

HALLYU (한류) IN SPAIN: VIEWERS, FANBASES AND NEW WAYS OF CONSUMING AUDIOVISUAL CONTENT

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IN THE DIGITAL SWARM: A NEW KIND OF CINEPHILIA

In 1990, Joseph Nye defined “soft power” as the new way for states to exert control and position themselves internationally. His study explained how this practically invisible power was filtered through culture, prestige, and audiovisual entertainment. In contrast with the old, unruly power of warfare, relations now would be established by means of this soft power rather than by military might (Nye, 1990). Thus, while the former USSR had striven to maintain a huge army, China and (especially) the United States had diversified their strategic efforts in order to disseminate their culture through success in sports, contributions to the arts and sciences, and film production. Twenty years after Nye formulated his theory, soft power is recognised as a highly effective weapon of control and influence between nations. Audiovisual entertainment is thus understood not merely as a

pastime, but also as a way that states can interact and assert their prestige.

It was precisely when the theory of soft power was first being developed, at the end of the twentieth century, that Korean television series began gaining popularity in China. Little by little, these audiovisual narratives began conquering the Asian giant, and it was Chinese journalists who were the first to give a name to all the Korean audiovisual and musical products invading their country: Hallyu (Yang, 2012: 105), written 한류, which translates roughly as “Korean Wave”. As noted by Kim (2015), Hallyu refers to a characteristic way of producing and consuming dramas, *doramas*, films and music made in South Korea.

Towards the end of the last century, Korean drama series began taking over television programming in China, and in other Asian countries as well. Although these series were widely disparaged as “women’s stories” or sentimental melodramas, they very soon became a clear example

of soft power (Nye and Kim, 2013) that found fans not only in China but also in Japan (Oh, 2009), throughout Southern Asia (Yang, 2012) and even in Latin America (Zarco, 2018). In less than two decades their impact had become global, and *Hallyu* had been consolidated as a new form of globalised audiovisual entertainment (Kim, 2015).

Although its expansion began at the end of the twentieth century, it was not until the development of social networks and the widespread use of the Internet that Hallyu reached every corner of the world (Kim, 2015), as online platforms facilitated the mass distribution of South Korean productions (Jang, 2012). Unlike other movements in film or television, Hallyu began as a vocation for a socially engaged audience, and more specifically for a creative audience, i.e., consumers who were eager to participate and generate new content (Deltell, 2014). These productions demanded a new kind of attitude from their audiences. Marinescu (2014) explains that Hallyu is not just a type of cinematic, television or musical production, but a way of understanding relations between an audiovisual product and its audience. Korean audiovisual content has established a form of communication between its film and music creators and their audiences. Fans of the Korean Wave contribute to its programming and to the reception of these productions in different parts of the world. Without referring directly to the Asian movement, Castells (2009) describes this new kind of viewer whose preferred viewing schedule is not “prime time” but “my time”; in other words, active viewers who consume content and share their personal experience on digital media.



Promotional poster for the successful drama *Descendants of the Sun*

Reports by KOCIS (Korean Culture and Information Service) clearly indicate that Korean music, or K-pop, represents the tip of the iceberg of Hallyu culture. K-pop has achieved its huge success thanks to the Internet and the thousands of followers of the movement who have shared and created forums for exchange, the so-called “fanbases” (KOCIS, 2011a, 2011b and 2015). These online fan forums became the best way of disseminating and expanding the reach of South Korean musical and audiovisual products. Thanks to the actively social audience willing to redistribute the message, South Korean products spread quickly in the most diverse contexts. The purpose of Hallyu, and of any soft power model, is to achieve worldwide recognition for these audiovisual productions and to blend their iconography in with the local culture. In this process, it is essential that each local audience view the Korean movement as something familiar or even as their own. To do this, as Kim and Ryoo (2008) point out, from the outset Hallyu has sought to construct a global referential universe.

