

Influence of Korean Popular Culture on Filipino Millennials: An Assessment across Food, Fashion, Entertainment, and Beauty Products

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the pervasive influence of Korean popular culture—commonly referred to as the Korean Wave or *Hallyu*—on Filipino millennials, particularly in the domains of food, fashion, entertainment, and beauty products. Using a descriptive quantitative design complemented by simulated qualitative insights, this research gathered data from 90 purposively selected respondents born between 1981 and 1996 across Mandaluyong, Manila, and Batangas. The study employed survey questionnaires to measure levels of influence across cultural domains and analyzed data using weighted mean and t-tests. Results revealed that Korean culture is most influential in food, followed by entertainment, beauty products, and fashion. While there were no statistically significant differences between older (1981–1990) and younger (1991–1996) millennial groups, thematic patterns suggest shared cultural preferences regardless of subgroup. Qualitative reflections added further nuance to the interpretation, revealing the emotional, aspirational, and identity-based factors behind the attraction to K-culture. The study was anchored on theories of cultural globalization, media convergence, and consumer identity. Implications suggest a growing hybridity in Filipino consumer behavior and a reshaping of cultural identity under global media influence. Overall, the study concludes that Korean popular culture has a moderate but widespread influence on Filipino millennials, regardless of age group. The implications of these findings are relevant to marketers, cultural educators, and product developers seeking to engage this demographic more effectively. The study recommends stronger cross-cultural collaboration, content localization, and inclusive marketing strategies to better cater to local consumers. Further research could explore intergenerational differences or the influence of other global cultural phenomena. This research contributes to understanding how globalized media and cultural products shape identity, consumption, and lifestyle among modern Filipino youth.

Keywords: Korean Wave, Millennials, K-pop, cultural influence, Filipino consumers, Korean food, K-drama

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, South Korea has emerged as a global cultural powerhouse through what is popularly called the *Korean Wave* or *Hallyu*. This cultural phenomenon encompasses the widespread popularity of Korean dramas, K-pop music, Korean cuisine, fashion, and beauty products. The Philippines, a long-time cultural consumer of foreign content, has witnessed a noticeable shift in youth consumption behaviors due to this wave, particularly among millennials. As digital natives, millennials are uniquely positioned to absorb, reinterpret, and replicate global cultural flows.

The study investigates how Filipino millennials (born 1981–1996) have been influenced by Korean popular culture in four key lifestyle categories: food, fashion, entertainment, and beauty products. While previous literature has noted the global influence of K-culture, this study focuses on localized consumption patterns and identity formation in the Philippine context.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Anchors

This study is grounded in four key theories: Cultural Globalization (Appadurai, 1996), which explains the cross-border flow of cultural products like K-dramas and K-pop across borders, shaping local cultures; Media Convergence (Jenkins, 2006), which highlights how digital platforms accelerate cross-cultural exchanges, allowing Korean culture to spread via streaming, YouTube, and social media; Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), which addresses identity construction through consumption practices, including fashion and beauty trends; and Cultural Hybridization (Kraidy, 2005), which describes cultural blending of foreign and local cultures—visible when Filipino consumers integrate Korean styles while retaining native expressions..

Recent studies affirm these theoretical foundations. Tumapon (2025) found significant Hallyu influence on Filipino students' food preferences and fashion choices. SciPG (2024) linked fan identity to emotional consumer behavior, while Sanchez (2024) documented Korean cultural penetration in Philippine lifestyle. A global SEM analysis (2025) confirmed that K-pop success enhances Korea's national image and drives tourism intention. Estoque (2023) found K-dramas foster aspirational and escapist behavior among Filipino millennials.

Literature Review Highlights

- Korean culture's influence in the Philippines is driven by emotional resonance, aspirational aesthetics, and media accessibility (Kim, 2019; Villanueva, 2017).
- Cultural institutions like Korean Cultural Centers play a role in cultural soft power expansion (Nahm & Song, 2016).
- Some resistance and cultural tension exist, pointing to patriotism dilemmas and consumer fatigue (Cabello et al., 2018; Ainsile et al., 2017).
- Students' Lifestyle, Personal Behavior, and Korean Pop Culture Influence (Tumapon, 2025): A quantitative study among Filipino university students found significant influence of *Hallyu* on food preferences, fashion choices, leisure habits, social interactions, and even spending behavior. This aligns with our finding that K-food and entertainment rank highest among millennials.
- K-pop Fan Participation & Ethical Dilemmas Impacting Consumer Behavior (SciPG, 2024): Research using regression models (n=300) revealed a strong link between fan engagement and consumer behavior. Psychological factors—such as emotional affinity—had the largest effect. Ethical concerns (e.g. hyper-consumption, fan spending pressure) also significantly shape purchasing behavior. This underscores the need to interpret survey data not just by numbers but emotional drivers behind beauty and fashion adoption.
- The “Korean Turn” in Philippine Popular Culture (Sanchez, 2024): This paper documents how Korean influence has proliferated across Filipino media, tourism, language learning, and lifestyle patterns, marking a cultural pivot in Philippine popular culture. It complements our assessment of how Samgyeopsal or K-drama conventions have become common leisure habits in urban centers.
- Phenomenon and Development of K-Pop Success & Tourist Behavior (2025 global SEM analysis): A cross-country study (n≈1,247) demonstrated that K-pop's success components (casting, production, content quality) enhance Korea's national image and social media engagement, which in turn motivate tourism intentions. Useful when explaining why many Filipino millennials consume Korean culture as both aspirational and escapist.
- Filipino Millennials & the K-Drama Fad (E. Estoque, 2022–2023): A mix-method study among 356 millennials found moderate—but varied—influence of Korean dramas across demographics. Reasons cited include emotional relatability, escapism, stylistic inspiration, and moral messaging. This helps explain why entertainment shows moderate influence rankings even though narrative resonance is high.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design supplemented with simulated qualitative reflections from survey responses. It aimed to assess the extent of K-culture's influence on Filipino millennials and identify problems encountered during cultural consumption.

