Hallyu's Effects on Seoul's Pop Culture Tourism

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Abstract

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The objective of this thesis is to research Hallyu's effects on Seoul's pop culture tourism and its image as a pop culture tourism destination. More people are interested in visiting South Korea's capital as Korean pop culture is consumed more widely and interest is growing, especially because of popular Korean pop music groups, TV shows, and movies.

The theoretical framework is based on the development of Hallyu and how it has improved knowledge of Korean culture, what motivates people to travel and choose certain destinations, niche-travel, and how a destination's image is formed.

The research data is collected from existing materials and analysed using mainly quantitative methods. The main question this thesis and research aim answer is How Hallyu has impacted pop culture tourism in Seoul and what effects does it have on Seoul's image as a pop culture tourism destination? Quantitative methods are used to analyse the data concerning the number of tourists in relation to the growing popularity of Korean pop culture content.

The results of the research indicate that as interest in Korean pop culture has grown, so has the number of tourists visiting Seoul. Hallyu has caused an improvement in Seoul's destination image as a tourism destination. Rather than being perceived just as a militaristic and industrial nation, Korea is now more well renowned for its rich cultural heritage. Hallyu's growing importance is seen in South Korea's GDP and tourist numbers, proving it is a major phenomenon helping South Korea's tourism.

Key words
Hallyu, pop culture tourism, special interest tourism, destination image formation

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1 Introduction

This thesis researches the role of Hallyu considering tourism in Seoul, Seoul's image as a pop culture tourism destination, and what changes Hallyu has caused in the travel industry. This topic is relevant for the tourism industry, as different types of companies in the tourism field need to be prepared for a growing interest in Korean culture and bigger and bigger numbers of tourists wanting to travel to South Korea, and Seoul more precisely. South Korea is already very aware of this opportunity for them, but the power of Hallyu is still overlooked by other countries, therefore the entire tourism industry could learn something from South Korea's ways of using Hallyu to increase tourist flows.

The theoretical framework focuses on the development of Hallyu from the beginning until the possible future of it, people's motivations and reasons for travelling, and special interest tourism (SIT). Hallyu, meaning the Korean wave, first started in China in the late 1990s with Korean TV-shows, and has developed into an international phenomenon with people being interested in all aspects of Korean culture. The motivations for travelling are examined with pull and push factors, psychological needs and what motivates people to choose certain destinations. Push factors are being explained as the reason for travelling itself, while pull factors influence the choice of destination. Special interest tourism, and pop culture tourism more specifically, are discussed as they are closely related to the tourism as a result of Hallyu. Special interest tourism, as opposed to mass tourism, benefits from more engaged and active tourists who look for locations connected to their particular interests. Destination's image formation, the factors contributing to it and how Hallyu and pop culture influence it are contemplated before getting into the research.

The aim of this thesis is to research Hallyu's effects on Seoul's pop culture tourism and how it has impacted Seoul's image as a pop culture tourism destination. The research was done using both quantitative methods, using them for analyzing the numbers of tourists and consuming of Korean pop culture contents.

Finally, the results of the research and proposals for further research are presented and discussed, and they are reflected to the theoretical framework. In general, it can be seen that the increasing interest in Korean culture has also increased the number of tourists, and this has had a positive impact on Seoul's destination image.

In short, this thesis focuses on how much Korean culture and content is being consumed outside of Korea and how the interest is rising, how this rising interest can be seen in the numbers of travellers, and how Hallyu has affected Seoul's destination image.

2 Hallyu shaping Korean culture

Due to companies like Hyundai, Kia, Samsung, and LG, Korea has been known as an industrial nation that produces cars and electronics (Lim & Giouvris 2020). However, as the Korean Wave known as Hallyu has gained popularity, more and more people are becoming interested in Korean cultural content, such as cuisine, music, fashion, and media. South Korea is taking advantage of this phenomenon by using well-known Hallyu Stars in their tourism marketing campaigns. For example, Visit Seoul is using the biggest K-Pop group, BTS, in their marketing campaigns such as BTS Film Location Tour (Visit Seoul, 2020). Korean media such as Korean pop music (K-pop), TV dramas and movies have been a significant pull factor and marketing tool for South Korea and helped attract 17.2 million foreign tourists in 2016 (Garcia December 2017). Kim Syunghoon from Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) tells BusinessWorld that "The Korean Wave worked very well and helped enhance South Korea's national brand". Foreign people weren't familiar what Korea is really like before Hallyu started becoming more impactful and known around the world, but now as a result of Hallyu more and more people are aware and understand what Hallyu is about.

