



Faculty of Legal Sciences

School of International Studies

**THE INFLUENCE OF HALLYU ON THE
YOUTH OF CUENCA**

Project prior to obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in International
Studies

Author:

Emily Liliana Mendieta Vanegas

Advisor:

Bernarda Quintanilla González

Cuenca – Ecuador

2025

To my parents, who with their unconditional love, effort and sacrifice have been my greatest support. Thank you for every word of encouragement, for your constant support and for teaching me the value of perseverance. Without you, this achievement would not be possible.

To my sister and aunt, for always being by my side and being a fundamental pillar in my personal and academic life.

Your trust in me has been a driving force to move forward. To you, my family, I dedicate this work with all my love and gratitude, because each page of this thesis also carries your effort and dedication. I love you.

To my friends, Salomé and Diana, for all your love, support and encouragement. You taught me the immense value of friendship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES AND APPENDICES	iii
List of figures	iii
List of tables	iii
List of appendices	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
RESUMEN	iv
1. Introduction	5
1.1 Objectives	5
1.2 Theoretical framework	5
Culture and cultural exchange	5
Cultural commerce	7
Youth as a Hallyu consumer	8
2. Literature Review	10
3. Research Methods	12
4. Results	13
4.1 Interview	13
4.2 Observation	14
4.3 Surveys	16
5. Discussion	22
6. Conclusion	23
7. References	24
8. Appendices	27

LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES AND APPENDICES

List of figures

Figure 1 <i>Social media content</i>	16
Figure 2 <i>Chart of the gender of respondents</i>	17
Figure 3 <i>Scale of the most practiced Hallyu activities</i>	17
Figure 4 <i>Means of expansion of Hallyu</i>	17
Figure 5 <i>Scale of the most consumed aspects of Hallyu</i>	18
Figure 6 <i>Accessibility of Hallyu products in the city</i>	18
Figure 7 <i>Scale of the main motivation for consumption</i>	18
Figure 8 <i>Hallyu content consumption time</i>	19
Figure 9 <i>Followers of Hallyu content users or pages</i>	19
Figure 10 <i>Scale of the frequency of attendance at events</i>	19
Figure 11 <i>Scale of the influence of Korean fashion</i>	20
Figure 12 <i>Scale of the importance of Hallyu culture</i>	20
Figure 13 <i>Strengthening relationships and Hallyu community</i>	20
Figure 14 <i>Scale of expansion of this movement in the city</i>	21
Figure 15 <i>Knowledge of Hallyu philosophy</i>	21
Figure 16 <i>Influence of Hallyu as a cultural and aesthetic factor</i>	21

List of tables

Table 1 <i>Selection Criteria</i>	13
Table 2 <i>Participants</i>	13

List of appendices

Appendix 1 <i>Interview Guide</i>	27
Appendix 2 <i>Survey Guide</i>	29
Appendix 3 <i>Observation content log</i>	31
Appendix 4 <i>Participatory observation log</i>	31
Appendix 5 <i>Interview responses</i>	32

INFLUENCE OF HALLYU ON THE YOUTH OF CUENCA

ABSTRACT

Hallyu is a global sociocultural phenomenon that has transformed the lifestyles of its followers through the dissemination of cultural elements such as K-pop, television dramas, fashion, gastronomy, and other aspects of Korean popular culture. This movement has gained significant acceptance among young people in Cuenca, Ecuador, who have incorporated elements of this wave into their identities and social practices. This research analyzes how Hallyu influences the construction and redefinition of individual and collective identities among cuencano youth aged 15 to 24 and their consumer behavior. It is approached from a qualitative perspective to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and cultural transformations resulting from this influence, highlighting the dynamics of reception, adaptation, and cultural resistance in the local context. Additionally, the study examines the factors that have facilitated its expansion, from the role of social media to the promotion by institutions such as the Embassy of South Korea. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the sociological processes underlying the interaction between global and local cultures.

Keywords

Cultural adaptation, Cultural trade, South Korea, Globalization, Hallyu

INFLUENCIA DEL HALLYU EN LOS JÓVENES DE LA CIUDAD DE CUENCA

RESUMEN

El Hallyu, es un fenómeno sociocultural global que ha transformado los estilos de vida de sus seguidores mediante la difusión de elementos culturales como el K-pop, los dramas televisivos, la moda, la gastronomía y otros aspectos de la cultura popular coreana. Este movimiento ha encontrado una notable acogida en los jóvenes de Cuenca, Ecuador, quienes han adoptado elementos de esta corriente en sus identidades y prácticas sociales. La presente investigación analiza cómo el Hallyu influye en la construcción y redefinición de las identidades individuales y colectivas de los jóvenes cuencanos entre 15 y 24 y sus tendencias de consumo. Se aborda desde un enfoque cualitativo para explorar las percepciones, actitudes y transformaciones culturales derivadas de esta influencia, destacando las dinámicas de recepción, adaptación y resistencia cultural en el contexto local. Además, se examinan los factores que han facilitado su expansión, desde el papel de las redes sociales hasta el impulso de instituciones como la Embajada de Corea del Sur. Este estudio busca aportar a la comprensión de los procesos sociológicos que subyacen en la interacción de culturas globales y locales.

Palabras clave

Adaptación cultural, Comercio cultural, Corea del Sur, Globalización, Hallyu

INFLUENCE OF HALLYU ON THE

1. Introduction

Hallyu is a sociocultural phenomenon in which Korean culture is welcomed abroad and influences people's lifestyle. It is a movement that connects with audiences around the world. The term Hallyu is used to describe various elements of Korean popular culture, such as language, music, Korean products, television dramas, movies, fashion, and gastronomy (Jang & Chang, 2023). It has transcended borders and has become a global cultural phenomenon that influences the identity, consumption and social dynamics of youth in various parts of the world (Jin et al., 2021). In the case of Cuenca, Ecuador, this phenomenon has generated new forms of expression and interaction among young people, who have incorporated elements of Hallyu into their daily lives through the consumption of Korean music, series, fashion, and products (García, 2021).

This research seeks to analyze the influence of Hallyu on Cuenca youth from a qualitative perspective, exploring how its elements are integrated into the identity and consumption practices of young people. To this end, in-depth interviews, observations, and social network analysis were used in order to understand the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Sampieri et al., 2014). The study will contribute to the understanding of the impact of cultural globalization in local contexts, identifying the processes of adaptation and appropriation of this cultural wave in the city.

1.1 Objectives

This thesis aims to analyze the influence of Hallyu on young people between 14 and 25 years old in the city of Cuenca, exploring how this cultural phenomenon has been adopted and reinterpreted in the local context. To this end, a theoretical framework will be developed that allows understanding culture, its conceptual bases and its dissemination process among the youth population. In addition, the various manifestations of Hallyu will be identified, from music and entertainment to fashion and the consumption of Korean products, in order to understand how young people from Cuenca interact with this cultural current. Finally, the incidence of Hallyu in the identity and social dynamics of this population will be analyzed, allowing to demonstrate its impact on individual and collective constructions, as well as on the spaces of socialization and cultural participation in the city.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Culture and cultural exchange

The Hallyu, is a cultural phenomenon that has expanded globally since the end of the twentieth century. Hallyu literally translates into English as "the Korean wave". It is used in connection with numerous Korean cultural practices. Initially, it covered areas such as TV shows, stars, and pop songs, but also, the meaning of Hallyu has increasingly expanded to include the Korean lifestyle, such as gastronomy, fashion, sports, etc (J. Kim, 2007).

This cultural phenomenon has made South Korea a benchmark in the entertainment and fashion industry. It has crossed borders through the consumption of cultural products such as K-pop, television dramas, gastronomy, fashion and beauty products, generating an emotional connection with millions of followers in different parts of the world. The Korean wave has transcended borders, consolidating itself as a significant manifestation of cultural globalization that involves the dissemination and adoption of cultural elements beyond their original geographical contexts, facilitated by technological advances and mass media (Steger, 2013).

A cultural phenomenon refers to a behavior or experience that is influenced by the beliefs, values, and practices of a particular society or group. It is often deeply rooted in history and can be difficult to fully understand without considering the cultural context in which it takes place (Hughes et al., 1993).

The theoretical framework of this research is nourished by the theory of cultural globalization, which provides a context to understand how cultural currents, in this case, Hallyu, are disseminated in diverse contexts. Culture, in its constant dynamics, is not excluded, on the contrary, globalization influences the expansion of cultures and the transformation of their manifestations, allowing cultural elements to transcend geographical borders and adapt to diverse contexts.

This phenomenon is clearly exemplified in the case of Hallyu, or "Korean Wave". It is a cultural phenomenon that has expanded globally, has managed to cross borders generating an emotional connection

with millions of followers in different parts of the world with the dissemination and adoption of cultural elements beyond their original geographical contexts.

Social psychologists and anthropologists agree in defining culture as a lifestyle. Culture consists of socially acquired patterns of thought, feeling, and action (Páez & Zubieta, 2004).

Along these lines, the definition of culture proposed by social psychologists and anthropologists, who agree that it is "a lifestyle". It acquires relevance when considering that culture is composed of socially acquired patterns of thought, feeling and action. Theories of cultural identity, which refers to the set of values, traditions, and symbols that define a social group, and cultural resistance, which implies the strategies by which these groups maintain and transform their identities in the face of dominant influences (Mejía et al., 2022)

The concept of sociocultural refers to the interaction between the social and cultural aspects that shape human behavior (Rodríguez & Alom, 2009).

With this background, which highlights the globalization of culture in its various manifestations, its impact has been made possible thanks to expansion and interculturality. These processes allow the continuous flow of information, practices and values between different cultures. Globalization can be conceptualized as a broad process, a current that has impacted communities, cultures and economies for centuries. It is the result of the transnational and transcultural integrations that have occurred globally throughout the history of humanity (Al-Rodhan, 2006). On the other hand, Interculturality refers to the equitable and respectful interaction between different cultures, promoting dialogue and mutual understanding. This concept seeks to recognize and value cultural diversity, fostering horizontal relationships that avoid the imposition of one culture over another (Estupiñán & Galarza, 2023).

In this context, Hallyu as a cultural manifestation is not transferred intact to other societies. It is not adopted in its entirety. Rather, in this process of cultural exchange, it is subject to the processes of modification such as cultural adaptation, which occur when individuals or groups interact with a new culture, adjusting practices and values to integrate or coexist with it. This process is dynamic and varies depending on the context and levels of acculturation. According to studies in anthropology, people internalize cultural elements of their environment while negotiating their original identity and practices (Rodríguez & Alom, 2009).

As a consequence of this cultural exchange, the result of interculturality and globalization, Hallyu can be considered a cultural manifestation of glocalization. As a category that describes the interconnection and simultaneity of global and local processes, emphasizing how local cultures can critically adapt or resist global phenomena, and how local creations are integrated into global dynamics (Preyer, 2016). In this way, in the various cultural manifestations, subjects reinterpret and adapt practices according to their own cultural identities.

Globalization has woven a cultural network that connects communities around the world, and in this framework, the influence of Hallyu, has emerged as a prominent cultural force that has reached Ecuadorian lands; as a consequence, among other aspects, of deliberate strategies by the Korean government, called soft power, described by Nye (2009), as the ability of a country to influence others through cultural attraction and shared values, rather than coercion or the use of force.

The interaction between socio-cultural aspects and trade is not an isolated phenomenon, but is deeply intertwined in a globalized world. Cultural exchanges, such as glocalization, allow products and services to be adapted to meet the needs and values of local cultures, while at the same time inserting them into a global market. This process not only involves the diffusion of products, but also the exchange of ideas and values that affect consumer behavior. Therefore, trade not only depends on global economic trends, but also on a deep understanding of sociocultural relations that influence purchasing and consumption decisions, facilitating a more inclusive business environment that is adaptable to local realities (Vizureanu, 2013).

The adoption of Hallyu by young people from Cuenca is evidenced in the formation of fan communities, the organization of thematic events and the participation in activities related to Korean culture. These young people not only passively consume cultural products, but also reinterpret them, adapting them to their local context and merging them with elements of their own culture, thus creating a hybrid identity (Ganghariya & Kanozia, 2020). Exposure to Hallyu has influenced the sociocultural adaptations of the youth of Cuenca, who incorporate values and behaviors observed in Korean culture. This includes a greater appreciation of discipline, teamwork and the importance of personal appearance. These adaptations reflect a process of interculturality, where a dialogue between cultures takes place that enriches and transforms existing social practices (García, 2004).

Cultural commerce

The term "cultural trade" refers to the exchange of cultural products and services that embody the values, traditions, beliefs, and identities of a particular society or community. This encompasses a wide range of goods and services, such as art, literature, music, gastronomy, fashion, cinema, and traditional crafts. These products serve as tangible or intangible representations of a community's identity, heritage, and creativity, and their exchange contributes to cultural diffusion and mutual understanding between different societies and nations (Qie, 2024).

Cultural exchange involves the interaction and flow of ideas, practices and products between different cultures, mutually enriching the societies involved. However, in the context of Hallyu, this exchange manifests itself in the adoption of South Korean cultural elements by young people around the world, who in turn influence Korean cultural production through their feedback and active participation (Jenkins, 2006). Consumer trends and choices related to the consumption of cultural goods (such as music, television, broadcasting products, among others,) are closely influenced by the rise of a trend. Products that were not initially of an economic nature, when they have a high demand value, they could be transformed into an industry and develop to promote the production of consumer goods such as food, beverages, makeup, fashion, medicines and others. For example, South Korea's cosmetic products lead the export value of cosmetic products (Tandy & Handoyo, 2024).

