

The culture of *hallyu* fan community and its representations

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Abstract

Hallyu or Korean Wave is a process of spreading culture originating from South Korea, which initially went only to East Asia and Southeast Asia and is currently developing globally. Various opinions emerge from the entire parts of the society in response to the spread of the Korean Wave, including from the fans who have been mesmerized by this South Korean culture. This research was conducted to find out the representation of *hallyu* and the culture of its fan communities in Surabaya. Therefore, the writer collected the data by field observations and interviews to student communities of South Korean culture fans. In addition, interviews were also conducted with five members of this community. The data was processed by utilizing qualitative method to obtain the most appropriate answer. The obtained answer reveals that *hallyu* has an important meaning for the fans and the fan culture is a useful activity since it includes learning activities inside the fun ones. This South Korean culture fan community is also trusted by various agencies and malls to organize activities with the theme of South Korean culture.

Keywords: *hallyu*, fan culture, community, South Korea

Introduction

Today, who does not know the term of Korean Wave? *Hallyu* or Korean Wave is one of the most unique aspects of the spread of culture today (Bergen 2011). *Hallyu* refers to the phenomenon of Korean popular culture that was favored in the Southeast Asian region and Mainland China in the late 1990s (Bok-Rae 2015). "The whole *hallyu* wave has become a unique blend of Korean culture with other aspects of Western and Asian culture which has created a unique style for this special historical moment" (Bergen 2011). Korean Wave brings several Korean cultures such as music, dance, television shows, drama series, films, food, clothing styles, language, and make-up style references. The drama series that the South Korean produces are also able to attract many fans from teenagers to mothers. "Especially in the Asian region, South Korea has developed a strong input for the production of high-quality television dramas, which can be categorized as special genres that differ nationally" (Kim, Long & Robinson 2009). The most popular of all is their music and dance culture that is commonly called K-Pop. K-Pop is the most important aspect in the *hallyu* phenomenon (Shim 2011). What K-Pop has is a neat, clean, and well-organized appearance (John 2013). A part of K-Pop playing a role in spreading *hallyu* are idol groups such as Girls' Generation, Big Bang, Super Junior, 2 pm, Wonder Girls, Black Pink, EXO, and BTS who are the current K-Pop representatives.

Hallyu or "Korean Wave" phenomenon has effectively been pandemic throughout Asia, bringing South Korean music, television shows and films to China, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, the Philippines and others (Leung 2012). Until today, the popularity of K-Pop is not only in the Asian region but has been spread to Europe and North America as well (Oh & Park 2012). At the same time, the South Korean government is attempting to take advantage of the Korean Wave as a tool to promote cultural diplomacy (Jang & Paik 2012).

Hallyu causes the Korean fever phenomenon which is currently affecting various countries including Indonesia (Wijayanti 2014). Obviously, the spread of Korean Wave also causes the spread of "Fan-Culture". Fans of Korean Wave have their own uniqueness that makes them different from the fans of other cultures. One of the examples is imitating the appearance of an idol group they like. In

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addition, there are some expressions that become parts of this Korean fan culture, such as the word “*bias*” that can be interpreted as the most preferred idol of an idol group. In addition, there is also something called “*fanchant*”. *Fanchant* is a song performed by fans during the concert (Kusuma 2014). Of course, the existence of social media really supports the activities of Korean culture fans.

“The K-Pop industry uses the internet and social media as a basic element of global marketing and distribution” (Ames 2016).

The high number and easy access to social media bring the latest news from South Korea to the corners of the world instantly. One of the most popular social media among the fans is Twitter.

“Twitter is utilized by many people as a tool to share their ideas, knowledge, or opinions with others. An interesting and important question is whether it is possible to identify users who are very good at spreading their content, not only for those who choose to follow them, but to a larger part of the network” (Romero et al. 2011).

Nonetheless, the available literature on Korean Wave still tends to define it as an intra-Asian wave from certain forms of content without discussing the dimensions of media technology or media environment from a complete global perspective (Jin 2014).

Indonesia itself can be considered as a country that is affected by this Korean Wave. Many teenagers in Indonesia are part of the fans of Korean culture. This can be viewed from the high demand for artists from the Ginseng country to come to Indonesia. Furthermore, products that have Korean elements such as make-up, music albums, and Korean-themed items are selling well in the Indonesian market. In Indonesia, Surabaya has become one of the cities with a large number of Korean culture fans. This can be seen from the number of the fan community members both offline and online (Pertiwi 2017).

Being a fan is certainly represented differently by the society. The society usually links fans of Korean culture with fanaticism. “The fame of Korean idol groups in the world is followed by the increasing number of fans of Korean idol groups who tend to be fanatical. The enthusiasm and love of Korean idol groups has led to fanaticism for their fans” (Rafsanjani 2014). Therefore, this research was conducted to find the representation of *hallyu* or Korean Wave and the fan culture owned by fans of Korean culture from members of the Korean fan community in Surabaya. Representation can be interpreted as a process to redefine an object based on what is received by the senses. Hence, we can interpret this phenomenon from the perspective of a fan that might be different from our previous interpretation regarding *hallyu* and fan culture.

Method

As a part that supports this research, the data collection was carried out using qualitative methods. This method was selected because in order to get information about the meaning of *hallyu*, broad answers are required in order to be able to provide maximum results. The information was obtained from the interview process and the results of field observations.

The source of the data that will be processed came from field observations by participating in several activities carried out by one of the Korean fan communities in Surabaya. This community consists of the students from various universities in Surabaya. They established this community three years ago and have more than 100 active members today. The observations were carried out in the meetings they hold routinely. In addition, interviews were also conducted with five members of this community.