Development of Hallyu

The term Hallyu, which is also known as "hanliu" in Chinese, was initially used by the Chinese press to characterize the rising popularity of Korean pop culture in China in the late 1990s. Hallyu is especially well-liked with young people who are fascinated by Korean pop music (K-pop), dramas (K-drama), movies, fashion, cuisine, and beauty (Kim 2015). The television drama What Is Love ranked in second place among all imported video content in China in 1997 when it was broadcast by a major state broadcaster, China Central Television (CCTV). When the KBS TV drama series Winter Sonata was broadcasted on NHK in 2003, the Korean Wave arrived in Japan. The drama was a huge success, and Nami Island in Chuncheon, where it was filmed, was a popular travel destination for Japanese tourists (Korea.net s.a.).

The development of the Korean Wave from the middle of the 2000s to the beginning of the 2010s was mostly driven by Korean boy groups and girl groups known as idols, including Big Bang, Girls' Generation and Shinee. In this time, the Korean Wave gained popularity outside of Asia, particularly among young people in their teens and early 20s in Latin America and the Middle East.

Since the 2010s, the Korean Wave, which had built a strong base through popular culture including TV dramas and music, has been expanding its sphere of impact. The craze has spread to traditional Korean culture, food, literature, and language as the distinctive charm of Korean culture

has become widely recognized to people across the world through global online platforms like YouTube and social networking sites, attracting more and more enthusiasts. Kim (2015) predicts that the future of Hallyu would lead to the development into "K-style", meaning the fans adapting aspects of Hallyu stars into their own lives.

Hallyu's Growing Role in Korean Culture

Popular culture is defined as something that is well liked by many people and often claimed as mass-produced commercial culture (Storey 2018). K-Pop refers to Korean pop music and implies a new standard of popular music that is distinguished by, among other things, the aesthetic appeal of its idols and performances, capturing the interest of millions of fans worldwide. K-pop is said to be the latest phase of Hallyu in K-pop – The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry (Choi & Maliangkay 2015), however it cannot be considered as the only major factor for the rising international popularity of Korean pop culture. This development is interesting to see, as Hallyu originally gained attention with the international popularity of Korean dramas.

As already stated, Korean TV shows first gained international popularity in China in 1997 with What Is Love. Now various major streaming services such as Netflix have many internationally popular and successful K-dramas. As an example, "Crash Landing on You" premiered in 190 countries through Netflix (Korea.net s.a.) and was named as one of the best international TV series of 2020 by Variety (2020). The K-drama Squid Game, released in September 2021, is the most popular series on Netflix with over 1,65 billion hours viewed in its first 28 days. As a comparison, the most viewed English series is Stranger Things season 4, with 1,35 billion views. (Netflix s.a.)

South Korean dark comedy thriller Parasite was released in 2019 and was very well received by many critics. It also won numerous prestigious awards, 197 in total, such as Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay and Best International Feature Film in the 92nd Academy Awards. These awards made Parasite become the first South Korean film to win an Oscar in any category, and the first non-English film to ever win Best Picture (Brzeski February 2020).

3   Travel motives

Push and pull factors are typically the main topics of conversation when discussing visitor motivation, with push motives being used to explain why people choose to travel, and pull motives being the reasons for destination choices (Soldatenko & Backer 2019). It is critical to comprehend tourists' wants and needs in order to understand why they select certain destinations. McKercher and Chan (2005) argue that it is more important to understand why people visit certain destinations, rather than what they do there, as this can be used by destination management organizations to better cater to the tourists' needs. In the context of Hallyu, its motivation is centered on the cultural industry's provision of emotion and pleasure as value-added services (Kim 2015).
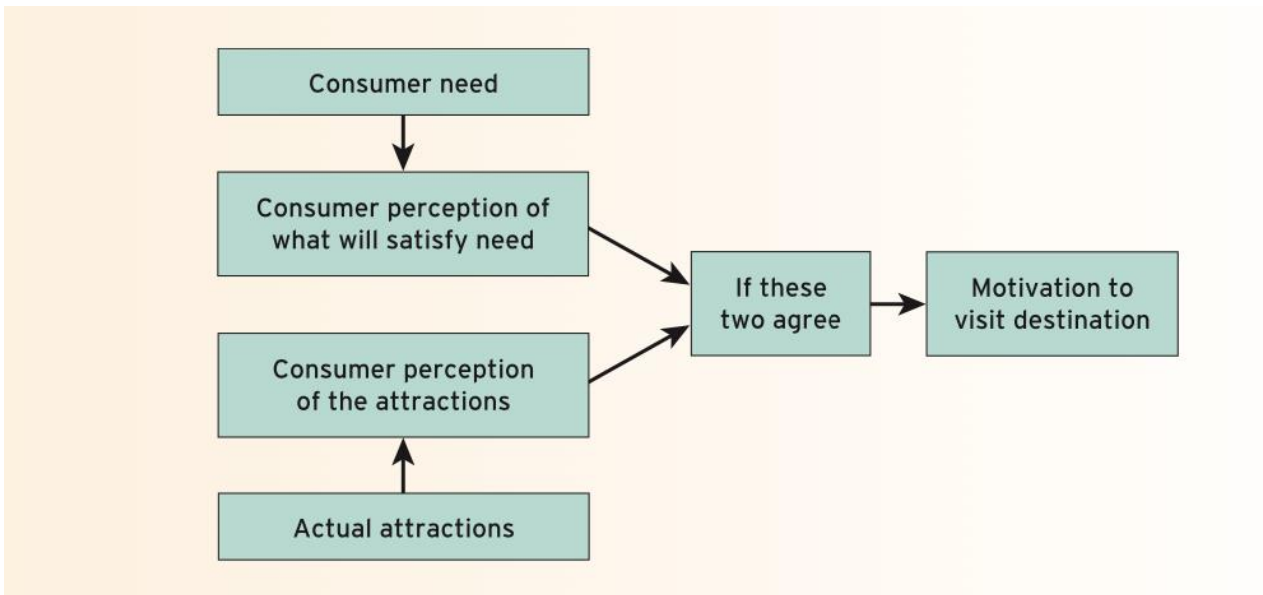