The consumption of cultural goods influenced by the expansion of the Korean Wave has led to an increase in international trade between countries (Howard, 2023). This phenomenon has been especially evident in the exchange of products related to South Korean culture, such as music, dramas, fashion, and beauty products. A clear indicator of this increase is the growth of South Korea's exports of entertainment products. A clear indicator of South Korea's growing cultural influence is the growth of its exports of entertainment products. In 2022, exports from the South Korean content industry reached an all-time high of 13.24 billion U.S. dollars, representing an increase of 6.3% compared to the previous year. This industry covers sectors such as publishing, music, video games, broadcasting, film, and animation (Kim, 2024).

Cultural consumption can be defined as the process through which people get involved with different cultural manifestations, such as films, music, art, literature, shows, among others. This process also implies an active participation of people with culture and is also a relevant way for each individual to express themselves, build an identity and participate in society (Alvear, 2023).

It is well-known that the process of crossing borders between cultures of different countries has intensified significantly due to globalization. The Korean Wave has acquired the characteristics of a regular development of the creative industry, which aims to promote international cooperation with other countries. This interest in culture contributes millions of dollars to South Korea's national budget, making it a country of great economic potential and achievement. The Korean Wave reflects Korea's internal culture that is becoming global and is considered as the expansion of Korean culture with the aim of conquering the global market (Glodev et al., 2023).

In this context from which cultural and commercial exchange is strengthened, cultural diplomacy focuses on making use of culture as a tool to promote mutual understanding, strengthen international relations and project the image of a country abroad. According to (Menéndez, 2018), cultural diplomacy implies that culture is used as an instrument to transmit clear political messages, with the aim of influencing the perception and relations between nations. South Korea has used its entertainment industry as a tool for cultural diplomacy, promoting a positive and attractive image at the global level (Jang & Paik, 2012).

Hallyu, through soft power, manages to create an emotional bond with its followers, using positive messages in music, series and other cultural manifestations to influence their lifestyle and consumption decisions. Cultural consumption is the process through which people get involved with different cultural manifestations, such as films, music, art, literature, shows, among others, in addition this process implies an active participation of people with culture and is also a relevant way for each individual to express themselves, build an identity and participate in society (Alvear, 2023).

In the case of Hallyu, South Korean cultural contents are reinterpreted by different cultures, generating a unique mix between the global and the local (Robertson, 1995). This process of glocalization has allowed elements of South Korean culture to adapt and integrate into different societies. In this sense, cultural consumption plays a crucial role, as it refers to how people select, interpret and use cultural products in their daily lives. The object of study of this research will focus on how Hallyu has manifested itself within the youth community of Cuenca, exploring the ways in which this cultural phenomenon is perceived and appropriated by young people.

The cultural product is sold mainly through the commercialization of the image of idols or celebrities of the music, film or television scene, and they are the main hook for attracting fans. Here we can talk about what would enter the game of the fashion, cosmetics and aesthetics industry. We are at a time in life where young people are very concerned about their physical appearance. We can see that Korea is not only a great influence in fashion and music but also there is a great acceptance the field of cosmetics in the world. This can be due to the types of beauty they use to recommend products that better help the appearance of the skin. For example, where through their videos they incite their followers to buy Korean cosmetic products (Panus, 2016).

This interest in culture brings millions of dollars to South Korea's national budget, making it a country of great economic potential and achievement in a short period of time. Hallyu reflects the internal culture of Korea that is becoming global and is considered the expansion of it with the aim of conquering the global market. Today, Hallyu has been adopted around the world by teenagers in Southeast Asia, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and Russia. Needless to say, K-pop in South Korea is itself a multi-billion-dollar industry and one of the country's main export products (López & Ryzhkov, 2017). The consumption and representation of Hallyu trends has also reached South America, manifested through events and festivals that celebrate Korean culture. Dance and singing competitions, drama screenings, and food festivals are organized that allow fans to experience and share their passion for Korean culture. Social networks and digital platforms have facilitated the formation of communities where fans share content, organize events and discuss their interests related to Hallyu.

Youth as a Hallyu consumer

The age range that is most influenced by Hallyu is between 15 and 24 years old, a period that the World Health Organization (WHO) defines as youth. This stage is crucial in psychological and social development, since young people experience processes of identity construction, need to belong, and search for cultural references. From youth psychology, Hallyu followers find in this movement a community with which they can identify, sharing values such as discipline, visual aesthetics and a passion for music and entertainment.

The K phenomenon, which encompasses the popularity of Korean cultural products, has generated a lucrative industry at a global level. Companies are taking advantage of this trend by marketing related products, such as music albums, merchandising, cosmetics, and Korean-style-inspired fashion. The media plays a crucial role in promoting these products and creating a constant demand among young consumers (Lie, 2012).

Thanks to this movement, several South Korean companies have been able to gain recognition through image marketing, which refers to the promotion and sale of a certain aesthetic or style through representative figures such as "idols." In addition to the sexy or tough image that male figures have always shown their followers, they have currently adapted much sweeter and softer concepts, promoting the use of pastel-colored clothing, makeup, and "cute" accessories, among others. Meanwhile, the marketing of female idols' images has utilized super femininity, with these idols most often displaying a very tender side, light makeup, and adorable outfits, along with a very delicate personality.

Although there have been changes in male aesthetics, such as the popularization of soft masculinity and "flower boys" in K-pop, this does not imply a true break with the traditional gender roles imposed by the heteropatriarchy. These models respond more to a marketing strategy that seeks to expand the consumption of beauty and fashion products to men. Their androgynous appearance does not eliminate the gender roles that perpetuate in songs and attitudes, presenting archetypes such as the "bad boy", which reinforce hegemonic masculinity although with a carefully stylized image (Olmedo, 2018).

In addition to consuming products derived from the K-pop phenomenon, young fans have also embraced activities such as learning Korean, practicing K-pop choreography, and participating in online communities dedicated to discussing and sharing related content. These activities reinforce their sense of belonging and allow them to express their identity in a tangible way (Jung, 2011).

At first glance, the K- seems to refer to Korea, but on closer examination, this modest K- means much more than it seems at first glance. K- is the product of years of cultural hybridization that has occurred both in Korea and around the world. The K- represents a globalized form of Korean culture that is at once national and international, commercial and traditional. The K-wave (or Hallyu **한류** as it is known in Korea) is a dynamic

version of Korean culture that is consumed by fans through online platforms, whether streaming services or social networks (Kiaer, 2023).

Moreno et al., (2024) report that a multidisciplinary approach seeks to capture the complexity of cultural interactions in an increasingly interconnected world by exploring how young Ecuadorian audiences interpret and assimilate South Korean culture. To understand how individuals and communities negotiate their identity in the process of encountering Hallyu, the author incorporates the notion of sociology of reception, a discipline that contributes to the analysis of the ways in which audiences receive, interpret and negotiate media messages, recognizing their agency and critical capacity in the process of reception.

K-pop is a musical genre originated in South Korea that combines various styles, characterized by its innovative visual production, synchronized choreographies and a strong connection with fans through social networks. Its global success is due to a well-structured strategy of the South Korean entertainment industry, which has promoted K-pop as a cultural product that can be exported through soft power. The Hallyu's main representatives include K-pop musical groups such as BTS, BLACKPINK, and EXO, whose musical and aesthetic styles have captured global attention. These artists not only dominate the charts, but also set trends in fashion and behavior, serving as role models for their international followers (Oh & Park, 2012).

As evidenced, within the branch of Kpop that is the most well-known, it is composed of diverse activities. These are developed with the good use in the outdoors that promotes the development of habits and cognitive, physical and social skills that they express through dances and fashion trends, which make them feel accepted in social groups. One of the most notorious trends in Cuenca is the "dance cover" community who are dedicated to following the world of Korean entertainment from a dance perspective, copying their choreographies, costumes, style in general. The objective is to become as similar as possible to their favorite group and compete in different events that are organized in the city or the country throughout the year such as the "KWF" organized by the South Korean embassy in Ecuador (Bustos, 2024).

K-pop is known as South Korean pop popular music that has its beginnings in the late 90s and early 2000s with the entry of Japanese pop music and Western music that began to affect the musical style of South Korean musicians/artists (Sobur et al., 2018). As mentioned above, beauty is an essential part of K-pop, so there are designated visual roles/categories that are fulfilled in each group. Visuals are considered the most attractive members of the group and are often the ones who are positioned in the center of the group, as they are the ones most likely to be seen (Camarillo, 2023).

One of the main icons of Hallyu culture is the group of seven South Korean boys called "BTS" created in 2013 by the global company Big Hit Entertainment. Although BTS had been around since 2013, the absence of a large global boy band and an increasingly digitized society propelled the group to unforeseen levels of recognition and success (Camarillo, 2023). Among the main causes for which his fans give him their support to the fullest, is for the great diversity and quality they project, his music transmits his motto called "Love yourself", hence a movement called "ARMY Love yourself". More than 10 million users have joined the movement. The group BTS, and his record label have renewed their commitment to UNICEF to help end violence and abandonment, as well as promoting the self-esteem and well-being of children and young people (UNICEF, 2021).

This movement is based on bringing a positive message to its audience by promoting self-love and the fight against mental illnesses such as depression. This has allowed fans to identify with its lyrics and melodies. Thus its increasing support caused many of its followers to become loyal followers of Korean culture and adopt the main features of it in their daily lives so the presence of its Embassy in the country is increasingly noticeable with all cultural, commercial, political and economic projects. This phenomenon occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people, due to mobility restrictions, began to consume popular content from Hallyu culture (Maulana et al., 2024).

Communities of Hallyu followers, known as fandoms, play a fundamental role in the dissemination and sustainability of the phenomenon. These groups organize events, create content, and establish support networks among their members. Participation in a fandom provides young people with a sense of community and belonging, allowing them to connect with others who share their interests and passions (Gray et al., 2017). Hallyu has given rise to various artistic movements, including the proliferation of dance groups that recreate K-pop choreographies, the production of art inspired by Korean idols, and the creation of related audiovisual

content. These cultural expressions show the influence of Hallyu on the creativity and artistic practices of young people, fostering a participatory and collaborative culture (Jenkins, 2006).

However, the reception of Hallyu is not a homogeneous phenomenon. It presents unique nuances based on its own cultural history, idiosyncrasies, and previous relations with South Korea. For example, in countries with a significant Korean diaspora, such as Peru, the reception of Hallyu may be influenced by the presence of communities that maintain cultural and family ties to Korea (Khatun, 2024).

In this sense, an analysis of the urban communities belonging to the movement is proposed, what they consist of and what their characteristics are (Necula, 2017).

2. Literature Review

Zarco (2018) study shows that the arrival of Hallyu in Latin America dates back to the early 2000s, initially through K-dramas. These television series captured the attention of young and adult audiences due to their innovative themes, engaging soundtracks and unique representation of Korean society. The narrative and production of these series resonated with Latin American audiences, generating communities of dedicated fans. This process of cultural penetration was particularly remarkable, considering the language, cultural and geographical barriers that, in theory, could have hindered its acceptance. As the decade progressed, K-pop emerged as a dominant force within Hallyu in the region. South Korean groups began to gain a considerable fan base in countries such as Argentina, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Events such as the "Latin K-pop Cup" brought together participants from various countries, demonstrating the growing popularity of this musical genre in the region.

In Ecuador, Hallyu has influenced new generations in various ways. Communities of fans have formed and organized events and gatherings to share their common interest in Korean culture. These spaces allow young Ecuadorians to express their affinity for K-pop, K-dramas and other cultural aspects, strengthening community ties and promoting cultural exchange. The cultural consumption related to Hallyu in Ecuador has been facilitated by access to digital platforms. Young Ecuadorians actively consume content related to Korean culture, which has allowed for greater familiarity with the Korean language, customs, and fashion trends. This phenomenon has led to an adaptation and integration of Korean cultural elements into the daily lives of young Ecuadorians (Macías, 2021)

Bustos (2024) investigates the immersion of the Korean wave in the young population of the city of Cuenca. First of all, since the manifesto has been growing rapidly in recent years within Cuenca, it is interesting to observe how the original meaning behind it has been transformed into a business. The popularity of this wave has been growing widely in the city and there are several commercial premises where we can find elements of this culture.

Based on the study by García (2021) who proposes to explore the extent and complexities of Hallyu's influence in Ecuador from a sociological perspective. These trends arise as a result of the "viralization of content", which is very well received by the digital platform YouTube. This platform has currently become the channel or transport of one of the largest acculturation processes in history, by eliminating the communication and linguistic barriers of various cultures, both Eastern and Western, for their assimilation and daily adaptation. The Korean phenomenon is booming and growing, one of the sources of expansion is through the media, mainly social networks since they are the sources that feed their followers. These trends also influence international marketing, finding strategies that are used by different brands to be able to market their products, taking advantage of the great acceptance that this culture has in the youth in Cuenca.

In this context, the phenomenon of Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, has emerged as a significant cultural force that has reached an unthinkable number of young people within the region. Regardless of whether their adaptation represents an identity conflict or is positive, Hallyu has influenced international trade by increasing South Korea's cultural exports. The demand for Korean cultural products has led to an increase in exports of music, series and other content to Latin America. In addition, the interest in Korean culture has motivated many Latin Americans to learn the Korean language, which has generated a greater demand for related courses and educational materials. The Korean wave has had a profound impact on Latin America, various studies have analyzed the influence of Hallyu culture on youth, evidencing its impact in different contexts.

Rocha (2021) analyzed the impact of Hallyu on cultural consumption patterns in Latin America, exploring how the popularity of Korean music, dramas, and other products has influenced language learning and the acquisition of goods and services related to South Korean culture. Their study found that the

phenomenon has not only strengthened international trade, but has also boosted significant cultural exchange between South Korea and the Latin American region.

