

## Soft Power of Korean Entertainment Industry: Hallyu Consumption, Cultural Exposure and Country-of-Origin Perception among Indian Youth

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### Abstract:

The Korean Wave or Hallyu is a cultural phenomenon characterised by popularity of Korean culture through the entertainment medium of music and cinema. The recognition for Korean entertainment has swept beyond South Korean boundaries and have captured the attention of people across continents. Today, it is one of the most successful entertainment industries in the world. As such, it has a crucial role to play in terms of soft power for the Korean economy. This paper seeks to highlight the power of cultural diplomacy in the field of international business. The research focuses on the presence and impact of Korean entertainment on Indian youth. The study explores the relationship between Korean entertainment media (Hallyu) consumption, exposure to Korean culture and Country-of-origin perception of South Korea among young Indians. For this purpose, the researcher has collected the relevant information through primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources include e-newspaper articles, academic journal articles, government documents and market intelligence reports. The primary data has been collected by conducting a survey among high school and college level students of North East India. To study the dynamics among the variables, a model was framed and PLS-SEM was performed using SmartPLS 4.0 software. The results indicate that the direct relationship between Hallyu consumption and Country of Origin perception is moderately significant. However, cultural exposure plays a strong mediating role. It can be concluded that Korean entertainment content has significant impact on consumer behaviour across different product categories in the Indian market.

**Keywords:** *Hallyu; Country-of-Origin; Cultural Exposure; Entertainment Industry; Korean Entertainment; Soft power; country perception.*

## 1. Introduction

Art, be it music or cinema has considerable influence on how countries and their cultures are viewed. It denotes a soft power that can make significant difference in matters of international business and geopolitics.

One example of soft power that is worth mentioning is that of the Korean entertainment industry. 'Hallyu' or the 'Korean Wave' refers to the popularity of Korean media products on an international level. It is the rise of popularity of Korean entertainment and cultural products in the transnational market.

Right from the 1990s, South Korean entertainment media has been making waves across the globe. 'Hallyu' or the 'Korean Wave' refers to a phenomenon of increasing popularity of Korean culture and lifestyle across the national boundary due to Korean cinema and music. The word 'Hallyu' was coined in the late 1990s by a Chinese journalist, while discussing the immense popularity of Korean television dramas in China (Yang, 2012). The first phase, also termed as Hallyu 1.0, is characterized by the popularity of Korean television shows in China, Japan and other select Asian countries. It was unplanned (Kim, 2016) but the art and content of these dramas struck a chord with the viewers. The popularity and power of Korean entertainment was significantly influential as evinced by the spike in Korean inbound tourism. Shows like "Winter Sonata" led to pilgrimage tourism where Japanese people travelled to South Korea to experience the places where the show was filmed.

The highlight of the second phase, Hallyu 2.0 is the consumption of Korean pop music. Music artists like Girls Generation and Super Junior made quite the impact among the international consumers of Korean media. Korean music and dramas were now being enjoyed beyond Asia. Korean media consumers in middle-east, North America, South America, Europe and Africa were also rising.

The reach of Korean pop music reached new heights with Hallyu 3.0. Music artists such as BTS and Blackpink enjoyed phenomenal success in the international market. Movies like Parasite and Train to Busan got outstanding recognition. This phase of global success opened the doors for international collaborations between Korean and global artists.

The fourth phase, Hallyu 4.0 is characterized by popularity of fashion, lifestyle and beauty products. It is not just the individual companies enjoying good branding. The entire nation as a whole garnered positive reputation for producing desirable products across different industries.

