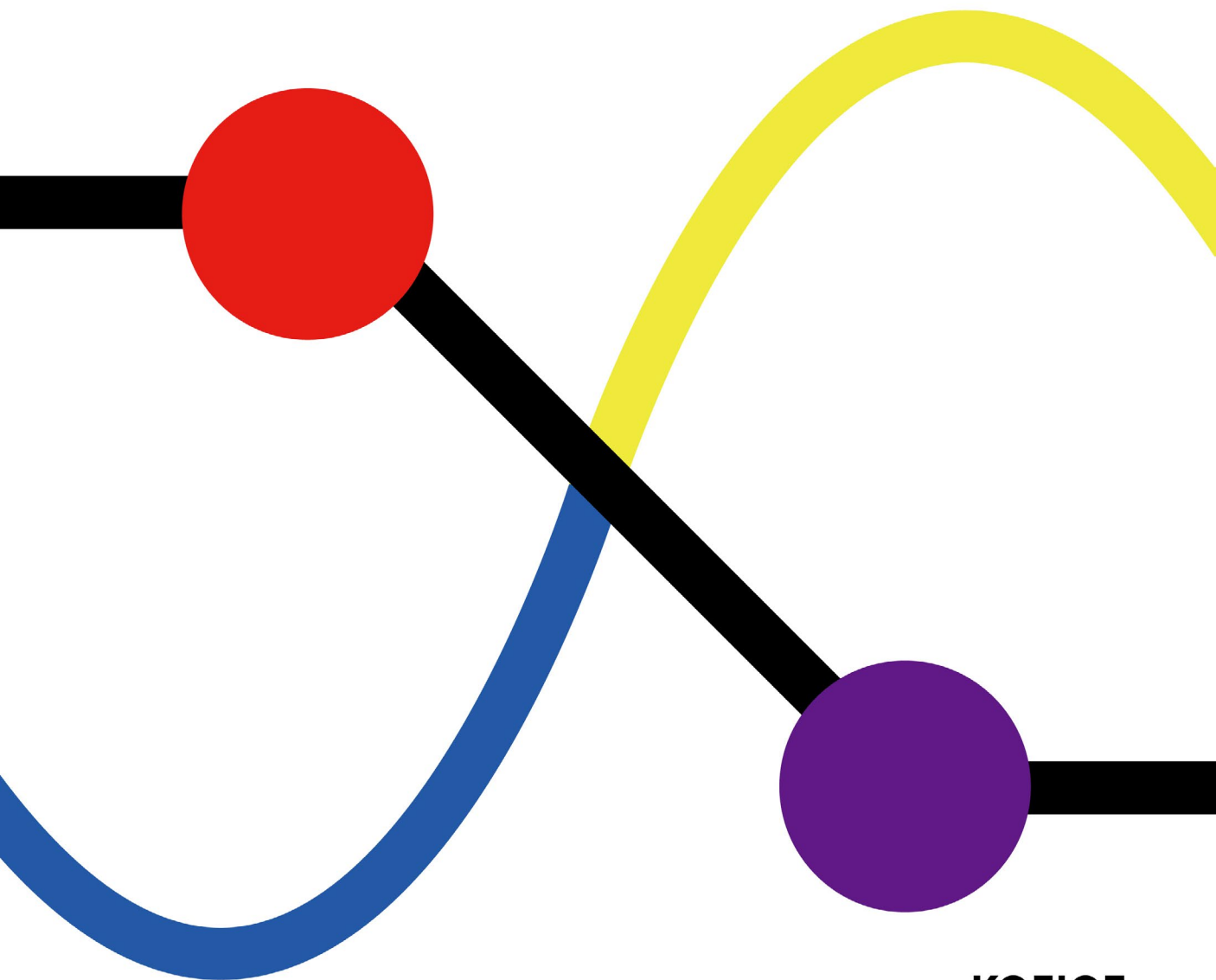


GLOBAL HALLYU
ISSUE MAGAZINE

〈한류NOW〉
한류 심층 분석 보고서

HALLYU NOW

HALLYU STORY
WITH STATISTICS
MALAYSIA



KOFICE
한국국제문화교류진흥원

HALLYU NOW

GLOBAL HALLYU ISSUE MAGAZINE

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A Deep Dive Into Hallyu in Malaysia



The Hallyu fever has continued in Malaysia, a country famous for tourist spots with natural environments, including Kota Kinabalu and Langkawi. Hallyu in Malaysia, which started in the early 2000s with the airing of *Winter Sonata*, is now creating demands for products made in Korea such as cosmetic products and electronics as well as music, dramas, and Korean food. The overall image of Korea was positive and the experiences of Korean cultural content exerted a positive influence on the nation's image. Based on the *2022 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status*, this paper focuses on the factors driving popularity and undermining likability for each major Korean content in Malaysia and seeks to present an outlook for Hallyu and projects for improving cultural cooperation that benefits mutually. For projects for sustainable cultural cooperation between the two countries, we suggest as follows: strengthening bilateral cultural cooperation, improving the understanding of local culture in the country and respecting their culture, removing factors lowering likability for Hallyu, and promoting cooperation in Halal industries.

Mingeum Shin — Senior Researcher, Southeast Asia and Oceania Team, Korea Institute for International Economic Policy

1 Hallyu Penetrated in Daily Life

The Hallyu fever has continued in Malaysia, which is famous for tourist attractions with natural environments, including Kota Kinabalu and Langkawi. For example, a Korean convenience store chain “CU” opened in April of last year in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the country, and people flocked to the store to form a long line of more than 100 meters despite COVID-19, showing explosive interest. Since then, the store has been on the fast track to success in Malaysia with opening more than 90 outlets nationwide in just a year. It can be said that the influence of Hallyu lies behind the success of CU. The Korean convenience store drew attention from young people in Malaysia by employing a strategy that reproduces the landscape of convenience stores shown in Korean dramas as well as products in consideration of the Hallyu fever in the country. One of the most popular items is *tteokbokki*, which can be cooked instantly in the store, according to a source.