Bretón (2024) conducted a study titled "The Impact of Hallyu in Mexico: A Comprehensive Analysis of Its Cultural and Social Influence," in which he examined how the Korean wave has transformed various aspects of Mexican society, including music, K-dramas, fashion, and gastronomy. The objective of the research was to analyze the impact of Hallyu on the cultural consumption preferences of Mexicans and its role in the construction of emotional and social bonds. The study was carried out in a context in which Mexico has become a key market for Korean entertainment, with a growing presence of products and cultural events related to Hallyu. Among the findings, it was identified that this cultural current has not only influenced the consumption habits of young people, but has also generated new forms of social and community interaction. In addition, the relevance of Hallyu in bilateral relations between Mexico and South Korea was highlighted, consolidating itself as a phenomenon that enriches the cultural exchange between both nations.

The study found that Hallyu has generated a significant impact on Mexican youth, not only in terms of entertainment consumption, but also in the adoption of values and behaviors associated with this culture; young people integrate K-pop, K-dramas, and Korean fashion into their daily lives, demonstrating a reconfiguration of their cultural habits. In addition, the author concluded that this influence is mediated by social networks and online communities, which amplify the dissemination of the phenomenon Bretón (2024).

Zambrano & Zamora (2022) conducted a study entitled "Hallyu: Cultural Consumption and Development of the Guayaquil Shopping Center Sector", in which they analyzed the relationship between the consumption of Hallyu cultural products and the growth of the commercial sector in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The objective of the research was to characterize how the interest in Korean culture has driven the commercialization of products related to K-pop, K-dramas and other elements of Hallyu in the city. The study was conducted out in a context of growing influence of Hallyu in Latin America and had as participants young Guayaquil consumers of these products. The findings revealed that the integration of Hallyu into the daily lives of young people has fostered an increase in the supply of Korean products in local shops, generating an impact on the economy of the city center. It was evident that the demand for merchandise linked to Hallyu has led to the expansion of specialized stores and cultural events, consolidating its presence in the local market.

On the other hand, Robledo (2022) investigated the consumption practices and social use of Hallyu through socio-digital networks by fandoms in Mexico. The study focused on how communities of followers use digital platforms to share content, organize events, and strengthen their collective identity around K-pop and other Korean cultural products. The research revealed that fandoms in Mexico have used socio-digital networks not only as a means of cultural consumption, but also as spaces for the construction of identity and belonging. Hallyu followers create virtual communities where they interact, organize events, and generate content related to K-pop and Korean dramas. The author concluded that this type of cultural consumption is highly participatory and that networks have allowed the consolidation of a transnational youth identity.

Thus, Guerra (2022) analyzes the impact of East Asian pop music in Argentina through a case study on the bands Mayday (Taiwan-China) and Super Junior (South Korea). Its objective is to explore how this phenomenon influences intercultural dynamics and local audiences. The research is developed in Argentina, where the presence of Hallyu has grown since 2000, especially through Korean and Chinese pop music. Young Argentines who are followers of these bands participated, and they are active in contests, festivals and other activities related to Asian culture. The findings indicate that East Asian pop music has been a vehicle for transmitting Confucian values, generating a strong impact on fans and their families. In addition, there is evidence of cultural appropriation, where young people reinterpret and adapt Hallyu to their own context, organizing events and developing communities around this phenomenon. The research highlights how cultural globalization allows the expansion of these cultural products and their integration into local identities.

In Colombia, Lozano (2021) explored the evolution of the South Korean entertainment industry and the Korean wave (Hallyu) in the country, analyzing how South Korea's soft power has influenced the adoption of its pop culture among Colombian youth. He revealed that young Colombians have shown a growing interest in K-pop and Korean dramas, which has led to greater cultural interaction and the strengthening of the Korean presence in the country. The study showed that the impact of Hallyu in Colombia has been increasing, promoted by soft power strategies of South Korea. The research showed that young Colombians have developed a great interest in Korean music and series, which has influenced their perception of South Korea as a modern and attractive country. The author concluded that this influence transcends the consumption of cultural products, even generating a desire to learn the language and learn more about Korean history and customs.

In addition, Macías (2021) analyzed the implications of the Hallyu dream on the influx of foreigners to South Korea, focusing on how the fascination with Korean culture has motivated young Latin Americans to travel to the Asian country. It showed that the interest in Hallyu has transcended media consumption,

influencing mobility decisions and intercultural experiences. The study found that interest in Hallyu has driven the mobility of young Latin Americans to South Korea, whether for tourism, studies or work. The participants of the study expressed that their interest in the country initially arose through cultural products such as music and series, but over time it became a desire to experience the culture in person. The author concluded that Hallyu has generated a new form of cultural migration driven by fascination with the idealized image of South Korea.

Finally, Kim (2021) examined Hallyu fandom in Mexico City and Lima, analyzing soft power, gender, and the self-formation of cross-cultural youth through new media. The research showed how young people in these cities use digital platforms to connect with Korean culture, adapting it to their local contexts and creating hybrid identities that reflect a mix of cultural influences. The research identified that young people in Mexico City and Lima have built a hybrid identity through the consumption of Hallyu. It was found that the K-pop band is a space where young Latin American women explore new forms of personal expression and reinforce values of community and sisterhood. In addition, the study concluded that South Korea's soft power has been successful in Latin America, shaping the perceptions of youth and establishing a cultural bridge between the two regions.

This phenomenon has fostered the creation of dedicated communities, influenced cultural consumption habits, and strengthened ties between South Korea and Latin American countries. Continued research and analysis of this phenomenon will provide a deeper understanding of its evolution and its influence on the cultural and economic dynamics of the region.

3. Research Methods

This qualitative research was conducted using a phenomenological approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and meanings related to the influence of Hallyu on the lives of young people in Cuenca. Phenomenology focuses on understanding how individuals experienced and described this specific phenomenon, facilitating the interpretation of their subjective experiences and the identity changes related to this cultural movement (Sampieri et al., 2014). The phenomenological approach allowed for the capture of the depth and subjectivity of their individual and collective experiences, providing a detailed understanding of the appropriation of Hallyu in the Cuenca context.

The research used the participatory observation technique, focusing on analyzing how young people received and integrated Hallyu into their identities. According to Sampieri et al. (2014), participatory observation is a qualitative research technique that consists of observing and recording the behavior of a social group while the researcher is directly and actively involved in their activities and environment. Special attention was paid to how this phenomenon impacted lifestyle, cultural consumption, and sense of belonging among the city's young population. Various techniques were used to collect data, providing a comprehensive view of the phenomenon: in-depth interviews, surveys, and participatory observation of events and digital platforms. The following tools were used: observation logs, interview guides with open-ended questions, and surveys. The tools were applied in contexts frequented by Hallyu fans in Cuenca, taking into account inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The methodological process was developed in three phases. First, an exhaustive literature search was conducted in academic sources using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, using keywords such as "Hallyu," "cultural change," "youth," and "identity," which provided a theoretical basis for the study. Google Scholar and Google Scholar were used to access sources in Spanish and English, respectively; in addition, high-impact databases such as Scielo and Scopus were consulted, ensuring the inclusion of peer-reviewed publications of international relevance. Selection criteria were applied to ensure the relevance of the analyzed studies, considering their direct relationship with the research topic, academic relevance, publication date after 2020, geographic location, prioritizing studies in Latin America; as well as the number of citations and the prestige of the authors. In total, at least 30 academic sources in Spanish and English were compiled and analyzed, ensuring a multidimensional approach to the Hallyu phenomenon. This allowed us to develop a state-of-the-art framework and inform the analysis of the results in this research.

Based on the theoretical framework constructed, a matrix of analytical categories was developed for the study. These categories allowed for the subsequent organization of the collected data: Hallyu culture, cultural exchange and identity, cultural consumption and commerce, and youth as Hallyu consumers and social belonging. Based on the established categories, data collection tools were designed and validated: questionnaires, interview guides, and observation logs. These tools were applied in contexts frequented by Hallyu followers in Cuenca, considering inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The study was conducted in the city of Cuenca and included young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Identities and preferences in this age group are constantly changing and are especially susceptible to the influence of global cultural phenomena. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, choosing individuals with a significant connection to Hallyu, whether as K-pop fans, consumers of Korean products, or interested in other manifestations of this cultural wave. As Sampieri et al. (2014) indicate, purposive sampling does not seek to generalize the results, but rather to obtain rich and in-depth information from people who have a direct relationship with the phenomenon. People outside the established age range, without evident interest in Hallyu, or with barriers to active participation were excluded.

Table 1
Selection Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion criteria
Youth between 15 and 25 years old	Individuals outside the established age range
Residents of the city of Cuenca	Individuals who do not reside in Cuenca
Those who identify as followers of the Hallyu wave	Individual with no clear connection or interest in Hallyu culture
Active participants or consumers of related products, content or events	Individuals with communication or expression barriers that hinder the interview process
Willingness to participate voluntarily and provide detailed information	Those who do not give informed consent or do not wish to participate

Note: Criteria for selecting research participants

During the fieldwork phase, the data collection methods included in-depth interviews with open-ended questions, closed-ended surveys, participatory observations at events, and an analysis of digital platforms. This methodological combination allowed for the collection of both symbolic and concrete data on the development of Hallyu in the city and its impact on young people. The data were systematized and subsequently organized based on the defined categories. A thematic coding process was used to analyze the findings and extract key meanings and trends in the phenomenon studied.

The research also included a phase of active participation, where the researcher, as part of the community, interacted directly with Hallyu followers, both at in-person events and in digital spaces. This strategy enriched the understanding of the processes of cultural identification and appropriation, as well as the motivations behind the consumption and reproduction of Hallyu-related practices.

Through this qualitative methodology, we were able to deepen our understanding of how Hallyu shapes the individual and collective identities of young people in Cuenca, thus contributing valuable insights to cultural sociology and contemporary global studies. Through the application of this methodology, we deepened our understanding of how Hallyu shapes individual and collective identities among young people in Cuenca, contributing valuable insights to cultural sociology and contemporary global studies.

4. Results

4.1 Interview

The interview was conducted with the participation of ten people who are active members of the Hallyu dance cover movement. This group ranged in age from 21 to 28, most of them university students. The interviews were conducted in person, except for two participants who live in Quito and Guayaquil, who were interviewed virtually via Zoom.

Table 2
Participants

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Characteristics
A	28	Male	Finalist KWF-Changwon KR 2015, winner of KWF EC -2022
B	25	Male	Winner of KWF EC 2022 and Hallyu 2018
C	23	Male	Finalist of KWF EC 2017, Yuefest winner
D	21	Male	Finalist of KWF EC 2020
E	25	Female	Finalist of KWF EC 2017
F	21	Female	Hallyu follower since 2016
G	21	Female	Hallyu follower since 2020
H	21	Non-binary	Member of LAW Dance Cover group
I	22	Non-binary	Member of LAW Dance Cover group

Note: Personal information of the interviewees

Regarding Hallyu culture, those interviewed indicated that their first exposure to Hallyu came primarily through K-pop, digital platforms like YouTube, social media, or recommendations from friends and family. Music has been the gateway to a broader consumption of cultural elements such as fashion, gastronomy, cosmetics, and language.

It is evident that the Hallyu community in Ecuador has grown considerably in recent years, going from a small group with some social rejection to consolidating itself as a more widely accepted movement.

Besides the representation and spread of this culture through dance covers and the generation of digital content, the Korean Embassy in Ecuador has played a key role in the expansion of Hallyu. They have organized events such as the KWF and Hallyu Fest, which have allowed for greater visibility and fan participation, thus facilitating the transmission of its philosophy of self-love, discipline, and peace. Regarding cultural commerce, the interviewees indicated that the consumption of Korean products is influenced by accessibility and perceived quality. In cities like Quito and Guayaquil, it is easier to find Korean merchandise, fashion, and snacks, while in Cuenca, fans tend to turn to online stores, since Korean products are unavailable in the local market.

Social media is the main channel for content consumption. Instagram and TikTok stand out as the most used platforms for sharing dance, fashion, and beauty videos. Findings confirm that digital dissemination, coupled with the limited physical supply of products, influences the type of cultural consumption, favoring audiovisual and symbolic content over the acquisition of goods.

Finally, it was concluded that the impact of Hallyu on fans' identity is significant. Many interviewees affirm that this culture has given them self-confidence, encouraging self-expression through clothing, makeup, and the adoption of new life philosophies.

The message of self-love and discipline promoted by K-pop idols has influenced the personal growth of several participants; for some, Hallyu has been a platform for exploring their gender identity and expressing themselves freely without fear of social judgment. They have found in this culture a source of inspiration to overcome personal problems and feel part of a community that understands and supports them. In terms of language, Hallyu has also influenced the way fans communicate, incorporating Korean terms such as "maknae," which refers to the youngest member of a group; "annyeong," as an informal greeting in Korean; "bias," which means the favorite member of a group; and finally, "saranghae," which is a way of saying "I love you" in this language.

They have incorporated all of the terms mentioned above into their everyday vocabulary because they say it is a faster way to understand other Hallyu fans and makes them feel part of the culture. Likewise, it was observed that dance cover, a term that refers to the formation of different K-pop dance groups dedicated to capturing the choreography of their favorite groups, including costumes and makeup, with the goal of representing the group as closely as possible, competing, or simply enjoying it as a hobby. This practice has established itself as one of the most relevant expressions, with young people dedicating considerable time to it, from 3 hours a week to taking it to a professional level, investing around 20 hours a week, resulting in Ecuadorian groups that have achieved recognition at both national and international events.