Figure 1. The Motivation Process (Holloway, J. 2016)

Holloway (2016) explains that when the consumer's perception of what will satisfy their need and the perception of the attractions meet, it gives them motivation to visit this destination (Figure 1). He also mentions that a holiday can be truly a need, especially for people working extremely demanding jobs, which might result in a breakdown if there is no relief from the pressure. It is explained that people sometimes do not understand how travelling can be a way to satisfy some certain needs, and the individual might not even recognize these needs. As an example, people might choose to return to the same destination every year, considering it as a "want" rather than a need, but which would link to wanting to satisfy the need for safety even if they do not recognize this need.
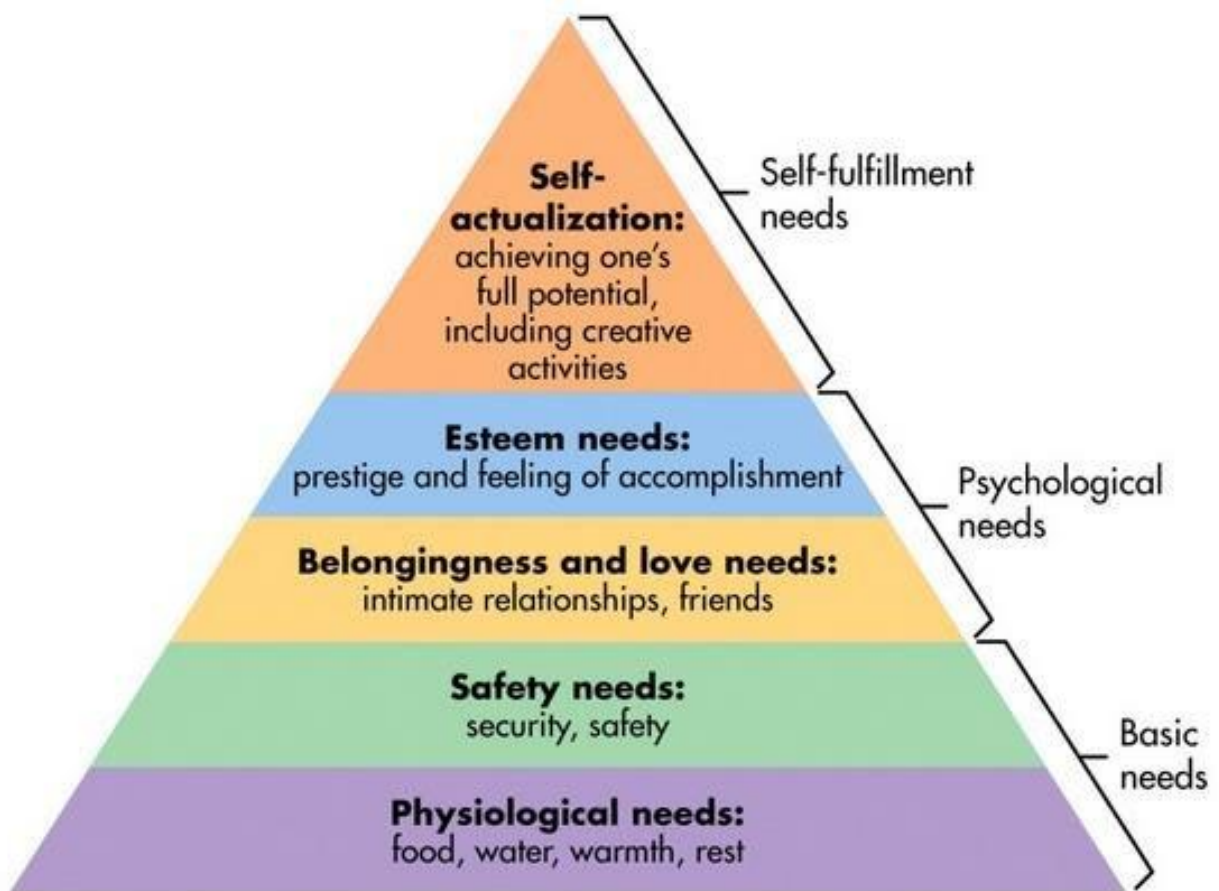
Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (McLeod, S. 2018)

