



Fiction, Fantasizing, and Romanticizing: Studying the Effect of Korean Dramas on Pakistani Youth

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Abstract

The study tends to investigate the effects of Korean dramas on Pakistani youngsters following the incredible popularity post pandemic globally and among Pakistani consumers as well. Fictional drama has always been among the most popular genres of entertainment among youngsters due to its fantasy and romanticism. Korean fiction is reported to be the sensation of time among young Pakistanis. Drawing on theoretical foundations from Cultivation theory the study has investigated and analyzed underlying factors behind popularity of Korean dramas. A sample of 300 students have been surveyed through a questionnaire developed on 5 points Likert scale questionnaire. The findings have suggested that Korean drama content has profound effects on Pakistani youth. They fantasize Korean lifestyle, romanticize their folktales and feel a strong desire to visit Korea to explore real time experiences. All the proposed hypothesis have been proven with the p-value of 0.01.

Keywords: Korean Wave, Korean Dramas, Youth of Pakistan, Emotionally

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INTRODUCTION

Fiction fascinates young minds as it amuses them with worlds of dreams, fantasy, imaginations and romanticism. It makes them enter into a different and better world, shape their perceptions and interpretations to infer social realities (Lohani, 2019; & Martin, 2021). Fictional dramas and fantasy have been among the most popular genres among youngsters. Korean dramas have taken fantasy a notch higher as Korean culture has a rich background of replete folktales and mythical characters (Mehra, 2022). The popularity of Korean dramas is primarily attributed to their extensive and heterogeneous viewership, surpassing conventional cultural platforms, strong fiction, fantasy and romanticism (Farrah et al., 2022; Vineet, 2011).

Korean fictional content particularly their dramas got immense popularity around the globe in pandemic of Covid 19 and this wave affected Pakistani audience as well with its popular show *Crash Landing On You (CLOY)* (Hasnain, 2021). People got to know about Korean fictional entertainment content and got affected by this bandwagon and the most affected group were the youngsters. As youth is considered to be the most potential consumer of fictional drama entertainment this consumption affects their behaviors in dynamic ways.

The present study aimed to examine the effects of Korean fictional drama content in Pakistani youth and to analyze their perceptions regarding the Korean Wave, given its widespread popularity and the lack of empirical evidence on its influence within the Pakistani community. By analyzing these perceptions, the study explored the underlying factors contributing to the Korean Wave's popularity among Pakistani students and its impact on them. In order to achieve the intended objective, a quantitative methodology was employed to gather data from a sample of Pakistani students for survey. Kim and Tahira (2022) proposed that Korean fictional entertainment and cultural products, such as K-pop and K-dramas, have certain effects on its consumers. Furthermore, they suggested that these factors subsequently impact the behavioral intentions of consumers to either visit Korea in the future or recommend others.

Over the last twenty years, the phenomenon known as the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has garnered international recognition, manifesting the intricate intersections between globalization, regionalization, and localization within the domains of media and popular culture. The proliferation of online media platforms, such as streaming services, has diversified and expanded television content's transnational circulation across nation-states. Recently, the popularity of K-drama and K-pop has expanded to a wider global audience, including individuals who were previously not consumers or fans of Korean media. This can be attributed to the effective utilization of social media platforms, particularly YouTube, in facilitating transnational media consumption. It is important to acknowledge that the Korean Wave has been a significant counter-flow within the realm of transnational pop culture, particularly originating from East Asia, for several years (Barma, 2023)

Soman and Jaggi (2022) investigated the impacts of Korean dramas on the younger generation in India, focusing on their patterns of viewership and the subsequent influence on their aspirations and consumption habits. The study participants offered many intriguing perspectives regarding their viewing experiences and how these experiences were applicable to the Indian cultural context. The imperative to broaden the immersion in Korean culture beyond the mere consumption of dramas was identified as a pivotal factor in the determination to acquire Korean merchandise. Furthermore, the interviews also addressed the participants' desire to visit the depicted locations in the dramas.

Prasopsorn and Panmanee (2019) investigated the soft cultural policy of South Korean government by studying impacts of Korean wave in Thailand. The study analyzed the socio-cultural and economic effects of Korean culture on Thailand and inferred after the analysis of interviews that a significant portion of the demographic perceives domestic dramas negatively. However, most interviewees preferred Korean dramas and music, fostering a broader appreciation for Korean culture. This opportunity allowed some individuals to fulfill their aspiration of visiting South Korea and gaining a deeper understanding of its cultural heritage.