The results reflect that Hallyu in Ecuador is not only an entertainment phenomenon, but a movement that profoundly impacts the identity and lifestyle of its followers. Through Korean music, fashion, and aesthetics, young people have found a space for self-expression, community, and personal growth. Furthermore, institutional support and constant dissemination on social media have allowed this cultural wave to continue expanding in the country. Participants recognize that the South Korean Embassy has played an important role in the dissemination of Hallyu culture in Ecuador, especially through artistic and cultural events such as the Kpop World Festival (KWF) and Hallyu Fest. However, some interviewees pointed out that this influence and support is felt most strongly in the capital, Quito. In cities like Cuenca, institutional support is more limited or barely visible. Despite this, they emphasize that the embassy has been a key pillar in making the movement visible and legitimizing it, creating spaces for young people to share their passion for Korean culture. In this context, they believe the embassy's work has been valuable, but that it could be expanded to reach other cities with equal strength and continuity.

4.2 Observation

In addition to in-depth interviews, another fundamental tool in this research was participant observation, applied both in virtual and in-person settings.

As part of the Hallyu community in the city of Cuenca, participant observation was not only a methodological technique but also a firsthand experience that allowed us to closely capture the dynamics of this movement through an in-depth understanding of it. By attending and actively participating in cultural

events, festivals, fandom gatherings, and community-organized activities, it was possible to directly observe the interaction between attendees, their behavior, clothing, language, and the ways in which they express their identity and sense of belonging. This immersion permitted a more authentic record of Hallyu cultural expressions in the local context, as well as the spaces for socialization and dissemination that are generated both in person and through social media, where participation is constant, creative, and highly symbolic.

A community highly committed to Hallyu in Cuenca was evident, actively participating in events and gatherings organized by local groups and collectives, such as fandoms. Different types of events were identified, such as exhibitions, fan meetings in cafes, dance and vocal cover competitions, and Korean product fairs.

One of the most relevant aspects is the number of new fans who attend these events and their level of engagement. The Hallyu community in Cuenca has proven to be very active, participating in all the events and their primarily dance-based dynamics, such as random dances, K-drama and K-pop trivia, and fan socializing spaces. It was observed that the audience is mostly composed of young people who, in addition to consuming digital content, seek live experiences that reinforce their sense of belonging to the community. A key point observed was the presence of Korean cultural elements, reflected in music, clothing, and the use of the Korean language in certain events. Furthermore, at larger events, stands selling Korean products have been set up, allowing access to merchandise, cosmetics, and typical South Korean snacks.

Finally, the impact of these events on the community is significant. It was evident that these spaces not only strengthen fandom for Korean culture but also encourage socialization, cultural exchange, and networking among fans. Attendees' feedback indicates that these events provide a space for recreation and generate a sense of community, reinforcing the idea that Hallyu in Cuenca is not merely a digital consumption phenomenon, but a cultural experience actively lived in the city.

Furthermore, the interaction of young people in Cuenca on social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, key platforms for the dissemination and re-creation of Hallyu content, was actively monitored. Observations were also conducted at local events related to Korean culture, such as K-pop festivals, fandom gatherings, and dance cover competitions. These observations allowed us to capture spontaneous expressions, aesthetic practices, group dynamics, and symbolic elements that reinforce the sense of belonging, self-expression, and cultural appropriation among young Hallyu fans. This instrument enriched the understanding of the phenomenon from a more experiential and collective perspective.

Through social media content analysis, it was possible to identify Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as the most active platforms in the Hallyu community in Cuenca. These networks are used daily by fans to share and consume content related to Korean culture. On TikTok and Instagram, short videos are the most popular due to their easy sharing and rapid interaction, while on YouTube, the most viewed videos tend to be music videos and longer-form Hallyu-related content.

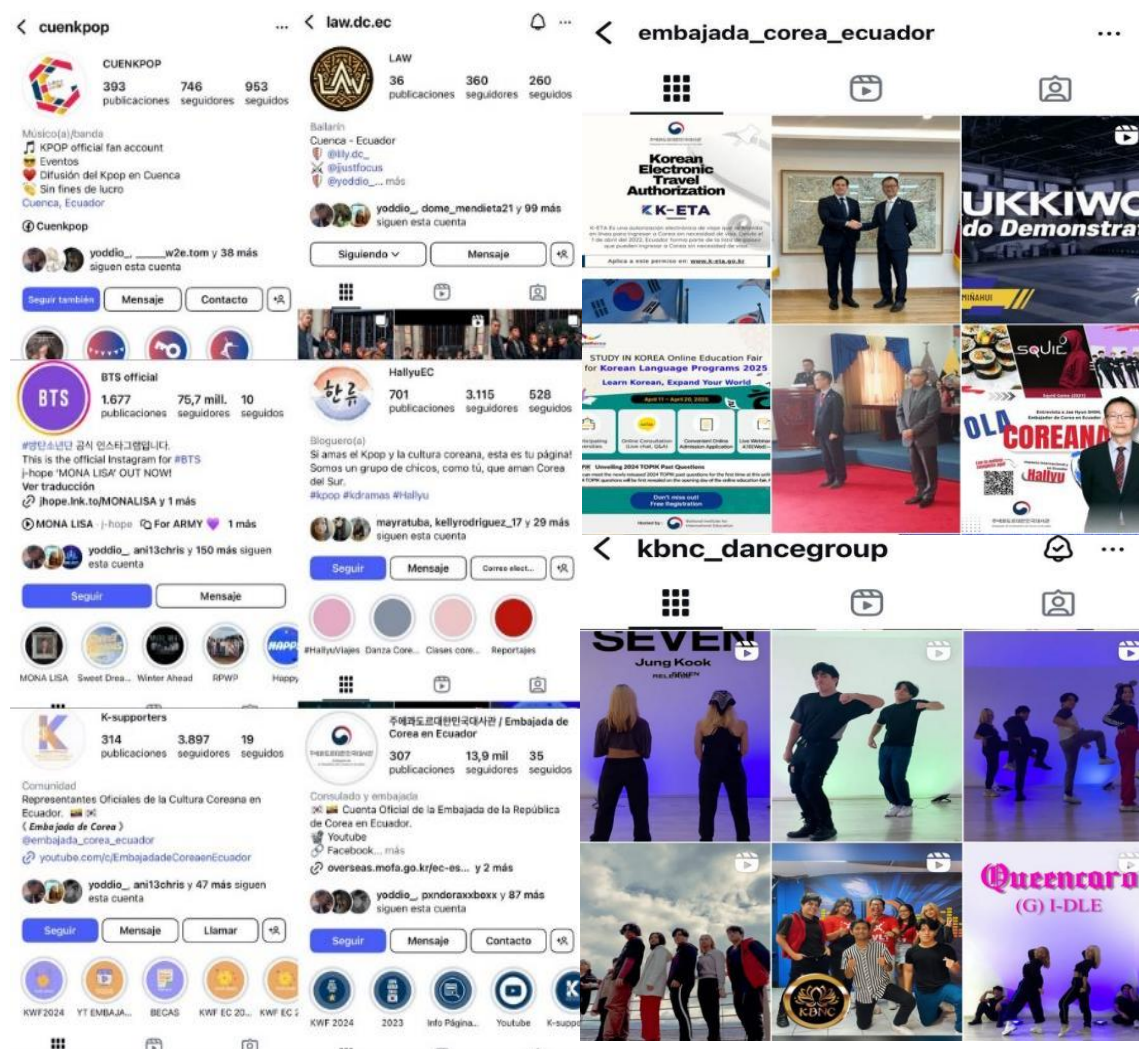
Meanwhile, other platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Weverse also play an important role in the community. Facebook is characterized by the use of long-form texts, where followers share stories, series recaps, interviews, and anecdotes with images about Hallyu. Meanwhile, Twitter and Weverse are spaces where fans can express opinions and hold active conversations about their favorite artists, with Weverse standing out for its direct communication between idols and fans.

Regarding the type of content shared, it was observed that young people in Cuenca primarily use Instagram Stories to share posts about Hallyu. This content is published daily and reflects the high level of engagement with the community. The most popular posts include dance covers, music, and images and videos related to K-pop and events. The posts of a strong Dance Cover community in Cuenca, with a high frequency of choreography and performance posts. Additionally, other forms of expression such as fanfics, edits, and content related to Korean fashion and beauty are quite common on these networks.

In terms of interaction, there are local groups like LAW, which constantly publish dance videos, achieving high numbers of views and reactions on social media. Cuenca fans actively interact with posts by Korean artists and local content creators, generating thousands of likes, comments, and shares. The viralization of content on social media confirms that these platforms are the most significant evidence of Hallyu consumption in Cuenca, as each post generates a strong response from the community. Among the most followed accounts are those of groups like BTS, BLACKPINK, and TWICE, as well as Korean actors and fashion and beauty influencers like Jinnichanel, LilyOnni, IU, and Lee Minho. At the local level, Cuenca fans turn to pages like Ksupporters, Cuen K-Pop, Korean Fest, and the Korean Embassy in Ecuador to stay informed about Hallyu-related news, events, and releases. These accounts play a key role in disseminating information and activities within the community.

These results allow us to conclude that the impact of Hallyu in Cuenca is significant both in the digital realm and in the daily lives of its followers. Social media has been the main driver of dissemination and consumption of Hallyu content, enabling posts to go viral and the creation of active online communities. However, observations at events show that Hallyu is not limited to passive content consumption, but also promotes participation, cultural identity, and social interaction in physical spaces.

Figure1
Social media content



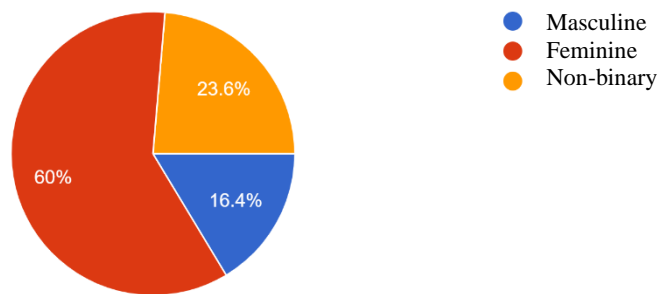
Note: Number of followers and likes on various Instagram accounts and the type of content shared on those channels Instagram, 2025

4.3 Surveys

The survey included 110 respondents. 50.9% of the sample was between the ages of 21 and 25, meaning the majority of respondents were young people, followed by adolescents aged 14 to 20 at 36.4%, and finally, 12.7% were young adults, over the age of 25. This suggests that Hallyu culture has a greater influence on young adults and adolescents, who, due to their constant interaction with global trends through social media and digital platforms, are more exposed to this phenomenon.

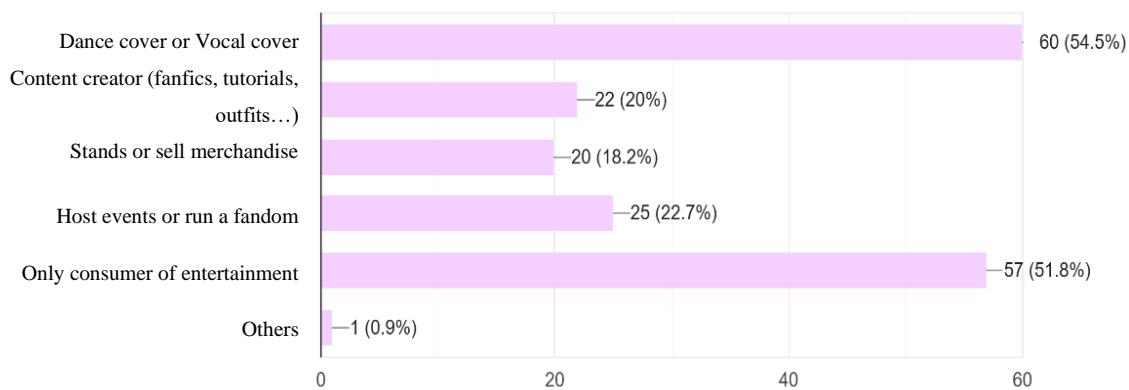
Regarding the gender of the respondents, 60% identified as female, 23.6% as non-binary, and 16.4% as male.

Figure 2
Chart of the gender of respondents



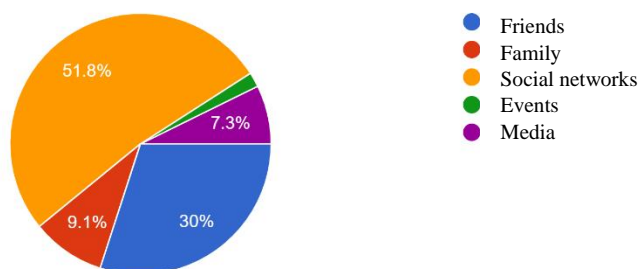
Regarding integration with Hallyu culture, 95.5% of respondents said they felt part of this movement, which reflects a strong connection with Korean elements in their daily lives. In addition, among the most common practices of those who consider themselves part of Hallyu, they mostly perform dance or vocal cover. A very important percentage also represent those who practice creating content, selling Korean products or managing stands, organizing events or belonging to Fandoms.

Figure 3
Scale of the most practiced Hallyu activities



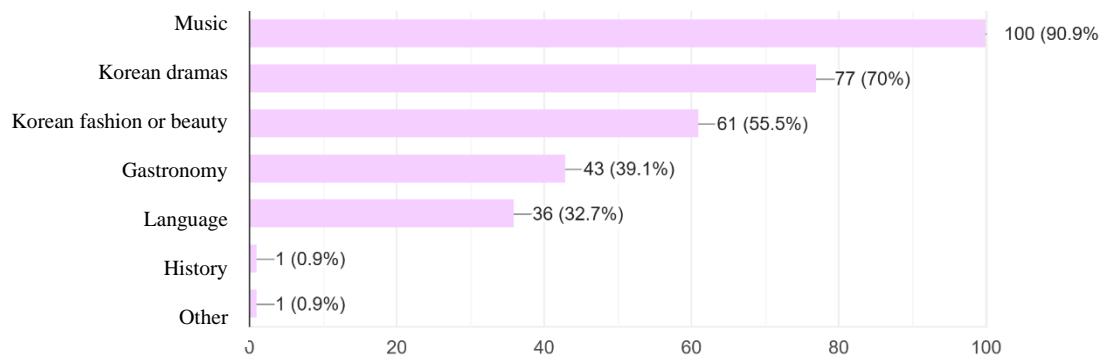
Social networks have been the main means of dissemination of Hallyu for respondents, with 51.8% indicating that they have learned about Korean culture through these platforms.

