Wholly owned by UTAR Education Foundation
(Co. No. 578227-M)
DU012(A)

MEDIA EFFECT OF KOREAN POP CULTURE TOWARD THE GENDER IDENTITY OF

MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY MALE

AU XIN YI 18AAB02797

NAM SIAW YUAN 18AAB03144

SOO JUN KIT 18AAB02029

TAN SHU YEE 18AAB03496

WONG PUI ENG 18AAB04288

A RESEARCH PROJECT
SUBMITTED IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
BACHELOR OF COMMUNICATION (HONS) PUBLIC RELATIONS
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

APRIL 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would be impossible to complete this thesis without the assistance and cooperation of a host of individuals and organization. We are therefore deeply thankful to our supervisor Mr. Pong Kok Shiong who made this work possible. Mr. Pong's guidance and advice carried us through all the stages of writing the report along with his brilliant comments and suggestions.

We are deeply grateful to our parents for their warm and sweet encouragement as well as their understanding. Besides, we must give special thanks to all the members for the continuous support and understanding to go through all the difficulties when undertaking the research, the writing the report.

To every one of you, I thank you. This thesis has been completed by having all of your efforts and contributions.

AU XIN YI

NAM SIAW YUAN

SOO JUN KIT

TAN SHU YEE

WONG PUI ENG

DECLARATION

We declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of our own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

Name   : AU XIN YI, NAM SIAW YUAN, SOO JUN KIT, TAN SHU YEE, WONG PUI ENG

Student ID: 18AAB02797, 18AAB03144, 18AAB02029, 18AAB03496

      18AAB04288

Signed   : *AU XIN YI, NAM SIAW YUAN, SOO JUN KIT, TAN SHU YEE,*

      WONG PUI ENG

Date   : 15 April 2022

Approval Form

This research paper attached hereto, entitled "Media effect of Korean pop culture toward the gender identity of Malaysian University male" prepared and submitted by AU XIN YI, NAM SIAW YUAN, SOO JUN KIT, TAN SHU YEE, WONG PUI ENG in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Public Relations is hereby accepted.

_____   Date: _____

Supervisor

Supervisor's name: Mr. Pong Kok Shiong

Abstract

The expansion of Korean culture had a significant impact in many areas, including culture, lifestyles, and arts. The influence of Korean culture has been widely discussed in different fields. However, the impact of Korean culture on gender identity is limited. The study aims to fulfill three primary objectives: firstly, (a) To explore the understanding of hegemonic and soft masculinity. (b) To discover the effect of media on gender identity. (c) To find out the extent of the acceptance of soft masculinity in the media. This qualitative study utilized in-depth interviews with 10 UTAR students aged between 21 and 23. The thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the data. Among the 10 students, all of them had a positive attitude toward Korean popular culture, and they agreed that the mass media heavily reconstructed their gender identity in terms of their physical appearance and internal characteristics. This research study helped understand the media effect of Korean pop culture on the gender identity of Malaysian males.

Keywords: Media effect, Korean pop culture, Gender identity, Soft masculinity, Malaysian Male

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

STUDENT DECLARATION FORM
Department of Public Relations
Academic Honesty Regarding Final Year Projects

The following are examples of academic dishonesty extracted from "Student Handbook" that are more applicable to final year projects.

- plagiarism, i.e., the failure to properly acknowledge the use of another person's work;
- submission for assessment of material that is not the student's own work;
- collusion, i.e., obtaining assistance in doing work which is meant to be solely the student's own work;
- use of fabricated data claimed to be obtained by experimental work, or data copied or obtained by unfair means;

It is important that the student reads the Student Handbook and understands the seriousness of academic dishonesty. The student should pay particular attention on how to avoid plagiarism.

Student Final Year Project Declaration

I have read the student handbook and I understand the meaning of academic dishonesty, in particular plagiarism and collusion. I declare that the work submitted for the final year project does not involve academic dishonesty. I give permission for my final year project work to be electronically scanned and if found to involve academic dishonesty, I am aware of the consequences as stated in the Student Handbook.

FYP Title:

Media effect of Korean pop culture toward the gender identity of Malaysian University male

Student Name:	Student ID	Signature
AU XIN YI	18AAB02797	*AU XIN YI*
NAM SIAW YUAN	18AAB03144	*NAM SIAW YUAN*
SOO JUN KIT	18AAB02029	*SOO JUN KIT*
TAN SHU YEE	18AAB03496	*TAN SHU YEE*
WONG PUI ENG	18AAB04288	*WONG PUI ENG*

Date: 15/4/2022

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of study

Korean popular culture, also called the Korean Wave, has deeply influenced other countries nowadays. The Korean Wave is the fast-spreading trend of contemporary Korean culture worldwide (Sin & Omar, 2020) and this is caused by the rapid dissemination of cultural products by the media in the global marketplace (Jin, 2018). The Korean Wave or "Hallyu" is the term used to describe the global appeal of South Korea's cultural economy, which exports foods, entertainment, music, television dramas, and films (Roll, 2021). Korean films, dramas, and music are popular worldwide, and Asia was at the forefront of the Korean wave and where most of its cultural success has been achieved (Trolan, 2017). Korean popular culture has a strong influence not only on Asians but also on western countries. Korean popular culture has reached audiences outside of Asia, including the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and South America (Ju & Lee, 2015). In addition, South Korea is one of the few countries with a clear ambition to become the world's leading supplier of popular culture to spread the Korean Wave to the world as it is primarily reliant on the rapid growth of social media (Roll, 2021).

Korean stars are famous in some countries such as China and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, people in those countries tend to imitate the appearance of those Korean stars, leading to a boom in plastic surgery (Eun, 2013). According to Phang et al. (2018), Malaysian young adult audiences pay attention to the actors and actresses' physical appearance, storyline, and Korean culture and values in a drama. Although the audiences are aware of the actors' plastic surgeries, they still have an open-minded attitude toward the culture. According to Yuen (2020), more men and teens opt for plastic operations with the current urge to look like K-pop stars in Malaysia. It stated that

Malaysian women still make up the majority of customers in the beauty industry, which was about 70% to 80%. Still, the demand from men and younger Malaysians is increasing, accounting for 20% of the entire clientele, up from roughly 10% five years ago which was 2015 (Yuen, 2020). Skin tightening, body contouring, hair transplants, anti-aging, and muscle sculpting are all popular operations among males. Therefore, when the audiences are overly obsessed with the reconstructed image that the actors in the media present, they will be influenced and tend to imitate those actors' identities.

Jin (2018) stated that young people who are tech-savvy have transformed how they consume popular culture by relying heavily on social media, showing that social media has become one of the most significant breakthroughs in popular culture's distribution and consumption. The media has become very common from the past to the present, including print media, broadcast media, outdoor media, and social media in spreading the cultural phenomenon (Jin & Yoon, 2014). Shah (2020) stated that advertisement channels that for decades referred to traditional media such as print, radio, broadcast television, or billboards had been used for advertising purposes as the businesses have relied on traditional media for years. For instance, Korean popular culture was primarily disseminated through analog media, mainly via analog print and broadcast media as the digital revolution was still in its early stages in the early 2000s (Sun & Liew, 2019).

Furthermore, social media has become common these days; more and more people are exposed to Korean popular culture through social media. Korean popular culture is more convenient for international audiences nowadays on various online communication platforms such as Social Networking Sites (SNS), blogs, and forums (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021). For example, a community of young people exhibits their soft masculinity on YouTube as they have been

inspired by the Korean Wave and further help them find a sense of belonging (Law, 2021). Therefore, the public is susceptible to the influence of Korean pop culture due to the widespread use of social media.

Moreover, customer perception of the advertised product is influenced by the celebrity's physical attractiveness, credibility, and congruence with the reference to the endorsed advertisement (Ahmed et al., 2015). As the Korean celebrity endorsement portrays features such as their good looks or beauty, physical appearance, and body shape, it can manipulate and change the consumer's attitude and lead to the intention to imitate the endorsing celebrity (Mat et al., 2019). For example, K-pop male bands are not committed to one version of masculinity expression, instead of experimenting with "versatile masculinity," "transnational masculinity," "alternative masculinity," and "overlapping masculinity" depending on their musical style, which had influenced the public (Song & Velding, 2019). Hence, Korean popular culture could influence the public to follow or imitate their culture.

The Korean wave has affected not only women but also men. According to Arambam (2019), masculinity has always been socially, culturally, and historically constituted. When males are supposed to be rational, powerful, and the family's breadwinner, while women are believed to be emotional, dependent, and inferior, binaries are often constructed. However, the Korean Wave significantly impacted redefining masculinity across Asia as the dominant form of East Asian popular culture (Ainsle, 2017). A specific male consumer category that has contributed to this emerging culture is the metrosexuals, young adult guys in metropolitan areas who are concerned about their looks and grooming, and they frequently spend the bulk of their leisure time and money on high-end fashion and grooming (Sin & Omar, 2020).

In addition, Kkonminam masculinities resemble a Korean version of a metrosexual (Lim, 2008). Kkonminam, which means *"pretty flower boy,"* refers to the *"soft"* image that young men in Korean dramas present (Monocello et al., 2017). Kkonminam men in popular dramas and romantic comedies are shown as attentive, sympathetic, and willing to communicate their feelings if necessary; they are well-groomed and fashionable, sporting the latest man-bag and being excessively self-conscious about their looks (Elfving-Hwang, 2011).

The Kkonminam men have both masculine and feminine characteristics which can satisfy a complex human yearning. They have particular physical features such as being tall, having smooth skin, silky hair, and being trendy and romantic (Khai & Wahab, 2017). They claimed to be the embodiment of a new Asian ideal of a privileged male. According to Azizah and Dwiyanti (2021), soft masculinity refers to how men handle other people more subtly and gently. It also refers to masculinity that pays less attention to physical strength and power assigned to male characteristics. They have particular mental characteristics such as being more emotional, less authoritarian, gentle, concentrating on intelligence, and having mental power.

According to Ainsle (2017), Malaysia showed the image of heavy control and exclusivity of hegemonic masculinity, which explained why the Korean popular culture and its soft masculinity model may be highly problematic in this context. Still, it also appeals to certain Malaysian men as an appealing and alternative masculinity model to invest. In Malaysia, hegemonic masculinity is further complicated by its entanglement with rigid and restrictive ethnic and religious boundaries. However, according to Lim (2013), Malaysians have been exposed to Korean pop culture for a long time. It represents an alternative, yet highly popular, kind of entertainment, which explains why the culture could slowly integrate into the society and be

adapted by a part of young Malaysian males as a kind of alternative identification through social media.

Hence, with the rapid growth of social media, it has become the most important platform for disseminating Korean popular culture. International audiences had become increasingly reliant on social media to follow Korean popular culture. Korean popular culture like K-drama, K-pop music, K-movies, and K-beauty influences people in other countries and reconstructs masculinity. In terms of East Asian masculinity's impact and reshaping, the growth and export of Korean popular culture have been the most influential (Ainsle, 2017). Korean popular culture has a tremendous impact in shaping the representation of gender identity. Therefore, this study will look into the media effect of Korean popular culture on the gender identity of Malaysians.

1.2 Problem Statement

Social media is a tool that may be used to stimulate and affect the attitudes and behaviors of individuals and communities in all areas of life. Social media encourages involvement, social interaction, and reciprocity. As a result, it facilitates not only information sharing but also social networking and interactive engagement (Benetoli et al., 2015). It also contributes to the formation of a nation's identity and culture, as well as its overall development (Khai & Wahab, 2017). The trend keeps changing all the time, especially the beauty trend. One of the most controversial issues is the beauty trend brought up by the Korean wave. For example, the beauty market mainly focused on females in the past, but some popular beauty brands also focused on the male market. One of the famous cosmetic influencers recognized in China is not a female influencer but a *"Xiao Xian Rou,"* Austin Li Jiaqi, also known as the *"Lipstick King."* Also, *"Xiao Xian Rou"* and flower boys

are challenging the traditional gender identity and argued by the public that they are softening masculinity (Wen, 2021).

According to Ariffin et al. (2018), the media landscape is no longer dominated by American TV shows and films, as they have successfully attracted audiences through the Asian mediascape (visual, cultural, or imaginary impact). Korean music, dramas, and television shows have all contributed to the phenomenon of idolization, particularly among teenagers. Due to their weak self-identity, adolescents are more easily influenced by others and participate in idolization (Ang & Chan, 2016), and some of them had their identities shaped in part by exposure to popular culture (Engle & Kasser, 2005).

According to Laffan (2020), the average ages of K-pop fans are 23 years. Adolescents could be influenced by a large group of people and tend to follow the culture or norm of the group so that they feel that they are also a part of the group. It was also a natural development for adolescents to make their favorite celebrities as role models (McCutcheon et al., 2002). For example, an adolescent will try to imitate famous music artists' culture, lifestyle, and fashion as if the musician is their ideal figure. When individuals self-categorize into a particular group, they will experience positive attachments to the in-group of interest and contribute to intragroup morale.

Besides, as well as the plastic surgery industry, an increasing number of males involve themselves in it to get a better appearance, such as *"Gua Zi Lian"* (oval face), which is different from the traditional look that a male should have. According to Gengmei (2016), the most attractive facial features in Chinese male cosmetic surgery were Huo Jianhua's eyes, Hu Ge's nose, Yang Yang's face, and Lu Han's lips. They are considered as the most popular *"Xiao Xian Rou"*

in China, that having a strong influence of these soft, androgynous, effeminate male idols on men's perceptions of particular features.