In India, the consumption of Korean media has undergone quite the transformation from niche to mainstream. It has been popular in the north-eastern states of the country for decades (Sagolsem, 2024). In the state of Manipur, the people have been familiar with Korean media since 2000. Due to some political and cultural differences, Indian Bollywood movies were banned during the time. The local entertainment industry did not have the adequate infrastructure to make create

entertainment content that could capture the market. It is under these circumstances, that led to the early rise of Hallyu in Manipur (Reimeingam, 2015; Sagolsem, 2024). The local people started consuming Korean movies and dramas through different ways, even “pirated CDs” (Sagolsem, 2024). Satellites channels like Arirang and KBS World was introduced that telecasted Korean media content (Sagolsem, 2024). These channels were relatively unknown in other regions of the country, but it has significant viewership in many north-eastern states. Movies like *My Sassy Girl* (2001) and dramas like *Full House* (2004) were well-known in north east India (Sagolsem, 2024). This rise of Korean media content led to the fascination with the Korean culture among the people. People were adopting the Korean fashion, lifestyle, food habits, even values and customs (Reimeingam, 2015; Sagolsem, 2024).

Owing to lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, with OTT platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime experience a surge of viewership. Korean dramas witnessed a dramatic rise in demand. The popularity rapidly went from marginal to mainstream. Indians, especially the youth found the entertainment productions emotionally engaging. The affection for Hallyu manifested in other ways such as fascination with Korean cuisine, the willingness to travel to South Korea and purchase of beauty products of Korean origin. The increase in Korean restaurants, Korean language (Hangul) learning centres and purchasing K-pop merchandise indicate the spread of Korean culture in India.

The purpose of this study is to highlight the soft power of Korean entertainment on Indian youth and how it influences their perception of South Korean culture and products.

## 2. Background of the Study

According to a survey report published by Statista (2024), K-dramas were widely known by 21.1 per cent of Indian general public.

The well reception of Korean dramas has also led to Indians picking up courses to learn the Korean language (Economic Times, 2020), eating Korean cuisine (Euromonitor, 2021) and purchasing Korean beauty products (Economic Times, 2020).

The recent meteoric rise of Korean dramas can be attributed to two factors chiefly - online streaming platforms like Netflix and customer engagement on social media platforms. Another factor that contributed to the popularity of K-dramas is the lockdown in India during COVID-19 pandemic. TV theatres being closed, people cloistered in their homes turned to OTT channels for entertainment. That is how general awareness spread among the masses about K-dramas. From a niche market, Hallyu had entered the Indian mainstream. The K-drama ‘Crash Landing on You’ which was initially released in December of 2019 became a cultural phenomenon in India by March 2020 (BBC, 2023).

A report published by the Economic Times (2020) shows that in 2020, India was among the top countries for streaming K-pop music videos on Youtube. Before pandemic, the viewership was 0.78M and it reached 2.3M during the pandemic. Even celebrities like movie-actors and well-known content creators were sharing their appreciation for the art on their social medias.'

### **2.1.Korean Drama Viewership**

The recent meteoric rise of Korean dramas can be attributed to two factors chiefly - online streaming platforms like Netflix and customer engagement on social media platforms. Another factor that contributed to the popularity of K-dramas is the lockdown in India during COVID-19 pandemic. TV theatres being closed, people cloistered in their homes turned to OTT channels for entertainment. That is how general awareness spread among the masses about K-dramas. From a niche market, Hallyu had entered the Indian mainstream.

During the pandemic lockdown in 2020-21, the viewership of Korean dramas on Rakuten Viki, an online platform streaming Korean dramas, increased by 46 per cent (Economic Times, 2020; Mediawire, 2021).

Netflix which is a very popular online streaming platform in India reported that viewership of Korean content reached an YoY increase of 370 per cent in 2020 (Euromonitor International, 2021). The CEO of an online streaming platform, MX Player which feature a number of Korean dramas with Hindi dubbing, said that the Korean dramas on their platform were performing well with the millennial viewers. He reasoned that the narrative of Korean dramas makes it easy for the Indian youth to connect with the content. The wildly successful K-drama 'Crash Landing on You (2019) became a cultural phenomenon in India in March 2020 (The Indian Express, 2021; Bangkok Post, 2021).