Figure 4
Means of expansion of Hallyu



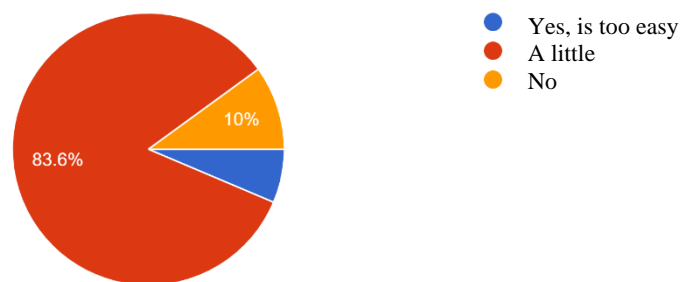
As for the most consumed aspects of Hallyu culture, music is the most popular, followed by Korean dramas, fashion, and Korean beauty.

Figure 5
Scale of the most consumed aspects of Hallyu



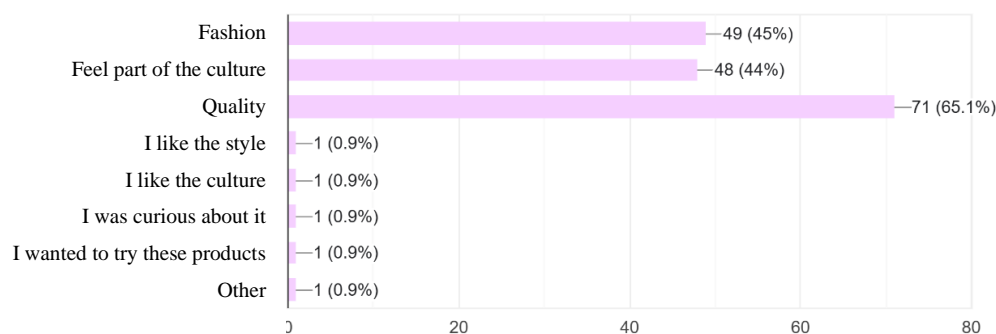
About the accessibility of products related to Hallyu culture in Cuenca, 83.6% of respondents consider that it is "a little" accessible, while 10% say that it is not possible to find that product here and only 6.4% believe that it is "very easy" to find them. This indicates that, despite the growth of the movement, there are still barriers in the supply and distribution of Korean products in the city.

Figure 6
Accessibility of Hallyu products in the city



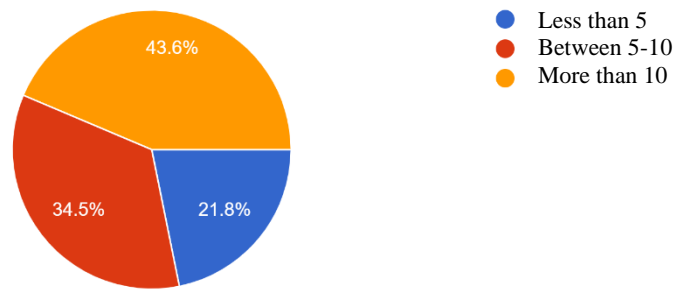
The main motivations for consuming elements of Hallyu culture focused on quality (65.1%), followed by fashion (47.6%), sense of belonging (39%) and general liking for the culture (4.5%).

Figure 7
Scale of the main motivation for consumption



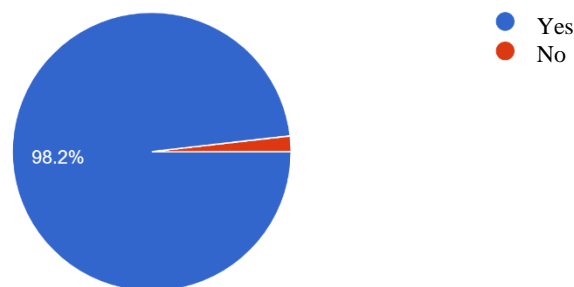
In terms of the time spent consuming Hallyu-related content, 43.6% of respondents indicated that they invest more than 10 hours a week, 34.5% between 5 and 10 hours, and 21.8% less than 5 hours.

Figure 8
Hallyu content consumption time



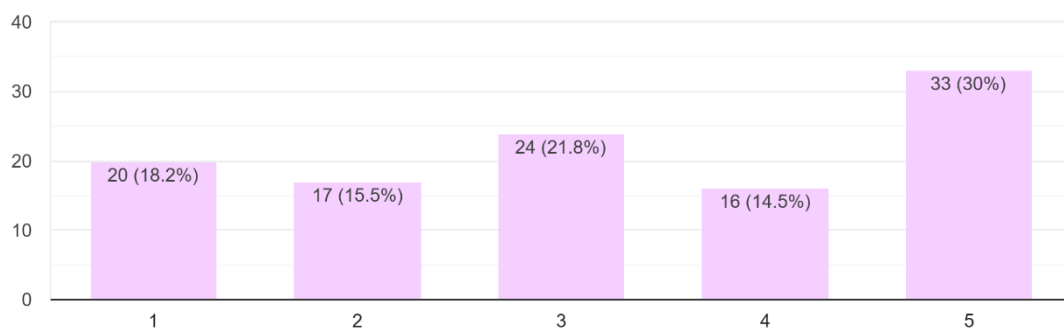
98.2% of those surveyed said they follow accounts of influencers, idols, entertainment companies or pages related to Korean culture on social networks, which reinforces the idea that Hallyu is a digitally driven culture, where interaction with online content is crucial for its dissemination and growth.

Figure 9
Followers of Hallyu content users or pages



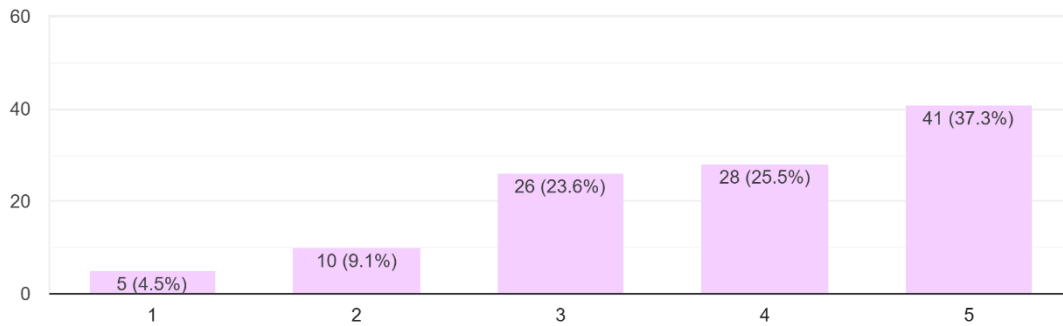
In relation to participation in local events about Hallyu in Cuenca, the frequency of attendance was varied: 18.2% rated their participation with 1 out of 5, and 30% with 5 out of 5. This shows that, although there is an active community of followers, attendance at face-to-face events is not constant for everyone.

Figure 10
Scale of the frequency of attendance at events



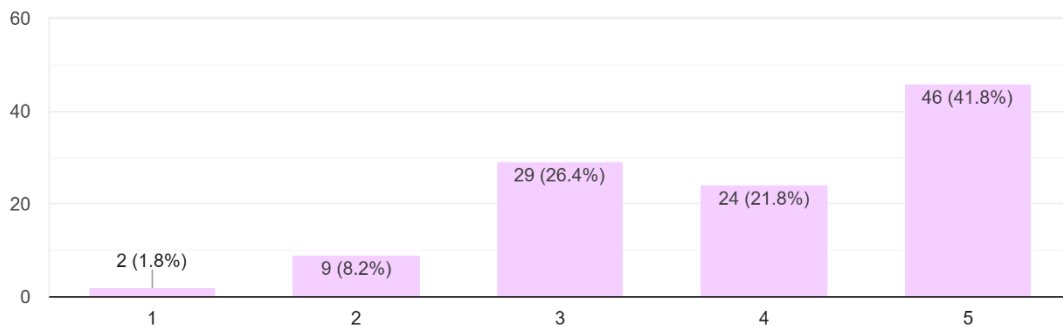
Regarding the influence of Hallyu on fashion and personal style, 37.3% of respondents gave a score of 5 out of 5, while 4.5% of respondents rated it with a point of 1. This indicates that the Korean aesthetic has significantly impacted the visual identity of the followers.

Figure 11
Scale of the influence of Korean fashion



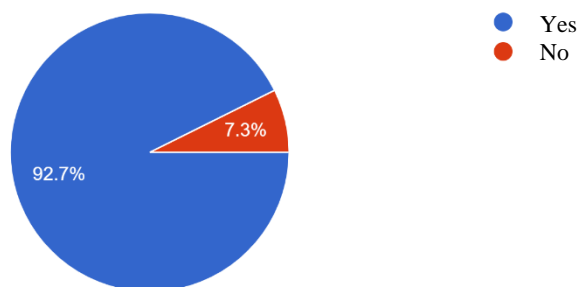
Regarding the importance of Hallyu in daily life, 41.8% of those surveyed rated it with 5 out of 5, which shows that this phenomenon has transcended entertainment to become a relevant aspect in the daily life of many people.

Figure 12
Scale of the importance of Hallyu culture



92.7% of the participants indicated that being part of the Hallyu community has helped them to make new friends or strengthen relationships.

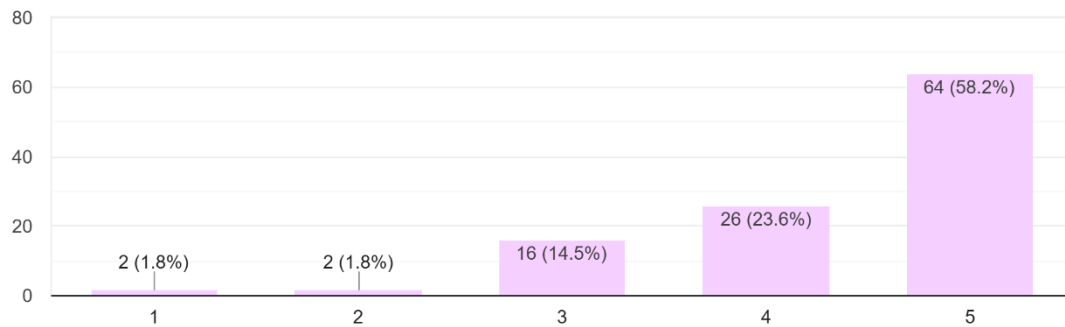
Figure 13
Strengthening relationships and Hallyu community



The perception of the expansion of Hallyu in Cuenca, 58.2% considered that its growth is very likely, which indicates an optimistic view of its consolidation in the city and that its growth will be positive as indicated by previous research.

Figure 14

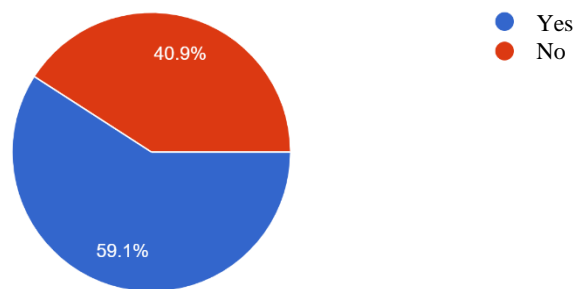
Scale of expansion of this movement in the city



59.1% of respondents said they knew the Hallyu philosophy, while the 40.9% did not. This suggests that, although there is a large consumption of Korean content, not all followers have a deep knowledge about the values that this movement promotes.

Figure 15

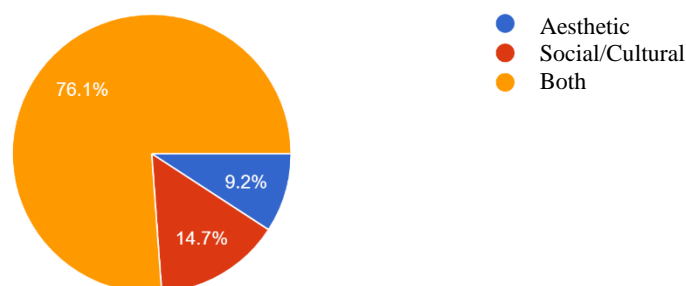
Knowledge of Hallyu philosophy



Finally, when analyzing the perception of the influence of Hallyu, 76.1% of those surveyed stated that it impacts both aesthetically and social-culturally, while 14.7% believe that its influence is only social-cultural and 9.2% only aesthetic. This confirms that Hallyu has managed to transcend the visual and entertainment sphere, impacting the identity and social dynamics of its followers.

Figure 16

Influence of Hallyu as a cultural and aesthetic factor



The results of the survey show that Hallyu has managed to consolidate itself in Cuenca as a cultural movement with a high level of influence on young people. Its impact is not limited only to the consumption of entertainment, but has also generated changes in the identity, social dynamics and community participation of its followers. The role of social networks is fundamental in the dissemination of Hallyu culture, allowing young

people to discover, consume and interact with this phenomenon in a global way. However, certain limitations persist in the access to Korean products in the city, which could be a barrier to the growth of the movement at the commercial level.