With the Hallyu fever, Malaysia has exhibited a strong preference for Korean products, including smartphones, water purifiers, cosmetics, food, and



1



2

1. 2.

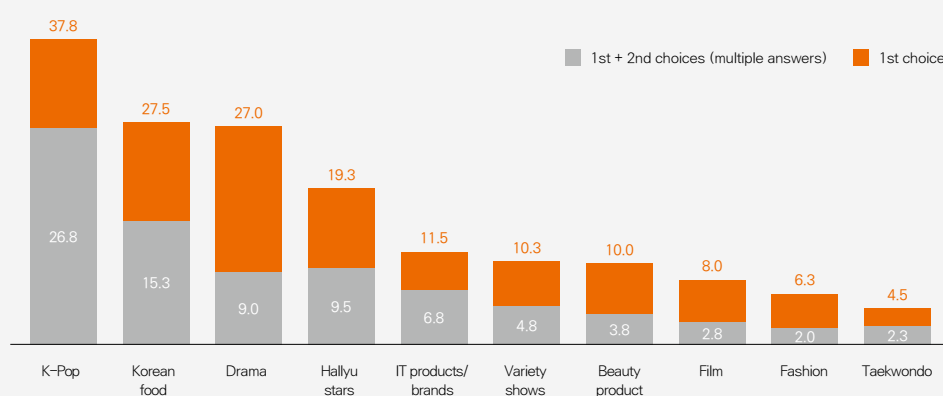
Over 10,000 people flocked to CU, which opened in April of last year in Malaysia, revealing the popularity of Hallyu (Source: *Consumer Times* (2021). New Hallyu of convenience store: 10,000 people flocked to CU in Malaysia for 10 Days.)

clothes. According to the *2022 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status*, which surveyed Hallyu consumers about images of Korea, 81.3% said “positive.” For images associated with Korea, they pointed out “K-pop (37.8%),” “Korean food (27.5%),” “dramas (27%),” “Hallyu stars (19.3%),” and “IT products/brands (11.5%).” This means that the popularity of Hallyu in Malaysia is generating demands for Korean products such as cosmetics and electronics in addition to pop cultural content and Korean food. Then, a question arises: When did Hallyu in Malaysia begin and what kind of occasion fueled it?

Images Associated with Korea

BASE: Total, n=(400), Unit: %

Q. What is the first image that comes to mind when you think about Korea?



In Malaysia, Hallyu started in the early 2000s, which was relatively late compared to other ASEAN countries including Thailand, the Philippines, etc. The drama *Winter Sonata* first aired in the country in the early 2000s and gained popularity, and since then, *Autumn in My Heart*, *Boys Over Flowers*, and *Jewel in the Palace* aired in a row on the terrestrial broadcasting stations, attracting more attention to Korean dramas. The interest in Korean dramas naturally developed into the one in K-pop, variety shows, and food, and became the starting point of the Hallyu fever. Now, Korean shows air in real time in Malaysia on the terrestrial broadcasting stations, and Astro TV, a service provider of satellite TV and IPTV content, operates 10 Korea-related channels and provides over 120 dramas, variety shows, and movies. Such experience of Korean cultural content positively impacted the impression of the country. In the *2022 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status*, 65.8% of respondents reported

their impression of Korea changed constructively after experiencing its cultural content.

Changes in Impression of Korea after Experiencing Korean Cultural Content

BASE: Total, n=(400), Unit: %

Q. How has your overall perception of Korea changed since you experienced Korean cultural content?



Despite the COVID-19 pandemic that started in 2020, the popularity of Korean cultural content has grown with the development of digital/IT technologies. The *2022 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status* shows that 50% of respondents reported they consumed Korean cultural content, such as dramas, movies, variety shows, and music, more than they did before COVID-19, while only 10% responded they did less. This is due to the combination of the development of online and mobile platforms, such as YouTube and Netflix, and staying at home for longer hours due to the social distancing policy. With regard to the access channels for Korean cultural content, “online and mobile platforms” were most used for consuming all content, including dramas, movies, music, and animations. YouTube was the most used means to access all types of Korean cultural content: dramas (81%), variety shows (81.1%), movies (78.2%), music (95.9%), and animations (83.6%). Following YouTube, Netflix, Viu, iQIYI, and iFlix were most frequently used in the order listed, except for music. According to the *2022 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status*, the most favored Korean dramas in Malaysia were *Squid Game* and *The Penthouse: War in Life*; movies, *Train to Busan* and *Parasite*; actors, Lee Min-ho, Lee Kwang-soo, Hyun Bin, Gong Yoo, and Song Hye-kyo; singers/bands were Blackpink and BTS. Favorite Korean animation characters were Larva, Pinkfong, Pororo, and Robocar Poly, while the most preferred Korean games were Battle Grounds, Ragnarok, and Maple Story. As such, the popularity of Hallyu in Malaysia is massive across all sectors, including music, dramas, animations, among others.

Access Channels for Korean Cultural Content (Top 3)

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean cultural content by genre, n=(), Unit: %

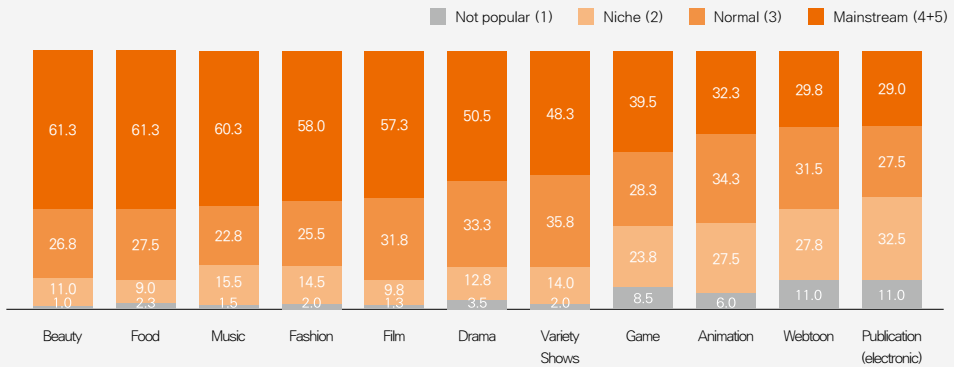
Q. Please select all channels of access to Korean cultural content.