Maslow's Hierachy (Figure 2) is a very fundamental study and theory of human motivation, which can be related to travel motivations. According to this theory, people have certain basic, psychological and self-fulfilment needs, and he suggests that the lower needs need to be satisfied before the higher needs can be satisfied. The basic needs consist of certain physiological and safety needs that indicate people's needs to eat, drink, sleep, keep warm and feel safe, and these are all needs essential to survival. Above those needs are psychological needs, which are essential for well-being. These include the feelings of belonging and being loved, as well as being valued and respected by others in addition to self-respect. On top of the hierarchy are self-fulfilment needs, referring to the need to reach full potential in life, meaning achieving everything that can be achieved, and involves exercising creativity. In relation to travel motivations, Lubbe (1998) considers these needs to be the push factors for travelling (Figure 3).

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Push (need to travel)       │
│   • Physiological           │
│   • Safety/security         │
│   • Belonging and love      │
│   • Esteem                  │
│   • Self-actualisation      │
│   • Acquiring knowledge     │
│   • Aesthetics              │
└─────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│ Pull (attractiveness of     │ ───▶ │ Travel motivation │ ──▶ │ Primary image    │
│ travel)                     │      └──────────────────┘      │ construction     │
│   • Static: landscape,      │                                └──────────────────┘
│     culture, climate        │
│   • Dynamic:                │
│     accommodation, food,    │
│     service, access         │
│   • Current decision:       │
│     promotion, price        │
└─────────────────────────────┘
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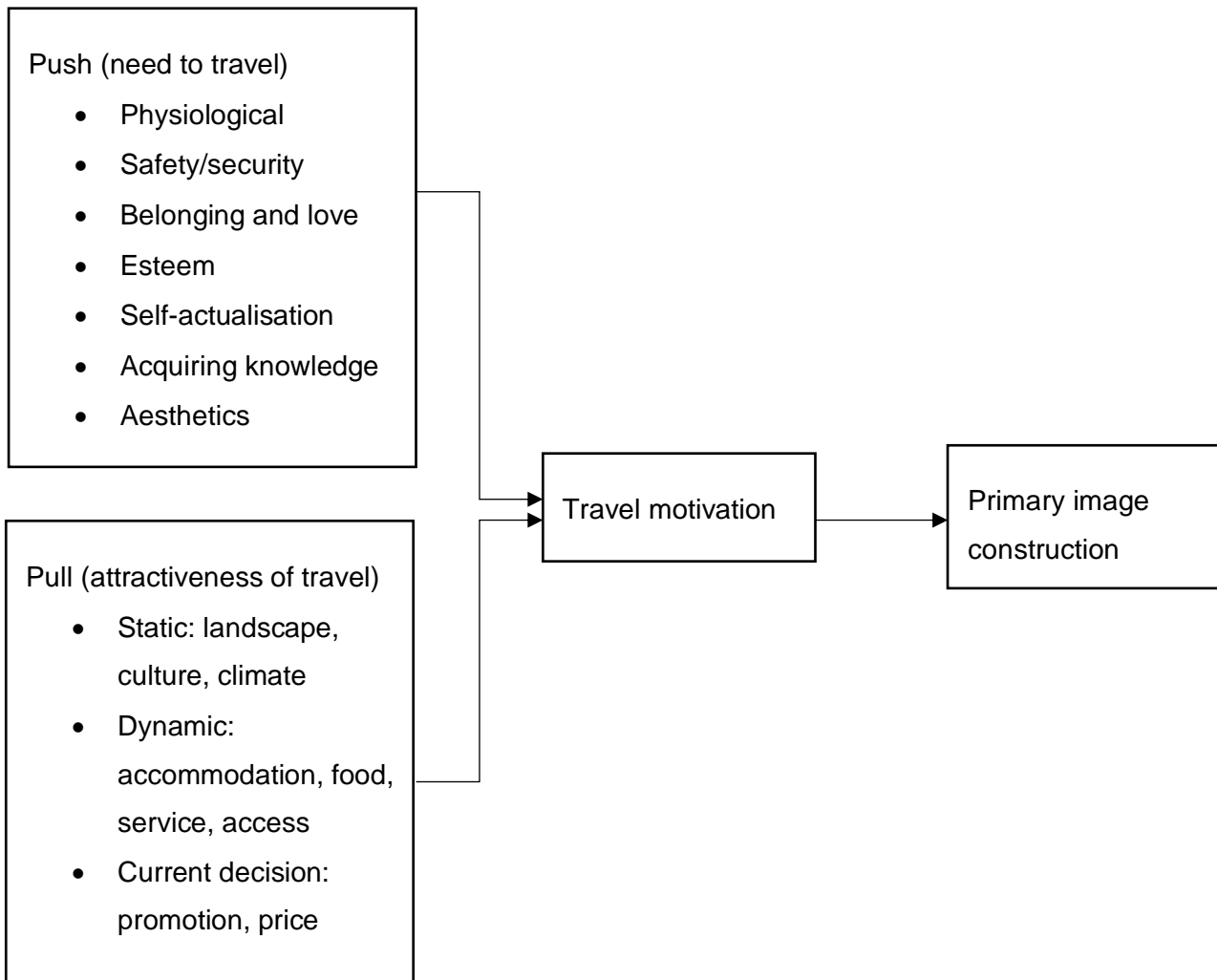
Figure 3. Travel motivation (adapted from Lubbe, 1998, 25)