The spread of Hallyu has been anything but random and, as numerous authors have suggested, the different South Korean governments over the years have supported this globalisation strate-

gy (Nye and Kim, 2013). Korean audiovisual products have opened up previously unimaginable avenues of communication between China, Korea and Japan (Oh, 2009). The musicians, actors and directors of the series and films in this movement have been effectively disseminating the culture of their country. As Lee Don-Yeon notes, K-pop solo artists now represent a recognisable international star system in most countries in Asia, the Americas and Europe (Lee and Nornes, 2015). The image of K-pop singers forms part of the personal imaginary of young people all over the planet, but this powerful audiovisual and musical representation has only been established thanks to the co-creation of spontaneous communities of followers who have adopted Hallyu modes of representation as their own. Thanks to these fans, Korean pop culture has been consolidated not only in Asia (Chua and Iwabuchi, 2008), but all over the world (Kuwahara, 2014).

Hallyu's worldwide expansion would not have been possible without the contributions and cultural activism of its fanbases. As Dal Yong Jin and Kyong Yoon (2016) describe so well, foreign fans are engaging in an ongoing campaign to build a social mediascape in which Korean productions can be distributed and understood. In every country that receives Hallyu content, an active audience emerges that begins sharing news, comments and experiences online until the movement has positioned itself as a recognised and accepted fashion. This has happened in countries as diverse as China (Chen, 2017), Peru (Flores Yapuchura, 2013), Palestine and Israel (Otmazgin and Lyan, 2013), Bolivia (Rosas, 2015) and Switzerland (Hubinette, 2012). These fanbases are not just participatory audiences that share things online, as occurs in Spain with other audiovisual content (Quintas Froufe and González Neira, 2014; Claes, Deltell and Congosto, 2015), as these fans act almost like cultural ambassadors for Hallyu. This new type of viewer is identifiable for displaying a highly conscious form of activism.

The activism of Hallyu followers and their fanbases reflects a creative audience that is not satisfied with merely consuming audiovisual narratives, but participates by commenting, critiquing, praising and discussing them. This is the cinephilia of the twenty-first century, where the viewer is also a content creator. Just as the cinephilia of the French New Wave contributed to a reappraisal of Hollywood cinema in Europe (Baeque and Tesson, 2004), these fanbases are consolidating the Hallyu universe around the world. The new audiovisual media not only generate their own unique modes of distribution and exhibition, but also encourage a new kind of commitment in viewers.

Thus, in some cases, this content is distributed and exhibited almost exclusively via these new promotional channels (Jung and Shim, 2017), and it is the followers who, with their comments and actions, whip up excitement over South Korean audiovisual productions. Fanbases thus serve as the central pillar of this cultural activism that promotes and consolidates Hallyu in different countries (Jung, 2012). The Korean-German philosopher Byung-chul Han suggests that one of the new forms of contemporary interaction is what he calls the digital swarm, referring to collectives of individuals who come together online or via mobile apps (with social networks, blogs, apps or fanbases) to share a vision of reality. The loose community of Hallyu followers constitutes a clear example of this digital swarm model (Han, 2014).

As foreseen by Bauman (2010), these digital swarms or fluid groups have left the traditional models of human relations behind. The purpose now is not merely to consume musical and audiovisual products from South Korea, but to form part of this vast digital swarm constituted by Hallyu. Fanbases are a key part of the process, as their proselytism and capacity for content creation maintain the appeal of and interest in Korean entertainment. In countries where the fanbases begin to weaken, as has recently occurred in China, the influence of

Hallyu appears to have been challenged and rejected on ideological grounds (Chen, 2017).

The new Korean Wave has also begun its entry into Spain, although it is in a rather more embryonic stage than that found in many countries in Asia and the Americas. This study explores how this new consumption of audiovisual and musical products has developed, and especially how this network of new fans—this digital swarm—has been created. To this end, we have conducted a survey on 1,058 Spanish subjects who shared or followed any websites, Twitter accounts or fanbases in Spain on Hallyu-related topics. The objective of this study is to show not only how Korean audiovisual products are creating a market niche in Spain, but also (and especially) how their audience is evolving into a digital swarm, in which each viewer feels the need to create and disseminate content and to build a network of co-creators around audiovisual content from South Korea. This phenomenon reflects the birth of a new kind of cinephilia unique to the digital era.