Drama			Variety Shows			Film		
No. of cases	(281)		(250)		(271)			
1st	Online/mobile platform	82.2	Online/mobile platform	82.4	Online/mobile platform	83.0		
2nd	TV broadcast	77.9	TV broadcast	72.0	TV broadcast	76.8		
3rd	CD/DVD/etc	15.7	CD/DVD/etc	14.0	Theater in home country	25.5		
Music			Animation			Publication		
No. of cases	(264)		(200)		(172)			
1st	Online/mobile platform	82.6	Online/mobile platform	79.5	Local website/app	63.4		
2nd	TV broadcast	67.8	TV broadcast	71.5	Global website/app	54.7		
3rd	Radio	28.4	CD/DVD/etc	16.0	Korean website/app	50.0		
Game			Fashion			Beauty		
No. of cases	(165)		(203)		(211)			
1st	Playing online	65.5	Korean videos	74.9	SNS videos/pictures	75.8		
2nd	Online platform	60.6	SNS videos/pictures	72.4	Korean videos	71.6		
3rd	Playing online	53.9	YouTube videos	49.8	YouTube videos	51.2		
Music								
No. of cases	(263)							
1st	SNS videos/pictures	73.0						
2nd	Korean videos	67.7						
3rd	YouTube videos	53.2						

2 Contributing Factors to the Popularity of Hallyu in Malaysia

Hallyu in Malaysia started with dramas and widened its territory into diverse sectors including cosmetics, fashion, and food, as well as music, variety shows, and movies. According to the *2022 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status*, the popularity of Korean cultural content in Malaysia was highest to lowest in the order of beauty-related products, food, music, fashion, movies, and dramas, and more than half of respondents shared that such content was widely known to and actively consumed by the Malaysian public. Then, what makes Korean cultural content popular in Malaysia?

Q. How popular do you think the Korean cultural content is in your home country?



With regard to the factors that contributed to the popularity of each cultural content type, for dramas, they were “well-structured stories (39.1%)” and “attractive actors (32.4%),” while for movies, they were “well-structured stories (38.4%),” “uniqueness that Malaysian movies lack (25.5%),” and “attractive actors (24.4%).” In particular, it is noticeable that the uniqueness of Korean movies was appealing to Malaysians. With *Running Man*, *Master in the House*, and *Single’s Inferno*, Korean variety shows have enjoyed high popularity in Malaysia, and it turns out that their popularity came from “distinctive characters/roles (33.2%),” “fun games (32.4%),” “likable concepts/formats (23.2%),” and “uniqueness of Korean culture (21.2%).” For example, the Malaysian version of *Master in the House*, which was co-produced by Korean broadcasting station SBS and TV3, the representative terrestrial broadcasting channel of Malaysia, was broadcasted in January, 2022 and became a smash hit with the highest viewer ratings in its time slot. The program drew more attention in that a Korean producer co-produced it with a local studio, going beyond merely exporting the format. In the meantime, factors driving the popularity of Korean music were “addictive chorus/rhythm (40.9%),” “singers’ attractive appearance/style (30.3%),” “outstanding performance (27.3%),” and “music style unseen in local music scene (19.7%).” Overall, in all sectors of dramas, movies, variety shows, and music, according to the respondents, the major popularity factor was the unique features of Korean culture, which implies that something “Korean” was fresh and attractive to Malaysians.

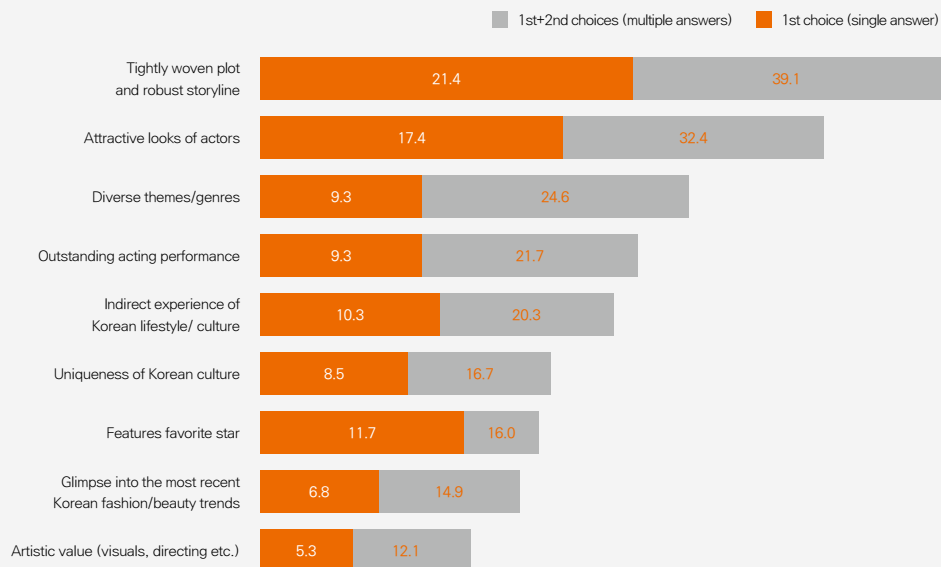
Factors Driving Popularity of Korean Cultural Content

Korean Drama

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean drama in Malaysia, n=(281), Unit: %

Q. What do you think drives popularity of Korean dramas in your country?

Please choose 2, in order.