Lubbe's (1998) framework suggests that the motivation for travel is a combination of the need to travel and the attractiveness of travelling, and this further contributes to the construction of destination's primary image. She suggests that tourists are more likely to be driven by their needs than by the attractions, meaning the push factors are more important for the motivation to travel. She explains this with the example of a tourist's need for social recognition, who gets their motivation to travel to a certain destination because "everyone else" has been there too, with the actual attractions being a secondary reason for the destination choice. In the case of tourism in Seoul, the static factors are the most important pull factor and biggest motivators for pop culture tourists as it includes culture. Based on this, it can be said that Hallyu has a big role in primary image construction for fans of Korean pop culture. Regarding the push factors and need to travel, pop culture tourists seek to learn more about the culture they admire and experience the culture themselves, which could be categorized in self-fulfilment needs.

4   Niche-travel

Government tourism strategies find special interest tourism (SIT) to be a profitable market segment, and it is considered as niche tourism (Macleod 2003). Contrary to mass tourism, special interest tourism benefits from more active and engaging tourists that seek destinations related to their specific interests. These people can be categorized in the Escapist realm, requiring active participation and immersion, in Pine & Gilmore's experience realms (1999, 45-56). Furthermore, according to Reichenberger & Smith (2019) belonging to a fandom implies an active and emotional involvement, which supports the Escapist realm of experiences. Pop culture tourists to Seoul wish to experience authentic Korean culture and get a glimpse of the way of life of their Hallyu idols, which inspires them to get emotionally and actively involved in the culture they find appealing.

Pop culture tourism

Pop culture-inspired travel, or pop culture tourism, has become popular, especially among pop culture enthusiasts. They visit places that are primarily influenced by pop culture or artistic elements found in media such films, TV shows, soap operas, music, famous figures, games, and animations (Lee & Bai 2016, Miller & Washington 2007, Seaton & Yamamura 2015). People can now more easily get familiar with pop culture from different nations than ever because of the growth of technology and the convergence of global media, regardless of geographic limits, cultural differences, or linguistic restrictions (Kim & Nam 2015). In addition, it has given people the opportunity to indirectly visit unfamiliar or new locations through the media if those locations were represented in pop culture. Pop culture has therefore raised awareness of places, and its counterflow can further contribute to the growth of inbound tourism (Hur & Kim 2020). Devoted fans actively seek out other people who share their interests, therefore tourism can offer opportunities for these connections that would typically take place online to happen in person (Meyer and Tucker 2007, Pearson 2010).

Pop culture tourists as cultural purists

Amadeus categorizes the Future Traveller Tribes of 2030 in six different categories based on the traveller's motives, choices, and behaviours. The most significant Obligation Meeters are business travellers, as their travels require to complete some certain goal. Usually, these goals consist of work commitments, but can also include personal obligations. While Obligation Meeters' demands and behaviours are mostly shaped by their needs to be in a specific location at a specific time,

Simplicity Searchers prioritize simplicity and openness in their travel and vacation preparation. They are willing to delegate their decision-making to credible parties rather than conducting thorough research themselves.

When planning and executing their travel, Ethical Travellers let their conscience, in some way, serve as their guide. They might be concerned of environmental worries, let their political beliefs influence their decisions, or be more conscious of the impact their tourism spending has on markets and economies. Reward Hunters however look for self-indulgent travel that typically combines luxury with a focus on personal growth and wellness. They are motivated by wanting a "reward" for their efforts in other parts of their lives and seek luxurious experiences that are a step above the ordinary.

Social Capital Seekers' decisions are influenced by their desire to gain the most social benefit possible from their travels, as they are aware if this being an admirable feat. They will take advantage of the capabilities of digital media to enhance their experiences and design their journeys with the constant awareness that online audiences will be following them. In contrast, Cultural Purists utilize their journey as an opportunity to fully immerse themselves in a foreign culture. They aim to completely disconnect themselves from their daily lives and actively participate with a different way of life.