### **2.2.Korean Food Products and Cuisine**

A report published by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in India indicated that the growth in import of Korean noodles increased by 162 per cent (Euromonitor International, 2021). The report also correlated the rise in demand for Korean food with the viewership of Korean entertainment content like Kdramas and Kpop music. Korean packaged food such noodles are available for purchase on platforms like Amazon, Flipkart and BigBasket (Mint, 2021). A significant number of Korean restaurants have also opened up in India to cater to the rising demand for Korean cuisine (Times of India, 2023). Besides noodles, there is also surging demand for Korean sauces and spices (Times of India, 2023). Seo Young Doo, the founder of Korikart, a marketplace that deals with imported Korean products in India stated that the demand for Korean food items are not only metropolitan cities like Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai. The demand from other regions of the country too, such as Chandigarh, Jaipur and the north-eastern states of "Assam,

Tripura, Mizoram, Sikkim, Meghalaya and Nagaland” (Mint, 2021). The reason Indians were drawn to Korean food was due to similarities in cooking ingredients such as rice, sesame oil and variety of spices common in cuisines of both countries (Mint, 2021, Mediawire, 2021).

### **2.3.Korean Beauty Products**

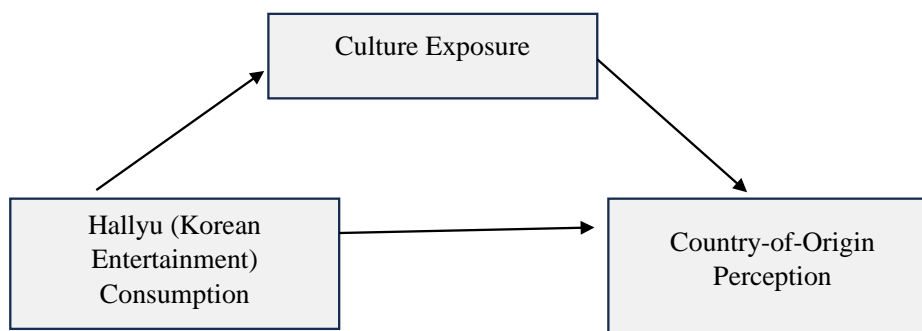
According to Global Market Insights (2023), the market size for K-beauty products worldwide in 2022 was valued at USD 9.5 billion and it is estimated to achieve a CAGR of 5.7 per cent between 2023 and 2032 globally. Another report by Market Data Forecast (2024) stated that the CAGR of global K-beauty product market was projected at 11.3 per cent from 2024 to 2029. Korean beauty products, including skincare and haircare are also enjoying a lot of popularity among the Indian masses. The revenue of K-beauty products in Indian market was approximately USD 531 million. It is projected to grow over USD 1.3 billion by 2032 (Statista, 2024). 53.7 per cent of Indian adults are inclined to give positive feedback for K-products that they use (Market Data Forecast, 2024). As per report by Rakuten Insight, around 35 per cent of Indian women stated that they use 25 per cent of Korean beauty products in their skincare routine. They are readily available in malls and various e-commerce platforms in India (Mint, 2021). Although Korean skincare products have been available in the Indian market for a while, it is clear that the general acceptance of Korean entertainment has made a huge impact on the demand for Korean beauty brands.

### **2.4.Korean Language Learning**

The appreciation of Korean culture in India is also attested by the fact that Indians were learning Korean language. There was an 11 per cent increase in Korean learners among Indian users in the Duolingo app during October 2019 and February 2020 (Economic Times, 2020). In March 2020, the language learning app Duolingo reported that an increase of 256 per cent of Indians who were learning Korean. The director of Korean Cultural Center India, Hwang Il Yong mentioned that when KCCI started an online three-month learning course for Korean language, the 1200 slots got filled up within two or three minutes of opening the registration (The Indian Express, 2021). The Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi has a Korean language learning as well as teacher training course, in collaboration with the FCCI. The KCCI also initiated an online “Korean Language Hobby Class”. The New Education Policy, 2020 introduced by the Ministry of Education, Government of India has introduced Korean language as a recommended foreign language to be taught at secondary levels in Indian schools (The Korea Herald, 2020).

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

To determine the relationship between Hallyu consumption, cultural exposure and Country of Origin Effect, the researcher developed and tested the conceptual model (fig 3.1).