The current beauty trend has changed time by time, as many factors influence the public's perception of *"beauty."* Indeed, media exposure has been found to play a significant impact in a variety of topics, including the formation and maintenance of racial/ethnic cognitions (and emotions), expectancies about intergroup relations, policy decision-making, and self-and identity perceptions (Mastro, 2015). Therefore, the rising Korean wave indeed has the most powerful influence on the beauty trend that might be challenging the current aesthetic and gender identity. Makeup is no longer a practice of only females, but also for the males, just like those K-pop stars did during their stage performance. Males do not necessarily have masculinity like what is expected by the public to be categorized as male. Masculinity is not necessarily identified by the outlook of the man, but by the actions a man should have, it is nothing more than wearing makeup (Tang, 2018). Based on the situation above, it indicates that the gender identity of males is reconstructed as people are pursuing a clean and delicate face. Society expected a man to have beards and tougher facial features but not as soft as those male celebrities that undergo plastic surgery. Therefore, the gender identity has been reconstructed by the influence of the media portraying those soft images of Korean male celebrities and served as a preferred template for males to follow the trend. It shows the obvious changes in gender identity.

Apart from that, the purpose of putting on makeup is to show the most beautiful side of an individual to the public, regardless of male or female. Therefore, when the audiences are attracted to the *"flower boy"* or "*Xiao Xian Rou,"* they will tend to imitate them and try to follow the trend that they brought up, which is also known as *"Hallyu."* The Korean Wave began in 1999, and Asia

has experienced a rise in Korean influence in everything from television, dramas, films, music, food, and fashion since then (Jonghoe, 2012). Therefore, it has a significant influence on the perception of the public toward gender identity.

According to the traditional masculinity ideology, manliness is reflected by taking care of oneself and being tough, strong, and healthy (Levant & Pollack, 2003). Initially, a man should be masculine and have a muscular body to match the public's expectations. However, the perception of the public toward masculinity has changed. The new masculine men are more feminine men that you can see in media like Justine Bieber or the Korean boy bands. For now, nerds are becoming the new masculine man. They are more prone to appear on TV than macho men anymore (Khalaf et al., 2013).

In fact, several past studies regarding Korean popular culture had been conducted in the field. However, there is still some improvement that could be done depending on the topic, especially in the masculinity-oriented countries and Islamic countries. For instance, a qualitative study that includes the in-depth interview aims to investigate further the changes in gender identity of our target participants. The Korean wave has been entering Asia for a long time, and the Korean media effect on public purchase behavior has been widely discussed. However, the Korean media effect on gender identity still lacks some research. For example, Western media often stress that the muscular mesomorphic body ideal is neither skinny nor fat, but it is extremely muscular (Keum, 2016). Therefore, when the dominant western media effect that tends to portray the strong muscular, and tough body image to the audiences has been combated with the Korean wave, how would the gender identity of a male will be affected by the rising of the Korean wave that portrays a totally different body image. Moreover, Asian countries that have different ethics and races such

as Malaysia were masculinity-oriented and dominated by Islamic. How is the acceptance of the Malaysian male on the new gender identity from Korean popular culture? Thus, the study aims to discuss the issues above in-depth.

In short, K-pop stars experiment with masculinity and beauty, challenging concepts of what it means to be a beautiful man' in a heterosexual or non-heterosexual way. It has opened up possibilities for beauty among men across the globe and plays a pivotal role in concentrating beauty among men internationally ("Flowerboys and the appeal of 'soft masculinity' in South Korea," 2018). With the high accessibility of media, Korean culture could be transited at high speed. Therefore, when people accept a new culture that is different from their own culture, it will change the cultural identity and the gender identity of an individual.

1.3 Research Objective

RO 1. - To explore the understanding of hegemonic and soft masculinity.

RO 2. - To discover the effect of the media on gender identity.

RO 3. - To find out the extent of the acceptance of soft masculinity in the media.

1.4 Research Question

RQ 1. - How do the public perceived hegemonic and soft masculinity?

RQ 2. - What is the effect of the media on gender identity?

RQ 3. - To what extent is the acceptance of soft masculinity in the media?

1.5 Research Significance

In terms of practical implication, this research is beneficial to marketing practitioners, retailers, manufacturers, growth industry and business players to modify and refine a new model business or marketing strategy in order to meet the preferences of Malaysian adolescents. It is because Korean pop culture may continue to influence the public's perception of product and brand positioning. Adolescents nowadays tend to follow their favorite celebrities and idols on social media. Korean pop culture serves as brand ambassadors, spokesperson, indicator or even representative of the product in Malaysia, it will eventually influence the buying behavior or preference of the consumer.

As an effort to transfer the greatest amount of business profit, further study on the influence of Korean popular culture in Malaysia must be conducted on a continuous basis. Marketers across a range of sectors will need to persevere in order to thrive and contribute to economic growth. As part of their survival strategy, products or goods manufacturers must maintain their study to understand the consumption decisions of adolescents. It is because adolescents are in the front of globalization. To succeed in today's shifting global marketplace, businesses must first have a thorough understanding of their position in this respect. Given the significant expansion and market opportunity in emerging nations, it is critical to the business to collect information on these markets. In the long term, all parties participating in different businesses in the market that target adolescents must be prepared to deal with the problems given by a shift in these adolescents' preference. It is imperative to marketers to examine and adapt the shifting requirements of modern and more affluent Malaysian societies (Ariffin et al. 2012).

Therefore, this study can contribute to the marketing practitioners, retailers, manufacturers, growth industry and business players to facilitate and cultivate effective new business models and business plans with the influence of Korean pop culture toward Malaysians. Additionally, the growthing business and industry are also able to identify the preference, purchase behavior, and consumption patterns of consumers in Malaysia with our study.

In theoretical implication, social identity theory (SIT) emphasizes that an individual's behavior reflects the wider society units in which they live (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This theory explains that an individual's internal structures and identity is guided by other larger societal structures such as large groups, different cultures, organizations, and personal identification with respect to these collective units. The core theory is cultural competence because a collective group will mostly influence and might frequently dictate an individuals' beliefs and behaviors (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

According to the previous study by Laffan (2020), this study expands the influence of social identity theory on the self-categorization of K-Pop fans, the result of the study showed that the theory will generate some psychological outcomes for the K-pop fans such as happiness, self-esteem, and social connectedness. Social identity theory has been applied in this study to examine how the traditional gender identity of Malaysian males has been reconstructed by the larger societal structure (Korean pop culture). Because Korean popular culture plays an important role in shaping the expression of gender identity. At the same time, gender identification is an essential component of a person's self-personality and idea, social identity theory also helps to explore the soft masculine consciousness of Islamic countries. Therefore, this theory may further strengthen the perception of soft masculinity on the topic and enhance people's understanding of this theory.

In conclusion, this research reveals the media effect of Korean pop culture on the traditional gender identity of Malaysian males. The influence of Korean pop culture on traditional gender identity, especially in oriented countries and Islamic countries has been limitedly studied. Therefore, by reflecting the influence of Korean pop culture on gender identity from an Asian perspective, this research can be regarded as an academic contribution in a non-Western context.

1.6 Scope of Study

Whilst the rise of the Korean wave globally, the influence of Korean popular culture on gender identity in masculinity-orientated countries is lacking in-depth study. The aim of this research is to explore the potential changes of reconstructed gender identity, also known as "soft masculinity" that is challenging the traditional hegemonic masculinity identity.

The scope of the study is limited to recruiting 10 male participants from UTAR between the ages of 21-23 that will be contacted by UTAR email accounts. The participants for the study will be filtered based on the result of the Traditional Masculinity Femininity Scale, and the recruitment period will be conducted for a maximum of 1 month and will end when 10 participants have been reached. An in-depth interview will be carried out with the selected participants to investigate any changes in their gender identity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conceptual framework of the research was discussed in Chapter 2. Further, the gender identity as well as the soft masculinity in East Asia was discussed, followed by the mass media, the influence of social media, the media effect on Korean popular culture, popular culture and body image, Korean popular culture in Malaysia context, social media effect of Korean culture on gender identity were further discussed in this chapter.

2.1 Social identity theory

A social identity theory predicts a particular individual's knowledge that they belong to a social group or category such as racial, ethnic groups, sexual orientation, and gender identities (Abrams & Hogg, 2006). A social group is a set of individuals who share a common identity or perspective belonging to the same social category. In-group refers to individuals who are similar to each other, such as individuals with feminine identities. Meanwhile, individuals who differ from the self are labeled as out-group, such as individuals with a masculine identity (Burke & Stets, 2000).

The theory includes three core elements: "social categorization", "social identification", and "social comparison" (Abrams & Hogg, 2006). According to Trepte & Loy (2017), social categorization indicates that people are defined and understood not only as individuals but also as members that belong to a certain group based on their age, cultural background, and economic level. People emphasize the similarities of their in-group members when they are members of that group. At the same time, they highlight the distinctions between those in out-groups. This notion of accentuation is a fundamental premise of social categorization since it accentuates and highlights social categories.

After the social categorization and social identification process, it came to the social comparison process. According to Abrams & Hogg (1999), comparisons of groups or categories that emphasize group distinctiveness in favor of one's ingroup over a relevant outgroup are favored in particular. As a result, when a certain group becomes prominent, one's beliefs and behaviors are guided by the characteristics associated with that group. As a result, distinctions between out-groups are accentuated, while differences within in-groups are minimized. This process aids in the maintenance of self-concept and esteem, as well as enhancing confidence in existing cognitions.

Berlinger and Seo (2021) stated that Korean popular culture (K-Pop) is the most significant transnational widespread culture phenomenon since hip-hop. It has grown exponentially within the past couple of years in the social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. These media platforms are connecting millions of people across the nations. CNN (2019) reported that South Korea is currently leading the global beauty industry for men. K-Pop strongly influences masculinity as they've had to deal with issues at the blurry intersection of race, culture, and gender identity (Yang, 2019).

Besides, the *"Hallyu"* fandom, or the Korean Waze, could be easily found in Asian countries. In the previously mentioned study by Ainsle (2017), the Korean wave argued that soft masculinity could encourage such men to critique the reductive and redefined hegemonic masculinity to develop a new form of identity within Malaysia and the Asian context.

The implementation of Korean pop culture has the capability to deconstruct gender identity and create new standards, which include the feminine, soft masculine materialistic, and human characteristics (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). The new beauty ideals and expressions have influenced the new model of masculinity called "pan-East Asian soft masculinity." The term is

also described as "male images that are exceptionally feminine to Western eyes" (Jung, 2010). The expression of male beauty ideas could be viewed as feminine or the lack of hegemonic masculinity in Western and Asian countries (Ainsle, 2017).

The outcome of the past study by Mckinley et al. (2014) suggests that when it comes to the media's involvement in establishing universally held norms and customs, the relationship between media exposure and intergroup results is further explored. Both in-group and outgroup members must recognize the comparative dimension for intergroup comparisons to work. As a result, the media play a role in establishing shared norms and activating the usage of these categories in later evaluations by promoting certain representations (which feature particular qualities of groups) while disregarding others. Media messages, in particular, have the potential to (1) influence the importance or relevance of, and ability to prime, different group memberships; (2) contribute to viewers' perceptions of the features/dimensions that characterize different groups; (3) provide treatment norms for different groups; (4) define the status and standing of different groups; and, finally, (5) normalize these notions by implying that media representations are consensually accepted.

In short, this study applies social identity theory to soft masculine consciousness as gender identity is an essential aspect of one's self-personality and concept; therefore, the theory could further enhance the identifications of soft masculine on this topic.

2.2 Gender identity

Gender refers to "male and female social categories within a culture" (Wood & Eagly, 2015). The fundamental core of gender identity is how we perceive ourselves as men and women encompass the connections and interpretations we attach to each other's behaviors, characteristics,

and feelings. The perceptual experience of being masculine or feminine is reflected in the self-structure, and individuals incorporate these cultural meanings into their perceptions, then gender becomes part of their identities. Through these gender identities, individuals may think and act according to the culture of masculine and feminine (Olesen, 1975).

The ideas of gender and gender identity are essential as not only does every community develop a concept of gender-appropriate characteristics, behaviors, and attributes, but these conceptual frameworks also influence society's basic functioning nowadays (Kacen, 2000). These traditional concepts and prescribed rules of behavior become the general guiding principles by which individuals are regarded as "proper" members of society. As Boehm and Gilmore (1992) stated, all societies identify themselves between males and females. All societies provide standardized gender-appropriate roles for both men and women, regardless of other normative distinctions made. In other words, the society determined the ideas of masculinity and femininity impact all our activities; even if an individual does not agree with gender-typed characteristics or rejects the traditional gender roles, the individual either he or will still learn the behavior that is expected them as a man or woman (Spence & Helmreich, 1978)

Traditionally, males and females are supposed to be masculine and feminine based on those gender cultural expectations. Risman (2004) stated that gender is a social structure that could explain the misconceptions about men and women's contributions to society; however, gender identity is determined by an individual's self-identification and beliefs about gender expression (Borry, 2020). Taking a Social identity theory perspective, it suggests that social identities affect an individual's attitudes and behaviors regarding their in-group and the out-group (Leaper, 2011).

According to the Human Rights Campaign, one's gender identity might or might not correspond to the socially defined masculine and feminine behaviors and characteristics. For instance, an individual who ascribed the same sex and gender identity is called "cisgender," an individual who ascribed the different sex and gender identity are called "transgender," while an individual who self-identifies as non-binary or gender-neutral is called "agender" (Monro, 2020). Thus, gender identity is a self- conceptualization that develops from identifying oneself as a part of a particular gender group, as well as all of the values and expectations within that gender group. One of the key concepts of social identity theory is identifying with a social group such as one's gender. Therefore, looking at gender identity from a social identity perspective enables a more comprehensive approach to understand the gender's impact (Maldonado et al., 2003).