Among these tribes, travellers to South Korea because of Hallyu fall mostly to the Cultural Purists category. Cultural Purists are described as travellers who use travelling to learn about new cultures and getting immersed in them (Amadeus). Understanding this traveller tribe is useful to know to be able to market Seoul as an authentic destination for pop culture tourists who wish to experience the culture of their interests. K-Pop fans can go see their favourite artists' companies, visit cafes specifically designed to celebrate the idols' birthdays and attend music shows and concerts. Fans of K-Dramas and movies can travel to the actual filming locations and places seen in different scenes to experience real life as it appears in the shows and movies.

To summarize, tourists travelling to Seoul because of their interest in Korean culture is considered special interest tourism, and tourism as a result of Hallyu is considered pop culture tourism more specifically. Understanding the needs and wants of this specific tourism group is important for different types of travel and tourism organisations to offer better services to them. The people travelling to Seoul because of Hallyu would benefit from services that offer authentic experiences of Korean culture and includes features of their pop culture related interests. As an example, currently majority of the tours offered are only pop culture related but lack the authentic Korean culture. While some tourists might look for only the pop culture content, it would be beneficial to add authentic elements to also raise awareness and knowledge of Korean culture.

5   Destination image formation

The image of a destination is a critical factor when selecting a destination, as it has an impact on the tourist's individual view and behaviour as a result (Pike & Page 2014). According to Pike & Page, the formation of an image is the result of the development of a mental construct based on a few impressions selected from a flood of information. This "flood of information" in the case of destination image comes from a variety of sources, including marketing materials (travel brochures, posters), the opinions of others (family/friends, travel agents), and the mainstream media (newspapers, magazines, television, books, movies). In addition, the image of the place will change as a result of first-hand knowledge and experience from personally visiting the destination. These sources are comparable to Gartner's (1993) three major agents contributing to destination image, which are organic, induced, and autonomous agents. In the context of pop culture tourism and Hallyu, elements of pop culture and Hallyu are considered as autonomous agents.

Destination image formation is also featured in Gunn & Var's (2020) model of the seven phases of the travel experience:
1. Accumulation of mental images about vacation experiences
2. Modification of those images by further information
3. Decision to take a vacation trip
4. Travel to the destination
5. Participation at the destination
6. Return home
7. Modification of images based on the vacation experience

In this model, the role of destination image can be seen in phases 1, 2 and 7. Phases 1 and 2 rely on secondary sources of information, while phase 7 alters the destination's image through personal experience. Gunn & Var refer to the destination image formed in Phase 1 as an organic image. At this stage, the primary image is based on information from non-touristic, non-commercial sources, such as the mainstream media (news reports, magazines, books, movies), education and the opinions of family and friends. In Gartner's theory, these would be considered the organic and autonomous agents. Phase 2 introduces the induced agents, with commercial sources such as travel agents, brochures and guidebooks altering and modifying the already formed organic image, forming an induced image. Finally, phase 7 which happens after the visitation uses the visitor's personal experience to modify the image into a more realistic one. To conclude, this model implies that there are two key points when the image of a destination is formed: before and after the visit. It suggests that people can form images of a destination even if they don't yet have personal experience of it or haven't been subject to commercial information sources.