Likewise, the Hallyu community has proven to be a space for socialization and integration, contributing to the creation of new friendships and bonds among its followers. This aspect is key to understanding the expansion of Hallyu, since beyond a consumption phenomenon, it also functions as a network of support and personal expression. Hallyu in Cuenca is not only an aesthetic phenomenon, but an expanding cultural movement that impacts multiple aspects of the lives of its followers, reinforcing their identity and generating new forms of social interaction.

5. Discussion

The cultural manifestations, consumption patterns, identity, and sense of belonging generated around this Korean wave, were analyzed through applied research techniques: surveys, interviews, and observation, generating a comprehensive view of the phenomenon. This research on the influence of Hallyu on young people in the city of Cuenca allowed us to contrast the theoretical postulates developed in the conceptual framework to the results obtained.

Based on the findings obtained from the surveys, a strong representation of the female gender and non-binary identities can be seen within the Hallyu community in Cuenca, which coincides with what is proposed in the theoretical framework. Studies such as that by Olmedo (2018) point out how the emotional message, androgynous aesthetic, and focus on universal emotions present in K-pop and Korean dramas have generated a significant connection, including young women and genderqueer individuals such as bisexuals, gays, lesbians, and transsexuals, among others. This shows how Hallyu has provided a space for representation and validation for these identities, strengthening a sense of belonging within the diverse movement. It is important to note that the community has found a way to express their gender roles through Hallyu. However, as stated by Olmedo (2018), idols maintain their masculinity, so it does not transcend the idea that having a "soft" concept identifies them as non-binary.

According to Bruèreç (2023), this expression goes beyond the boundaries of fashion. K-pop has instilled gender aesthetics and created a positive environment toward cross-dressing practices. While the representation of queerness in K-pop is mostly depoliticized, devoid of real love, we can still argue that it encourages the normalization of queer images and provides many young people with easily accessible representation. The phenomenon studied is based on the importance of García's (2021) concept of cultural globalization, understood as a process through which cultural elements expand and are reinterpreted in diverse contexts. Thus, we recognize that the Korean Wave in a city like Cuenca is a very clear example of how global processes impact local culture and transform forms of consumption, identity, and socialization. In this sense, the data show clear evidence that Hallyu has managed to establish itself in the city as a result of the role played by social media and digital platforms.

Vizureanu (2013), among others, points out that in the cultural sphere, the local reappropriation of global trends is recognized as glocalization. This process is evident among young people belonging to the Hallyu culture, as they recognize that they have adapted practices such as dance cover songs, the use of Korean terms, or aesthetic modifications (hair, makeup, clothing), which demonstrate that the phenomenon is not merely a superficial imitation, but rather translates into a meaningful integration into everyday life.

Likewise, Nye (2009) theory of soft power finds support in this research. The findings reveal that South Korean cultural diplomacy, particularly through the South Korean Embassy in Ecuador, has played a strategic role in promoting Hallyu through festivals, contests, and cultural events such as the Kpop World Festival (KWF) and Hallyu Fest, in addition to other types of international cooperation events closely related to government entities. However, some interviewees indicate that this effort is particularly concentrated in Quito, creating a gap in other cities such as Cuenca. This highlights a limitation in the uniform reach of the soft power movement across the country, as discussed by the author. The lack of a constant embassy presence in cities like Cuenca weakens relationships and the interest of its followers.

Regarding cultural consumption, López (2015) and Alvear (2023) argue that the appropriation of cultural elements can vary depending on the accessibility and motivation of consumers. The results partially coincide with these approaches, as, although there is a strong motivation for aesthetic quality, artistic representation, and a sense of belonging, access to Korean products in Cuenca remains limited. This was confirmed in both surveys and interviews, which indicated that much of the merchandising must be purchased online. This limitation has not impeded the movement's expansion, but it does influence its form of

appropriation, prioritizing symbolic consumption (audiovisual content, dance, fashion) over tangible consumption.

The study also confirms the hypothesis that Hallyu influences the construction and redefinition of individual and collective identities (Howard, 2023). Many young people affirm that this culture has allowed them to be more authentic, develop personal confidence, and connect with communities that share similar interests. As Kiaer (2023) argues, Hallyu is a hybrid culture that blends the traditional and the modern, the local and the global, and this is reflected in young people in Cuenca, who reinterpret Korean models from their own perspectives. An example of this is the rise of dance cover songs, where participants not only reproduce choreographies but also incorporate their own clothing and language.

On the other hand, the concept of community and fandom takes on central importance. According to García Camarillo et al. (2023), fandoms are not only spaces of admiration, but also of symbolic production. In Cuenca, this is evident in the creation of content (fanfics, videos, outfits), the organization of events, and the consolidation of groups like LAW. Social media is the main vehicle for this dissemination, confirming what Glodev et al. (2023) pointed out about the role of digital platforms in the viralization of cultural products. In this sense, the results validate the idea that Hallyu is not only consumed but also recreated locally.

The fact that over 73% of participants dedicate more than five hours a week to consuming Hallyu-related content suggests a high level of commitment and belonging. This finding aligns with what has been pointed out regarding the role of Hallyu in shaping globalized lifestyles among new generations, who find in this culture a constant source of entertainment, aspiration, identity, and connection with like-minded communities. Thus, Hallyu in Cuenca is presented as a phenomenon deeply rooted in the daily lives of its young followers, overcoming the barrier of superficial consumption and becoming a pillar of self-expression, social interaction, and identity transformation.

Regarding aesthetics, it is important to highlight that participants acknowledge having modified their way of dressing, applying makeup, and even their way of expressing themselves to align with the visual canons of K-pop. This is consistent with the contributions of Sobur et al. (2018) regarding aesthetics as an identity axis in K-pop. However, some participants also reported facing rejection from their surroundings, which highlights sociocultural tensions inherent to the process of cultural hybridization. Despite this, the majority acknowledge having found a space for authentic expression through Hallyu, which supports Samosir and Wee's (2024) postulates about the redefinition of subjectivities through contact with global cultures.

Furthermore, the survey results confirm that Hallyu is not limited to passive content consumption, but has also fostered active practices such as the creation of digital content, participation in dance cover groups, and the organization of events and commercial stands. With 54.7% participating in activities such as dance or singing covers, and another significant percentage in activities such as content creation or product sales, a clear creative and commercial appropriation of Korean culture is observed. This reinforces what was mentioned in the theoretical framework regarding the Hallyu phenomenon as an active cultural agent that mobilizes youth toward new forms of expression, not only cultural but also economic.

Finally, the results also allow for reflection on the vision of Hallyu as a comprehensive phenomenon. 76.4% of respondents believe its influence goes beyond the aesthetic, also encompassing the sociocultural. This confirms Maulana et al.'s (2024) approach to Hallyu as a form of soft power with political, social, and economic implications. In Cuenca, this phenomenon has generated new forms of socialization, influenced vocational choices, and consolidated youth support networks.

In short, the discussion demonstrates that theory strongly supports the empirical findings, although gaps and challenges are also identified, such as unequal institutional dissemination and the lack of accessible physical products. This research not only confirms many of the theoretical hypotheses but also provides a situated perspective on how young people in Cuenca redefine Hallyu in their daily lives.

6. Conclusion

This research has provided a deeper understanding of the impact of the Hallyu phenomenon on the construction of individual and collective identities and cultural consumption among young people in Cuenca, especially those between the ages of 15 and 24. Through the analysis of various sources, it was confirmed that this phenomenon has generated new forms of expression and belonging among young people, influencing their lifestyles, consumption habits, and social interaction networks. Furthermore, the crucial role of social media in the dissemination and appropriation of Hallyu was identified, as well as the existence of processes of cultural adaptation and resistance within the youth community.

This study contributes to the field of cultural sociology by offering a perspective on how a global phenomenon can be dynamically and meaningfully integrated into local contexts. Although there were limitations in the availability of specific studies on Hallyu in Ecuador, the findings open the door to new research that delves deeper into the relationship between cultural globalization and youth identity in Latin America. Further exploration of the evolution of Hallyu in the region and its long-term impact on the identity constructions of new generations is recommended.

Through a qualitative approach and phenomenological methodology, we were able to explore not only the patterns of cultural consumption associated with Korean culture, but also the subjective experiences that young people associate with this movement. As various authors have pointed out within the theoretical framework, Hallyu has managed to cross borders and become a cultural symbol that redefines the lifestyles, motivations, and social relationships of those who adopt it.

The results revealed that Hallyu is not limited to a passing fad or a superficial expression of aesthetics, but rather acts as a phenomenon that directly impacts the processes of consumption, identification, belonging, and personal expression. Through music, fashion, makeup, language, and the emotional messages of idols, young people not only consume cultural elements but also actively integrate them into their lives, transforming their way of thinking, their image, and their relationship with their surroundings. Furthermore, digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube play a central role in the dissemination and appropriation of Hallyu, confirming the role of social media in the processes of cultural globalization.

One of the study's most notable findings is the role played by the South Korean Embassy in Ecuador as a key agent in cultural diplomacy. Through educational and cultural events, multiple contests, and activities aimed at youth, the embassy has enabled Hallyu to remain active within the country. For the young people interviewed, the embassy's role is recognized as fundamental in legitimizing and expanding the movement; however, it is worth noting the limited presence of this entity outside the capital, which hinders its expansion and weakens its support among Cuenca's youth. These soft power actions not only promote Korean culture but also foster bilateral relations, intercultural respect, and open educational, artistic, and commercial opportunities between the two nations. This research shows that Hallyu has become a significant cultural expression that, beyond its Asian origins, has established a foothold in the Ecuadorian context, especially among younger generations. Its influence transcends entertainment, affecting the consumption, self-image, identity, and social networks of those who adopt it. The expansion and appropriation of Hallyu in Cuenca reflects the capacity of global cultures to resonate locally, transforming imaginaries, social practices, and cultural horizons. These findings not only contribute to the field of cultural sociology but also open up new lines of research on the effects of cultural flows in non-hegemonic contexts such as Latin America.

In summary, the findings of this research show that Hallyu has a multidimensional impact on Cuenca's youth. From a symbolic perspective, it represents a space for emotional escape and personal aspiration. From an identity perspective, it allows young people to redefine their self-images, gender roles, and sense of belonging. From a consumer perspective, it demonstrates a concrete preference for products such as Korean music, cosmetics, and food. From an aesthetic perspective, it directly influences the way people dress, wear makeup, and present themselves socially. Lastly from a community perspective, it generates networks of support, expression, and active participation, particularly through dance cover songs and in-person events. This active appropriation of Hallyu demonstrates that it is not a phenomenon of superficial imitation, but rather a deeply significant process of cultural reconfiguration.

Based on these results, it is recommended that cultural institutions strengthen their presence in intermediate cities like Cuenca through inclusive programs that promote access to Korean content, technology, educational and language programs, and products, as well as recognition of local cultural dissemination initiatives. In this way, future research could explore in greater depth the relationship between Hallyu and the construction of non-binary gender identity, or analyze the economic impacts of consuming Korean products in the region. It would also be valuable to investigate the role of social media algorithms in the dissemination of this cultural wave and its influence on young people's perceptions of South Korea. These lines of research would further enrich our understanding of Hallyu as a globalized global phenomenon.

7. References

- Al-Rodhan, N. (2006). *Definitions of Globalization: A Comprehensive Overview and a Proposed Definition* [Geneva Centre for Security Policy].
https://www.academia.edu/2969717/Definitions_of_Globalization_A_Comprehensive_Overview_and_a_Proposed_Definition_The_International_Relations_and_Security_Network_ETH_Zurich_June_19_2006