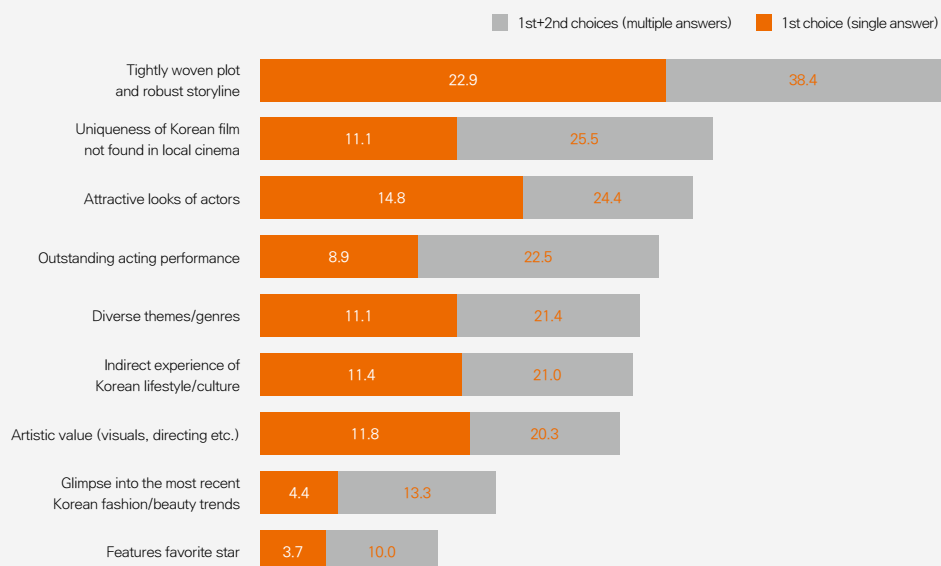


Korean Film

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean film in Malaysia, n=(271), Unit: %

Q. What do you think drives popularity of Korean film in your country?

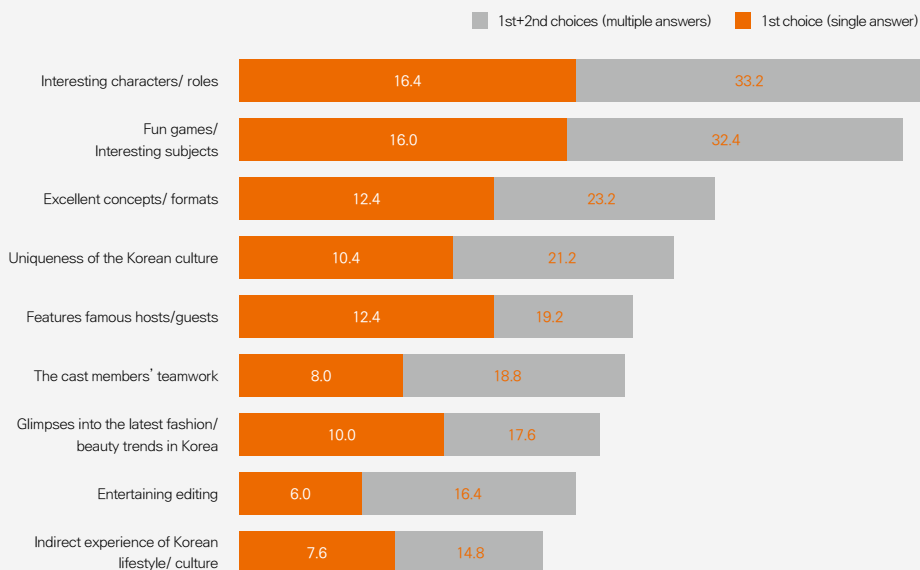
Please choose 2, in order.



Korean Variety Shows

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean variety shows in Malaysia, n=(250), Unit: %

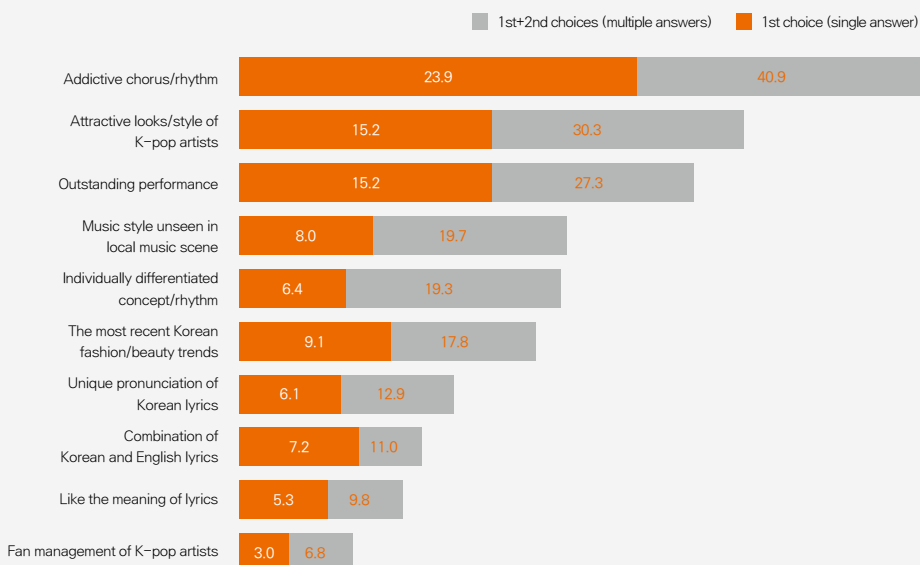
Q. What do you think drives popularity of Korean variety shows in your country?
Please choose 2, in order.