Factors influencing the image formation

Because it is based on each tourist's personal views of the destination, the perception that each individual may have of a certain area can be very personal (Gallarza, Saura & García 2002). The image is said to be a combination of two components based on the tourist's rationality and emotionality (Cohen, Prayag & Moital 2014, Gartner 1993). While the rationality of destination image formation is based on the destination's cognitive features, meaning its qualities and attractions (Stabler 1988), the emotionality of destination's image is based on its affective features, referring to feelings and emotions evoked by the destination (Pike & Page 2014). Additionally, Pike & Page argue that the affective component is influenced by the cognitive component, and they claim that the evaluation of the destination's affective features may become more significant than the evaluation of its objective properties in terms of the relevance of these elements to the overall image. Other studies however propose that in the overall image structure, the cognitive component precedes the emotional component (Russell & Pratt 1980, Anand, Holbrook & Stephens 1988). Meanwhile it is suggested that the two components (cognitive and affective) establish whether the overall image is a positive or negative evaluation of the destination (Baloglu & McCleary 1999, Beerli & Martín 2004).
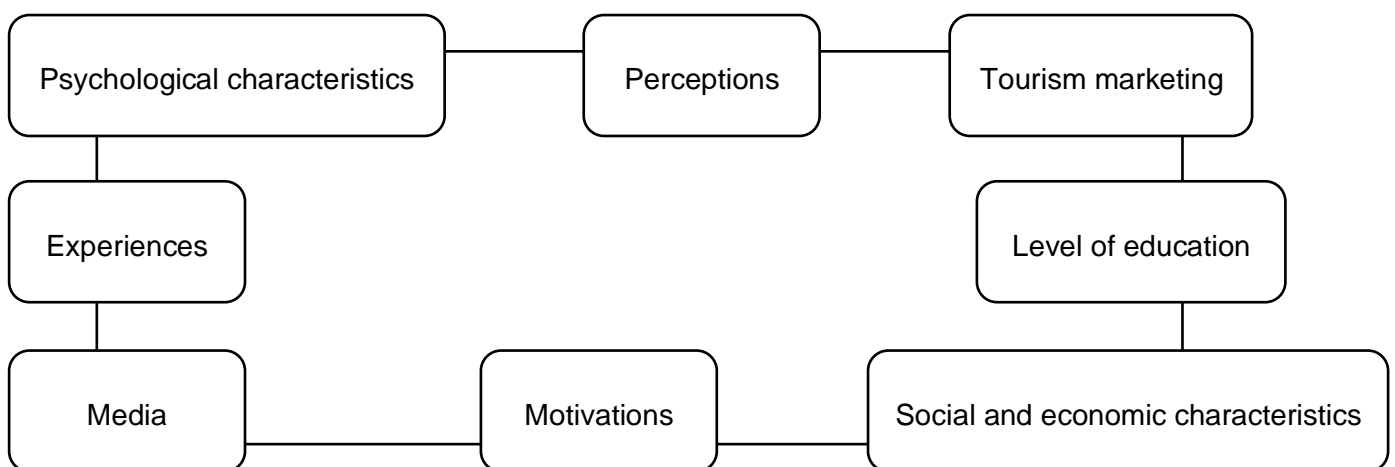

Figure 4. Factors influencing the image formation of tourism destinations. (Adapted from Stabler, 1988)

As it is said to be possible for people to form images of a destination before it is visited, Stabler (1988) identifies some psychological factors such as personal characteristics and motivations that influence this image. Other factors in Stabler's theory that influence the formation of the image are seen in figure 4. In the case of Seoul, pop culture tourism is driven by the tourists perceptions of Seoul as an authentic destination where they can get first-hand experiences of Korean culture. Therefore, the biggest acting factors from Stabler's model for pop culture tourists view of Seoul's

destination image before the visitation are perceptions, motivations and media. In Gunn & Var's (2020) model, these factors affect the destination image in phases 1 and 2 of the travel experience. After the visit, the image is further modified in phase 7, when the personal experience is the biggest factor for enhancing the image.

While these theories and frameworks are older and generally used for tourism in general, they prove to be useful when studying pop culture tourism and Hallyu. As stated, pop culture has the power to enhance a destination's image. For Seoul, pop culture is the first touchpoint into Korean culture for some visitors, and some form their first impressions and expectations of Seoul based on their pop culture interests.

6   Theoretical framework conclusions

Hallyu's role in Korean culture is changing, and currently the Hallyu phenomenon is mainly being driven by K-pop. South Korea's destination image has been that more of an industrial country, but thanks to Hallyu it is shaping to be inspired by Korean culture more and more. Due to this development in South Korea's brand and image as a tourism destination, more people are becoming motivated in visiting South Korea themselves.

To combine the three travel motivation theories in chapter 3, it can be concluded that Hallyu and pop culture have a big role in travel motivation. In Holloway's theory (figure 1), the consumer's need to travel to Seoul would be a self-fulfilment need, which includes creativity, aesthetics and acquiring knowledge, presented in figures 2 and 3. The attractions and perceptions of them aren't primarily concrete and physical attractions, but more of the atmosphere and the ability to immerse in the culture they admire. The perception of these needs and attractions motivates fans of Korean pop culture to travel to South Korea.

Hallyu tourists would be considered as Cultural Purists in 2030's traveller tribes, as they seek destinations where they can be involved in authentic cultural experiences. Rather than mass tourists, who would benefit most of the services targeted to the Simplicity Searchers of these tribes, special interest tourists benefit of more individual and genuine amenities. This is another factor contributing to Hallyu's motivation and why tourists interested in Hallyu wish to travel to South Korea themselves.

Finally, pop culture affects the visitors' views of South Korea's destination image through different elements and in different phases of the travel. As they have formed certain images of South Korea already before the visit, or even researching South Korea as a destination, they have some kind of ideas and expectations of the country. Pop culture is the primary source and main agent for the primary image construction in the case of Hallyu tourists, as it often is the first touchpoint before reaching for induced agents such as marketing and promotional tourism materials, or organic materials like the opinions of others.

7   Research

This thesis researches Hallyu's effects on Seoul's pop culture tourism using quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse already existing data. The changes in tourist numbers are observed from the past 15 years, taking into account the travel restrictions caused by the global pandemic COVID-19 that started in 2020.