Spain offers a number of interesting aspects for studying Hallyu and its influence on audiovisual consumers. The first of these is the fact that the young people of this European country are far removed from the tensions of Asian soft power and the rivalry between China, Japan and Korea. The second aspect is that as the Hallyu effect began much later in Spain (around the middle of the 2010s), its evolution and characteristics can be observed more clearly. And finally, as has already been explored in other studies, Spain has one of the most actively social and creative audiences (Claes and Deltell, 2015). All of this makes tracking and studying the influence of Hallyu on Spanish youth particularly interesting.

When Altman (1999) attempted to define what a film genre is, he noted that the attitude of the audience was key to understanding whether a particular group of films could be described as belonging to a given genre. The American theorist argued that Hollywood had managed to impose

its thematic universe on the world because any filmgoer on the planet could recognise the codes of its films and interpret them correctly. It is the audience that identifies and names the genre of a film. Hallyu is one of the few audiovisual and musical phenomena from outside the West that have managed to consolidate their own status as a genre; and it has also managed to win over a faithful, active audience all over the world.

METHODOLOGY

This study explores the influence of South Korean audiovisual and music content in Spain. As noted above, Hallyu is a movement that constructs its own digital swarm, and its success is founded on a tightly woven web of local viewers and consumers who identify the universe of South Korean productions as their own. This virtual network is only possible thanks to social networks and fanbases. The web of communicative interactions that defines the digital era offers a new way of understanding audiences and their behaviour: each viewer is necessarily a creator of content and of opinions about the films and series they watch (Osteso, Claes and Deltell, 2014).

The fandom or fanbase phenomenon is characterised by its fluid construction. Although fans may occasionally interact as a group on websites or blogs, they more often use more flexible forums for exchange, like microblogging websites (Twitter) or social networks (mainly Facebook and Instagram). The swarm-like nature of fanbases make them difficult to pin down, as they are not fixed meeting spaces but forums accessed sporadically. In the case of Hallyu, these sporadic forums are the Spanish websites dedicated to the South Korean audiovisual movement, as well as events like concerts, Korean (and Japanese) art weeks, meet-ups and others.

For this research, a survey was conducted on Hallyu followers. This survey was offered openly via the Google Forms service. It was distributed

throughout Spain (including the Canary and Balearic Islands and the territories of Ceuta and Melilla) and was open to Spanish residents over the age of 14. No compensation or prizes were offered to survey participants and submissions were controlled by means of participant IP addresses and email addresses. The questionnaire was made available from the 8th to the 19th of May 2019. The distribution method was by spreading word of the survey on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. One specific source of distribution was the Spanish blog on Hallyu, La BA NA NA, and its associated Twitter account @bloglabanana.

The total sample was n=1,058. The confidence level of the survey is 97% and the respondents

were from all over Spain. As can be seen in Table 1, the respondents are quite evenly distributed around the country, as the percentage of surveys received from each region is roughly in proportion with its population except for the Autonomous Community of Madrid, which has a rather higher percentage of survey respondents than its percentage of Spain's total population. However, in the other autonomous communities and cities, the deviation is insignificant.

Ten in-depth interviews were also conducted on the people responsible for websites like the La BA NA NA blog and for Korean institutions in Spain like Centro Cultural Coreano de Madrid, the Spanish-based K-pop artist Hyemin (혜민), and anonymous followers of Korean music concerts. These interviews were qualitative in nature and sought to shed light on the experiences of the respondents with Korean music and audiovisual products.

In addition to the survey and interview information, data was obtained from the following online platforms:

- A. YouTube (views by users in Spain of the video clips and official videos of Korean groups; and views by users worldwide of video clips and official videos of Korean groups), to determine each group's positioning in Spain compared to its global audience in terms of views.
- B. VLive, a Korean platform for streaming Korean audiovisual content (number of fans of each group on this platform).
- C. Twitter and Facebook (Spanish-based followers of each group on these social networks).
- D. Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) statistics on Spain's total population, age and geographical distribution.