Iftikhar and Raza (2020) studied the relationship between exposure to Korean plays and its impact on young individuals and reported that increased consumption of Korean content is associated with a heightened influence of Korean brands on these individuals. Furthermore, the findings from the survey indicated that heightened exposure to Korean web-based content leads to enhanced consumer engagement, ultimately influencing purchasing decisions in favor of Korean brands. In essence, the brand selection process among young females is influenced by the enhanced level of consumer engagement that arises from their exposure to Korean content accessible through online platforms.

It has also been observed that the rising popularity of the Korean Wave in Indonesia has served as a source of inspiration for creative industry professionals in Indonesia, motivating them to produce higher-quality works. Specifically, they have used Korean popular culture as a reference point in their creative endeavors. Indonesia can benefit from studying the globalization of the Korean Wave as a reference for cultural and economic development. Indonesia can learn valuable lessons and strategies to enhance its cultural and economic growth (Anwar, 2014). Khair (2022) proposed that the purchase intention of young individuals towards Korean products featured in K-dramas as product placement (PPL) have increased due to their heavy consumption. These factors encompass social value, attachment, idolization of favorite celebrities, and a positive perception of K-drama content and Korean culture.

Indrawan et al (2022) discussed influence of Korean dramas on the lifestyle and linguistic patterns of the technologically advanced Generation Z, encompassing individuals aged 6 to 25 years. Based on the research findings, it has been determined that Korean dramas influence youngsters by shaping their lifestyle, choices and language patterns to align with those depicted in Korean dramas. Effective socialization is crucial to prevent the potential cultural detachment of

Generation Z individuals from their heritage, particularly in the context of the Korean wave phenomenon. The popularity of Korean dramas among Indonesian audiences, particularly teenage Korean fans, has engendered a notable inclination toward addiction. This phenomenon is primarily observed among individuals who possess impressionable traits and tend to emulate their admired figures. (Seo, 2020). Pakistani females like portrayal of romantic tropes, dynamic subplots and fascinating storylines in Korean dramas. Another most important factor underlying the popularity of Korean drama content in Pakistani viewers is the depiction of South Korean culture (Zehra, 2018).

Aims of the study

Objectives

- The present study aims to explore the effects of Korean dramas on Pakistani Youth.
- To investigate increasing trend of desire to wish Korean among youngsters.
- To analyze promotion of Korean culture and fantasized content through these dramas.

Research questions

- How does the exposure to Korean Dramas affect Pakistani Youth?
- Does exposure to Korean Dramas lead towards generation of desire to visit and explore Korea among youngsters?
- Does Korean drama content promote tendencies to fanaticize Korean culture among youth?

Hypothesis

H1: There is a positive relationship between exposure to Korean Dramas and desire of viewers to visit Korea.

H2: There is a positive relationship between exposure to Korean Dramas and tendency to fantasize contents in viewers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The media has significantly disseminated information and entertainment to previously difficult regions (Jin & Liu, 2022). Audiences make deliberate decisions to select their favourite genre of entertainment (Jang et al., 2021). According to Kim (2007), globalization can influence human interactions. The enduring popularity of Korean dramas (K-dramas) and the associated phenomenon of Hallyu tourism can be attributed to the romantic and sexual allure of Korean male characters (Lee, 2020).

South Korean television dramas frequently center on themes of Romance, fantasy, and Fiction, as evidenced by the works of Gammon (2022), Soman and Jaggi (2022),

and Seo et al. (2020). These dramas commonly propagate the ideals of an idealized partner and an idyllic romantic relationship, as discussed by Cariappa (2020) and Lee (2020). According to Zehra (2018) Pakistani viewers feel connected to the cultural elements portrayed in Korean dramas. Korean dramas (K-dramas) have gained popularity among mass audiences compared to Western series, primarily due to the perceived modesty in storytelling and the actors involved (Pha & Lhe, 2022).