Korean Music

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean music in Malaysia, n=(264), Unit: %

Q. What do you think drives popularity of Korean music in your country?
Please choose 2, in order.



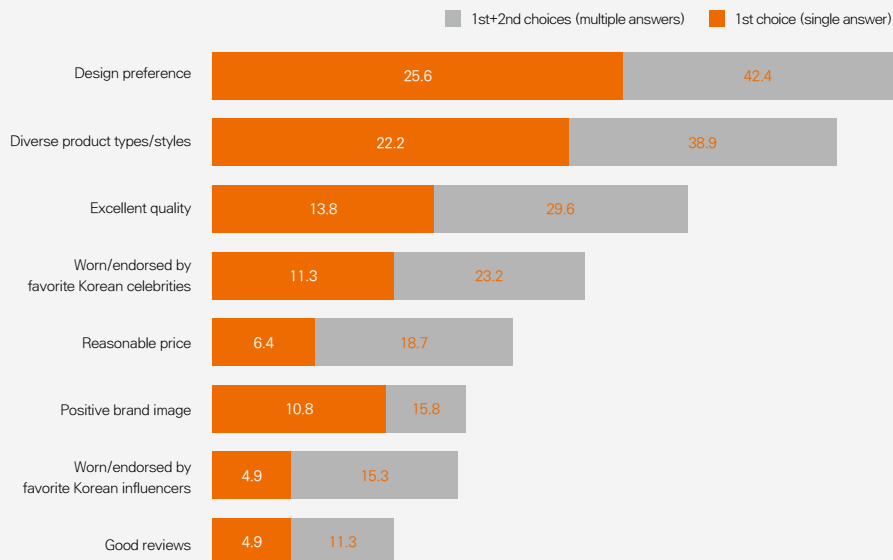
“Diverse product types and excellent quality” for the fashion and beauty sectors and “taste” for the food sector ranked high as popularity factors. “Design preference (42.4%)” was placed first for fashion, followed by “diverse product types/styles (38.9%)” and “excellent quality (29.6%)”; for beauty, “excellent results/quality (49.8%),” “good reputation (27%),” and “diverse product types (23.2%)” were highly placed as main drivers. In general, Hallyu star endorsement is often used in the fashion and beauty sectors; yet, “products used/promoted by likable Hallyu stars” ranked unexpectedly low.

Korean Fashion

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean fashion in Malaysia, n=(211), Unit: %

Q. What do you think drives popularity of Korean fashion in your country?

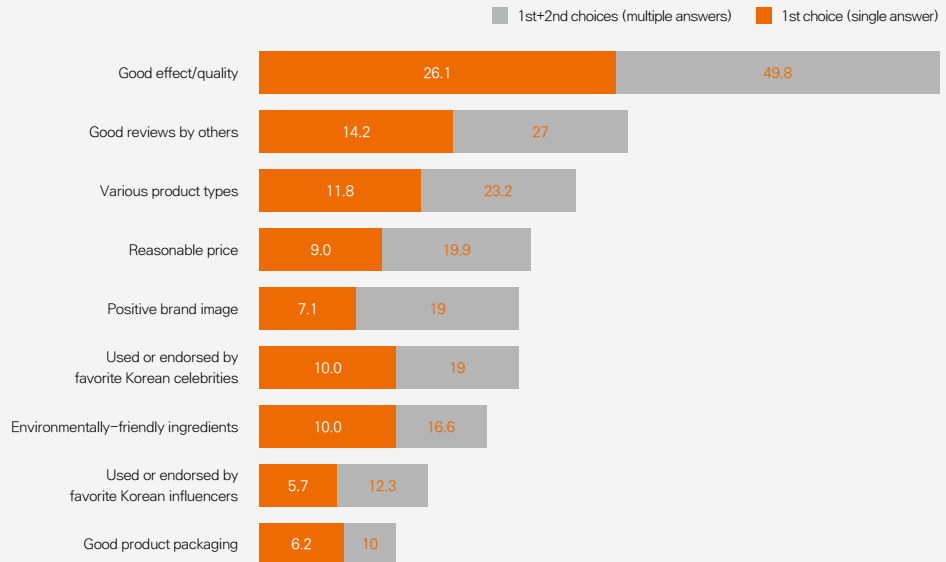
Please choose 2, in order.



Korean Beauty Products

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean beauty products in Malaysia, n=(211), Unit: %

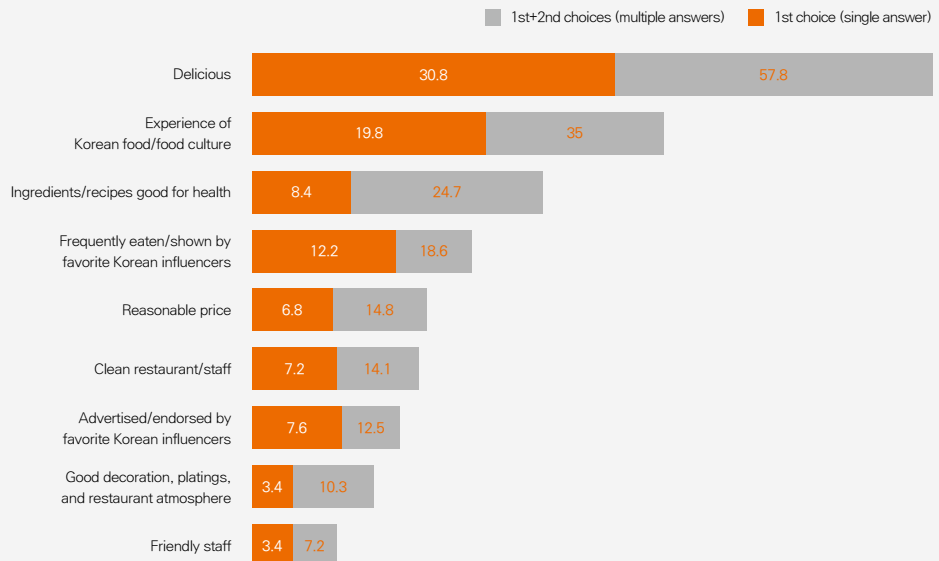
Q. What do you think drives popularity of Korean beauty products in your country?
Please choose 2, in order.