Geographical distribution of survey respondents across Spain

AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY	PERCENTAGE POPULATION	
	SURVEY	CSIC
ANDALUCÍA	14,8	17,99
CATALUÑA	14,6	16,08
COMUNIDAD DE MADRID	19,8	14,1
C. VALENCIANA	10	10,59
GALICIA	6,9	5,78
CASTILLA Y LEÓN	3,9	5,16
PAÍS VASCO	4,3	4,65
CANARIAS	5,7	4,51
CASTILLA-LA MANCHA	3,7	4,35
REGIÓN DE MURCIA	3,2	3,16
ARAGÓN	2,5	2,82
ISLAS BALEARES	1,8	2,52
EXTRAMADURA	2	2,28
PRINCIPADO DE ASTURIAS	2,8	2,19
NAVARRA	1,3	1,38
CANTABRIA	1,4	1,24
LA RIOJA	0,9	0,67
CEUTA	0,3	0,18
MELILLA	0,2	0,18

Table prepared by authors based on survey data.

HYPOTHESIS

The main objective of our research was to demonstrate that the influence of Korean audiovisual and music content in Spain is generated by an

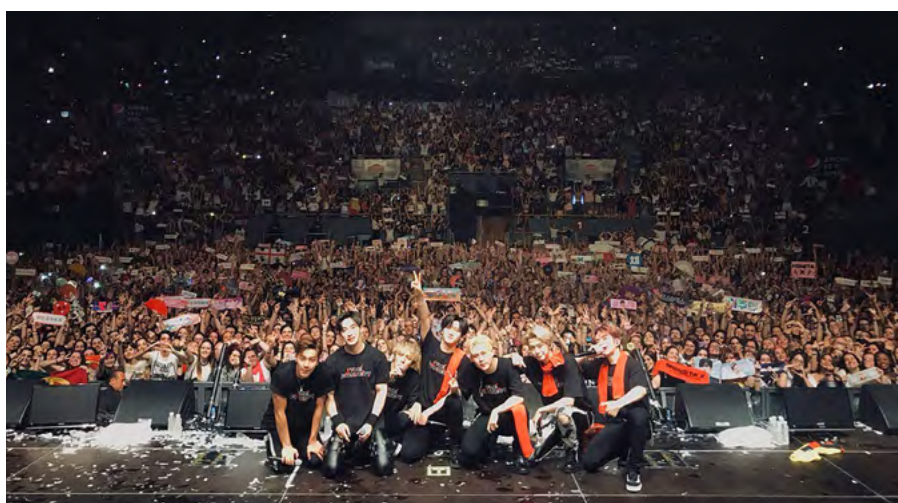
identifiable group of viewers who not only consume television and film content but also participate actively as a social and creative audience. These Spanish viewers, many of whom are grouped in fanbases, engage in a form of cultural activism to spread and expand the Hallyu movement. In contrast with traditional cinephilia, this is a new kind of viewer who is active and committed to the creation of a virtual network through which Hallyu content can be developed and disseminated.

DISCUSSION: A NEW KIND OF AUDIENCE

The results of the study offer one very clear and significant piece of information about this new kind of audience: 91% of respondents identified as women, compared to only 6% who identified as men and 3% who preferred not to state their gender. These figures clearly reveal one of the key features of the Hallyu movement. As has been observed previously in China and other countries, Korean audiovisual content initially attracts a female audience. A lot of South Korean entertainment is labelled with the same disparaging description given to the Hollywood genre of melodrama in the 1940s and 1950s: “women’s stories”. However, in all countries, after starting off with a predominantly female audience, the gender distribution of Hallyu consumers gradually balances out, although there is always a slightly higher percentage of female viewers.

While in China it was adult women who were the first to

become fans of Korean series and *doramas* (Kim, Lee and Min, 2014), in Spain, the interest in Korean audiovisual content has begun with younger females. Around three quarters (74%) of survey respondents were in the 14-21 age group, while respondents over the age of 30 represented only a tenth of the sample. These data obtained in the survey were confirmed in the in-depth interviews, where respondents spoke of predominantly female audiences at concerts and events related to Hallyu and K-pop. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the overwhelming majority



In the image (above), the group BLACKPINK (블랙핑크) in their Barcelona concert at Palau Sant Jordi. In the image (below), the group MONSTA X (몬스타엑스) in their Madrid concert at Palacio Vistalegre.