Media globalization can be interpreted as a manifestation of cultural imperialism, as Noor (2022) and Dubey (2022) suggested. This perspective posits that disseminating a nation's media products can exert oppressive influences on other cultures (Jinn, 2022). There has been a noticeable surge in the fascination with Korean beauty ideals, associated with heightened self-esteem and self-assurance levels among individuals of Asian American descent (Yoon, 2022; Fong, 2021). The primary objective of this research endeavor is to examine how young individuals from Pakistan engage with Korean media.

Korean dramas have garnered a distinct position within Pakistani viewership by their capacity to present captivating and relatable narratives (Cariappa, 2020; Lee, 2020). The themes commonly examined in K-dramas frequently resonate with the audience's ambitions, desires, and sentiments, engendering a sense of personal involvement in the storylines (Jang et al., 2021). The depiction of profound human emotions, such as affection, companionship, selflessness, and determination, resonates with the viewers, resulting in a compelling emotional bond.

Moreover, Korean dramas offer a revitalizing departure from the conventional domestic programming aired on indigenous television networks in Pakistan (Eijaz & Ahmad, 2011). Various genres, such as Romance, fantasy, historical, and science fiction, accommodates a broad range of audience preferences. Consequently, Pakistani audiences are inclined towards Korean dramas due to their inventive narrative techniques, which provide an escape from monotonous everyday life.

The appeal of K-dramas is further enhanced by the notable acting abilities of the performers, who frequently garner a substantial following in Pakistan (Zehra, 2018). The increasing popularity of Korean actors and actresses reinforces the affinity between Pakistani viewers and Korean dramas. According to Jang et al. (2021), the characters depicted in these dramas attain the status of cultural icons, eliciting admiration and reverence from audiences for their on-screen representations.

Korean dramas, commonly referred to as K-dramas, portray romantic relationships in a diverse array of manifestations, encompassing both pure and heartwarming initial romances, as well as intense and enduring connections between characters (Jang et al., 2021). According to Farrah et al. (2022) romantic relationships are frequently depicted in a manner that encompasses captivating and highly emotive storylines, which effectively resonate with the emotions and aspirations of the viewers. Consequently, Pakistani youngsters exhibit a strong inclination towards depicting romantic relationships in Korean dramas, often leading to the idealization and romanticism of such relationships.

The portrayal of idealized romantic relationships in Korean dramas can shape Pakistani viewers' perceptions and attitudes toward romantic relationships within their societal context (Lee, 2020). The allure of idealizing romantic relationships in Korean dramas can also be ascribed to the opportunity for escapism from the intricate and demanding nature of relationships in actuality (Seo et al., 2020). The realm of K-dramas, a fictional universe, serves as a utopian setting where the romantic narratives of its characters transpire, devoid of the constraints and complexities of mundane existence (Vineet, 2011). The act of seeking refuge in fictional narratives serves as a source of solace and comfort for Pakistani youngsters, presenting an alternative romantic storyline that disengages from their realities momentarily personal realities.

Including fantasy elements in Korean dramas engages the audience's imagination, transporting them to fictional worlds where concepts that defy reality are presented as believable (Farrah et al., 2022). The narrative structures employed in these creative storylines elicit a profound sense of awe and inquiry within the Pakistani populace, stimulating their inclination to delve into the limitless potentialities offered by fictional realms (Eijaz & Ahmad, 2011). Consequently, Korean dramas (K-dramas) foster a sense of curiosity and a willingness to embrace non-traditional concepts within their audience.

In addition to their extraordinary narratives, Korean dramas (K-dramas) demonstrate exceptional proficiency in depicting compelling interpersonal connections that deeply resonate with viewers' emotions (Jang et al., 2021). The depiction of romantic relationships in K-dramas frequently occurs within a complex framework of characterizations and emotional challenges, thereby enhancing the depth of this narrative (Cariappa, 2020). The relationships in various genres encompass a wide range of emotional connections, ranging from heartwarming and innocent romances to intense and complex bonds, evoking strong emotional responses from the audience (Lee, 2020).

Korean dramas, commonly referred to as K-dramas, exhibit a distinctive ability to transport audiences to a wide range of imaginative and diverse settings, thereby enabling them to transcend the limitations of their everyday reality (Farrah et al., 2022). The narratives frequently explore many genres, including Romance, fantasy, historical, thriller, and science fiction, offering a diverse array of fictional realms (Vineet, 2011).