Constantinople (1973) critiqued the traditional measure of masculinity and femininity and showed the statistical studies indicated the different dimensions instead of a single bipolar masculine-feminine dimension. Furthermore, Constantinople stated that the various dimensions of masculinity and femininity established the stage for developing a new approach to gender identity (Wood & Eagly, 2015). Indeed, the growth of the Korean wave had a significant impact on the new forms of masculinity as Jung (2010) refers to this growing and powerful new approach of masculinity as "kkonminam" masculinity also known as soft masculinity.

2.2.1 Soft Masculinity in East Asia

"Kkonminam" (literally, 'Korean flower boy'), also known as soft masculinity, represents a new and modern feminization of masculinity in East Asia (Kang-Nguyen, 2019). Kkonminam men are perceived as caring, sensitive, and willing to express their feelings in popular Korean dramas and movies as they are attractive, fashionable, and well-groomed. Also, *"kkonminam"* men

are young, and often not afraid to use any cosmetic or plastic surgery to maintain their attractive appearance and show their well-toned muscular bodies (Elfving- Hwang, 2011).

According to Lim (2008), "*kkonminam*" masculinities are directly associated with a Korean version of the metrosexual. A point reinforced in TIME magazine, which discussed the rise of *"aimei nan ren"* (love beauty men) in China and Taiwan and *"bishōnen"* (beautiful young men) in Japan are expanding the trend of soft masculinity across East Asia (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). Apart from that, soft masculinity, homosexuality, and homosociality have profound historical connections as Hong (2008) suggests that soft masculinity is modeled from prior scholarly masculinity contrasted with the traditional measure of masculinity. For instance, all men must fulfill two years of military service in Korea, also well-known as militaristic masculinity.

In the context of discussing "*kkonminam*" masculinities as a new identity of masculinity as Jung (2010) described the K-pop male idols' soft masculinity as hybrid and culturally odorless, and hence lacking national characteristics which enable their masculinity to freely travel across countries as the soft masculinity of K-pop male idols would soon be addressed under the phrase of "Global Soft Masculinity" (Lee et al., 2020). The K-Pop Male idol's presentation of soft masculinity can challenge normative perceptions of Asian masculinity in East Asia and Western countries (Kimmel, 2005) because they are now widely recognized as attractive, sexy, handsome, and masculine (Anderson, 2014).

On the other hand, there was an increased emphasis placed on beauty and cosmetics for males in the early 2000s. It reinforced traditional beliefs about masculinity traits, for instance, a well-built male brand ambassador representing men's makeup products in the advertisement (Lee et al., 2020). Furthermore, the concept of men's grooming and beauty is blurring the boundaries

between masculinity and femininity as a man or woman may easily deceive someone by cross-dressing as the opposite gender (McCracken, 2014).

The popularity of K-Pop within East Asia has promoted a soft-masculinity reputation where a man also can be masculine yet gentle and tender at the same time. This suggests that gender performance is mainly dependent on an individual's physical appearance and also body gestures. The change is not only affecting the male performers in the entertainment field but also the perception of how males and females perceive soft masculinity (Tan, 2019).

2.3 Media Effect of Korean Popular Culture

The media effect has been a core study in this society since the beginning. A media effect is a change in an outcome, such as behavior, attitude, belief, or cognition, within an individual or a social entity due to the influence of mass media messages (Potter, 2011). Mass media development affects various aspects, such as individuals' and society's values, thoughts, and actions. It could view the influence and impact of media on a limited scale (individual) and a large scale (society), as well as the spread of specific influences sooner or later (Rosengren & Windahl, 1977). For instance, the Korean wave has developed from a regional phenomenon to a worldwide phenomenon (Thussu, 2007). Media is a tool to impact the attitudes and behavior of individuals and communities who adopt media content in their daily life. For example, Astro Hitz, a Malaysian radio show, had collaborated with the Korean Tourist Organization to launch a new program called K-pop Hitz Talent Show in 2011 (Ariffin et al., 2013).

The mass media play an essential role as a channel for transmitting information and entertainment and as a tool to develop and create society, culture, and personality development, regardless of positive or negative. The positive effect of mass media included spreading and

instilling moral values to the public and espousing high moral values to influence and change the value and behavior of society. Previous research has shown that Korean media content's non-threatening, fresh, healthy, and graphically appealing aesthetic appeals to East and Southeast Asian audiences more than Western media content (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008). For example, K-popularity drama's in East and Southeast Asia have been attributed to its cleverly repositioning and rebranding of cultures as part of a highly new modern way of life, presenting "Asian-ness" in a modern image (Yang, 2012). Nevertheless, the negative effects of media such as television, and broadcasts could also shape the negative thinking of society.

According to Stark and Castells (1997), the media effect is direct and unlimited. It touched directly on every aspect of daily life, such as television, social media, and radio. For instance, kids often imagine and act like a superstar or idols portrayed in some movies (Brosius & Engel, 1996). This phenomenon could be recognized as idolizing. Media influence could bring several effects on media users in terms of their behavior, attitude, and values Nowadays, society gathers youngsters and children in the virtual world such as gaming, role play that will influence their behavior and value from the mass media such as the social media platforms: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter.

Social media has a substantial impact on teenagers in terms of their behavior as the photos or videos shared by the public or particular celebrities might consist of some violating content that will influence the behavior of children and teenagers (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). According to Park (2011), the public could get the newest information about a celebrity regardless of demographic factors on social media. Therefore, the Korean culture that is brought up mainly by those Korean celebrities could spread globally easier. For instance, the attractive images presented by those

Korean celebrities are influencing the audiences to follow their style and trend. Teenagers who have weak self-identity will try to imitate the appearance of those Korean celebrities based on their beautiful photos shared on social media. In order to look as beautiful as those Korean celebrities, they will involve themselves in plastic surgery and blindly follow the cosmetics used by Korean celebrities.

In addition, social media has one of the most pervasive and powerful impacts on how we perceive men and women. The pervasiveness of the Internet has begun to alter the landscape of today's world. The fluidity of gender can be realized and experienced thanks to the ever-changing nature of the internet and the ability to flexibly navigate among online cultures (Bailey & Telford, 2013). Gender is considered to be a social and cultural construct that embodies the idea of being male or female, masculine or feminine, as well as how women and men are expected to think and behave in accordance with their shared rules and ideologies (Salzmann & Coates, 1994). However, social media is not only for getting information and interacting with people but also can be seen as a liberating space for establishing and altering gender identities. For example, a transgender person can create a website to discuss or showcase his or her personality, and because the boundaries of the Internet arena are digital, determining whether that person's identity is real or virtual can be difficult (Mckie, 1997).

2.4 Popular Culture

The set of behaviors, beliefs, and objects that embody a social system's most widely shared meanings is a popular culture that encompasses media items, fashion and trends, amusement and leisure, and other things (Kidd, 2017). The beliefs and behaviors widely shared among a population and the objects they organize are popular cultures (Ariffin et al., 2013). It includes popular beliefs,

customs, and objects rooted in local traditions and popular beliefs, customs, and objects generated in political and commercial centers. Popular culture refers to the culture industry that produces cultural commodities and experiences and markets to mass audiences (Papke, 2007). Therefore, there are a lot of popular cultures from other countries that have brought a lot of influences, such as American popular culture and Korean popular culture.

"American popular culture is the influence of popular culture originated from the United States and has a penetrating effect throughout the world" was the conceptual meaning of American popular culture given by the researchers (Ariffin et al., 2012). American culture has influenced people worldwide, particularly in the Western realm, through various forms of adaptation (Rezianurwanto, 2020). Music from America has been widely listened to worldwide, and American films and television are widely seen. Western popular culture has dominated the world for nearly a century (Putri & Reese, 2018). However, Asia has become an exporter too since the late 1990s. South Korea has arisen with its popular culture and economic stability. The United States, Mexico, France, Germany, and other western countries have been regarded as new markets for Korean pop culture since the mid-2000s (Ju & Lee, 2015).

Korean popular culture, particularly K-drama and K-pop music, has exploded in popularity worldwide in the previous fifteen years. This phenomenon is known as the "Korean Wave" or *"Hallyu,"* a term popularized by Chinese media in 1998 and now widely used around the world (Chang & Lee, 2017). Korean cultural items have successfully entered into different countries and dominated global pop-culture marketplaces so that the current Korean wave is considered a facet of cultural globalization (Anwar & Anwar, 2019). According to Yang (2012), Korean popular culture had extended over pan Ethnic-Chinese countries such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and

Singapore since the mid-1990s, then into Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, and even outside East Asia.

According to Khalid and Wok (2020), the Korean wave had a significant impact on daily life, such as language, Korean food, and beauty and fashion. The analysis stated that the respondents could understand or speak the Korean language after being exposed to the Korean popular culture which made them feel closer to the Korean wave. Moreover, it also stated that the respondents were attracted to Korean celebrities and imitated their fashion style and beauty regime as the Korean celebrities had a good fashion sense and fresh and rejuvenated skin. However, Korean popular culture has affected males, especially in terms of masculinity.

Male idols of Korea are no longer marketed in a bold and masculine style but instead a soft, gentle, and effeminate picture of the flower boy. It appears that the Korean wave has given young people a fresh viewpoint on gender (Law, 2021). The prevalence of K-pop is changing masculinity which is affecting the male performers in the entertainment industry and young men in the region (Tan, 2014). Korean performers who represent soft masculinity have influenced the perceptions of their fans about masculinity ideals by promoting the consumerist masculinity model that is linked to cosmetic surgery and a glossy fashion style (Maliangkay & Song, 2014). Soft masculinity expressed in Korean popular culture is becoming increasingly popular in entertainment and everyday life. According to Yang (2013), young Asian men's bodies have been targets of the beauty business since the 1990s. Women are no longer the only targets of the beauty industry, but now men are being targeted as well, as the soft masculinity presented in Korean popular culture has affected the perception of the public. In Malaysia, Korean popular culture is the dominant form of East Asian popular culture, which influenced Malaysians' masculinity (Ainsle, 2017).

2.4.1 Korean popular culture in Malaysia context

In many nations around the world, including Malaysia, the popularity of the Korean Wave has become a hot topic. According to Chan (2018), South Korea capitalized on this trend and effectively exported Korean popular culture to the rest of the world. The Korean wave is growing increasingly popular and influential in Malaysian culture. The first Korean Wave product to penetrate Malaysia is Korean drama, followed by movies and popular music (Phang et al., 2018). Malaysia was primarily exposed to western culture due to its colonial past. Still, in recent years, a new phenomenon has emerged with the growing popularity of Korean dramas broadcast on Malaysian television networks (Ariffin et al., 2018).

Some of the Korean dramas included Korean cuisine, which piqued the interest of Malaysians in cooking. Korean cuisines and outlets, such as KyoChon 1911, Daorae Garden Korean BBQ Restaurant, and many other Korean eateries, are sprouting up throughout Malaysia's major cities (Gan, 2019). Besides that, Korean popular culture also affects the beauty of Malaysians. K-beauty, a phrase that refers to skincare and cosmetics goods from South Korea, is gaining popularity in Malaysia because of the celebrity and K-pop idols' attractiveness (Gan, 2019).

According to Sin and Omar (2020), the Korean Wave has spread Korean grooming and fashion cultures throughout East Asia. It stated that the traditional masculinity norm in Malaysian society has been challenged and has undergone considerable changes as a growing number of Malaysian males are paying more attention to their looks and grooming, including skincare, haircare, and general cleanliness. Soft masculinity can be found in cultural products from all around East Asia, but the emergence and export of Korean pop culture have probably had the most significant impact on the reshaping of East Asian masculinity (Ainsle, 2017).

The dissemination of visual media of Korean cultural products and grooming culture has impacted Malaysian males to be more open to Korean grooming items and subsequently embrace the grooming behaviors of Koreans (Sin & Omar, 2020). According to Ainsle (2017), soft masculinity in Korean popular culture becomes an ideal model of masculinity for Malaysians as the soft masculinity found in Hallyu adheres to ideals of personal expression and freedom instead of the restrictive kinds of masculinity people connect with contemporary Malaysia.

2.5 Social Media Effect of Korean Culture on Gender Identity

In the new era of advanced technology, people are relying more on social media. In earlier times, television was one of the channels of entertainment and information. Nowadays, people are getting used to other communication channels such as smartphones, the Internet, and social media. Thus, the media influence will be strong on those that are overly relying on social media. The media content exposed in those media has become an essential source in constructing the audiences' perceptions. Mainstream media is not only limited to the four walls of the news; it also entertains, educates, informs, and endorses generational, and cultural transition (Johnson & Perlmutter, 2013). The fixed male and female image portrayed by the media has formed a stereotype in people's perception. For example, men are often assumed to be hegemonic masculinity, the embodiment of traditional and stereotypical masculine norms and values (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The American media are portraying the masculinity of men and the femininity of women all the time. In the traditional mindset of the public, a male should have a muscular body and should not put up the makeup as it is a practice for only females.

However, the rise of Korean culture has implemented a new concept of gender identity and tends to reconstruct the gender identity in Malaysia. In fact, soft masculinity could be found in

cultural products from all around East Asia. The growth and export of Korean pop culture undoubtedly followed similar Japanese products in the late 1990s, which had the most impact on reshaping East Asian masculinity. For instance, the image of "kkonminam" was also popular in the Korean entertainment industry in the late 1990s. The pretty boy with smooth skin, silky hair, and a feminine demeanor has been portrayed in television commercials, dramas, and billboard advertisements (Jung, 2010). The "Hallyu " has a significant influence in Malaysia in terms of Korean drama and Korean music. The easy accessibility of media allowed the audiences to reach the content easily, and the audiences in Malaysia favored it. For instance, local programming has begun to implement changes by incorporating Korean dramas and Korean music due to the popularity and demand (Ariffin et al., 2013).