- Alvear, F. (2023). *Transculturación: Análisis las estrategias de comunicación y marketing que utiliza el fenómeno bangtan hacia sus públicos* [Transculturation: Analysis of the communication and marketing strategies used by the Bangtan phenomenon towards its audiences]. <https://repositorio.uta.edu.ec/handle/123456789/39714>
- Bretón, M. (2024). El impacto del hallyu en México: Un análisis integral de su influencia cultural y social [The impact of hallyu in Mexico: a comprehensive analysis of its cultural and social influence]. *A&H Revista de Artes, Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales*, 10(19), 97-113.
- Bruèreç, C. (2023). *The Paradox Of Queerness In K-Pop | BØWIE Creators—Home of Queer & Feminist Creators*. Bowie. <https://www.bowiecreators.com/article/the-paradox-of-queerness-in-k-pop>
- Bustos, D. J. (2024). *Diseño de indumentaria Dance Cover para la ciudad de Cuenca* [Dance Cover clothing design for the city of Cuenca]. <http://dspace.uazuay.edu.ec/handle/datos/14889>
- Camarillo, S. (2023). *La ola Hallyu: Un estudio sobre la adopción y adaptación cultural a través de la música y las interpretaciones en Latinoamérica*. Universidad de Texas.
- de Valle Guerra, M. (2022). *El impacto de la música pop de Asia Oriental en América Latina. Estudio de caso de Mayday (Taiwan-China) y Super Junior (Corea del Sur) en Argentina* [The Impact of East Asian Pop Music in Latin America: A Case Study of Mayday (Taiwan-China) and Super Junior (South Korea) in Argentina]. <https://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/688545>
- Estupiñán, M., & Galarza, J. (2023). *Importancia de la interculturalidad en la enseñanza de idiomas extranjeros y la adaptación cultural* [Importance of interculturality in foreign language teaching and cultural adaptation]. 7.
- Ganghariya, G., & Kanozia, R. (2020, junio 1). Proliferation of hallyu wave and korean popular culture across the world: A systematic literature review from 2000-2019. *Journal of Content, Community & Communication*, 11(5), 2456-9011. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343376147_PROLIFERATION_OF_HALLYU_WAVE_AND_KOREAN_POPULAR_CULTURE_ACROSS_THE_WORLD_A_SYSTEMATIC_LITERATURE_REVIEW_FROM_2000-2019
- García, C. (2021). *La cultura Surcoreana y el impacto en los centennnials en Latinoamérica* [South Korean Culture and its impact on mentennnials in Latin America]. Fundación Universitaria del Área Andina.
- García, N. (2004). *Diferentes, desiguales y desconectados: Mapas de la interculturalidad* [Different, unequal, and disconnected: Maps of interculturality]. (3. reimpr). Ed. Gedisa.
- Glodev, V., Wijaya, G., & Ida, R. (2023). The Korean Wave as a globalization of South Korean culture. *WACANA: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Komunikasi*, 22(1), 108-120. <https://doi.org/10.32509/wacana.v22i1.2671>
- Gray, J., Sandvoss, C., & Harrington, C. L. (Eds.). (2017). *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (Segunda edición). New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/9781479845453>
- Howard, M. (2023). *Rendering Hallyu: Gyopo Media Histories of the Korean Wave*. <https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/resolver/1840.20/41189>
- Hughes, D., Seidman, E., & Williams, N. (1993). Cultural phenomena and the research enterprise: Toward a culturally anchored methodology. *American journal of community psychology*, 21(6), 687-703. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00942243>
- Jang, G., & Paik, W. (2012). The Korean Wave as a tool for Korea's new cultural diplomacy. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 02(03), 196-202. <https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2012.23026>
- Jang, W.-J., & Chang, M.-H. (2023). The effect of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) on the music industry. *Industrial Distribution and Business Magazine*, 14(11), 11-18. <https://doi.org/10.13106/JIDB.2023.VOL14.NO11.11>
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.
- Jin, D. yong, Yoon, K., & Min, W. (2021). *Transnational Hallyu: The Globalization of Korean Digital and Popular Culture*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Jung, S. (2011). *View of K-pop, Indonesian fandom, and social media / Transformative Works and Cultures*. Race and Ethnicity in Fandom: Praxis. <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/289/219>
- Khatun, M. (2024). *Hallyu or korean wave: Unravelling cultural dynamics that propelled South Korea global super power status*. 2(1), 6.
- Kiaer, J. (2023). *The Language of Hallyu: More than Polite*. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Language-of-Hallyu-More-than-Polite/Kiaer/p/book/9781032130927?srsId=AfmBOoqkNQzPRCqMc5CC7DfNUOwHtq47CbVyPOAizx56zdwOkfTlPYka>

- Kim, H. (2024). *Las exportaciones de la industria de contenidos de Corea del Sur baten un récord histórico en 2022* [South Korean content industry exports hit a record high in 2022]. Agencia de Noticias Yonhap. <https://sp.yna.co.kr/view/ASP20240105001600883>
- Kim, J. (2007). Why Does Hallyu Matter? The Significance of the Korean Wave in South Korea. *International Journal of Television Studies*, 2(2), 47-59. <https://doi.org/10.7227/CST.2.2.6>
- Kim, M. S. (2021). *El fandom Hallyu en la Ciudad de México y Lima: Poder blando, género y la autoconstrucción de la juventud transcultural en los nuevos medios* [Hallyu fandom in Mexico city and Lima: Soft power, gender, media, self-fashioning of transcultural youth]. <https://hdl.handle.net/2152/90036>
- Lie, J. (2012). What Is the K in K-pop? South Korean Popular Music, the Culture Industry, and National Identity. *Korea Observer*, 43, 339-363.
- López, N., & Ryzhkov, A. (2017). Hallyu y su percepción por los jóvenes coreanos en el contexto marca país [Hallyu and its perception by young Koreans in the context of the country brand]. *Revista Digital Mundo Asia Pacífico*, 6(11), 26.
- Lozano, D. (2021). *Evolución de la industria del entretenimiento surcoreano y la ola coreana Hallyu, en Colombia a través del soft power* [Evolution of the South Korean entertainment industry and the Korean Hallyu wave in Colombia through soft power]. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.
- Macías. (2021). Implicaciones del sueño Hallyu en afluencia de extranjeros a Corea del Sur [Implications of Hallyu Dream on Foreigners' Influx to South Korea]. *PORTES, revista mexicana de estudios sobre la Cuenca del Pacífico*, 15(29), Article 29. <https://revistasacademicas.ucol.mx/index.php/portes/article/view/284>
- Macías, G. (2023). *Análisis del uso de soft power como estrategia de política exterior de Corea del Sur: Caso de relación bilateral con Ecuador (2000-2022)* [Analysis of the use of soft power as a foreign policy strategy in South Korea: Case of the bilateral relationship with Ecuador (2000-2022)]. Puce.
- Maulana, D., Siti, U., Saefullah, K., & Novianti, E. (2024). Hallyu pop culture and the motivation of generation z in visiting South Korea. *Bricolage: Master's Journal in Communication Sciences*, 10(2), 193. <https://doi.org/10.30813/bricolage.v10i2.5365>
- Mejía, D., Albán, J., & Garcés, E. (2022). *Identidad cultural latinoamericana: De las definiciones teóricas a las resistencias decoloniales* [Latin American Cultural Identity: From Theoretical Definitions to Decolonial Resistance]. <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.7042110>
- Menéndez, M. E. (2018). Diplomacia cultural: Aproximación al concepto, y apuntes sobre el modelo de diplomacia cultural en España. *Culturas España* [Cultural diplomacy: an approach to the concept and notes on the cultural diplomacy model in Spain]. *Revista de Gestión Cultural*, 5(2), 29. <https://doi.org/10.4995/cs.2018.10816>
- Moreno, C., Ordóñez, A. A., & Ramón, S. (2024). Influencia del K-pop en el comportamiento e intención de compra del consumidor en línea [The influence of K-pop on online consumer behavior and purchasing intentions]. *593 Digital Publisher CEIT*, 9(3), 397-409. <https://doi.org/10.33386/593dp.2024.3.2429>
- Necula, A. (2017). The Hallyu Influence. K-POP on Foreign Lands. *"Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research (IJIR)*, 3(6), 295-301. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345942968_The_Hallyu_Influence_K-POP_on_Foreign_Lands
- Nye, J. S. (2009). *Soft Power: The Means of Success in Global Politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Oh, I., & Park, G. (2012). From B2C to B2B: Selling Korean Pop Music in the Age of New Social Media. *Korea Observer*, 43, 365-397.
- Olmedo, T. (2018). *Estereotipos raciales y de género en el kpop. Caso en español* [Racial and Gender Stereotypes in K-Pop: A Case Study in Spanish]. https://uvadoc.uva.es/bitstream/handle/10324/33344/TFM_F_2018_60.pdf?sequ
- Páez, D., & Zubieta, E. (2004). Cultura y psicología social [Culture and social psychology]. *Research Gate*, 958. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dario-Paez-2/publication/285580199_Psicologia_Social_Cultura_y_Educacion_Libro_descatalogado_2014/links/565f878708ae1ef929855c68/Psicologia-Social-Cultura-y-Educacion-Libro-descatalogado-2014.pdf
- Panus, M. (2016). *Tema: Análisis semiótico de la ola coreana "hallyu wave" y su influencia sociocultural en los jóvenes miembros de la asociación hallyu ecuador de la ciudad de guayaquil* [Semiotic analysis of the Korean "Hallyu Wave" and its sociocultural influence on young members of the Ecuador Hallyu Association in Guayaquil]. Universidad de Guayaquil.
- Preyer, G. (2016). Una interpretación de la globalización: Un giro en la teoría sociológica [Interpreting Globalization: A Switch in Sociological theory]. *Nueva Época*.
- Qie, X. (2024). Spatio-temporal analysis of cultural product exports and factors affecting spatial distribution. *PLOS ONE*, 19(3), e0299654. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0299654>

- Robertson, R. (1995, enero 1). *Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity*. SciSpace - Paper; SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250563.N2>
- Robledo, A. (2022). *Prácticas de consumo y uso social del Hallyu a través de redes sociodigitales por parte de los fandoms en México [Consumption practices and social use of Hallyu through social media by fandoms in Mexico]*. <https://ri-ng.uaq.mx/handle/123456789/3266>
- Rocha, J. (2021). *Hallyu (la ola coreana) y su impacto económico onómico [Hallyu (the Korean wave) and its economic impact]*. Casa Asia. <https://www.casaasia.es/actualidad/hallyu-la-ola-coreana-y-su-impacto-economico/>
- Rodríguez, W., & Alom, A. (2009). El enfoque sociocultural en el diseño y construcción de una comunidad de aprendizaje [Sociocultural approach and construction of a learning community]. *Actualidades Investigativas en Educación*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.15517/aie.v9i4.9520>
- Sampieri, R., Collado, C., & Baptista, P. (2014). *Metodología de la investigación* (Sexta edición) [Methodology of the investigation]. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Sobur, A., Darmawan, F., Kusumalestari, R. R., Listiani, E., & Ahmadi, D. (2018). The Meaning of K-Pop and Self-Concept Transformation of K-Pop Fans in Bandung. *MIMBAR : Jurnal Sosial Dan Pembangunan*, 34(2), 414-422. <https://doi.org/10.29313/mimbar.v34i2.3729>
- Steger, M. B. (2013). *Globalization: A very short introduction* (3.). Oxford Univ. Press.
- Tandy, A. C. H., & Handoyo, R. D. (2024). The impact of the Korean Wave on South Korea's consumer goods exports to ASEAN-5 countries. *Development Economies Magazine*, 9(1), 27-36. <https://doi.org/10.20473/jde.v9i1.53284>
- United Nations Children's Fund. (2021). *BTS y Big Hit renuevan su compromiso con la campaña "LOVE MYSELF" para ayudar a UNICEF a poner fin a la violencia y el abandono, así como fomentar la autoestima y el bienestar [BTS and Big Hit renew their commitment to the "LOVE MYSELF" campaign to help UNICEF end violence and neglect, as well as promote self-esteem and well-being]*. <https://www.unicef.org/es/comunicados-prensa/bts-y-big-hit-renuevan-su-compromiso-con-la-campa%C3%B1a-love-myself-para-ayudar>
- Vizureanu, V. (2013). Some Remarks Concerning the Concept of Glocalization. *Public Reason*, 5, 69-86.
- Zambrano, T., & Zamora, K. (2022). *Hallyu: Consumo Cultural y Desarrollo del Sector Centro Comercial de Guayaquil [Hallyu: Cultural Consumption and Development of the Commercial Center Sector of Guayaquil]*. <http://repositorio.ug.edu.ec/handle/redug/65642>
- Zarco, A. (2018). Difusión de dramas coreanos, un análisis de su éxodo a América Latina y Colombia [Distribution of Korean dramas: an analysis of their exodus to Latin America and Colombia]. *Revista Palabra, «palabra que obra», 18*, 82-98. <https://doi.org/10.32997/2346-2884-vol.0-num.18-2018-2165>

8. Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Introduction

This interview guide, designed as part of the research, aims to gather detailed information on the perception, impact, and ways in which young people in Cuenca experience and adopt elements of Hallyu culture in their daily lives. Through these interviews, we seek to understand how the consumption of music, dramas, fashion, cuisine, and other aspects of South Korean culture has influenced the participants' identity, social relationships, and consumption habits. We will also explore the personal motivations behind this affinity, as well as the barriers and opportunities that exist for the expansion of this phenomenon in the city. The questions have been formulated with the aim of obtaining thoughtful and detailed responses, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the impact of Hallyu in the local context. The information collected will be used exclusively for academic purposes, ensuring confidentiality and respect for opinions.

Characterization of the Interviewees

The participants in this interview belong to an age range between 14 and 28 years, with a greater concentration in the 18 to 25 age group. As for gender, the majority identify as female, although male and non-binary people are also included, reflecting the diversity of the Hallyu community in Cuenca.

In terms of occupation, the interviewees are mainly members of the dance cover community even high school and university students, although they also include young people who work in various areas, such as commerce, digital content creation and entrepreneurship related to Korean products. All participants have a common link with Hallyu culture, either as consumers of its content (music, dramas, fashion, gastronomy, etc.) or as people actively involved in activities such as thematic events or the marketing of products associated with this cultural current.

Questionnaire

Hallyu Culture

How did you first learn about Hallyu, since when, and which aspects of Korean culture do you find most appealing?

Do you consider yourself part of the Hallyu culture?

What impact has Hallyu culture had on your life?

Has the Hallyu community given you a sense of belonging?

Which aspects of Hallyu culture do you consider most influential in the cultural diffusion process—life philosophy, aesthetics, art, language, etc.?

Through which channels do you think Hallyu culture has been most widely spread?

Have you ever contributed to the dissemination of Hallyu culture through any social media platform?

Can you mention any terms related to Hallyu culture and explain their meaning?

Do you think Hallyu culture has spread in the city of Cuenca?

How do you perceive the social acceptance of Hallyu culture in the city?

Have you ever experienced rejection from family or friends because of your involvement in Hallyu culture? If so, what kind?

Is there any specific vocabulary or terminology you use as part of this movement?

Are you familiar with the philosophy behind Hallyu? What message do you think this movement seeks to convey to young people?

Cultural commerce

What types of products do you think are consumed locally as part of the Hallyu phenomenon, art, food, aesthetics, fashion?

What motivates you to consume Hallyu culture?

Is it accessible to consume Hallyu-related products or content in your city?

Identity construction

What changes have you experienced in your life since becoming part of the Hallyu culture—fashion, aesthetics, life philosophy?

Do you feel part of the Hallyu culture? If so, which aspects do you identify with the most?

Is there a particular artist or group you identify with? Who and why? How has this role model influenced your life?

Do you believe diplomacy has influenced the spread of Hallyu in Cuenca?