The questions asked during the interviews included how they interpreted *hallyu*, the impact they got when joining this community, and the activities they carried out as a reflection of “fan-culture”. Some questions are expected to collect the data needed about the representation of *hallyu* and fan culture carried out by the community. The results obtained can be used as a

comparison of point of views between people who only see from the outside with fans who know the ins and outs of their culture.

The Research Result and Discussion

This research took the data by conducting interviews with several members of a student community of the Korean culture fan in Surabaya. Some of the informants were A who has been a fan of Korean culture for about 5 or 6 years, B who has become a fan for two years, and finally C who is a fan for 5 years. The first question asked was the meaning of *hallyu* in their view as fans of Korean culture. Informant B replied that *hallyu* was a form of culture from Korea which was inclined more in the fields of music, movies, style, and the others. Meanwhile informants A and C had a quite unique interpretation of *hallyu*, which was as a breath of fresh air in the world of music industry and as a form of cultural globalization. In this community, *hallyu* is like a playground where they meet with those who have the same hobbies and interests, do fun activities and become a place of recreation from their duties and obligations. Becoming a fan of South Korean culture is also used as a means to escape from the burden of thinking since they can discuss the things they like when they are gathering; thus, they will forget the problems they face for a moment.

In terms of the question about the reasons why they like Korean culture, they said, "The difference between Korean culture and Indonesian culture makes it interesting and unique, so there is much to learn". Moreover, Informant B added that Korean language structure was simpler compared to that of other East Asian countries.

Regarding the fan culture that they do, informant B the experience as the fan of whom is the newest compared to the two other sources mentioned the most frequent activities he had done compared to the other two sources. He mentioned that the "fan-culture" that he had done was trying to wear Korean-style dress, learning to dance the choreography of an idol group, trying to talk in Korean language and using cosmetics from South Korea. Informant C mentioned some unique things like doing "Twitter role player" and joining *Fandom* (a term for a group of fans who idolizes one idol group and usually has their respective names for each group of fans, for example BLINK, which is the name for fans of *Blackpink* idol group). The Twitter role player he mentioned was a role-playing activity as a member of a Korean idol group or artist. Meanwhile, informant A said that his activities were only limited to watching K-Pop *dance cover*, and participating in large events on the theme of Korean culture. This is related to the activities carried out by the student community of Korean culture fan.

This community has a surprising agenda of activities. The biggest agenda is to hold a Korean-Indonesian festival every year in one of the big malls in Surabaya. The festival is held annually on November 2-4. The festival presents a wide variety of events, ranging from having talk show under the theme of cultural differences and scholarships to South Korea, imitating South Korean idol group competition, eating Korean spicy noodle competition, having a beauty class, performing traditional Indonesian dances, to having a mathematics Olympiad. Moreover, this community is often appointed a collaborative partner in the event with the theme of South Korea by several agencies.

The three informants also gave almost the same answers to the question about the good effects they had as a fan and the way they responded to the negative views of others about them as a fan of South Korean culture. The three of them compactly answered that the good effects were getting a lot of knowledge about South Korean culture, getting many friends from different circles, and opening their perspective on the available differences. For negative views from others, they chose to leave it alone and did not think about it as long as what they did is still within reasonable limits and did not harm others because they knew what was good for them and the limits they set for themselves.

The next question about the great things they have done while becoming a fan of South Korean culture provides distinct answers. Informant C considered that he still had not done anything great as a fan while informants A and B were in harmony by replying that joining the South Korean culture fan

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community was a big thing they had done that changed their lives, which were originally just ordinary fans. The last question was about the role of the fan community they join for themselves. The three speakers again responded harmoniously. According to those three, the fan community was their place to channel their talents and interests by providing facilities for sharing experiences, learning, socializing, and being organized. This community frequently hold a meeting filled with activities such as Korean language classes, Korean food cooking classes, and socialization of South Korean culture in order to minimize the misunderstanding in the society.

Culture is the broadest concept that includes several definitions and can be found in various cultural contexts (Do 2012). Culture is also presented in a variety of ways. Some consider that other people's culture looks strange, but there is something special about the strangeness. The spread of *hallyu* is an instance in this case. One side views positively and the other is in vice versa. When interpreting *hallyu* using positive perspective, there is a compliment to this Asian culture phenomenon (Kim & Lee 2014). "Korean culture in Indonesia is spread through mass media that actively introduces this culture" (Etikasari 2013).

The rise of Indonesian teenagers who become fans of South Korean culture creates a slightly bad image for ordinary people. In contrast to Indonesian culture which tends to embrace the middle eastern culture, South Korea has a free culture that gives rise to bad assumptions. On the contrary to the societal assumptions about the fanaticism of South Korean culture enthusiasts, these fans can actually create a variety of useful activities.

Despite the initial criticism and doubt, *hallyu* is still growing to this day (Yang 2012). This can be observed from the growing popularity of the culture of this Ginseng country. Several idol groups have been able to compete in the international area. Recognition from other countries is considered necessary because it has special values from their culture (Lee 2013).

Conclusion

From the results above, a conclusion can be drawn that the representation of *hallyu* and fan culture from the perspective of a fan of South Korean culture in Surabaya is diverse and there is more information about activities in South Korea culture fans.

This research shows the meaning of *hallyu* from the side of South Korean culture fans themselves. In addition, the fan culture activities that this community carry out are not only those that are wasteful and time-consuming but also the ones that are able to develop scientific insights.

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