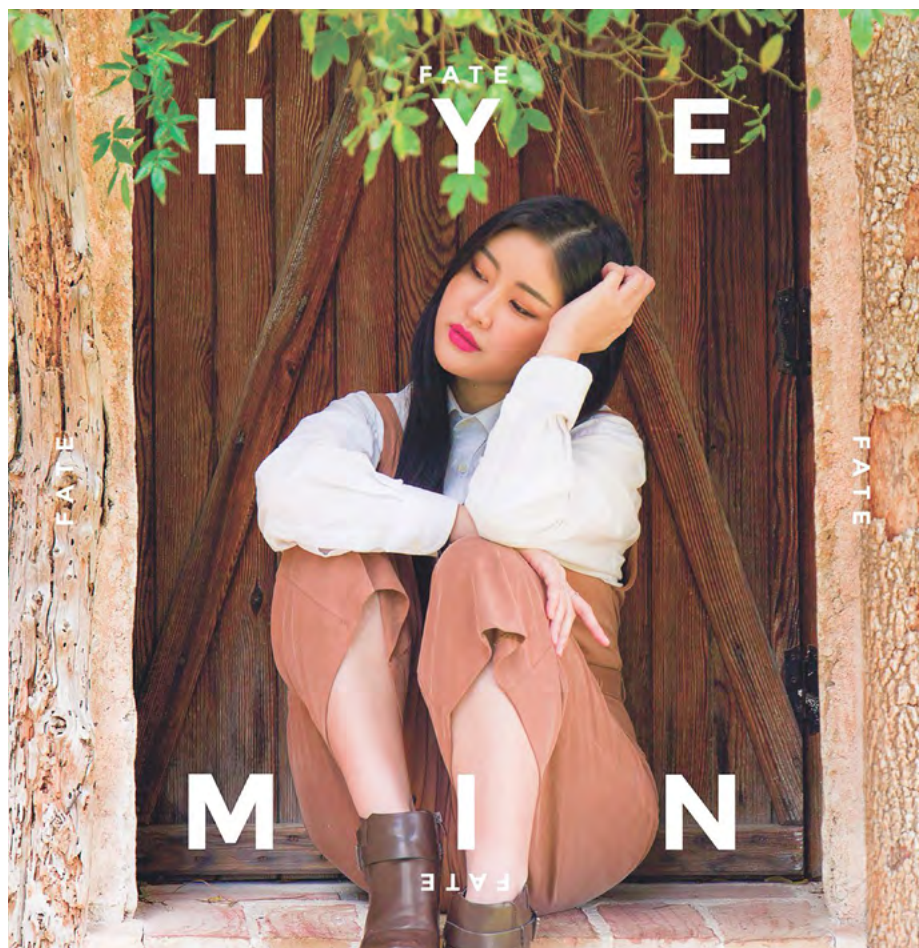
of Hallyu fans are women aged between 14 and 30. Moreover, nearly all respondents use social networks and the Internet daily as a means of social interaction.

Another significant piece of data on Spanish audiences is that Hallyu has won fans over mainly through K-pop rather than through films and television series. In the survey, 95% of respondents indicated that they followed South Korean music. It is therefore unsurprising that the preferred activity of Hallyu fans in Spain is attending concerts (68.2%), which have quadrupled in number in only one year, followed by manga or anime conventions (62.6%) or exhibitions (30%) where activities focusing on Korean music take place. Moreover, the fact that the South Korean artist Hyemin (혜민) has settled in Madrid to pursue her

music career is a clear sign that K-pop has begun to gain prominence in Spain.

Based on the survey results, it would seem that fanbases currently have less of a presence in Spain than they do in other countries. Only 20.4% of respondents belong or contribute actively to a Hallyu fanbase, blog or website. However, of this group, 44% spend more than one hour a day creating content on South Korean entertainment (audiovisual products, music or other digital creations). This group constitutes a community of fans who are genuinely motivated to help spread Hallyu content, who view their relationship with Korean audiovisual production not merely as a source of passive enjoyment but as an opportunity for cultural activism. For this reason, they write, comment, translate episodes of series or post photographs of their favourite South Korean actors.

Cover of *Fate*, debut single for the singer Hyemin (혜민) in Spain.