Thus, *"Flower man"* is one of the concepts of man to look like fairies or elves, and are soft, sweet, and sensitive are represented by the male protagonists in a K-drama. In fact, the soft masculinity images in female codes are often shown by most K-pop bands. For instance, they include patterns of pink blooms and extravagant ornamentation with lace embroidery on them, to enhance their status as the ideal flower men (Joo & Epstein, 2012). "*Wen"* and *"Wu"* is included in the gender identity that is represented by Confucianism culture. According to Confucius, external appearances are not related to virtue (Hong, 2008). Thus, although the image and soft masculinity that is presented by Korean culture are challenging the traditional male gender identity, it is still able to influence globally, especially in Asia, and slowly integrate into the society.

Besides, if the audiences from different cultures spend a significant amount of time voluntarily consuming these entertainment items, their identities and values will be shaped as a result (McKee et al., 2014). The ideas of pretty boys portrayed in Korean dramas openly embrace

both masculine and feminine features as they were often described as tall, possessing a slim feminine face, fashionable and romantic. Therefore, the phenomenon of the changing identity of a male is perceived as a form of *"new masculinity."* Korean dramas are defined as female-coded texts as the fan base is primarily female (Miyose & Engstrom, 2015). However, social media has made them visible to atypical fans or male fans. Thus, consuming female-coded texts can provide a means to address men's frustrations with the limits of hegemonic masculinity and carve a new form of masculine-based identity (Click et al., 2015). For instance, the male actors and male idols that portray are mostly full makeup with slim feminine faces, which promotes the new form of masculine-based identity, also known as "soft-masculinity." Some male influencers from TikTok are also teaching the male audiences how to put up makeup that is suitable for males and look ideally like how the male actors are in the movie.

However, it does not have a direct relationship between soft masculinity and feminization. The phenomenon has developed not because males were getting feminized but as the result of deconstructing both male and female identity and reconstructing a new gender identity. Thus, the identities of *"flower boy"* are able to satisfy both male and female qualities, which means that a male could be gentle but also manly. For instance, with the rise of social media, live commercials have allowed users to sell their products online. Usually, the targeted audiences of domestic products will be females. However, one of the famous cosmetic influencers recognized in China is not a female influencer but a *"xiao xian rou,"* Austin Li Jiaqi, also known as the *"Lipstick King"* (Wen, 2021).

In short, based on the current media that portrays the new masculinity, it showed a new version of masculinity identities. It refers to an image-conscious man who spends a significant

amount of time and money on looks and lifestyle (Miyose & Engstrom, 2015). Nowadays, males are also putting on makeup and paying more attention to their daily outlook. Males do not necessarily have a masculine body portrayed by the American media but could also have a soft masculinity image like the Korean culture. The beauty trend is changing, as well as the gender identity to look perfect in society. Although gender identity is different from the traditional identity practiced by the public, Korean culture is still growing rapidly and is famous in Malaysia. Malaysians have accepted the Korean wave for many years because the message contents are related to their daily lives (Khalid & Wok, 2020). The perception of the public toward male masculinity identity has also changed accordingly.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provided the methodology used in the research, a qualitative research method that employed the present study was in-depth interviews. The research design and the sample used in the research was discussed, followed by the interview questions presented. After the explanation of data collection was provided, the thematic analysis was discussed as the data analysis method.

3.1 Research Design

The method chosen to conduct this research was a qualitative research method. The qualitative research methodology was adapted in this research in order to investigate the media effect of Korean pop culture on the gender identity. According to Ariffin et al. (2018), he pointed out that the qualitative research method aimed to investigate human phenomena and study the unknown interpretation as well as the meanings that need to be explored. Besides, using the qualitative research method gives opportunities to gain insights into targeted organizations or specific events and not only make superficial descriptions by using large population samples (Bengtsson, 2016). The qualitative research method provided a simple structure, sequence, and observable patterns, which could be found in a group of participants. It also helped researchers understand how participants get meaning from their surroundings and how their meaning will influence their behavior (Bengtsson, 2016).

Furthermore, the qualitative method further enforced the reason why this method could help the researcher to know why and how does Korean pop culture the public perceived hegemonic and soft masculinity, what is the effect of the media on gender identity, and to what extent is the acceptance of soft masculinity in the media. Qualitative research could explain the "why" questions

to get to know the problem or the "how" questions to describe the process or behavior (Hennink et al., 2012).

By using qualitative research methods, it was able to collect the opinions and responses on the media effects of Korean pop culture on gender identity. Therefore, a qualitative method was able to investigate this research more in-depth and it was appropriate for the data collection. In addition, it could effectively and clearly describe and analyze the media effect of Korean pop culture on gender identity through in-depth interviews.

3.2 Sampling Design

The sampling procedure employed two sampling methods which were the purposive sampling method and the snowball sampling method. First, a purposive sample had been adopted to explore the media effect of Korean pop culture on the gender identity of Malaysian Male. According to Rai and Thapa (2017), the purposive sampling method was a non-probability sample in which the researcher decided which individuals to include in the sample based on a variety of criteria which included being able to answer the research question in the study, expertise in the research issue, ability and willingness to participate in the research. In other words, the researchers needed to use their own judgment in selecting respondents and choose only those who best fit the purpose of the survey. In simple terms, the researcher determines what needs to be discussed and then proceeds to find people who could and were willing to provide the information as an outcome of their experience or knowledge (Bernard, 2018).

In our research, we focused on discussing the individual perception of the media effect of Korean pop culture on gender identity. This topic was classified as an anthropological context

because it discussed how social culture affected humanity's gender identity. The essential to choose the purposive sampling method in this research as it had the reputation to be cost-effective and time-effective among the other sampling methods that could obtain a representative sample (Campbell et al., 2020). This method was applicable to us because we could obtain the data from a small sample size and get a wide range and depth perspective from the samples that represented the entire population. We directly selected the representative from the population and chose the one who fulfilled our research objective.

The other reason for using this sampling technique was because it could effectively explore the anthropological situation, and such intuitive methods may sometimes lead to more meaningful discoveries (Sauders et al., 2012). The research questions were fully based on a person's perception of gender identity and answers were derived from a personal point of view. According to Sauders et al. (2012), if the number of primary data sources (the samples) that could contribute to research is limited, purposive sampling might be the only suitable method. Therefore, this sampling method was suitable for our research because we needed to collect the perspective of certain individuals to explore the significant impact of the media effect of Korean pop culture toward gender identity.

Besides, a snowball sampling method was also carried out in this research in order to explore the media effect of Korean pop culture toward the gender identity of Malaysian Male. The Snowball sampling method was also a non-probability sampling approach used in sociology and statistics research (Sanap, 2017). It involves existing research participants recruiting future participants from their acquaintances (Sanap, 2017). As a result, the sample group looks to develop like a snowball. As the sample size increased, sufficient data was acquired for research purposes.

Moreover, this sampling approach was often utilized in hidden populations that are difficult for researchers to approach (Handcock & Gile, 2011).

Owing to our target sample, we must fulfill the characteristics which are soft masculinity or have obeyed the Korean culture, so we found that it is difficult to approach this group of individuals. Nevertheless, snowball sampling is a method of non-probability sampling. When it is difficult to find samples with the required characteristics, this method is used (Naderifar et al., 2017). In this method, one of the interviewees provides the researcher with the name of at least one additional potential interviewee, and so on, with the sample expanding like a snowball if more than one referral is given per interviewee (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018) and sampling will continue until the data is saturated. To address this, we decided to employ snowball sampling to approach more samples in order to conduct our interviews in this study. Thus, in this research, we selected a few of the participants through the first method then they were asked to propose more participants who had comparable qualities and were acquainted with them, such as friends, relatives, siblings, or acquaintances in UTAR.

3.2.1 Sampling Size

The targeted population of this study was University students. The reason for choosing UTAR students as a sample was because university students were more frequently forming their identities through exposure to global culture communication through media (Ju & Lee, 2015). Meanwhile, their traditional identities will easily be influenced by the global identities due to their weak self-identity.

As this research used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), this research categorized the sampling method using data collection and the size of the project. These projects were categorized as 'small', 'medium', or 'large'. Our research was labeled as a small project and according to the thematic analysis sampling method, for a small project, 6 to 10 participants were recommended. Therefore 10 UTAR students were the ideal amount for us to organize, structure and schedule interview sessions for them. Furthermore, it provided us with enough time to directly and partially transcribe and capture the important information.

This research study targeted 10 UTAR male students who scored between 1 to 3 in soft masculinity. The participants were filtered based on the Traditional Masculinity- Femininity (TMF) scale, designed to assess central facets of self-ascribed masculinity-femininity to validate the measurement. The TMF indicated gender and sexual orientation, which aimed to assess masculinity-femininity rather than infer it from the degree of affirmation of specific traits and behavior (Kachel et al., 2016). Thus, the TMF scale functioned as an instrument for measuring gender-role self-concept and was used before in-depth interviews were conducted. Hence, we used the TMF scale to measure the aspects of the soft masculinity scale instead of recruiting our interviewees baes on an individual's outlook, physical appearance, and behavior. After filtering out the participants based on the TMF scale, they will be carried forward to an in-depth interview to carry out the findings and results in this study.

Construct validity is tested in the table described below to test the validity of our interviewees.

TABLE 1 | Item Characteristics of the TMF

1. I consider myself as …
2. Ideally, I would like to be…
3. Traditionally, my interests would be considered as…
4. Traditionally, my attitudes and beliefs would be considered as…
5. Traditionally, my behavior would be considered as…
6. Traditionally, my outer appearance would be considered as…

Scales ranged from 1— "not at all masculine" to 7— "very masculine."

The item characteristic of the TMF has a high level of validity. Each item is to be independently rated in terms of masculinity. A 7-point-scale is used to identify the participant's high level of masculine; while a 1-point-scale is used to identify the low level of masculine. The results will be divided into three groups as soft masculine (scores 1-3), moderate masculine (scores 3-5), and typical masculine (scores 5-7) in order to check for dimensionality.

3.3 Data Collection

The method that we used to collect the data was through in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview was considered as a data collection in a qualitative method. In-depth interviews mostly

required long-duration and face-to-face communication in order to achieve the desired goals (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). Therefore, in-depth interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of how media affect Korean pop culture toward the gender identity of Malaysian males in our study.

The type of question conducted in our study was semi-structured with open-ended questions. Semi-structured allowed the interviewer to expand the range of the pre-set questions into new and deep developments in the cause of the interview (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Open-ended questions were designed to let the respondents have more freedom in expressing their views and opinions towards a certain topic (Spinelli et al., 2017). Thus, in this study, we had collected the data through in-depth interviews with semi-structured open-ended questions. All the conducted interviews were recorded as the aim of the transcript.

The main tool for the data collection was mainly conducted over the Microsoft Teams with the participants, while the audio had been recorded for the data analysis of the research. The researchers made an appointment with all the participants before the interview. The second phase of data collection was through UTAR email. It is used as a medium to reach the interviewees, meanwhile, as a follow-up method for the researcher to clarify any questions with the participants.

Interviewees that were chosen in this research u/serc/02/2022 had been informed by the research team that ethical principles were to be imposed before conducting their interview (Gill et al., 2008). This action was performed due to the fact that there was a strong stigma associated with the non-normative forms of masculinity in Malaysia. It was more acceptable to allow the interviewees to get the information by themselves and explain their feelings with the benefit of keeping anonymity in check.

Apart from that, interview questions were posed based on the general research questions and being asked to each of the participants using an interview protocol to ensure validity. (Appendix A)

3.4 Data analysis

The method that we analyzed the data was through thematic analysis (TA). Thematic analysis (TA) is able to resolve various types of research questions which include aspects like an individual's practices, perspectives, views, and perceptions (Braun & Clarke 2006). The reason for using this method was because all the research questions that we designed needed to be answered based on people's experiences and discussed their views and opinions on the media influences of Korean pop culture on the gender identity of Malaysian males.

Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that thematic analysis was used to identify themes that include important or interesting patterns that were collected from a study and to fully utilize the result obtained and address a research question or illustrate a problem. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), there are 5 phase frameworks for conducting the thematic analysis.

In phrase one, become familiar with the data. The researchers needed to note down the initial analysis of the respondent's opinions and perceptions and observed the data in detail in order to have potential ways to explore further. In phase two, generate the initial code. In this phase, researchers were required to systematically code the data. Coding allowed us to reduce large amounts of data into small chunks and helped to capture potential data characteristics that were related to research questions and needed to compare as well as discuss each code before moving to the next transcript (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

In phase three, search for themes. Researchers needed to examine and combine the related code into a theme. For example, in our research, we collected several codes about the perception of the media effect of Korean pop culture toward the gender identity of Malaysian males. Then, clearly fit together the code into a theme. After this process, researchers were able to organize a broader and more descriptive theme (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Review theme which is phrase four. Researchers needed to review or modify the theme and to make sure the valid themes are compelling and coherent with the coded data and able to work in the entire data set (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The last phrase defined the themes. In the last stage, researchers needed to make sure all the themes and sub-theme were related or relevant to the main topic of the research, and finally our analysis of the data had been written (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

To assure the reliability and validity of the current research, we adopted a combination of Creswell and Miller procedures and Maxwell's check-list of validity (Bashir et al., 2008). Firstly, we recorded the interviewees' perceptions with the aim of clarifying the validity of the findings. Besides, we presented the data analysis and findings to the participants in a feedback session and asked them to comment on the themes and interpretations that had developed throughout the study. Overall, they agreed that the themes established appropriately reflected their perspectives of the research study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presented the research findings of the data collected from the in-depth interviews. The findings were presented in relation to the research objectives stated in the study. The method used to analyze the data is already discussed in the methodology chapter.