Korean Food

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean food in Malaysia, n=(263), Unit: %

Q. What do you think drives popularity of Korean food in your country?
Please choose 2, in order.



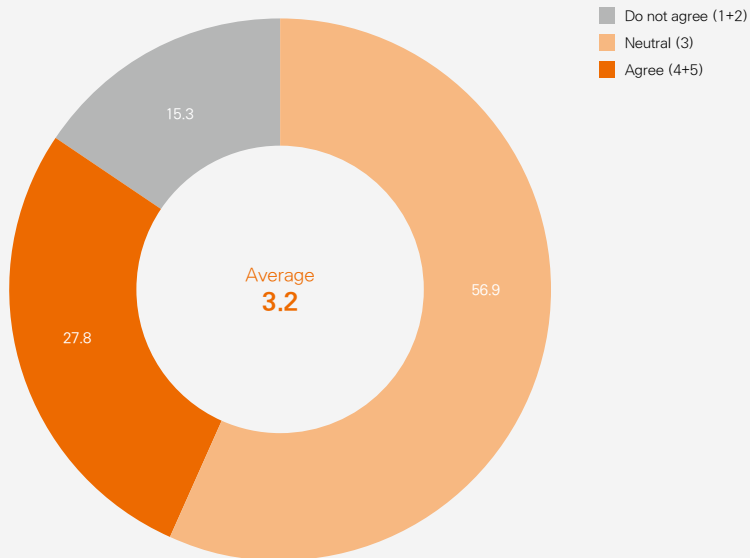
3 Background of Negative Perception of Hallyu

To cultivate cultural cooperation between Korea and Malaysia based on Hallyu, it is necessary to pay attention to the negative views on Korean content and causes for lowering its likability. In the *2022 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status*, 27.8% of respondents agreed on the negative perception that people have on Hallyu. The main causes for the unfavorable views on Hallyu were excessive commercialism, inappropriate words and actions of Hallyu stars, and excessively provocative and sensual aspects. In particular, it was presumed that excessive product placement in dramas and movies contributed to the negative perception of Hallyu as being too commercial. Furthermore, inappropriate words and actions of Hallyu stars such as sexual scandals and illegal acts immediately went viral through various press outlets and social media, which were believed to largely contribute to the spread of negative opinion toward Hallyu.

Negative Perception of Hallyu

Base: Malaysia total, n=(400), Unit: %

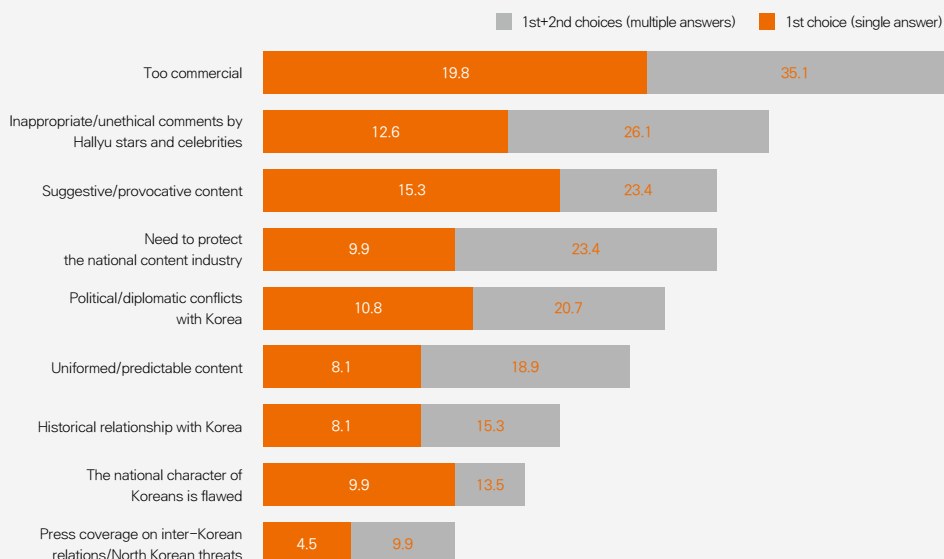
Q. Please mark your level of agreement with the negative perception of Hallyu.



Causes for Negative Perception of Hallyu

Base: Malaysians who agree with the negative perception of Hallyu, n=(111), Unit: %

Q. Please choose your 1st and 2nd reason, in order, for why you agree with the negative perception of Hallyu.



Regarding the factors that decreased the likability of Hallyu in Malaysia by content type, inconvenience related to the Korean language was pointed out as the main reason in all fields surveyed. Respondents answered that the inconvenience caused by the unfamiliar language and subtitles/dubbing was the main cause that reduced likability, and it is necessary to draw up measures to encourage the use of Korean or improve translation quality to tackle the language barrier. In the case of music, unfamiliar and difficult Korean lyrics, lyrics that violate social/moral values of Malaysia, and inappropriate words and actions of Korean singers/music makers were evaluated as the main factors that provoked negative views.