**Fig 3.1: Conceptual model**

The model (Fig 3.1) proposes a link between consumption of Korean entertainment content (Hallyu) and perception of country-of-origin (South Korea), with culture exposure as a mediator variable.

### 3.1.Hallyu consumption

Hallyu consumption, in the context of this study means the consumption of Korean entertainment content, such as Korean movies (K-movies), Korean dramas (K-dramas) and Korean pop music (K-pop).

### 3.2. Culture Exposure

Cultural exposure refers to the awareness and familiarity with a culture of a nation. In this case, it implies the knowledge and appreciation of the culture of South Korean people.

### 3.3.Country-of-Origin Perception

Country-of-Origin Perception is a term used in marketing parlance to mean the influence of a consumers' perception of the country where the product originates and how it affects the choices and buying behaviour. In this context, this paper delves into whether the perception of South Korea (country-of-origin) as a country can be affected by the cultural exposure of Indian youth through Korean music, dramas and movies.

## 4. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this research is to study the soft power of entertainment industry in shaping perceptions about country-of-origin. In this case, the researcher examines the effect of Korean entertainment content on perception of South Korea as a country by spreading the Korean culture.

- i. To investigate the relationship between Hallyu consumption and Country-of-Origin perception of South Korea among Indian youth.
- ii. To examine the mediating role of cultural exposure in the relationship between Hallyu consumption and Country-of-origin perception.

### **5. Research Methods Used**

For this study, the researcher referred to secondary sources of data in the form of government documents, reports of marketing analysts and online news portals such as BBC, Mint, Mediawire, Indian Express, Times of India and the Korea Herald. Academic sources include journal articles found by searching through databases of ScienceDirect, Google Scholar and Wiley.

The findings of this study are based on empirical evidence. The researcher wanted to understand the influence of Hallyu at the grassroot level. The general youth in India was the population under study. So, a primary survey was conducted at college level in Guwahati city of North East India in the month of September, 2024.

Right now, India has the largest population of young people in the world. 27.2 per cent of Indian population fall under the age category of 15 to 29 years old (Youth in India, 2022). A questionnaire was framed using Google Forms and sent via email and social media platforms.

A total of 175 questionnaires were circulated by following convenience and snowball sampling method. Out of this, 31 did not respond. 6 questionnaires were eliminated on account of outliers and incompleteness. A final sample of 138 was used for data analysis.

For developing theoretical framework, the researcher conducted a review of literature which included research articles, official government documents and newspaper articles. Based on conceptual understanding, a model was constructed with Hallyu consumption as the predictor variable, cultural exposure as the mediator and country-of-origin effect as the outcome variable.

To check the validity of the proposed model, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling was performed.

### **6. Data Analysis:**

The demographic profile of the respondents is given in Table 5.1.



**Table 6.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Respondent Characteristics	Total number	Percentage
Respondents	138	100
Gender		
Male	57	41
Female	81	59
Others	-	-
Age		
Below 18 years	34	24
18 – 25 years	104	76
Education		
High School	34	24
Undergraduate	104	76

**Table 6.2: Other information at a glance**

Aware of Korean Entertainment Media	102	74
Korean Pop Listeners	86	62
Korean Drama Viewers	91	66
Korean Movie Viewers	61	44
Visited South Korea	Nil	Nil
Wish to Visit South Korea	101	73
Found Korean Entertainment through		
Social Media	54	39
Family and Friends	57	41
TV Advertisements	9	7
OTT platforms	18	13

The latent variables have been labelled as HAL, CUL and COO for representing Consumption of Hallyu media, Cultural exposure and Country of Origin (South Korea) perception, respectively (table 4.3). To check the internal consistency of the questionnaire, reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha was conducted (table 4.4).

