harju, A. A. & Sommer, D. (2018). From Mediatized Emotion to Digital Affect Cultures: New Technologies and Global Flows of Emotion. *Social Media + Society* 4(1)
- Durocher, M. (2017). Mediatization Studies and Cultural Studies: A Possible Dialogue for Further Critical Analysis?, 31–43.
- Fiske, J. 1992. Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life. In. Grossberg, L., Nelson, C. & Triecher, P.A. (Ed.). *Cultural Studies* pp. 154–173. New York : Routledge.
- Hepp, A. 2009. Differentiation: Mediatization and cultural change. In. Couldry, N. (Ed.). *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences*. pp. 135–153. New York: Peter Lang.
- Hjarvard, S. 2008. Mediatization of Society. A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change. *Nordicom Review* 29(2), 105–134.
- Hodkinson, P. (2005). “Insider Research” in the Study of Youth Cultures. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2, 131–149.
- Iacono, J., Brown, A., & Holtham, C. (2009). Research methods - a case example of participant observation. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 7(1), 39–46.
- Jang, G., & Paik, W. K. (2012). Korean Wave as Tool for Korea’s New Cultural Diplomacy. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 02(03), 196–202.
- Joanne B.Y. Lim. (2013). Engaging Participation: Youth Culture and the Korean Wave in Malaysia. In M. J. Ainslie & Joanne B.Y. Lim (Eds.), *The Korean Wave In Southeast Asia: Consumption and Cultural Production* (pp. 155–174). Malaysia: SIRD.
- Jung, S., & Shim, D. (2014). Social distribution: K-pop fan practices in Indonesia and the “Gangnam Style” phenomenon. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17(5), 485–501.
- Kim, M. (2011). The Role of the Government in Cultural Industry: Some Observations From Korea’s Experience. *Keio Communication Review*, (33). <http://www.mediacom.keio.ac.jp/publication/pdf2011/10KIM.pdf>
- Korean Culture and Information Service. (2011). *The Korean Wave: A New Pop Culture Phenomenon*. Republic of Korea: Korean Culture and Information Service Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online. *International Journal of Advertising*, 29(2), 328-330.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39, 61–72.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). Netnography. In P. H. Ang & R. Mansell (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of digital communication and society*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Krotz, F., & Hepp, A. (2011). A concretization of mediatization: How mediatization works and why “mediatized worlds” are a helpful concept for empirical mediatization research. *European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication*, 3(2), 137–152.
- Lee, W.-J. (2015). The Effects of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) Star and Receiver Characteristics on T.V Drama Satisfaction and Intention to Revisit. *International Journal Science and Technology*, 8(11), 347–356.
- Md Azalanshah Md Syed. (2019). K-pop , Aspirasi Kemodenan dan Ketidapatuhan Strategik K-pop dalam Kalangan Wanita Melayu, *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 35(2), 103–122.

- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research : a guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). United State of America: Jossey-Bass.
- Nor Hasimah Jalaluddin, & Zaharani Ahmad. (2011). Hallyu Di Malaysia: kajian sosio-budaya. *Jurnal Komunikasi, Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 27(2).
- Parc, J., & Moon, H.-C. (2013). Korean Dramas and Films: Key Factors for Their International Competitiveness. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 41, 126–149.
- Rashiqah Ilmi Abd Rahim. (2016). Risiko CWS Akibat Fanatik K-pop. *Berita Harian*. Retrieved from <https://www.bharian.com.my/node/198373>
- Ravina, & Mark. (2009). Introduction: Conceptualizing the Korean Wave. *Southeast Review of Asian Studies*. <https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-213529550.html>
- Ezaruddin Abd. Rahman. (2015). Rebahlah Sebagai Srikandi Bukan Kerana Ketampanan artis K-pop. *Utusan Online*. <http://www.utusan.com.my/rencana/rebahlah-sebagai-srikandi-bukan-kerana-ketampanan-artis-k-pop-1.47326>
- Kosmo Online. (2015). Fanatik K-pop Makan Diri. *Kosmo Online*. http://ww1.kosmo.com.my/kosmo/content.asp?y=2015&dt=0118&pub=Kosmo&sec=Rencana_Utama&pg=ru_02.htm
- Muhammad Shamsul Abd Ghani. (2017). Ratapan melampau peminat Jong-hyun ditegur. *Sinar Harian*. Retrieved from <http://www.sinarharian.com.my/mobile/hiburan/ratapan-melampau-peminat-jong-hyun-ditegur-1.774134>
- Sinar Harian. (2015). Gadis K-pop: Jawi Buka Kertas Siasatan. *Sinar Harian*. <http://www.sinarharian.com.my/semasa/gadis-k-pop-jawi-buka-kertas-siasatan-1.349905>
- Siti Fatimah Hassan. (2015a). Apa Sudah Jadi. *Harian Metro*. <https://www.hmetro.com.my/node/23109>
- Siti Fatimah Hassan. (2015b). Bebas Sampai Lupa Diri. *Harian Metro*. <https://www.hmetro.com.my/mutakhir/2015/01/23294/bebas-sampai-lupa-diri>
- Turner, G. (2016). *Re-inventing the media*. London: Routledge.
- Wan Syamsul Amly. (2017). Kematian Jong-hyun: Umat Islam haram ikut aksi berkabung dengan lilin - Mufti Perak. *Astro Awani*. <http://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/kematian-jong-hyun-umat-islam-haram-ikut-aksi-berkabung-dengan-lilin-mufti-perak-163732>
- Yoon, S. Y. (2020, June 14). [Post-Covid-19 New Normal] K-pop finds solace online, but how long can it really last? *Korea JoongAng Daily*. <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2020/06/14/culture/features/>