Interview respondents suggested that most fanbases develop content around events that will take place in Spain, such as future concerts, meet-ups, new episodes of series translated into Spanish or other activities. But they also describe events in other countries, and thus Spanish followers receive full daily information on their favourite singers or series. The data obtained suggest that fanbases serve a powerful function in reinterpreting the Korean audiovisual imaginary to help make it more understandable to Spanish audiences.

The survey offers an interesting piece of data related to understanding and appreciation of Hallyu: the comparison between Korean audiovisual content (which was given

Views of South Korean groups on YouTube in Spain

GROUP/SOLOIST	YOUTUBE SPAIN		
	2017 April	2018 April	2019 April
PSY	7 1 091 692	149 021 158	157 551 158
BTS	27 066 730	91 648 521	14 844 8521
EXO	10 843 276	24 448 280	31 213 163
BIGBANG	11 794 611	24 094 163	27 654 413
BLACKPINK	5 665 898	23 117 434	55 467 434
Girls' Generation	7 440 811	15 205 189	16 565 189
TWICE	3 767 218	14 460 543	25 049 543
GOT7	5 644 928	11 625 671	15 959 253
RED VELVET	3 041 931	10 049 564	15 263 564
SUPER JUNIOR	4 041 469	7 980 477	11 440 477
MONSTA X	2 752 230	6 911 831	10 652 411
GFRIEND	2 163 272	5 886 523	8 026 523
SHINee	3 118 742	6 791 064	8 221 064
SEVENTEEN	1 689 960	5 826 431	9 286 431

Prepared by authors based on YouTube data.

scores between 8 and 10 by 80% of respondents) and Spanish productions (which received ratings between 5 and 8 from 80% of respondents). These data are corroborated by the in-depth interview respondents, who highlighted the fact that Korean audiovisual content is viewed as more original and more appealing than Spanish content.

According to this study, one of the most common ways of consuming Korean audiovisual content is viewing it on YouTube, especially to check out music videos by K-pop groups. Table 2 shows the total number of views by users in Spain of South Korean music videos, with three control dates: April 2017, April 2018 and April 2019.

As can be observed, the annual growth has been huge, with a practically exponential upward trend. In addition to the YouTube statistics, it is important to consider those of VLive, a platform similar in use to YouTube but dedicated exclusively to Hallyu content, which offers live streaming of showcases, concerts, talks, awards ceremo-

nies, and even singers and actors themselves talking directly to camera, chatting with their fans.

This type of music is consumed almost exclusively online, as reflected in our findings; platforms like YouTube and VLive host all Hallyu-related audiovisual content, especially K-pop. But it is also important to note other platforms like Netflix, Viki, and other online sites that offer live streaming of Korean television networks. Thanks to these sources, consumers can easily browse and watch concerts, performances, interviews or any other type of entertainment content, most of which is subtitled in Spanish, thus removing the language barrier. The huge importance of the Internet (the distribution of this

content would be practically impossible without the web) has prompted researchers to coin the term “Hallyu 2.0” (Lee and Normes, 2015). In Spain, according to our study, all viewers use the Internet to access this content.

K-pop and South Korean audiovisual productions are consumed at a frantic pace; every day there is new viewing material being accessed by an international audience. High viewing figures are achieved not only by the major series and videos of older pop groups, known in their day as the Golden Era of K-pop (Kim, 2015), but also by so-called New Era bands, and even younger stars, or “rookies”. The success of some of these rookie groups is reflected in Table 3.

One essential feature of Hallyu is its nature as a complete entertainment network that demands a huge level of dedication from its audience. As Sun Jung (2012) observes, viewers of Hallyu audiovisual content tend to spend hours watching these productions every day. In our survey we

Views and followers of South Korean “rookie” groups

New groups	Social Networks		Fanbase		YouTube	
	Twitter	Facebook	Twitter	Facebook	Worldwide	Spain
STRAY KIDS	1 151 261	353 304	11 574	-	316 000 000	5 010 000
ATEEZ	255 224	41 024	9 597	-	-	-
TXT	2 000 926	398 420	9 597	44	130 000 000	1 440 000
G-I-DLE	323 953	158 029	4 353	-	385 000 000	3 520 000
LOONA	293 459	95 807	6 925	-	-	-
IZONE	571 813	230 170	1 105	-	235 000 000	941 000

Prepared by author with information from Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

found that more than half of respondents (52.4%) spend more than two hours a day watching series, *doramas* or other Korean audiovisual products. The time invested in viewing K-pop music videos would also need to be added to these figures.