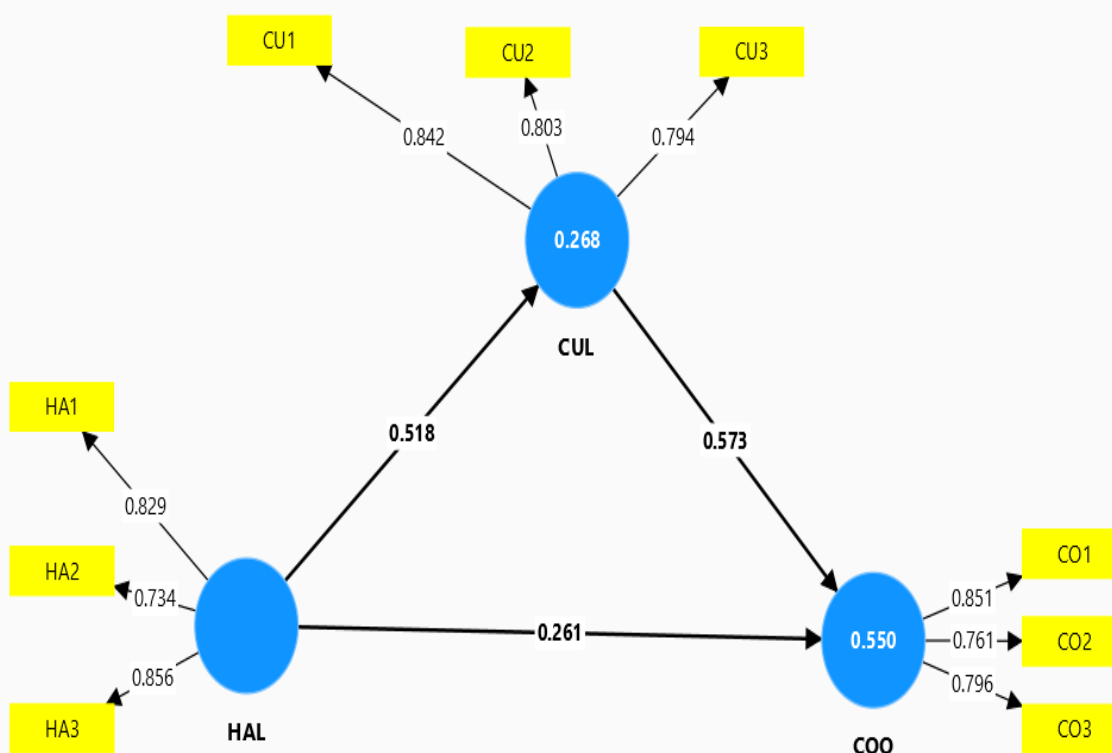
**Table 6.3: Constructs and variables**

Constructs	Variable
HAL	HA1: Awareness about Korean Entertainment HA2: Enjoyment of Korean Pop Music HA3: Enjoyment of Korean dramas and movies
CUL	CU1: Awareness about Korean Culture CU2: Attraction towards Korean Culture



	CU3: Attraction towards Korean cuisine
COO	CO1: Willingness to visit South Korea CO2: Quality perception of South Korean Products CO3: Positive Perception of South Korea as a friendly country

**Fig 6.1: SEM depicting the relationships among Hallyu consumption, Culture Exposure, and Country of Origin Perception**



**Table 6.3: Path Coefficients**

	Path coefficients
CUL -> COO	0.573
HAL -> COO	0.261
HAL -> CUL	0.518

**Table 6.4: Indirect Effect**

	Specific indirect effects
HAL -> CUL -> COO	0.296

**Table 6.5: Total Effect**

	Total effects
CUL -> COO	0.573
HAL -> COO	0.557
HAL -> CUL	0.518

**Table 6.6: Outer Loadings**

	Outer loadings
CO1 <- COO	0.851
CO2 <- COO	0.761
CO3 <- COO	0.796
CU1 <- CUL	0.842
CU2 <- CUL	0.803
CU3 <- CUL	0.794
HA1 <- HAL	0.829
HA2 <- HAL	0.734
HA3 <- HAL	0.856

**Table 6.7: Outer Weights**

	COO	CUL	HAL
CO1	0.520		
CO2	0.341		
CO3	0.374		
CU1		0.387	
CU2		0.376	
CU3		0.470	
HA1			0.391
HA2			0.355
HA3			0.485

**Table 6.8: Latent Variables – Correlations**

	<b>COO</b>	<b>CUL</b>	<b>HAL</b>
<b>COO</b>	1.000	0.707	0.557
<b>CUL</b>	0.707	1.000	0.518
<b>HAL</b>	0.557	0.518	1.000