4.1 Demographics of the Interviewees

Table 4.1. Demographic Information of interviewees

Name	Age	Course	Years of study
1. Foong	22	Psychology	Y3S3
2. Ong	22	Psychology	Y3S3
3. Wong	21	Public Relations	Y2S3
4. Lim	23	Public Relations	Y3S3
5. Chew	22	Public Relations	Y3S3
6. Wan	22	Public Relations	Y3S3
7. Tai	22	Public Relations	Y3S3
8. Foo	22	Psychology	Y3S3
9. Ho	22	Public Relations	Y3S3
10. Leong	23	Public Relations	Y3S2

Table 4.1 provides data on the categories of informants interviewed according to name, age, course and years of study. A total of 10 male UTAR students participated in the interviews. They were between 21 to 23 years old, and currently studying for a Bachelor of Communication (Hons) in Public Relations and Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) Psychology.

4.2 Research Findings

RQ 1. - How do the public perceived hegemonic and soft masculinity?

4.2.1 Perceived Hegemonic Masculinity and Soft Masculinity

Gender identity in society means how we are expected to act as male or female. This could be supported by the view of the majority of informants. Informant 1 thinks that hegemonic masculinity is a practice that legitimizes the dominant position of a man and explains how and why the man maintains this dominant social role to women or some other gender identities. This statement is also supported by other informants, and they also agree that hegemonic masculinity is more an attitude or behavior that is attempting to legitimize male dominance position in any community, society, and working environment. Below is the following supported transcript:

> *"... As for males, usually they'll have to be working, they serve as a more dominant role in charge of more house chores, fixing things, the pipes, the lights, fixing machines and also they will have to be the breadwinner of the family."*
>
> *[Informant 1]*
>
> *"... Hegemonic masculinity or the traditional gender identity is about the man having a dominant social role over the woman."*
> *[Informant 3]*
>
> *"... It's more like a practice or attitude or behavior that is trying to legitimize the male dominance position in any society or any working environment."*
> *[Informant 6]*

"... They are in a dominant social status and maybe they are aggressive and higher authorities than others."

[Informant 7]

"... Hegemonic masculinity is a practice that legitimizes men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the common male population."

[Informant 8]

"... Hegemonic masculinity is something like the male always holds the dominant positions and also they will control all the important decisions as well like, regardless whether in-home or like in the workplace like for example like a father in a family, they're always at the top of the hierarchy."

[Informant 9]

On the other hand, four interviewees believed that soft masculinity identity tends to express themselves more freely and not hesitate to show their weaknesses in public. Soft masculinity identity is more tender or softer in terms of the characters and values. So, the man is no longer expected to be the strong image only. This is clearly stated in the following transcript:

''...Soft masculinity has begun to blur the line of what is masculinity and feminine. Allowing gender to express themselves more freely, I think they just do what they want to do like act what they want to act...''

[Informant 4]

''...For the characteristics like maybe inner characteristics, they are more emotional and then also will be more gentle to others I think...''

[Informant 5]

"...Soft masculinity that is preferred to be more presentable in front of

everyone. They will be very aware of how they behave and also how they present

themselves in front of everyone."

[Informant 6]

''...They are allowed to express their emotions openly to the public and also can

tell the words their weaknesses...''

[Informant 7]

4.2.2 New trends by the Korean celebrities

Soft masculinity is the new trend that allows men to express themselves more freely in the public

coming from Korean pop culture in terms of physical appearance and internal characteristics. All

of the interviewees provided opinions on the soft masculinity by the Korean celebrities through

the Internet website, social media applications such as Instagram, YouTube, Netflix, etc. Due to

the high acceptance of the particular trend on social media, the beliefs and behavior of the

informant are being affected. They perceive that these trends have a great effect on reconstructing

gender identity.

"...Their appearance, they are stylish themselves, those who put makeup on

themselves, those coding and those delicate faces they convey to the audience

will inevitably influence those people, especially youngsters who perceive these

kinds of things to always watch this kind of movie, K-drama."

[Informant 4]

"…Since you are small because after you give birth, nobody is teaching you to have your own skincare routine and also makeup. They will follow those Korean male celebrities and follow their steps, making up, dyeing your hair, or maybe eyebrows."

[Informant 6]

"…When they want to like make-up themselves, then they will just realize that, oh, I remember that I saw a makeup style that is really trendy right now, like the Korean celebrities, how they're makeup themselves. I suddenly realized this way, how to make up for themselves or then I will start to like to follow their makeup like that."

[Informant 9]

RQ 2. - What is the effect of the media on gender identity?

4.3 Korean pop culture arises soft masculinity

Korean pop culture plays a dominant role and arouses soft masculinity in East Asian popular culture. This could be supported by the view of informant 3 and informant 4. They agreed that soft masculinity is a consequence and began in the Korean wave or Korean country because it plays a dominant role in Asian culture.

"…I think mostly agrees, because most of this soft masculinity began in the Korean country or even Japan, Japan. So, I think… ya… there is a form as a consequence of Korean."

[Informant 3]

"...I agreed that this kind of appearance is the consequence of the Korean wave because they play the dominant role in Asians..."

[Informant 4]

4.3.1 Korean media lead to soft masculinity

Korean media like K-drama, K-pop, K-movie, and others will influence gender identity and lead to soft masculinity. Because the Korean media portrays more soft masculinity to the audience. The appearance of the celebrity in Korean media is more soft and beautiful. Therefore, the daily exposure of the Korean media will eventually reshape the cognition of gender identity and lead to soft masculinity.

"...this kind of identity can be conveyed through Kpop music, those MVs, those K-dramas because they always present that male in a more female-friendly model to the audience..."

[Informant 4]

"...K-Dramas will like portraits more about this soft masculinity because like all of the actors, they are like white, and then they are skinny, and then they are tall..."
[Informant 5]

"...One of the movies or dramas I watched last time was ``The Descendants of the sun. It's featuring the boy, the male that has to the army that they are having a muscular body shape. But then when you look at their appearance like their face, they are very tidy and look like they have short hair and also good makeup..."

[Informant 6]

On the other hand, Korean media have a strong influence on the audience by accessing the daily lives of their idols or celebrities. Individuals will imitate their idol or celebrity that they admire such as imitating their dressing style or trying to behave and act in the same way as their idol.

> *"...all these influencers and also K-Drama, they are like idols and also like the celebrities that appear on the screen. So the way they act and also the characteristics they are shown on the screen as is confirmed will be imitated by the audiences."*

[Informant 5]

> *"Korean drama as people are watching the drama, so people would tend to try to imitate their Korean celebrities because they like it and they prefer the style of their celebrities...."*

[Informant 6]

> *"I think it is because of the K-culture, as said because once you follow all those K-dramas or K or K-pop songs, or the artists, and then because you really admire them, right? So you will start to want to follow their trends like you try to imitate them as much as possible..."*

[Informant 9]

4.4 The rise of flower boy presented by mainstream Korean pop culture

The term Flower boy has been around for a long time in Korean pop culture. The majority of the informant stated that a flower boy is used to describe a pretty boy that has their own way of dressing up and is good looking especially in the Korean industry. Informant 3 specifically stated flower boy is a term that originated from Korea and Japan, and the first time he came across the concept of flower boy was through Korean and Japanese drama.

"...When I was young, I saw these terms through watching K-dramas or Japanese dramas. So, they will act as flower boys. So, the flower boy is the term describing a boy with a nice look or in other words can be said the boy with a beautiful outlook or appearance."

[Informant 3]

"I think it is used to describe a young boy or an attractive male. Their appearance is slim and like with some effeminate features rather than those traditional tough or muscular man identities."
[Informant 4]

"...If not mistake in Chinese like something like 花美男 (flower boy/beautiful boy). So do hear before and then I think this term is like you used to describe a young man or teenagers ah teenagers like us. Yeah, with a good-looking appearance."
[Informant 5]

"I think the flower boys are defined male genders who look good or beautiful or more gentle and softer and also maybe pay more attention to their looks."

[Informant 7]

Moreover, flower boy actually mostly refers to those Korean male celebrities from Korean dramas or K-pop groups. They have their own fashion style and formed a role model for flower boys. Even the ambassador of cosmetics is also served by Korean male celebrities. One of the informants stated:

"...K-pop is actually a standard for us, Asian Southeast Asian to refer to as you usually look to them for on how we wear and how we look has all the aesthetic sense. It's becoming like a standard for us and definitely, they have brought very much impact and influence."
[Informant 1]

"...they have already followed K-culture for such a long time. So definitely they will like to keep following all those latest styles like makeup, dress up from the K-idols and artists and that's why some of the minorities inside the male group will keep following the K-artists and K idols."
[Informant 9]

4.4.1 Socially differentiating soft masculinity

Flower boy could be considered a new gender identity compared to the traditional gender identity which is a hegemonic gender identity. Flower boys usually will be categorized as soft masculinity

by society as the practices between these two gender identities are totally different. This could be supported by the view of informant 3, informant 5, and informant 6.

> *"...I think the flower boy is categorized as soft masculinity. Ya, so because I think this flower boy most likely likes a soft masculinity which is the same concept which is a man, a normal man with a beautiful or nice physical appearance."*
> *[Informant 3]*

> *"...I will categorize flower boy into this soft masculinity, because uhh...for all the characters and then like what just now I mentioned they're all like fulfilled the measurement the requirement of this soft masculinity."*
> *[Informant 5]*

> *"...The flower boy is actually related with the soft masculinity, which is, uh...flower boy tends to have a more like I mentioned just now uh... childish look and also younger look uh... in contrast to those traditional male identities like having strong and also muscular bodies."*
> *[Informant 6]*

In addition, other 8 interviewees agreed that compared to the traditional male, flower boys will tend to have a soft body image, instead of those traditional tough or muscular man identities. Nowadays, the mainstream body image of a male is no longer to be muscular or tough, but also to have a soft appearance.

> *"...Their appearance is slim and like with some effeminate features rather than those traditional tough or muscular man identities."*

[Informant 4]

"...For me, a flower boy is meant by a man having a soft appearance, smooth skin, decent manners, and very fashionable, fashionable makeup and clothes."

[Informant 8]

Besides that, the biggest difference between soft masculinity and hegemonic masculinity is the body image presented by them. Due to the influence of Korean media, male celebrities tend to portray a new fashion style or trend that is usually categorized as soft masculinity, such as putting on make-up and fashionable outlook.

"...I think flower boys, generally people use the word to describe boys who wear makeup, or who have a really great sense of fashion."

[Informant 1]

"...I think this flower boy most likely likes a soft masculinity which is the same concept which is a man, a normal man with a beautiful or nice physical appearance."

[Informant 3]

"...I think the flower boys are defined male genders who look good or beautiful or more gentle, softer and also maybe pay more attention to their looks."

[Informant 7]

4.4.2 Changes in public preferences

A trend could be formed when it is a preference for the majority of people. The popularity of Korean dramas and Korean male celebrities is high around the world. Therefore, the audiences are accepting the features that are portrayed by those Korean male celebrities and even try to follow the trend. In addition, the media is having a long-lasting effect on the audiences that are leading their actions. This could be supported by the view of informants 8 and 9.

> *"...So I think the popularity of K-drama, I think it is quite popular as well in western countries. I can see that most of the people in social media also got like a boss, I mean bossing the image of the K drama, Wow, "Oppa" something like that."*
> *[Informant 8]*

> *"...Ok, normally for soft masculinity, because they have already followed the K-culture for such a long time. So definitely they will like to keep following all those latest styles like makeup, dress up from the K-idols and artists."*
> *[Informant 9]*

RQ 3. - To what extent is the acceptance of soft masculinity in the media?

4.5 Common and general

Korean pop culture has been widely spread among Malaysians and most of them have sought this culture as a common culture. As Korean pop culture has a huge impact on Malaysians, they accepted the culture and also tend to have a similar identity with the culture. This could be supported by the view of informant 5. Informant 5 stated that the acceptance among the Malaysian male is common and general and most of his friends also have an identity like soft masculinity.

"...I think that the acceptance for this soft masculinity in K-pop among Malaysian male is really common and general, which I think that most of the most of them will accept because as an example most of my friends are also more like a soft masculinity identity."

[Informant 5]

"...soft masculinity is just a normal thing for them in Malaysia."

[Informant 7]

Moreover, the younger generation tends to be more open-minded and they seek the culture as a general trend only. They can accept and learn the new culture as well as the new gender identity compared to the past few years. Therefore, they will follow the newest culture just like they follow a general trend. This could be supported by the view of informant 3 and informant 8.

"...You can see the young Malays or even Chinese, India, they will be more open-minded. It's not like the past 20 years or 30 years that they have the concept of not being open-minded, but now they will be more like a trend, so they must and they will accept this soft masculinity in their gender identity."

[Informant 3]

"...So I think the soft masculinity right now is quite high, I think most of the men they're more like in the Korean culture. Not to say they like it, they are more willing to learn the other country's culture. That's why we can see that more and more people are very, very stylish and they are adhering to the Korean style, something

like that. So I think it's more on people nowadays. they're more willing to learn,

and accept others. so they're not hard to accept."

[Informant 8]

Apart from that, some Malaysians will have a more open-minded attitude because of the emergence of online platforms. As the common use of the online platforms, they will get influenced by the content itself and have the ability to consider other perspectives. Thus, they will get used to the culture or trend that shows on the platforms and take it as a common thing. This could be supported by the view of informant 7. The informant stated that they will be more open-minded due to the development of social media as well as the Internet.

"...I think acceptance among them would be higher as they are more open-minded

due to social media and the Internet. But with the development of viral-like I said

just now, they will see that soft masculinity is just a normal thing for them in

Malaysia."