Religion is a sensitive issue in Malaysia. The country basically guarantees religious freedom. However, Islam is recognized as the state religion by constitution, and Buddhism and Hinduism also thrive in Malaysia as it is a multi-ethnic society consisting of Malay (62%), Chinese (22%), and Indian (7%). In particular, in Malaysia, special attention should be paid to lyrics, words, and actions in order not to violate the religious values of Muslims that account for the majority of population. In 2021, I.M, a member of K-pop boy band Monsta X, wore a costume with the main phrase of the Islamic sacred book Quran, which brought adverse criticism in the country. Also in 2015,

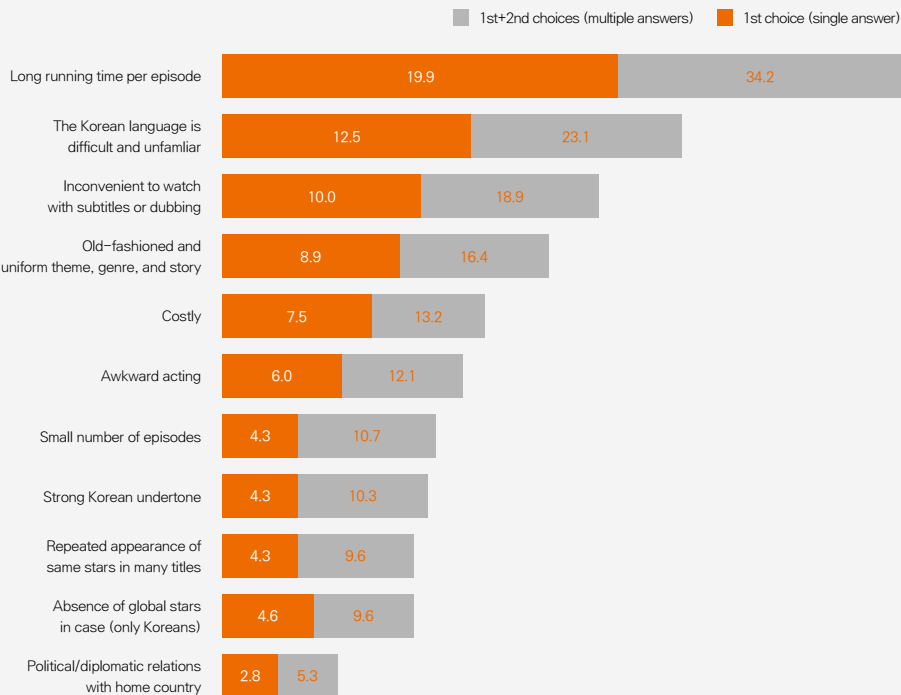
boy group B1A4 was almost punished for violating Sharia (Islamic Law) for hugging and kissing female Muslim fans at a local fan meet-and-greet.

Factors Contributing to Negative Perceptions of Korean Cultural Content

Korean Drama

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean drama in Malaysia, n=(281), Unit: %

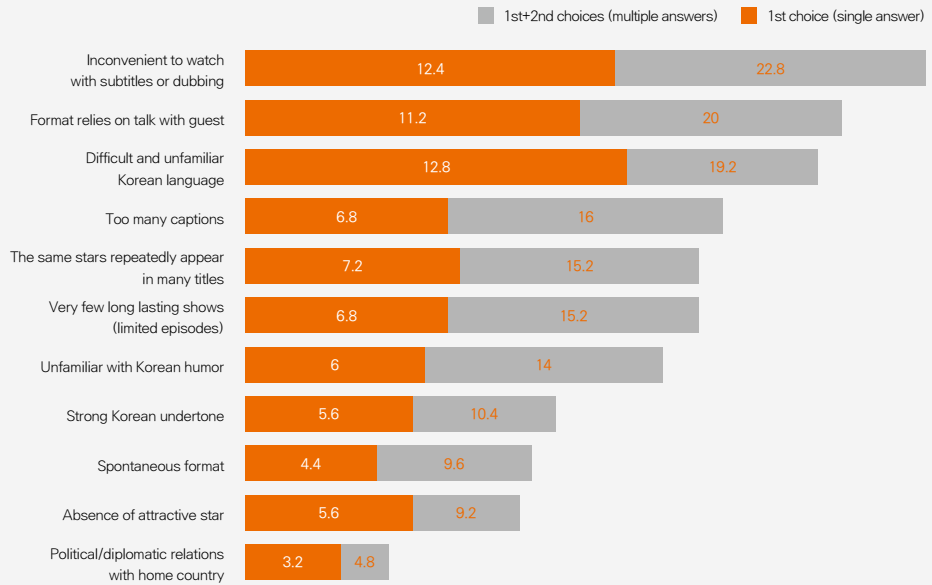
Q. What hinders likability of Korean drama? Please mark your 1st and 2nd choices in order.



Korean Variety Shows

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean variety shows in Malaysia, n=(250), Unit: %

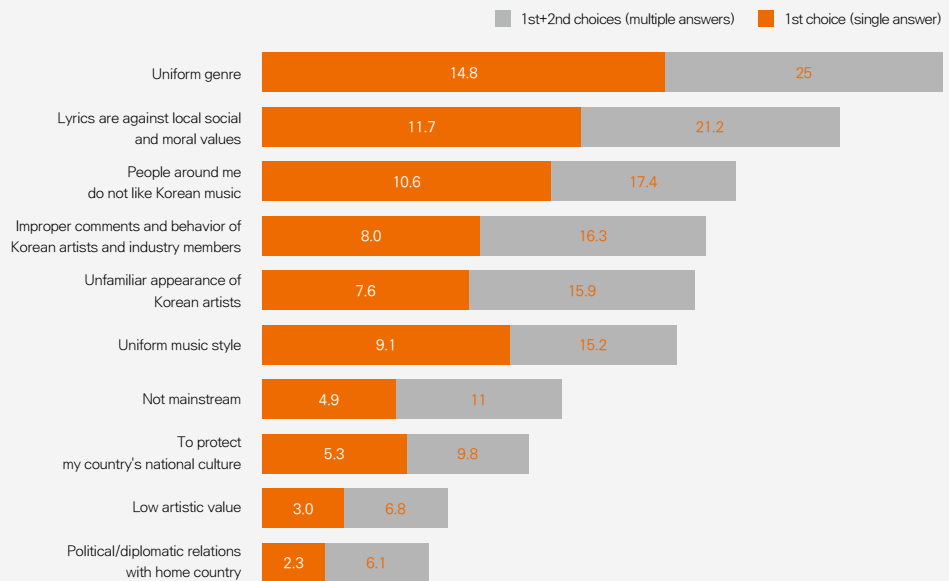
Q. What hinders likability of Korean variety shows? Please mark your 1st and 2nd choices in order.