Conclusively Korean dramas elicit a profound emotional engagement with the fictional realms they portray (Soman & Jaggi, 2022). The profound emotional attachments that viewers develop with the characters and their challenges evoke a yearning to delve into the realm of Fiction that extends beyond the confines of the screen. The emotional bond between Pakistani viewers and the drama extends beyond its duration, prompting them to actively pursue various forms of creative expression, such as novels and fan fiction (Lee, 2020).

Korean fiction and cultivation analysis

George Gerbner introduced the cultivation theory in 1960s, positing that prolonged exposure to media content has the potential to shape individuals' perceptions of social reality. The correlation between media exposure and its impact on consumers is evident in shaping their worldview and influencing their behavior. These individuals are more inclined to adopt a perception of reality that aligns closely with the portrayal of reality on television.

The global phenomenon of Korean dramas, commonly called Hallyu, has captivated Pakistani youth with remarkable intensity amidst the pandemic. Many individuals were exposed to South Korean media through personal connections, such as family and friends, specifically through this television program. Korean dramas encompass a wide range of elements that cater to the preferences of the Pakistani audience in a television program. These include melodramatic storytelling, romantic plotlines, action sequences, a clearly delineated antagonist, and relatable and endearing protagonists that evoke emotional investment and affection. The Pakistani audience exhibited a strong interest in the storylines due to their dynamic nature, which included multiple subplots. Additionally, they discover a sense of cultural affinity between their own culture and their interpretation of South Korean culture as portrayed in South Korean dramas.

Due to these factors, a significant portion of Pakistani youth is exposed to and drawn towards it. The influence of Korean products and Korean culture on youth society is evident. There is a growing demand among individuals for an increased presence of content resembling Korean dramas within the Pakistani drama industry. Youngsters have developed strong urge to visit Korea to explore their culture and they are fantasizing Korean culture. This shows that Korean fiction content and dramas have inculcated a view of ideal, romanticism and fanaticism among Pakistani youth.

Research Methodology and instrument

The study has adopted survey as research method using questionnaire as instrument for data collection. A pilot study has been conducted as well to gain an idea of the audience's mindset and clarity of the instrument. The questionnaire was developed on 5 points Likert scale. However, the questions or statements are generated to find the agreement or disagreement of the respondents on the theme, and finally, scores are evaluated to get the findings.

Population and sampling

The population consisted of youngsters of the Lahore City, mainly students of different universities aged 15-28 or above. A sample of 107 respondents belonging to different age groups and socio-economic statuses were selected for the survey. The criteria for choosing the respondents lie in their exposure to Korean dramas during the Korean Wave in Pakistan. The collected data through the survey was

analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Hypotheses Testing

H1: There is a positive relationship between exposure to Korean Dramas and desire of viewers to visit Korea.

| Correlations | | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| | | | <i>Exposure to Korean Dramas</i> | <i>Desire of viewers to visit Korea</i> |
| Spearman's rho | <i>Exposure to Korean Dramas</i> | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .734** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| | | N | 300 | 300 |
| | <i>Desire of viewers to visit Korea</i> | Correlation Coefficient | .734** | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| | | N | 300 | 300 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | | |

Spearman's correlation was used to examine the association between exposure to Korean Dramas & desire of viewers to visit Korea. Findings of applying the statistical test demonstrated that an important confident correlation exists between the two variables mentioned and since the p-value is .000 which is less than 0.05, the hypothesis stands proven indicating a significant positive correlation between exposure to Korean Dramas & desire of viewers to visit Korea.

H2: There is a positive relationship between exposure to Korean Dramas and tendency to fantasize contents in viewers.

| Correlations | | | Exposure to Korean Dramas | Tendency to fantasize contents |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Exposure to Korean Dramas | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .506** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .001 |
| | | N | 300 | 300 |
| | Tendency to fantasize contents | Correlation Coefficient | .506** | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 | . |
| | | N | 300 | 300 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Spearman's correlation was used to examine the relationship between exposure to Korean Dramas and tendency to fantasize contents in viewers. The findings of applying the statistical test demonstrated that a positive correlation exists between the two variables mentioned and as the p-value is .001, which is less than 0.05, the hypothesis stands proven indicating a positive correlation between exposure to Korean Dramas and tendency to fantasize contents in viewers.