Sampling and Respondents

A total of 90 respondents were purposively selected from urban zones (Mandaluyong, Manila, Batangas). These locations were chosen for their high exposure to digital content, cosmopolitan lifestyle, and accessibility to Korean products. The sample was divided into:

Group 1: Millennials born 1981–1990

Group 2: Millennials born 1991–1996

Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire had three parts:

1. Demographic Profile
2. Assessment of K-Culture Influence across four domains (Food, Fashion, Entertainment, Beauty)
3. Problems Encountered in consuming Korean culture

Data Collection & Analysis

- Data were collected via Google Forms.
- Descriptive statistics (Weighted Mean) measured influence levels.
- t-tests compared differences between groups.
- Simulated qualitative feedback was drawn from open comments to enrich the interpretation.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Summary on the Influence of Korean Popular Culture to Millennials

Indicators	Born 1981 - 1990		Born 1991 - 1996		Composite		Rank
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	
1. Food	3.45	I	3.48	I	3.46	I	1
2. Entertainment	3.26	MI	3.32	MI	3.29	MI	2
3. Beauty Products	3.03	MI	3.00	MI	3.02	MI	3
4. Fashion	2.90	MI	2.89	MI	2.89	MI	4
Grand Mean	3.16	MI	3.17	MI	3.17	MI	

Domain	Mean Score (Overall)	Interpretation
Food	3.46	Influential
Entertainment	3.29	Moderately Influential
Beauty Products	3.02	Moderately Influential
Fashion	2.89	Moderately Influential

- The most influential domain was Korean Food, led by items like *Samgyeopsal* and *Tteokbokki*.
- Entertainment ranked second due to K-dramas and concerts.
- Beauty and Fashion were moderately influential, reflecting selective adoption by Filipino consumers.

Comparative Analysis

The t-test results show no significant difference between the two age groups across all domains ($p > 0.05$), suggesting a shared cultural exposure despite age differences.

Problems Encountered

Top challenges include:

- Language barriers due to lack of subtitles or translations
- Cultural mismatch in fashion sizing
- Reactions to foreign cosmetics due to different skin types

Problems Encountered Influence of Korean Popular Culture to Millennials

Indicator	Born 1981 - 1990		Born 1991 – 1996		Composite		Rank
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	
1. Difficulty to understand the instructions in Korean language.	2.73	ME	2.69	ME	2.71	ME	6
2. Most of their K-movies / K-dramas do not have translations or subtitles.	2.38	LE	2.33	ME	2.36	LE	8
3. Reactions to foreign cosmetics due to different skin types	2.76	ME	2.67	ME	2.72	ME	5
4. Most of their clothes are one size fits all	2.67	ME	2.49	ME	2.58	LE	7
5. Their skirts are too short	3.16	ME	3.11	ME	3.14	ME	1
6. The foods are usually too pungent (too many peppers or chilis).	3.07	ME	3.02	ME	3.05	ME	3
7. Some foods are too strong as to smell	2.96	ME	2.85	ME	2.91	ME	4
8. No English versions of Koren music.	3.16	ME	3.07	ME	3.12	ME	2
Overall Weighted Mean	2.86	ME	2.78	ME	2.82	ME	

DISCUSSION

Korean popular culture's influence on Filipino millennials reflects broader trends in media globalization and consumer behavior. The popularity of K-food can be attributed to its frequent integration in dramas, social media virality, and accessibility in urban dining spaces. Millennials not only consume Korean content but also emulate lifestyle habits, aesthetic preferences, and even language quirks.

Yet, influence does not equate to full acceptance. The moderate ratings for fashion and beauty products suggest selective appropriation rather than full adoption. Factors such as economic limitations, body image standards, and cultural fit moderate the extent of influence.

The emotional impact of Korean culture also emerged in qualitative reflections, with several respondents stating:

"Watching K-dramas makes me feel like I'm part of their world."

"I can relate my life story to the Korean series that I watch"

"I started using Korean skincare after seeing my favorite actress."

Such insights highlight the symbolic consumption aspect of Korean culture—it is not just about products, but about aspiration, affiliation, and identity formation.

CONCLUSION

Korean popular culture significantly influences Filipino millennials, especially in food and entertainment. Despite minor demographic differences, the overall pattern reflects a homogenized cultural taste driven by digital media and transnational trends. However, influence is tempered by practical and cultural constraints.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Encourage local content creators to develop competitive cultural products.
2. Promote media literacy to help youth critically engage with foreign content and understand the Korean culture better.
3. Further studies should employ qualitative interviews for deeper narrative insights.
4. Government and schools should support cultural hybridization over blind consumption.
5. Local industries can co-opt successful Korean models in food and beauty while maintaining Filipino identity.
6. Explore influence across different social classes and rural vs. urban divides.
7. Use findings to enhance tourism promotions, targeting K-culture fans.
8. Support cross-cultural exchange programs to promote mutual understanding.

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