Are you aware of the role of the South Korean Embassy in Ecuador?

Appendix 2

Survey Guide

Introduction

This survey aims to analyze the influence of Hallyu culture on young people in the city of Cuenca, considering aspects such as the consumption of Korean content, participation in events and communities, and the impact on their identity and lifestyle. Through this research, we seek to understand how this global phenomenon has been adopted and adapted in the local context, as well as its scope and relevance in the daily lives of the respondents through closed answers in order to obtain concrete and synthesized information.

Characterization of the Respondents

The survey was applied to a total of 110 people, mostly young people between 14 and 28 years old, with a greater concentration in the 21 to 25 age range. As for the gender distribution, a predominance of people who identify as feminine was observed, followed by non-binary and masculine people.

In terms of employment, most of the respondents are high school and university students, although young workers and entrepreneurs also participated. All respondents have some kind of relationship with Hallyu culture, either as consumers of its content (music, dramas, fashion, gastronomy, among others) or as active participants in the community.

Questionnaire

- **How old are you?**
 - 14–20
 - 21–25
 - Over 25
- **What is your gender?**
 - Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary
 - **Hallyu Culture**
- **Do you consider yourself part of the Hallyu culture?**
 - Yes
 - No
- **Do you practice any activity related to Hallyu culture? Which one?**
 - Dance cover or vocal cover
 - Content creator (fanfiction, outfit videos, vlogs, tutorials...)
 - Stands or Korean product sales
 - Organize events or lead a fandom
 - Only a consumer of entertainment and products
 - Other
- **How did you first learn about Hallyu culture?**

- Friends
- Family
- Social media
- Events
- Mass media
- **Which aspects of Hallyu do you consume most frequently?**
 - Music
 - Korean dramas
 - Korean fashion or beauty
 - Korean food
 - Korean language
 - Other
- **How many hours per week do you spend consuming Hallyu-related content?**
 - Less than 5
 - Between 5–10
 - More than 10
- **Do you follow influencers, idols, entertainment companies or pages related to Korean culture on social media?**
 - Yes
 - No
- **How frequently do you participate in Hallyu-related events or meetups in Cuenca?**
 - Not at all ①②③④⑤ Very frequently
- **Are you familiar with the Hallyu philosophy or the message it aims to convey?**
 - Yes
 - No
- **Do you think this movement will continue expanding in the city?**
 - Not at all ①②③④⑤ Very much
- **Identity Construction**
- **Has your style of clothing, makeup, or hairstyle changed under the influence of Korean fashion?**
 - Very little ①②③④⑤ A lot
- **On a scale of 1 to 5, how important is Hallyu in your daily life?**
 - Not important ①②③④⑤ Very important
- **Do you believe being part of the Hallyu community has helped you make new friends or strengthen relationships?**
 - Yes
 - No
- **Do you think Hallyu is a phenomenon that has influenced only aesthetics, or also social and cultural aspects?**
 - Aesthetic
 - Social/Cultural
 - Both
- **Cultural Consumption**
- **Do you consider it accessible to find Korean products, merchandise, or cultural elements in the city?**
 - Yes, very easy
 - Somewhat
 - No
- **What is your main motivation for consuming these elements?**
 - Fashion
 - Feeling part of the culture
 - Quality
 - Other

Appendix 3

Observation content log

Social media content						
Date & time	Platform	Content	Interaction	Admiration, pride, excitement	N.º Posts	Categories
2025-04-8 20:00	Instagram	Dance Cover Reels (Various groups)	20,000 views, 1,200 likes, 340 comments, 20 shares	Interest, enthusiasm	8	Culture, Aesthetics
2025-04-10 15:30	TikTok	Makeup, dance, and outfit tutorials	50,000 views, 1,980 likes, 150 comments, 70 shares	Euphoria, identification	10	Aesthetics
2025-03-15 18:00	YouTube	Music videos, covers, and dance practice	70,000 views, 900 likes, 80 comments	Empathy, sadness	1	Culture
2025-03-18 21:00	Facebook	Drama post + comments	87 reactions, 30 comments	Curiosity, joy	1	Culture
2025-03-20 17:45	Instagram	Photo of Korean snacks + review	310 likes, 60 comments	Joy, connection	2	Products
2024-03-22 14:10	Weverse	Real-time chat between idols and fans	Active conversations	Admiration, pride, excitement	7	Culture

Appendix 4

Participatory observation log

Participatory observation in events								
Date & time	Type of event (Artistic, Cultural, Commercial)	Attendees	Participants	Age range	Attendees' aesthetics	Homogeneity among the attendee group	Activities	Cultural elements
2024-12-07 16:00	Artistic	Aprox. 150	DC groups, stands, some followers	15-25	K-pop fashion, dyed hair, eye-catching accessories	High – sharing of Hallyu aesthetics	Dance Cover performance, Dancing contest	K-pop music, Korean language, visual aesthetics
2025-03-30 14:00	Cultural	Aprox. 60	Fans	15-30	Simple aesthetics with Korean details (lightsticks, photocards)	Media – different levels of involvement	Random dance, Cultural fair with food, talks about Korea	Dance, Gastronomy, Language, Korean Cultural Values
2024-04-05 17:00	Commercial	Aprox. 200	Local shop, fans and content creators	15-30	Outfits inspired by idols, use of Korean cosmetics	High – shared aesthetic codes	Random dance, Cultural fair with food, talks about Korea	Cosmetics, fashion, merchandising, audiovisual products

Appendix 5

Interview responses

Analysis categories	Personal data	Hallyu Culture	Cultural commerce	Identity construction
Daniel Arcos – Quito 28 years	Finalist KWF 2015 South Korea - Changwon	He discovered Hallyu through K-pop after finding content from the group Shinee on YouTube. He has been part of the community for 17 years and is a benchmark in the world of dance cover songs, having been part of the group Xplicit since 2014, spreading this culture in the country through videos, presentations, etc. The Korean wave has been fundamental in his daily life for a long time, which generated a sense of belonging, encouraging him to take dance classes, learn more about aesthetics, culture, and even learn the language. He indicates that before, there was not such a large community, which is why there was a lot of rejection of this culture, but currently, he believes that people are more receptive and this movement is much more appreciated. He also stated that the role of the Korean embassy has been one of the fundamental pillars in the dissemination of culture, promoting large-scale artistic and cultural events since 2010. Due to his trip to Korea in 2015, he was able to delve deeper into the Hallyu philosophy and fully understand the message of discipline, peace, and self-love that it seeks to leave.	Her main motivation for acquiring Hallyu items is quality, and especially the entire experience involved in consuming a product, good, or content. Currently, she believes she mostly consumes music, fashion, and merchandise; since she's located in the capital, finding Korean products is very accessible.	He claims that thanks to Hallyu, he's experienced personal growth. For him, a before and after in his life has clearly changed since he discovered this culture. Not only in his way of dressing and consuming, but also in his way of thinking and how he sees himself. This culture has motivated him to be more disciplined and perseverant without neglecting his self-respect.
Carlos Erazo Guayaquil 23 years	Winner KWF EC 2022	She joined Hallyu in 2009 thanks to her cousin, who was already into K-pop. She says that joining the dance group completely changed her life's direction, as she started a family with its members. She has high aspirations in the world of dance and plans to continue promoting this cultural movement professionally for a long time to come. She believes the embassy's role is strong only within the capital and that this organization no longer provides as much attention to other cities.	What he mostly consumes is music and also a bit of gastronomy since he is in GYE and says he can find a variety of places that offer very interesting snacks, but he is not a big fan of Korean products.	Because of dancing, he's worn makeup several times for his performances. He also says he liked dyeing his hair since he was little, but this move has motivated him to do so without feeling judged. Through his role models, he's changed his self-perception and strengthened his courage and personality. He believes he's experienced significant personal growth.
Paúl Chalco-Cuenca 23 years	Finalist KWF EC 2017	He's been part of this movement since 2015, having been introduced to the music through friends, which led him to consume more items due to his interest in Hallyu. He shares content on his social media, such as vlogs and dance covers, and within the city, he's the leader of one of the first groups to reach the KWF finals, having dedicated himself to training and learning the language due to his love for the culture. He affirms that the embassy's support for the community has kept the wave going within Ecuador, holding events like the Hallyu Fest and bringing together his followers on those occasions. His favorite group is BTS, which follows his message of self-love.	The main reason for buying Korean products is because of the curiosity they generate. He believes the way they sell their art and products in general is very appealing to the public and different from what we have in the city. The quality is higher, but it's difficult to find merchandise in the city, as there are very few stores selling Korean products.	Since learning about the culture, he no longer feels judged when changing aspects of his appearance, such as his hair color or makeup. Being a cover dancer, he bonds with the artist, and in Korea, such practices are normal. He has adopted new ways of dressing and also feels more confident.
Josué Pelaez-Cuenca 21 years	Finalist KWF EC 2020	She discovered Hallyu in 2017 through a YT video. Thanks to the Hallyu culture, she joined a DC group where she practices many hours a week, giving them a sense of belonging and generating many friendships that she considers family. She often felt rejected, but currently she can speak freely about this culture. She hasn't gotten too involved, so she doesn't know the Hallyu philosophy, but she does know the messages that most groups want to convey, such as self-love.	He consumes social media and entertainment content daily, and rarely purchases products because he isn't very interested. He believes there isn't much variety in the city for these products either.	It has motivated him to work out at the gym since idols maintain very strict health care routines, he has also tried various Korean diets and follows Korean street style clothing a lot.
Cristina Hurtado-Cuenca	Finalist KWF EC 2017	She has been involved in Hallyu culture since 2011. Her father liked K-pop music, which is how she learned Hallyu. She also joined a DC group at a very young age, considering her team like family, and has been dancing ever since. She also learned a little of the language and always participates in all the events that take place, not	Consume casi todos los elementos de esta cultura, principalmente merchandising, pero afirma que no es fácil conseguir esto en la ciudad por lo que siempre pide	She has dared to share content on social media and upload dance ideas for many years. Hallyu has strengthened her confidence, and she also assures that

25 years		only within the city but also throughout the country. She believes the role of the embassy is important, but it doesn't have much relevance in spreading the culture in cities other than the capital. She learns about the Hallyu philosophy and the message of self-love.	online. Le gusta mucho los cosméticos, snacks,	during this process she was able to explore different genres and how she perceives herself since she discovered Hallyu, which has practically transformed her life. It has motivated him to work out at the gym since idols maintain very strict health care routines, he has also tried various Korean diets and follows Korean street style clothing a lot.
Jacqui García-Cuenca 21 years	Hallyu follower since 2016	She discovered the culture through social media and Korean series in 2016. Being part of the movement has given her a sense of belonging through messages from her favorite groups. She says it has helped her overcome personal issues involving anxiety and depression, along with the philosophy of self-love. She believes that despite the culture being very strong in the city, there is still a lot of rejection. She has incorporated terms like bias, maknae, and anniong into her vocabulary.	She mostly consumes content from social media, primarily Instagram and Facebook. She also consumes food found in snack stores, along with beauty products like cosmetics, her preference for their high quality.	This culture has encouraged her to have self-confidence, regardless of the opinions of others. Thanks to the events, she shares her experience with the rest of the community and has allowed her to make physical changes, such as changing her hair color and the way she dresses.
Melanie Campos-Cuenca 21 years	Hallyu follower since 2020	She joined Hallyu through a family member who introduced her to K-pop, which was her main motivation to become part of this movement. She believes the Hallyu community is very supportive of its members, which has given her a strong sense of belonging. She also points out that people appreciate art much more, which has allowed the expansion of Hallyu, and social media is the main channel for its dissemination. She follows the Hallyu message and philosophy that speaks of being unique and fulfilling your dreams. She has incorporated terms such as bias, maknae, anniong, and saranghe into her vocabulary.	What she's most frequently accessed are snacks and cosmetics at local stores; her curiosity about these products is her main motivation for consumption. She also consumes social media content, such as videos about Korean fashion and skincare.	It allowed me to open myself up to new experiences and knowledge, the way I see myself and my personality. She doesn't consider it to be something aesthetic, it's more of a movement that allows you to feel like yourself.
Ian Navarrete-Guayaquil 21 years	Member of LAW Dance Cover group	He has been a follower of Hallyu since 2021. He learned about it through friends, and what caught his attention the most were the dances that K-pop groups perform. After learning about this culture, he says he invests many more hours in this sport, that he met many people who are now very important in his life, and now he likes to compete since he joined his dance group. He is aware of the message that Hallyu leaves to pursue his dreams. He has rarely felt rejection for belonging to this movement. He is not familiar with the role of the embassy within the country.	He consumes nothing but food; he claims to be very curious about Korean snacks. He also watches YT content like dance videos.	After learning about the culture, she feels she has been able to freely express her non-binary gender, which has given her more confidence to be able to change her hair color and dress the way she likes without feeling judged.
Dorian Bustos-Cuenca 22 years	Member of LAW Dance Cover group	He has been part of Hallyu culture since 2016. Thanks to its influence on his life, he enrolled in dance classes and studied textile design to recreate the outfits of his favorite groups. He believes Hallyu has had a huge impact on the city, but he has still felt rejection from his family and friends for following this movement. His main means of communication are Instagram and TikTok, where the strongest aspects of the culture, which for him are music, fashion, and aesthetics, are evident. He affirms that for him, the Hallyu philosophy is based on self-love.	She frequently consumes Korean food at snack shops in the city, as well as fashion and beauty. She believes her main motivation is the quality of these products and also does it to feel part of the community, but she has to buy products online since those items are not easy to find in the city.	After learning about the culture, she feels she has been able to freely express her non-binary gender, which has given her more confidence to be able to change her hair color and dress the way she likes without feeling judged.