DISCUSSION

The study has collected data from 300 respondents using quantitative research design and survey research method. As per the sample, 37.4% were males and 62.6% were females who responded to the statements, of which 54.2% were undergraduate students and 30.8% were post-graduate students. Further data is collected from the age group of mainly 19-21 years who were 25.2%, and 22-24 years 46.7%. They had different household incomes ranging from a maximum of 1 Lac or a minimum of 20-40k. The respondent's frequency and regularity of watching Korean dramas vary as 73.8% watch 1-2 times a day, 13.1% watch weekly, and 24.3% watch monthly. Of the respondent's frequency and regularity of Korean dramas, 73.8% watch 1-2 times a day, 6.5% watch 3-4 times daily, and 11.2% watch 4-5 times daily. By analyzing the response of respondents about their preference of living in Korea over in Pakistan after watching Korean Dramas, it is found that 26.2% said disagree, 23.4% said strongly disagree, and 14.0% said strongly agree. When participants were asked whether, after watching Korean Dramas whether they have eager to visit Korea and explore their culture/living style, it was found that 27.1% said strongly agreed, 29.0% said to agree, 12.1% answered neutral, and 15.0% said strongly disagree. When people were asked whether watching Korean dramas based on Fiction, their stories fascinated them very much. They found that 27.1% said strongly agree, 29.0% said to agree, and 12.1% answered neutral. When the population was asked when they watch Korean Dramas Based on Fiction, they always have curiosity to know more about it, they found that 27.1% said strongly agree, 29.0% said to agree, and 12.1% answered neutral. When the populace was asked if they watch Korean dramas based on Fiction, they thought about what

would happen if something like this happened in the real world; it was found that 31.8% said to agree, 22.4% said disagree, and 6.5% said strongly disagree. When subjects were asked that they watch Korean dramas based on Romance, they kept daydreaming about it; it was found that 18.7% said to agree, 28.0% said disagree, and 11.2% said strongly disagree. When human subjects were asked when they watch Korean Dramas, their story always attracts them and they always glamorize everything related to it; it found that 24.3% said strongly agree, 20.6% said to agree, and 13.1% said strongly disagree. When appellants were asked if they watch Korean Dramas and sometimes wish that the same thing happened to them, it was found that 125.2% said to agree, 25.2% said disagree, and 13.1% said strongly disagree. When respondents were asked that Korean Dramas fantasize about them too much and if they wished to see the same content in the Pakistani drama industry, too, it was found that 29.0% said to agree, 29.0% said disagreed, and 11.2% said strongly disagreed.

Analysis

Since the present study aimed to explore effects of Korean fictional content on the youth of Pakistan. So the findings have comprehended that Korean fictional content have profound effects on youngsters of Pakistan as they are found to become active consumers of Korean dramas in recent years. They are hooked towards excessive consumption of these dramas and developing strong sense of followership towards their culture, storylines, romanticism, fanaticism and an image of ideal for their leading characters. They are adopting their styles, fashion, dressing, makeup and there is an increased urge among youngsters to visit and explore Korean culture. As per the propositions of Cultivation theory, these dramas have inculcated an image of ideal, beautiful, romantic love life among youth and they are idealizing their life as per portrayal of Korean culture in dramas. Conclusively these dramas have cultivated strong urge to embrace Korean life style and culture among youngsters.

CONCLUSION

The study has investigated the underlying factors behind the popularity of Korean dramas in Pakistani youngsters and found that they are becoming regular and frequent consumers of Korean drama content due to the fiction, fantasy and romanticism of these dramas. The mythical characters and folktales entice young minds and keep them hooked up to the consumption of these dramas. Henceforth, Korean dramas have significant effects on youngsters of Pakistan. The findings of study have showed that the proposed hypothesis concerning the effects of Korean dramas on young minds regarding the fantasy and desire to visit Korea have been supported. Korean culture has inculcated its strong impression in the young minds. They fantasize Korean lifestyle and culture, romanticize their folktales, and idealize their favorite characters, and follow Korean heroes and heroines. This immense popularity of Korean dramas have lead them to feel a strong desire to visit Korea to explore real time experiences.

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