THE DIGITAL SWARM AS A NEW KIND OF VIEWER: FANBASES

One of the constants observed in every country where Hallyu content has found an audience is the confrontation between the local discourse (or the Hollywood audiovisual discourse, understood to be the dominant one) and that of South Korean

productions, which were and continue to be perceived as a minority resistance or counter-hegemonic force. As Michael Foucault (1977) famously stated, all power necessarily generates resistance. Just as has been observed in Peru, Japan and Indonesia, Hallyu followers in Spain identify this content as a new form of cultural entertainment that challenges the dominant audiovisual and musical discourse. For Hallyu to be accepted by the domestic audience of each country, its fanbases must engage in constant cultural activism through blogs, social network accounts and profiles and comments in chat rooms, to foster a resistance against the dominant audiovisual tastes and promote an alternative way of understanding the South Korean movement.

Manuel Castells (2009), in his exploration of the issue of power and resistance (*contrapoder*, or “counterpower”, is the term used by this Spanish author), suggests that technology is the effective weapon of choice for these dissident groups. Castells refers to this phenomenon, which allows individuals who do not control the media to generate a new discourse (in this case, a new taste for non-canonical audiovisual production), as mass self-communication, and it constitutes a powerful form of cultural activism.

In Spain, both the interview respondents and the fanbases observed in this study define them-

In the image, participants and winners of the 2018 K-Pop Competition in Madrid



selves as individuals or groups seeking to spread the Korean Wave. As was the case in other countries, traditional Spanish media (both digital and analogue) originally treated K-pop and Hallyu as a laughable spectacle of minor importance. The news offered on the phenomenon always focused on highlighting the marginal nature and compulsive behaviour of its followers; this reaction is evident in Pablo Gil's article on the phenomenon for the national newspaper *El Mundo* (Gil, 2012) or the news reports on the La Sexta TV network in 2012.

Hallyu's profile in Spain as a form of resistance or counterpower has been fostered by its fanbases, and through websites and information blogs. These forums have offered a different view of South Korean audiovisual content and have constructed alternative ways for Hallyu followers to consume that content. The main characteristic of these websites used to be that they provided a meeting space for individuals who did not iden-

tify with the dominant audiovisual language, or who wanted to discover and enjoy one that was new (and that for a long time had been disparaged). Today, the fanbases have become the reference points for information on K-pop in Spain. Each fanbase has specialised in a particular group of singers or actors and every day they post information, images and translated videos to boost the popularity of those artists in Spain.

Each fanbase has effectively become a database that can be used to promote concerts, audiovisual series and even events related to South Korea. In this way, the community of digital followers has been able to create a way of understanding Hallyu, and offers a new paradigm, in the sense described by Kuhn (1975), for the reception of audiovisual content. Hallyu audiences don't just consume South Korean products but also contribute to their dissemination and assimilation in their own countries, in a kind of cultural activism in support of the movement.

Increase in Spanish fanbase sizes on social networks

FANBASE	TWITTER			FACEBOOK		
	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
Astro	2 490	5 404	10 241	-	-	-
B I A4	5 673	5 855		4 237	4 234	
B.A.P	5 883	6 734		11 207	11 268	
BTS	27 663	69 678	123 661	37 696	62 752	70 867
EXO	9 004	9 738	13 395	16 267	16 530	16 181
GOT7	3 581	9 517	14 627	3 035	1 656	2 362
Infinite	4 545	5 234	5 559	73 483	71 424	69 229
Monsta X	3 004	5 079	12 441	2 100	2 086	2 240
NCT	6 296	9 848	14 928	200	508	1 392
Nu'est	6 715	7 601	8 114	8 087	7 918	7 675
SHINee	6 307	6 724	6 516	8 236	8 621	8 424
Teen Top	8 173	8 143	7 606	3 257	3 133	3 019
VIXX	4 636	5 814	6 535	4 946	4 930	4 870

Prepared by authors based on Twitter and Facebook data.