[Informant 7]

4.5.1 New culture to learn

Most people are willing to try and learn about different cultures from other countries which might lead to the high acceptance of soft masculinity in Malaysia. They are willing to try the style of the Korean and accept the new culture of Korea. This could be supported by the view of informant 8. Informant 8 stated that people nowadays are more willing to learn and accept others such as their style.

"...I think most of the men they're more like in Korean culture. Not to say they like

it, they are more willing to learn the other country's culture. That's why we can see

that more and more people are very, very stylish and they are adhering to the

Korean style, something like that. So I think it's more on people nowadays. They're

more willing to learn, and accept others. so they're not hard to accept."

[Informant 8]

Besides that, Malaysia has different races, which are Malay, Chinese, and Indian which Malaysians will tend to accept the new culture. It was because Malaysia itself has a different culture and the Malaysians had accepted the different cultures and got used to the cultures. When it comes to other countries' cultures, Malaysians are willing to learn a new culture and get used to it.

"...It would definitely be a great thing for us because Malaysia itself is promoting

various cultures. Promoting three different races, which are Malay, Chinese, and

India in Malaysia. So definitely it would be great if we could accept every single

different thing in our country, our Malaysia."

[Informant 6]

4.5.2 Different from the past

For the older generations, they will have more traditional thinking, so they will find it hard to accept this kind of culture which is soft masculinity. As the culture is beyond what they know, they think it is hard to accept the changes in terms of soft masculinity. They need to have some time to accept the changes and adapt to it slowly. This could be supported by the view of informants 2 and 7.

"...The elders or like the older generation, they might not be adapted, they might

not accept it, but they're slowly adapting to it and they're slowly ok with it."

[Informant 2]

"...I think for the older generation; it is definitely hard to accept."

[Informant 7]

However, not only the older generation, will have some typical and traditional thinking toward this kind of gender identity. As some of the people could not accept the changes in terms of soft masculinity so there will be some sound like prejudices and discrimination toward soft masculinity people. They will judge the outlook or the hairstyle of this kind of person. This could be supported by the view of informants 1 and 4.

"...I think to a certain extent, of course, I still sound prejudiced and discriminated against like "my boys these days' wear makeup, and the hair like that" like very self-conscious."

[Informant 1]

"...I think as we know Malaysia is an Islamic country, and they have stricter requirements in the gender identity of women and men, so I think the acceptance of this kind of soft masculinity, the identity of Kpop, among Malaysia committees is not really high but they still got a bunch of people and there will like a bunch of Malay people, they have chased this kind of Kpop culture, and they are very preferred in this kind of soft masculinity identity of Kpop idols."

[Informant 4]

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter the conclusions derived from the findings of this study on the media effect of Korean popular culture on gender identity were described. The conclusions were based on the purpose, research questions, and results of the study. The implications of these findings and limitations followed by the future study will also be explained.

5.1 Understanding of hegemonic and soft masculinity

According to Scharrer & Blackburn (2017), the ideas about hegemonic masculinity that viewers see on television impact how they expect and understand behavior in real life. For example, the audiences watching police and detective shows affect attitudes toward toughness, physical violence, and restricting emotionality as endorsed characteristics of traditional masculinity. The televisual portrayals of masculinity can impact viewers' perceptions about what constitutes proper masculine behavior; therefore, when the soft masculinity that originated in Korea has merged worldwide and challenged the dominant concept of masculinity.

The portrayal of hegemonic masculinity somehow acts like guidance or teaching that tells how a male should behave to be perceived as male by society. Based on the answers given by the informants, their understanding of hegemonic masculinity is mostly that males should have muscular bodies, stay strong and tough to others, hold dominant roles against females, give commands, and lastly, should not show out their emotions. Western countries portray those features of males that have a dominant role in constructing masculinity. For example, Western media often portrays males' muscular bodies and rugged images which refer to a practice of hegemonic masculinity that a male should have a strong and tough image (Keum, 2016). Therefore, it formed a set of practices for males to follow and included an expectation of masculinity.

However, with the rising of "*Hallyu,*" a new form of masculinity has emerged. In contrast with Western masculinity, soft masculinity or so-called "flower boys" had influenced the concept of masculinity. Muscular body, strong and tough image in terms of physical appearance or internal characteristics are no longer portrayed by Korean media. For example, those Korean male celebrities and Kpop idols will wear makeup to make them more presentable, take care of their outlook, and be soft and gentle to others. According to the answers given by the informants, their understanding of soft masculinity is mainly about a male that carefully takes care of their physical appearance to look presentable whenever and wherever they are, tall and skinny, neat, and friendly and gentle to others.

Thus, the portrayal of masculinity between Western and Korean media is different. It could conclude that the new gender identity, so-called soft masculinity, portrays additional images of masculinity that are different from hegemonic masculinity. It reconstructed gender identity and formed a new form of masculinity. Based on the interview, the interviewees agreed that soft masculinity does not change the gender identity but reconstructs a new gender identity by combining both male and female features.

5.2 Korean Media Effect on Gender Identity

As a result of conducting this research, we conclude that Korean popular culture, or so-called "*Hallyu*," significantly impacts the reconstruction of gender identity among Malaysian males. Based on our in-depth interview, those interviewees tested as low masculinity on our TMF test; the most repeated answer about the factor that may lead to soft masculinity among Malaysian males was the influence of Korean drama, K-pop idols, and Korean male's celebrities. It is undeniable that Korean popular culture has a say in the fashion trend, makeup trends, and

aesthetics for males in current society. For instance, the soft image portrayed by the Korean male celebrities in Korean dramas, such as being gentle, romantic, and caring to others, makeup style for males, and cosmetic endorsements, are the popular fashion trend worldwide.

In Malaysia, hegemonic masculinity has been perceived as the society's expectation for how a man should behave to be fixed. For example, some examples given by most of the interviewees are that men should have the dominant role in the society, issue the command in the workplace and family, be strong and tough to the others, not show their emotions, and also focus more on their internal strength but not their external appearance. However, due to the influence of social media that transmit popular culture, such as Korean and Japanese popular culture, that is counter to the culture of Malaysia, the society's expectations and gender identity have been reconstructed as they are promoting the soft masculinity that is presented by those male celebrities that have a faint image in terms of their internal characteristics and external appearance.

Therefore, the first popular Korean drama that portrayed and introduced the image of a flower boy was Moon Embracing the Sun (Jung, 2010). This revealed that these Korean men were feminized through the close-up shots of their smooth skin and silky hair and the use of bright and colorful costumes of the Korean male celebrities (Khai & Wahab, 2017). The soft masculinity shown in the Korean drama is famous because it has masculine and feminine characteristics; a flower boy could satisfy a complex human desire (Jung, 2010). Therefore, when the acceptance of outside influence is high, the influence power of the new culture will easily be merged and adapted by the public. They will tend to follow the latest trend and imitate their style to look presentable and up to date when appearing in the public area like what was mentioned by most of our interviewees. Based on hegemonic masculinity practices, a male should not emphasize their external appearance but their internal strength. Thus, when they are passionate about following the

fashion trends from Korea, such as the dress-up style and makeup style, it shows the reconstruction of gender identity. For example, makeup is no longer a practice that prejudices females; males could also use makeup to boost their external appearance like those Korean male celebrities. Gender identity guides how a man should act to be categorized as male. Still, the male gender identity is reconstructed because of the impact of Korean culture in terms of their practices that are contrary to the traditional gender identity, which is called hegemonic masculinity.

Furthermore, male idols in Korea are no longer marketed boldly and masculinity. Instead, the entertainment industry prefers to portray a flower boy's soft, gentle, and effeminate appearance. They represent certain physical appearances, such as tall, smooth skin, silky hair, and fashionable and romantic (Strategic Information and Research Development Center, 2015). The Korean wave has given young people a different viewpoint on gender. Soft masculinity and flower boys are no longer just a marketing strategy. They offered a new way for young people to affirm themselves while also assisting them in developing their identity and confidence. Many young men aspire to learn and imitate the styles of Korean pop celebrities, but they are not the only ones that show soft masculinity. As most of our interviewees mentioned, they agreed that they would also follow the trend of the Korean male celebrities and imitate their style as the aesthetics and preferences of the public no longer remained on traditional masculinity like Western culture.

In short, the Korean wave has had a long-lasting impact on Asian countries as it has existed since the late 1990s and early 2000s and takes the place of the dominance of western culture (Elaskary, 2018). For example, marketing cosmetic products to the female segment, but it is not surprising to see some male celebrities appearing in the advertising of cosmetic products. The effects of having male celebrities endorse those cosmetic products could encourage male audiences to purchase those cosmetic products and start to practice the makeup style of those Korean male

celebrities. They are now tending to expand the market by targeting the male segment (Ferry & Astuti, 2021). Those male celebrities in Korean dramas and Kpop idols were portraying soft masculinity that contrasts with the practices of traditional masculinity. Still, it has merged smoothly all around the world. Therefore, the acceptance of the Korean wave among Malaysian males was high, which led to the rising popularity of flower boys when they tend to follow the trend. Although the Korean media effect was not the only factor that we are focusing on in our research, it is the most important factor mentioned by almost all of the interviewees.

5.2.1 Social Expectation and Family Background Effect

Nevertheless, the family background was still an essential factor. Despite this fact, the Korean wave still greatly influences culture and norms. Those interviewees mentioned that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is mostly about men taking up the responsibility to find income for their families and focusing more on their internal strength. Socially expected, men should have dominant status over women and always be the side that gives a command and be tough and strong anytime. However, rather than building specific forms of masculinity, masculinity involves dynamic activities in regular contact (Bartholomaeus & Tarrant, 2016). A child was born as a plain paper; they will learn and form their own identities by their parents, but primarily create by themselves during their daily life. Therefore, as mentioned above, family background is also a factor that influences gender identity. For example, suppose a boy grew up with only his sisters and is the only male among the siblings. In that case, the interaction between him and his siblings will indirectly affect his gender identity. He interacts with them most of the time. The boy will tend to imitate their behavior, how they act and speak, and how they dress up.

Men of various generations share values, and their shared experiences impact their knowledge and practice of masculinities over the same period and social context (Anderson, 2017). People were more likely to be open-minded and accept the new culture to form new practices in a family. On the nurture side of children's upbringing, some parents may emphasize their children's behaviors or identities, but some may be much more open and have no fixed practices for their children. For example, according to informants, when the family members adapt to Korean culture, they tend to have Korean cuisines, listen to k-pop songs, and watch Korean dramas. If the older generation adapts to Korean culture and accepts the changes from Korean culture, they will probably pass on the culture to the next generation.

The expectation of our current society is changing and trying to promote gender equality. As people are more open-minded, there is no longer a fixed mind-set on how men should behave to be categorized as male. Our interview could prove that even flower boys are not classified as female by society. All of the informants mentioned that flower boys could not be categorized as hegemonic masculinity, as they are not fulfilling the practices of traditional gender identity. However, they agreed that they are forming a new gender identity, so-called soft masculinity, that society accepts. For instance, people will not categorize those Korean male celebrities that put on makeup and show their romantic and gentle side in those Korean dramas and flower boys from Korean idols as female. They were not changing the traditional gender identity but reshaping the gender identity to a combination of male and female traits. Thus, based on the interview, the terms "well-groomed," "stylish," and "wearing makeup" to describe a man are a good sign and compliments to them. By practicing gender equality in current society, males could also take care of their outlook to boost their confidence and look presentable in the public area. It gives a sense of respect to others when a person looks tidy.

5.3 Acceptance of The New Gender Identity In Malaysia

After discussing how Korean popular culture reconstructed gender identity and how open-minded our society is, we could conclude that the acceptance of the new gender identity in Malaysia is high. Based on the answers given by our informants, they prefer to have a well-groomed and stylish appearance like those Korean male celebrities rather than having beards and wearing casual clothes, especially when they appear in the public area. They will follow the dress-up style or even the makeup style of those Korean male celebrities to make them more presentable and match the public's preferences nowadays. As the population of our targeted sampling is UTAR students, the high acceptance of the new gender identity in university could be proven by our interviewees. The dress-up styles of most of the UTAR students when they appear on campus are from Korean trends.

Moreover, most of the informants stated that their friends surrounding them are fans of particular Korean male celebrities, K-pop idols, and Korean dramas. Thus, it showed that the acceptance of soft masculinity in Malaysia is considered high, as people only follow the trend they prefer or accept. It also indicates why Korean popular culture transmitted by the media could be merged smoothly and reconstruct the gender identity in Malaysia, a country-oriented toward masculinity and Islam, as the acceptance of the new gender identity is high. Nowadays, people are open-minded to accept the recent changes that external culture brings. However, it was against hegemonic masculinity practices, and people are given the right for them to be who they are, which was also mentioned by most of the interviewees.

In short, based on social identity theory (SIT) proved how social categorization, social identification, and social comparison formed new norms or customs in reconstructing gender

identity. The rise of "*Hallyu*" introduced a new gender identity: soft masculinity, which came with different practices for a male that was different from hegemonic masculinity. However, Korean popular culture still emerged smoothly in Malaysia, as there is a particular undiscovered group of people that belong to the concept of soft masculinity from Korean which refers to social categorization stating that people are defined and understood not only as individuals but also as members that belong to a particular group. The group of people that follow the practices of soft masculinity is getting bigger as social identification states that people will self-identify themselves to include themselves in a group that is most suitable for them. Lastly, for social comparison, as a result, when a particular group becomes prominent, one's beliefs and behaviors are guided by the characteristics associated with that group. Thus, it indicates why the acceptance of soft masculinity in Malaysia is high.