**Table 6.9: Latent Variables -Covariances**

	<b>COO</b>	<b>CUL</b>	<b>HAL</b>
<b>COO</b>	1.000	0.707	0.557
<b>CUL</b>	0.707	1.000	0.518
<b>HAL</b>	0.557	0.518	1.000

**Table 6.10: R-Square**

	<b>R-square</b>	<b>R-square adjusted</b>
<b>COO</b>	0.550	0.544
<b>CUL</b>	0.268	0.262

**Table 6.11: Construct Reliability**

	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>Composite reliability (rho_a)</b>	<b>Composite reliability (rho_c)</b>	<b>Average variance extracted (AVE)</b>
<b>COO</b>	0.732	0.768	0.845	0.646
<b>CUL</b>	0.746	0.749	0.854	0.661
<b>HAL</b>	0.735	0.756	0.849	0.653

**Table 6.12: Discriminant Validity- Fornell Larker Criterion**

	<b>COO</b>	<b>CUL</b>	<b>HAL</b>
<b>COO</b>	0.804		
<b>CUL</b>	0.707	0.813	
<b>HAL</b>	0.557	0.518	0.808

**Table 6.13: Discriminant Validity**

	<b>Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)</b>
<b>CUL &lt;-&gt; COO</b>	0.908
<b>HAL &lt;-&gt; COO</b>	0.749
<b>HAL &lt;-&gt; CUL</b>	0.673

**Table 6.14: Cross Loading**

	<b>COO</b>	<b>CUL</b>	<b>HAL</b>
<b>CO1</b>	0.851	0.720	0.504
<b>CO2</b>	0.761	0.415	0.453
<b>CO3</b>	0.796	0.511	0.376
<b>CU1</b>	0.522	0.842	0.410
<b>CU2</b>	0.529	0.803	0.368
<b>CU3</b>	0.654	0.794	0.470
<b>HA1</b>	0.461	0.354	0.829
<b>HA2</b>	0.406	0.333	0.734
<b>HA3</b>	0.479	0.538	0.856

**Table 6.15: COLLINEARITY STATISTICS (IV) OUTER MODEL**

	<b>VIF</b>
<b>CO1</b>	1.399
<b>CO2</b>	1.448
<b>CO3</b>	1.509
<b>CU1</b>	1.840
<b>CU2</b>	1.706
<b>CU3</b>	1.294
<b>HA1</b>	1.621
<b>HA2</b>	1.319
<b>HA3</b>	1.554

**Table 6.16: COLLINEARITY STATISTICS (IV) INNER MODEL**

	<b>VIF</b>
<b>CUL -&gt; COO</b>	1.366
<b>HAL -&gt; COO</b>	1.366
<b>HAL -&gt; CUL</b>	1.000

**Table 6.17: MODEL FIT**

	<b>Saturated model</b>	<b>Estimated model</b>
<b>SRMR</b>	0.103	0.103
<b>d_ULS</b>	0.477	0.477
<b>d_G</b>	0.207	0.207
<b>Chi-square</b>	166.186	166.186
<b>NFI</b>	0.663	0.663
<b>BIC (Bayesian information criterion)</b>		
<b>COO</b>	-96.484	
<b>CUL</b>	-34.170	