Table 4 shows the thirteen most important fanbases in Spain and their evolution on the social network Facebook and the microblogging space Twitter.

As can be seen in the table, the growth of the fanbases on Twitter has been huge, while on Facebook the growth patterns are more irregular. In terms of the number of followers on Twitter, the growth of the most popular groups has been exponential, while there has been a slight drop in numbers for a few other groups; these latter cases are groups of the Golden Era who have either broken up or are no longer recording and performing. What these figures reveal is a true digital swarm that produces content and discussion related to Korean audiovisual and music content.

CONCLUSION: THE HALLYU WEB IN SPAIN

In the discussion of this research we have referred to Michel Foucault and his famous observation that where there is power, there is resistance. The consumption of Hallyu content by Spanish youth constitutes a clear case of resistance in the form of a digital swarm that challenges the dominant model of audiovisual representation led by Hollywood cinema. As is the case with most spaces of counterpower, the creation of this space has been possible thanks to the construction of a web of engagement and contact among new viewers who have found a form of entertainment of their own outside the dominant narrative and musical styles.

Our study has revealed that Spain's Hallyu audience is made up mostly of young women. This audience is spread evenly across the country and reflects a new paradigm for audiovisual consumption. Many of these viewers exhibit a strong predisposition for posting content and comments online to advocate for South Korean music and audiovisual content. In contrast with traditional audiences, which consume films or television series without sharing a particular

THE SPANISH HALLYU AUDIENCE IS MADE UP PREDOMINANTLY OF YOUNG WOMEN

response to them, these young Hallyu fans act daily to defend and promote their tastes and to build the network of their digital swarm. This is a radically new kind of cinephilia, with the consumption of videos and audiovisual creations dependent on YouTube and other digital platforms.

In Spain, nearly all Hallyu followers identify themselves as K-pop fans, while a smaller percentage also identify as fans of South Korean audiovisual content (series, *doramas* and films). All of them check online for news on K-pop and audiovisual productions on a daily basis, and a high percentage use fanbases and informational websites, which serve as forums of exchange for the construction of a local perspective on Hallyu.

As has been found in international studies in relation to other groups of foreign followers of South Korean content, Spanish fanbases clearly perform a mass self-communication function aimed at transforming South Korean discourse into a comprehensible narrative for the receiving culture. These fans thus become privileged viewers who contribute to the correct interpretation of the Hallyu movement in Spain. As other studies have suggested, Hallyu and K-pop constitute a significant model of soft power, as they foster an engagement with the language, culture and traditions of South Korea.

In short, this study has shown that a virtual web has been constructed in Spain, made up of a creative audience that consumes South Korean audiovisual content and contributes to its promotion. This community forms a digital swarm of new viewers who interpret their passion for South Korean audiovisual content not only as a form of entertainment, but above all as a form of cultural activism. ■

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HALLYU (한류) IN SPAIN, AUDIENCE, FANBASES AND NEW WAYS OF CONSUMING AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA

Abstract

This article presents the results of a study of the influence of Hallyu, the new Korean Wave, in Spain. The behaviour of new viewers and the organization of their fanbases have been analyzed. Research data reveals that Spanish Hallyu followers are a creative audience. This group, mostly women and young people, not only consume Korean audio-visual media but they also carry out an important task of cultural activism in favour of Hallyu.

Key words

Hallyu; Fanbase; K-pop; Audience; Korean Cinema; TV Series; drama.

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HALLYU (한류) EN ESPAÑA: ESPECTADORES, FANBASES Y NUEVAS FORMAS DE CONSUMIR EL AUDIOVISUAL

Resumen

En este artículo se recogen los resultados de una investigación sobre la influencia del Hallyu, nueva ola coreana, en España. Se ha estudiado el comportamiento de los nuevos espectadores y cómo estos se organizan en fanbases. Los datos de la investigación revelan que los seguidores españoles del Hallyu configuran una audiencia creativa. Este público, mayoritariamente compuesto por mujeres y jóvenes, no solo consumen audiovisual coreano, sino que realizan una importante tarea de activismo cultural a favor del Hallyu.

Palabras clave

Hallyu; Fanbase; K-pop; Audiencia; Cine coreano; Serie; *Dorama*.

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