5.4 Implications

5.4.1 Theoretical Implications

This research's conceptual framework could be considered a framework extension that contributes to the research of related fields. The study applied social identity theory (SIT) to explore how Korean pop culture has reconstructed the gender identity of Malaysian men. The popular culture in Korea greatly influences how people portray their gender identification. Thus, social identity theory (SIT) is essential for a person's self-identity and concept (Laffan, 2020). Based on the research findings, interviewees' perceptions of soft masculinity have been significantly influenced by Korean culture, personal identification, public preferences, social changes, and social interactions. Hence, the results partially aligned with social identity theory (SIT). Social identity theory also assists in researching soft masculine consciousness in Asian

countries, and it can increase people's perceptions of soft masculinity and improve their knowledge aligned with the approach. As such, applying social identity theory in this study could contribute to future discoveries on the influence of K-pop on gender identity research.

In conclusion, the present study results could also provide information and knowledge to future scholars who would like to conduct research in the field of soft masculinity on the influences of Korean pop culture. The present results allow future scholars to explore the extended perspective on social identity theory (SIT) if further studies are conducted.

5.4.2 Practical Implications

These findings may contribute to marketing practitioners, retailers, manufacturers, growth industry, and business players because the study provided some indication that Korean pop culture significantly influences the perception, attitude, and purchase behavior of adolescents in Malaysia. In recent years, Korean pop culture has grown in popularity among Malaysian consumers, particularly the younger generation. Therefore, it may help and provide research to the new entrants to understand the consumer preference, provide potential business opportunities, and add value to the existing business. For example, through our study, retailers or business players can develop a strategy or design tactics to encourage leadership and imitation, knowledge and consumerism, and choose the suitable authenticating brand or spokesperson for their product or service to optimize promotional efforts. Our study shows that a well-promoted method of understanding consumer purchasing behavior will efficiently enhance the opportunity of the business. e.g., "*these celebrities will hold this product and then say some propaganda, the caption. And then they will also like uhh…use this or this skincare product on their face and then show up*

like a wow. We've used this skincare product, and then your skin can be as shiny and then as white as these celebrities."

As a result, our study provides practical guidance for various industries and businesses in strategic planning and decision-making processes. Understanding the impact of the preference of adolescence is essential for a company to survive. Our research adequately analyzes or predicts adolescents' behaviors used, perceptions, and attitude in the presence of Korean pop culture influences in Malaysia. Hence, the current study has served as an effective means found the marketplace and business in Malaysia.

5.5 Limitation

There are some limitations in this study throughout our research that could be addressed in future research. Firstly, the research design limitation due to our sample focused on the UTAR male students in Malaysia, and most of the students at UTAR are Chinese students. Consequently, the race of all our interviewees was Chinese, which does not reflect the general population perception because we lacked the perception of the different races of students, such as Malay and Indian, in this research study. In a multi-ethnic country, sharing the perception of each ethnic group engages with one another, intending to develop a better understanding of one another's culture and values (Husin et al., 2020) can help us develop our research further.

On the other hand, our study was limited because we adopted a snowball sampling technique to find the target sample, so we decided to choose FAS students as a data collection. The candidates nominated were from FAS, such as Public Relations and Psychology students.

Besides, the interview protocol was a limitation for our study because a few questions used the terminology words of the study in the interview question. Thus, some interviewees found it

hard to understand specific terms such as hegemonic masculinity, flower boy, etc. Hence, there was a limitation while this study discusses the topic of study, which is the Media effect of Korean pop culture on the gender identity of Malaysian University males.

5.6 Future Study

Future studies should focus on other races to complete the data population. Malaysia's multiracial population consists primarily of three ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnicities, with unique cultural roots (Kaboudarahangi et al., 2013). To have complete data on Malaysian males, the perception of three races is essential. Therefore, further studies could include other races, such as Malay and Indian, to collect complete data and better understand other races regarding the gender identity of Malaysian males with the media effect of Korean pop culture.

Besides that, future studies should focus on Malaysian males with different faculties and various social levels. As the sampling of this research was UTAR male students from FAS, future studies can include students from other faculty to have complete data. Moreover, university students are the minority of society while working adults are the majority of the community. More demographic differences could help us better understand the extent and depth of Korean pop culture's influence on the gender identity of Malaysian males. Therefore, further research on the perception of working adults toward the effect of Korean pop culture also can be carried out.

Apart from that, the interview protocol of future studies should use simple words instead of using terminology words to make it easier for the interviewee to understand the question. The interviewee will have more ideas while answering if the questions are easy to understand. Therefore, future researchers should further explore the interviewee's perspective and develop the interview protocol with easily understood words.

References

Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (1999). *Social identity and social cognition*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (2006). *Social identifications: A social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes*. Routledge.

Ahmed, R. R., Seedani, S. K., Ahuja, M. K., & Paryani, S. K. (2015). Impact of celebrity endorsement on consumer buying behavior. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2666148

Ainslie, M. J. (2017). Korean soft masculinity vs. Malay hegemony: Malaysian masculinity and Hallyu fandom. *Korean Observer, 48*(3), 609-638.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320553002_Korean_soft_masculinity_vs_Malay_hegemony_Malaysian_masculinity_and_Hallyu_fandom

Anderson, C. S. (2014). That's my man! Overlapping Masculinities in Korean popular music. *The Korean Wave*, 117-131. https://doi.org/10.1057/97811373502827

Anderson, E. (2017). Generational masculinities. *Journal of Gender Studies, 27*(3), 243-247.
https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1406088

Ang, C., & Chan, N. (2016). Adolescents' views on celebrity worship: A qualitative study. *Current Psychology, 37*(1), 139-148. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-016-9497-0

Anwar, R. P., & Anwar, W. W. (2019). The Effect of Korean Wave on Young Generation and Creative Industry in Indonesia.

Arambam, T. D. (2019). Transition of the idea of masculinity in k-pop culture within Indian viewers. *International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research, 4*(2).

Ariffin, J.T., Abu, B.H., & Yusof, N.H. (2018). Culture in Korean Drama towards Influencing Malaysian Audiences. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Engineering & Management, 5*(1). https://doi.org/10-14. 10.21276/ijirem.2018.5.1.3.

Ariffin, Z. Z., Othman, K., Abdullah, R. T., & Arif, W. N. (2013). Analyzing the Dimension of Korean Popular Culture Among Malaysian Adolescent.

Ariffin, Z. Z., Othman, M. N., & Karim, J. A. (2012). Relationship between American popular culture and conspicuous consumption: A moderating effect of religiosity. *African Journal of Business Management, 6*(36). https://doi.org/10.5897/ajbm11.1930

Ariffin, Z., Othman, K., Tee, R., Nor, A., Wan, A., Arif, M., & Othman, M. (2013). Proceedings Analyzing the Dimension of Korean Popular Culture Among Malaysian Adolescent.

Azizah, N., & Dwiyanti, A. (2021). South Korea in Reconstructing Masculinity as Brand Image of the State's Economic Diplomacy. https://doi.org/10.24197/st.2.2021.1-22

Bailey, B., & Telford, T. (2013). What's So "Cyber" about It?: Reflections on Cyberfeminism's Contribution to Legal Studies. *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law 243*.

Bartholomaeus, C., & Tarrant, A. (2016). Masculinities at the margins of "Middle adulthood". *Men and Masculinities, 19*(4), 351-369. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x15588592

Bashir, M., Afzal, M. T., & Azeem, M. (2008). Reliability and validity of qualitative and operational research paradigm. *Pakistan Journal of Statistics and Operation Research, 4*(1), 35. https://doi.org/10.18187/pjsor.v4i1.59

Benetoli, A., Chen, T. F., & Aslani, P. (2015). The use of social media in pharmacy practice and education. *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy*, *11*(1), 1–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sapharm.2014.04.002

Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open, 2*, 8–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001

Bernard, H. R. (2018). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Berlinger, J., & Seo, Y. (2021, March 17). North Korea blasts K-pop industry as 'slave-like exploitation'. *CNN*. https://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/17/asia/north-korea-kpop-criticism-intl-hnk/index.html

Boehm, C., & Gilmore, D. D. (1992). Manhood in the making: Cultural concepts of masculinity. *Anthropological Quarterly, 65*(3), 157. https://doi.org/10.2307/3317781

Borry, E. L. (2020). Social equity and popular culture: Gender and gender identity on TV. *Public Integrity, 23*(3), 235-252. https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2020.1791672

Braun, V& Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Brosius, H. B. & Engel, D. (1996). The causes of third-person effects: unrealistic optimism, impersonal impact, or generalized negative attitudes towards media influence? *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 8*(2), 142–162. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/8.2.142

Burke, P. J., & Stets, J. E. (2000). Identity theory and Social Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 63*(3), 224-237. https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870

Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206

Chan, K. Y. (2018). The experiences of Malaysian youth with Korean cosmetic product. *Journal of Services and Management, 9*, 101-114.

Chang, P., & Lee, I. H. (2017). Cultural preferences in international trade: Evidence from the globalization of Korean pop culture. *Structural Changes in the Global Economy: Global Value Chains and Financial Risks, 4*, 80-103. https://doi.org/10.11644/kiep.eaer.conf.2019.46

Chua, B. H., & Iwabuchi, K. (2008). *East Asian pop culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*. Hong Kong University Press.

Click, M. A., Miller, B., Behm-Morawitz, E., & Aubrey, J. S. (2015). Twi-dudes and Twi-guys. *Men and Masculinities, 19*(3), 219-239. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x15575159

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity. *Gender & Society, 19*(6), 829-859. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639

Constantinople, A. (1973). Masculinity-femininity: An exception to a famous dictum? *Psychological Bulletin, 80*(5), 389-407. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0035334

Elaskary, M. (2018). The Korean Wave in the Middle East: Past and present. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity, 4*(4), 51. https://doi.org/10.3390/joitmc4040051

Elfving- Hwang, J. (2011). Not So Soft After All: Kkonminam Masculinities in Contemporary South Korean Popular Culture. *Korean Studies*.

Engle, Y., & Kasser, T. (2005). Why do adolescent girls idolize male celebrities? *Journal of Adolescent Research, 20*(2), 263-283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558404273117

Eun, S. (2013). Brilliant Hallyu and plastic surgery. *Journal of Korean Medical Science, 28*(11), 1561. https://doi.org/10.3346/jkms.2013.28.11.1561

Ferry, R. T., & Astuti, R. D. (2021). Analysis of urban male consumers attitude and behavioral intention towards skincare product in Indonesia. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business and Engineering Management (ICONBEM 2021).* https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.210522.017

Flowerboys and the appeal of 'soft masculinity' in South Korea. (2018, September 4). *BBC News.* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42499809

Gan, X. N. (2019). A qualitative study on the soft power of Korean popular culture on consumer behaviour in Malaysia.

Gengmei. (2016). Yimei baipishu [White paper of aesthetic medical industry in 2016]. https://www.199it.com/archives/544781.html

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British dental journal, 204*(6), 291–295. doi:10.1038/bdj.2008.192

Handcock, M.S., & Gile, K.J. (2011). On the Concept of Snowball Sampling. *Sociological Methodology, 41*(1), 367–371. https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-9531.2011.01243.x

Harrell, M., & Bradley, M. (2009). Data Collection Methods: Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups.

Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2012). Qualitative research methods, by Monique. *Critical Public Health, 22*(1), 111–112. doi:10.1080/09581596.2011.565689

Holliday, R., & Elfving-Hwang, J. (2012). Gender, globalization and aesthetic surgery in South Korea. *Body & Society, 18*(2), 58-81. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034x12440828

Hong, X. (2008). Theorising Chinese masculinity: Society and gender in China (review). *China Review International, 14*(1), 175-178. https://doi.org/10.1353/cri.0.0000

Husin, W. N. W., Halim, N. A., & Kernain, N. F. Z. (2020). Students' perceptions on ethnic tolerance in Malaysia: A study in three public universities. *Ethnicities.* https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796820951991

Jin, D. Y. (2018). An Analysis of the Korean Wave as Transnational Popular Culture: North American Youth Engage Through Social Media as TV Becomes Obsolete. *International Journal of Communication, 12*, 404-422.

Jin, D. Y., & Yoon, K. (2014). The social mediascape of transnational Korean pop culture: *Hallyu 2.0* as spreadable media practice. *New Media & Society*, *18*(7), 1277-1292. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814554895

Johnson, T. J., & Perlmutter, D. D. (2013). *New media, campaigning and the 2008 Facebook election*. Routledge.