**Table 6.18: INDICATOR DATA (EMPIRICAL CORRELATIONS MATRIX)**

	<b>CO1</b>	<b>CO2</b>	<b>CO3</b>	<b>CU1</b>	<b>CU2</b>	<b>CU3</b>	<b>HA1</b>	<b>HA2</b>	<b>HA3</b>
<b>CO1</b>	1.000	0.445	0.480	0.530	0.509	0.689	0.365	0.360	0.481
<b>CO2</b>	0.445	1.000	0.506	0.312	0.311	0.378	0.459	0.291	0.350
<b>CO3</b>	0.480	0.506	1.000	0.373	0.422	0.445	0.305	0.321	0.294
<b>CU1</b>	0.530	0.312	0.373	1.000	0.634	0.461	0.320	0.212	0.431
<b>CU2</b>	0.509	0.311	0.422	0.634	1.000	0.388	0.267	0.177	0.413
<b>CU3</b>	0.689	0.378	0.445	0.461	0.388	1.000	0.276	0.393	0.459
<b>HA1</b>	0.365	0.459	0.305	0.320	0.267	0.276	1.000	0.454	0.571
<b>HA2</b>	0.360	0.291	0.321	0.212	0.177	0.393	0.454	1.000	0.415
<b>HA3</b>	0.481	0.350	0.294	0.431	0.413	0.459	0.571	0.415	1.000

Through Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling using Smart PLS 4.0, the proposed conceptual model was tested. The path coefficients (table 6.3; table 6.4 and table 6.5) suggest that the direct influence of Hallyu consumption on country-of-origin perception is moderate. However, its indirect influence through cultural exposure increases the influence quite significantly. As such, it can be concluded that cultural exposure plays a strong mediating role in the relationship. The path coefficient indicating the direct effect of Hallyu consumption on country-of-origin perception is 0.261 (table 6.3). But, the total effect when the relationship between the two constructs is mediated by cultural exposure becomes 0.557 (table 6.5), proving cultural exposure to be a strong mediator.

The Cronbach's Alpha (table 6.11) for the constructs in the model are 0.732 for Hallyu consumption, 0.746 for cultural exposure and 0.735 for country-of-origin perception. Since, the Cronbach's Alpha for all are above the threshold of 0.7, the internal reliability of the constructs in

the model stands good. However, the model fit statistics (table 6.17) indicate the proposed model is poor and far from perfect. The reason for this could be the use of different scales in the survey questionnaire. There is scope for refining the path model. One explanation for the discrepancies is the use of different scales while collecting data from respondents. To bring uniformity to the data, the 'STANDARDIZE' function in MS-Excel was used. The discrepancies in the model could also be that the sample size is not good enough.

In the survey conducted by the researcher, 71 per cent respondents stated that they found Korean food products in their local convenience stores. This indicates a rising demand in Korean packaged food. 79 per cent are attracted to Korean cuisine due to Kdramas. 76 per cent found the fashion sense of Koreans very attractive. Among the product categories, Korean beauty products were the most popular (43 per cent), followed by Korean fashion clothing and accessories (21 per cent) and electronics (16 per cent).

63 per cent agreed that their choices and buying behaviour were influenced by Korean pop culture. 41 per cent respondents said that they became aware about Korean media through friends and family while 39% found it through social media platforms. 14% found Youtube to be most used social media platform for Korean media content, while 27% cited Netflix as the best platform for watch Korean movies and dramas. 73 per cent wish to travel to South Korea.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The researcher shows that Korean Entertainment industry is quite well known among Indian youth. The existing literature and survey conducted by the researcher concludes that Kdramas, Kpop and Kmovies are capturing a huge share of market in India across different product categories. They are well aware of Korean products in the Indian market. Clubbed together with This engagement in Korean entertainment content has also led to cultural awareness about South Korea- its lifestyle, traditions, cuisine and fashion. Although none of the respondents have ever been to South Korea, they are still fascinated by the Korean culture and lifestyle. The primary source of their awareness of Korean culture is through Korean entertainment media. Considering the fact they the overwhelming majority view South Korea as an attractive travel destination, it can be said that Hallyu has led to an increase in positive sentiment towards South Korea as a country. Indians are interested in Korean products of different categories such as beauty products, fashion clothing and accessories due to the influence of Korean entertainment media. What was once a niche market has turned into a mainstream phenomenon. The effect of Hallyu can be seen in consumption patterns as well as country-of-origin perceptions. Majority view South Korea as a friendly country. By showcasing the Korean culture through art, Korean entertainment industry is spreading the popularity and a positive image of South Korea. The influence of Hallyu on perception of South

Korea as a country and quality perception of products originating from there, is an exemplary case of soft power in the field of international business and geopolitical diplomacy.

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