Korean Music

BASE: Persons with experience of using Korean music in Malaysia, n=(264), Unit: %

Q. What hinders likability of Korean music? Please mark your 1st and 2nd choices in order.



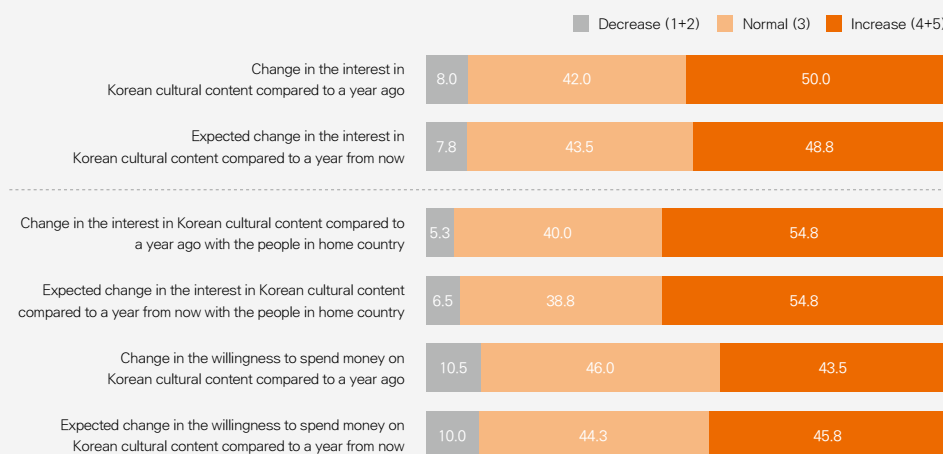
In the sectors of fashion, beauty, and food, high prices compared to quality was the leading cause that reduced likability. Korean products are priced relatively higher than Malaysian brands because extra expenses are added to the process of import, distribution, and customs clearance. However, considering the aforementioned negative factors, Korean companies need to secure price competitiveness by conducting local production. Korean fashion also received unfavorable marks on deficiency of size variety and disagreeable design. Considering that Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country unlike Korea, it seems necessary to conduct a preliminary survey on the sizes of local people and launch products more diverse in size. Regarding beauty products, people evaluated that excessive promotion and inclusion of herbal ingredients that did not suit their taste were responsible for their unfavorable views. For food, low cost-effectiveness was regarded as a major factor that decreased likability, and locals pointed out that disagreeable taste/fragrance, an excessive number of side dishes, and the difficulty of using utensils were also reasons for lowering likability. Just as the Chinese food that Koreans have adapted to is generally preferred in Korea over authentic Chinese cuisine, the above-mentioned problems are expected to be partially resolved if Korean companies actively implement localization strategies.

4 Prospect of Hallyu in Malaysia and Challenges for Mutually Beneficial Cultural Cooperation

According to the *2022 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status*, more than 90% of respondents answered their interest in Korean cultural content and willingness to spend on Korean products would be similar or increased even a year later. Hallyu in Malaysia is expected to continue for the time being.

Interest in Korean Cultural Content

BASE: Malaysia total, n=(400), Unit: %



Celebrating the 62nd anniversary of the diplomatic ties between Korea and Malaysia in 2022, the two countries have greatly advanced social and cultural cooperation such as Korean language education and cultural and human exchange with Hallyu as a momentum. What measures are needed to continuously promote mutually beneficial cultural cooperation between Korea and Malaysia? First of all, since conducting unilateral cultural exchange is not sustainable, it is necessary to strengthen two-way cooperation. Due to Hallyu, people in Malaysia are highly aware of Korean culture and language, while Koreans are not familiar with Malaysian language and culture as much. It is necessary to raise awareness of Malaysian culture with a medium- and long-term plan through cultural cooperation platforms such as ASEAN-Korean Center, ASEAN Cultural House, and Asia Culture Center.

In addition, when entering the Malaysian market, companies producing Hallyu content, Hallyu stars, entertainment agencies, and Korean corporations need to respect Malaysian culture and improve their understanding by thoroughly conducting in-depth preliminary research. In particular, violating religious taboos, such as costume issues of K-pop groups, is taken very seriously in Malaysia, so special attention should be paid.

In order to further develop cultural cooperation based on Hallyu, it is necessary to focus on the causes that decrease likability and strive to settle them. In consideration of the inconvenience caused by the unfamiliar language or subtitles/dubbings being pointed out as the main factor that

leads to unfavorable response, the quality of subtitles and dubbing should be improved by training and hiring competent translators. In the case of music, although it may be difficult for K-pop singers to sing in fluent Malaysian, lyrics and performances violating religious or cultural values are recommended to be changed when performing in Malaysia through preliminary research. In addition, since inappropriate words and actions of Hallyu stars are shared in real time and provoke unfavorable responses, to minimize the risk, strengthening and thoroughly conducting moral education for celebrities by entertainment agencies is deemed necessary.

Malaysia, whose state religion is Islam, is a global hub of the halal industry fostered nationwide. Therefore, Korean government and companies can strengthen cooperation on cultural content with Malaysia, in consideration of the sector. Halal means “things allowed for Muslims under Islamic law,” and products manufactured and processed according to Islamic doctrines are classified as halal. They include not only food, cosmetics, and medicine, but also electronic products such as water purifiers. The field is one of the areas the Korean government wants to focus on in cooperating with the Malaysian government, along with the fourth industry and smart city sectors. Companies entering Malaysia need to adopt various strategies, such as reviewing plans to obtain halal certification in cooperation with JAKIM, a local halal certification agency. 

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