Jonghoe, Y. (2012). The Korean Wave (Hallyu) in East Asia: A comparison of Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese audiences who watch Korean TV dramas. *Development and Society, 41*(1), 103-147. https://doi.org/10.21588/dns.2012.41.1.005

Joo, R. M., & Epstein, S. (2012). Multiple exposures: Koreanbodies and the transnational imagination. *The Asia-Pacific Journal, 10*(33). https://apjjf.org/2012/10/33/Stephen-Epstein/3807/article.html

Ju, H., & Lee, S. (2015). The Korean Wave and Asian Americans: The ethnic meanings of transnational Korean pop culture in the USA. *Continuum, 29*(3), 323-338. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2014.986059

Jung, S. (2010). BAe Yong-joon, soft masculinity, and Japanese fans: Our past is in your present body. *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption*, 34-72. https://doi.org/10.5790/hongkong/9789888028672.003.0002

Jung, S. (2010). K-pop idol boy bands and manufactured versatile masculinity: Making Chogukjeok boys. *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption*, 163-170. https://doi.org/10.5790/hongkong/9789888028672.003.0005

Kaboudarahangi, M., Tahir, O. M., & Kamal, M. (2013). Malaysia's three major ethnic group preferences in creating a Malaysian garden identity. *Australian Geographer, 44*(2), 197-213. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2013.789588

Kacen, J. J. (2000). Girrrl power and boyyy nature: The past, present, and paradisal future of consumer gender identity. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 18*(6/7), 345-355. https://doi.org/10.1108/02634500010348932

Kachel, S., Steffens, M. C., & Niedlich, C. (2016). Traditional masculinity and femininity: Validation of a new scale assessing gender roles. *Frontiers in Psychology, 7*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00956

Kang-Nguyen, D. B. (2019). 1. The softening of butches: The adoption of Korean "Soft" masculinity among Thai Toms. *Pop Empires*, 19-36. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824879921-005

Kanozia, R., & Ganghariya, G. (2021). Cultural proximity and hybridity: Popularity of Korean pop culture in India. *Media Asia, 48*(3), 219-228. https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2021.1902079

Keum, B. T. (2016). Asian American men's internalization of western media appearance ideals, social comparison, and acculturative stress. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 7*(4), 256-264. https://doi.org/10.1037/aap0000057

Khai, S. W., & Wahab, J. A. (2017). Prettiness as a shield: The romantic perpetuation of patriarchy through the representation of pretty boy in popular Korean dramas in Malaysia. *Media Watch, 8*(3). https://doi.org/10.15655/mw/2017/v8i3/49153

Khalaf, Z. F., Low, W. Y., Ghorbani, B., & Khoei, E. M. (2013). Perception of masculinity amongst young Malaysian men: A qualitative study of university students. *BMC Public Health, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-1062

Khalid, N. K. N. & Wok, S. (2020). The Influences of Korean Wave among Young Adult Malay Muslim Women. *Asian Journal of Applied Communication, 9*(2), 368-390. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348621553_THE_INFLUENCES_OF_KOREAN_WAVE_AMONG_YOUNG_ADULT_MALAY_MUSLIM_WOMEN

Kidd, D. (2017). Popular culture. *Sociology*. https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199756384-0193

Kimmel, M. S. (2005). Globalization and its Malecontents: The gendered moral and political economy

of terrorism. *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities*, 414-431.

https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233833.n24

Kirchherr, J., & Charles, K. (2018). Enhancing the sample diversity of snowball samples:

Recommendations from a research project on anti-dam movements in Southeast Asia. *PLOS*

ONE, 13(8), e0201710. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0201710

Laffan, D. A. (2020). Positive psychosocial outcomes and Fanship in K-pop fans: A social identity

theory perspective. *Psychological Reports, 124*(5), 2272-2285.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294120961524

Law, K. (2021). A New Form of Masculinity and the Rise of "Soft Masculinity" in Contemporary Social

Networking Sites. *2nd International Conference on Economics, Education and Social Research*.

Leaper, C. (2011). More Similarities than Differences in contemporary Theories of social development?:

A plea for theory bridging. *Advances in Child Development and Behavior, 40*.

https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-386491-8.00009-8

Lee, J. J., Lee, R. K., & Park, J. H. (2020). Unpacking K-pop in America:The Subversive Potential of

Male K-pop Idols' Soft Masculinity. *International Journal of Communication*.

https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/13514/3281

Levant, R. F., & Pollack, W. S. (2003). *A new psychology of men*. Basic Books (AZ).

Lim, I. (2008). The trend of creating atypical male images in heterosexist Korean society. *Korea*

Journal, 48(4), 115-146. https://doi.org/10.25024/kj.2008.48.4.115

Lim, J. (2013). Engaging Participation: Youth Culture and the Korean Wave in Malaysia. *TheK wave in Southeast Asia: Consumption and cultural production*, 155-174.

Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars. *Dundalk Institute of Technology, 8*(3).

Maldonado, R., Muehling, D. D., & Tansuhaj, P. (2003). The Impact of Gender on Ad Processing: A Social Identity Perspective. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*.

Maliangkay, R., & Song, G. (2014). *A sound wave of effeminacy: K-pop and the male beauty ideal in China*. K-pop - The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry, 164-177. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315773568-17

Mastro, D. (2015). Why the media's role in issues of race and ethnicity should be in the spotlight. *Journal of Social Issues, 71*(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12093

Mat, W. R., Kim, H. J., Manaf, A. A., Ing, G. P., & Adis, A. A. (2019). Young Malaysian consumers' attitude and intention to imitate Korean celebrity endorsements. *Asian Journal of Business Research, 9*(3). https://doi.org/10.14707/ajbr.190065

McCracken, A. B. (2014). Conclusion: Youth, gender and fashion globalization. *The Beauty Trade*, 156-169. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199908066.003.0008

McCutcheon, L. E., Lange, R., & Houran, J. (2002). Conceptualization and measurement of celebrity worship. *British Journal of Psychology, 93*(1), 67-87. https://doi.org/10.1348/000712602162454

McKee, A., Collis, C., Nitins, T., Ryam, M., Harrington, S., Duncan, B., Carter, J., Luck, E., Neale, L., Butler, D., & Backstorm, M. (2014). Defining entertainment: an approach. *Creative Industries Journal, 7*(2), 108-120. https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2014.962932

Mckie, C. (1997). *Using the Web for social research*. Mcgraw-Hill Ryerson.

Mckinley, C. J., Mastro, D., & Warber, K. W. (2014). Social Identity Theory as a Framework for

Understandingthe Effects of Exposure to Positive Media Images of Self and Other on Intergroup

Outcomes. *International Journal of Communication, 8*, 1048-1068.

Miyose, C., & Engstrom, E. (2015). Boys over flowers: Korean soap opera and the blossoming of a new

masculinity. *Popular Culture Review*. https://doi.org/10.18278/pcr.26.2.1

Monocello, l. T., Dressler, W. W., Decaro, J. A., Pritzker, S. E., & Roskos, B. (2017). Flower boys and

muscled men: comparing American and South Korean cultural models of the ideal male body

using cultural domain analysis.

Monro, S. (2020). Non-binary and genderqueer: An overview of the field. Non-binary and Genderqueer

Genders, 8-13. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003015888-2

Naderifar, M., Goli, H., & Ghaljaie, F. (2017). Snowball sampling: a Purposeful Method of Sampling in

Qualitative Research. *Strides in Development of Medical Education, 14*(3).

https://doi.org/10.5812/sdme.67670

Olesen, V. (1975). Sexual identity. Sex roles and social change. *Social Science & Medicine, 9*(1), 53-54.

https://doi.org/10.1016/0037-7856(75)90166-3

Padilla, A.M., & Perez, W. (2003). Acculturation, Social Identity, and Social Cognition: A New

Perspective. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 25*(1), 35–55.

doi:10.1177/0739986303251694

Papke, D. R. (2007). The impact of popular culture on American perceptions of the courts. *SSRN*

  Electronic Journal, 82(5). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1005385

Park, J. (2011). The Aesthetic Style of Korean Singers in Japan: A Review of Hallyu from the

  Perspective of Fashion. *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 2*(19).

Phang, G. I., Adis, A. A., & Osman, Z. (2018). Korean Wave and Malaysian Young Adults: Attitudes,

  Intention and Behaviour. *Journal of Business and Economics, 5*(1), 77-94.

Potter, W. J. (2011). Conceptualizing Mass Media Effect. *Journal of Communication, 61*(5), 896–915.

  https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01586.x

Putri, V. K., & Reese, M. (2018). The impact of 'Korean Wave' on young Indonesian females and

  Indonesian culture in jabodetabek area. *Emerging Markets : Business and Management Studies*

  Journal, 4(1), 35-53. https://doi.org/10.33555/ijembm.v4i1.60

Rai, N., & Thapa, B. (2017). A study on purposive sampling method in research.

  https://www.academia.edu/28087388/A_STUDY_ON_PURPOSIVE_SAMPLING_METHOD_I

  N_RESEARCH

Rezianurwanto, E. I. (2020). The influences of American popular culture towards Indonesian lifes as

  reflected in Indonesian soap operas, music, fashion and foods.

  http://repository.unissula.ac.id/id/eprint/18742

Risman, B. J. (2004). Gender as a social structure. *Gender & Society, 18*(4), 429-450.

  https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243204265349

Roll, M. (2021). *Korean Wave (Hallyu) - Rise of Korea's cultural economy & pop culture*. Martin Roll. https://martinroll.com/resources/articles/asia/korean-wave-hallyu-the-rise-of-koreas-cultural-economy-pop-culture/

Rosengren, K. E., & Windahl, S. (1977). Mass Media Use: Causes and Effects. *Communications, 3*(3). https://doi.org/10.1515/comm-1977-0306

Salzmann, Z., & Coates, J. (1994). Women, Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language. *Language, 70*(3), 601. https://doi.org/10.2307/416506

Sanap, J. (2017). Pros and cons of different sampling techniques. *International Journal of Applied Research, 3*(7), 749-752. https://www.allresearchjournal.com/archives/2017/vol3issue7/PartK/3-7-69-542.pdf

Sauders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research methods for business students. 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited.*

Scharrer, E., & Blackburn, G. (2017). Cultivating conceptions of masculinity: Television and perceptions of masculine gender role norms. *Mass Communication and Society, 21*(2), 149-177. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2017.1406118

Shah, M. (2020, April 1). *Traditional media vs. new media: Which is beneficial*. Techfunnel. https://www.techfunnel.com/martech/traditional-media-vs-new-media-beneficial/

Showkat, N., & Parveen, H. (2017). In-depth Interview.

Siddiqui, S., & Singh, T. (2016). Social Media its Impact with Positive and Negative Aspects. *International Journal of Computer Applications Technology and Research, 5*(2), 71–75. https://doi.org/10.7753/ijcatr0502.1006

Sin, L. M., & Omar, B. (2020). The impact of Korean Wave on Malaysian Metrosexual grooming attitude and behaviour: The moderating role of visual media consumption. *Media Watch, 11*(2). https://doi.org/10.15655/mw/2020/v11i2/195647

Song, K. Y., & Velding, V. (2019). Transnational masculinity in the eyes of local beholders? Young Americans' perception of K-pop Masculinities. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 28*(1), 3-21. https://doi.org/10.1177/1060826519838869

Spence, J. T., & Helmreich, R. L. (1978). *Masculinity and femininity*. https://doi.org/10.7560/764439

Spinelli, S., Dinnella, C., Masi, C., Paolo, Z.G., Prescott, J., & Monteleone, E. (2017). Investigating preferred coffee consumption contexts using open-ended questions. *Food Quality and Preference*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2017.05.003

Stark, D., & Castells, M. (1997). The Rise of the Network Society. *Contemporary Sociology, 26*(6), 725. https://doi.org/10.2307/2654643

Strategic Information and Research Development Center. (2015). The Korean Wave in Southeast Asia: Consumption and cultural production.

Sun, M., & Liew, K. K. (2019). Analog Hallyu: Historicizing K-pop formations in China. *Global Media and China, 4*(4), 419-436. https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436419881915

Tajfel, H., &Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S.Worchel& W. Austin (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup behavior* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Tan, R. (2014). Gender performance within East Asian popular culture -with focus on so masculinity in Korean popular culture.

Tan, R. (2019). Changing tides, turbulent times: The discursive practices of feminism in South Korean media and society. *Culture and Empathy: International Journal of Sociology, Psychology, and Cultural Studies, 2*(1), 32-49. https://doi.org/10.32860/26356619/2019/2.1.0004

Tang, Z. (2018, August 31). China's made-up men are redefining gender aesthetics in the country. *Quartz*. https://qz.com/quartzy/1374343/chinas-made-up-men-are-redefining-gender-aesthetics-in-the-country/

Thussu, D. K. (2007) Media on the move: Global flow and contra-flow London: Routledge. 2006. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies, 28*(1-2), 223–225. https://doi.org/10.3368/ajs.28.1-2.223

Trolan, J. (2017). A look into Korean popular culture and its tourism benefits. *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review, 4*(9), 203-209. https://doi.org/10.15739/IJEPRR.17.022

Trepte, S., & Loy, L. S. (2017). Social identity theory and self-categorization theory. *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0088

Wen, H. (2021). Gentle yet manly: Xiao Xian ROU, male cosmetic surgery and neoliberal consumer culture in China. *Asian Studies Review, 45*(2), 253-271. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2021.1896676

Wood, W., & Eagly, A. H. (2015). Two traditions of research on gender identity. *Sex Roles, 73*(11-12), 461-473. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0480-2

Yang, H. (2013). Flower boys on campus: Performing and practicing masculinity. *Journal of Gender Studies, 23*(4), 391-408. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2013.795112

Yang, J. (2012). The Korean Wave (Hallyu) in East Asia: A Comparison of Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese Audiences Who Watch Korean TV Dramas. *Journal of Development and society, 41*(1), 103-147. https://www.jstor.org/stable/deveandsoci.41.1.103

Yang, J. (2019, November 28). No, Simon Cowell, it's not 'time for UK-pop'. *CNN*. https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/27/opinions/k-pop-groups-are-changing-music-and-world-yang/index.html

Yuen, M. K. (2020, November 15). The beautiful people. *The Star*. https://www.thestar.com.my/news/focus/2020/11/15/the-beautiful-people

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your understanding of hegemonic masculinity/traditional gender identity?

2. What do you think about the "soft-masculinity" identity towards a male? (Compared to traditional)

3. What are the possible factors that lead to soft masculinity?

4. To what extent do you agree that soft masculinity is formed as a consequence of Korean? (if mentioned)

5. Have you heard about the term "flower boy"?

6. In your opinion, how would you categorize "flower boy" in terms of gender identity?

7. What do you think about the popularity of K-dramas and Korean male celebrities?

8. Can you tell me more about the terms "well-groomed", "stylish", "wearing makeup" to describe a man?

9. Do you think it's acceptable for men to spend time on their outlook and makeup?

10. Can you accept the changes on the new gender identity?

11. How (the factor mentioned by the interviewee) is reshaping the gender identity compared to the traditional gender identity/ hegemonic masculinity?

12. How is the acceptance of soft masculinity in K-pop among Malaysian males?