7.1   Research approach

The fundamental approach of this research answers to the question How Hallyu has impacted pop culture tourism in Seoul and what effects does it have on Seoul's image as a pop culture tourism destination? The reason this research approach was chosen is because the consuming of Korean culture is rising more and more internationally, which is leading to bigger tourist-flows to Seoul. Many different types of tourism businesses will benefit from learning about the phenomenon and its impacts since it will help them provide better services to visitors to Seoul. Studying the effects on Seoul's image as a tourism destination is also significant since the findings will enable Seoul to further enhance its reputation and draw in more tourists. Furthermore, international travel agencies and tourism organizations can pick up on Hallyu's strategies for enhancing Seoul's image as a destination and apply some of them to other locations as well.

This research targets international tourists in Seoul. The target has been narrowed down to Seoul instead of the whole South Korea, as it is the most popular destination in Korea and has the biggest pop culture related attractions, activities and experiences. The research studies only international tourist arrivals and their perceptions of Seoul's destination image because the results are more beneficial for different types of companies and organisations globally, as they can learn something new from the ways Hallyu motivates people to travel.

7.2   Methods

Since there is already a lot of data available online in e-books, documents, and media texts, which will serve as the research's primary data sources, data for the study is gathered from already published resources.

In this thesis, quantitative methods are used to objectively analyse the numbers of tourists in Seoul, and if there is a relation between the growing popularity in Korean pop culture and growing number of people travelling to Seoul. Quantitative data benefits from concrete numbers and fewer variables, making it easier to statistically prove Hallyu's impacts on tourism in Seoul. However, quantitative data can be limited and there is a risk of missing broader information and themes, as it overlooks personal experiences and more in-depth thoughts (Rahman 2020). As an example

concerning this thesis, quantitative data won't provide as much information on the reasons and motivations people choose to travel to Seoul, which is why qualitative methods would be more beneficial when studying Seoul's destination image.

For the most thorough results, both quantitative and qualitative methods should be used as a pair to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of Hallyu's impacts on Seoul's tourism. While quantitative methods provide statistical numbers, qualitative methods help understand the reasons behind these numbers. Therefore, it would be beneficial to use both methods in the case of this research approach, as they support one another, with different advantages and limitations.

7.3   Implementation

For the quantitative method used to study Hallyu's effects on Seoul's pop culture tourism, data will be collected and compared between the years 2017 and 2021. The past five years were chosen specifically because that's when Hallyu and Seoul have been gaining a lot of international attention, with K-pop and K-dramas becoming more and more popular around the world. Numbers that will be studied include the numbers of the "big four" K-pop agencies yearly sales. Additionally, their most viewed YouTube videos are studied and presented. The statistics and numbers of tourist arrivals in Seoul are studied, as well as Hallyu's contribution to South Korea's gross domestic product (GDP).

Seoul's destination image formation and how pop culture affects destination's image are briefly discussed in chapter 5: Destination Image Formation but are not researched more thoroughly in the research part of this thesis. For future research, the author recommends using qualitative methods to analyse and study Hallyu's effects on Seoul's destination image, especially among pop culture tourists.

Company	SM Entertainment	YG Entertainment	JYP Entertainment	HYBE Labels
Established in	1995	1996	1997	2005 (formerly Big Hit Entertainment)
Groups	EXO, Girls' Generation, Shinee, NCT, AESPA	BLACKPINK, iKON, BIGBANG, TREASURE, WINNER	TWICE, Stray Kids, ITZY, DAY6, NMIXX	BTS, SEVENTEEN, TXT, ENHYPEN, LE SSERAFIM

Figure 5. The big four companies of K-pop

The big four K-pop agencies are SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, JYP entertainment and HYBE labels. Figure 5 presents these companies, the years they were established in and some of the best-known groups from each company. It is important to note that HYBE Labels used to be Big Hit Entertainment between 2005-2021 but rebranded into HYBE in March 2021, acquiring new subsidiaries. HYBE Labels in South Korea consists of Big Hit Music, Belift Lab, Source Music, ADOR, Pledis Entertainment and KOZ Entertainment, with different groups under each label.

8   Results

The quantitative results of this research prove that there has been an immense change in sales and music video numbers, meaning there is a rising interest in Korean pop culture. Sales numbers have increased 175,5% in the past five years in the past five years, while music video views of these same companies have increased by 111,6%. While all the smaller K-pop entertainment companies couldn't be taken into account, the big four companies were chosen to present K-pop, and the results from studying these companies gives a good overall understanding of the rising interest in K-pop.

South Korea's tourism numbers have been increasing between 2008 and 2019, and the peak was 17,5 million inbound visitors in 2019. Compared to the 6,9 million visitors in 2008, this was a 153,6% increase. In 2020 however the number fell to 2,52 million yearly visitors, and further to 0,97 million yearly visitors in 2021. This huge drop was a direct result of Covid-19, which caused severe travel restrictions to South Korea.

But as both the interest in K-pop and South Korea's visitors had been rising, it can be concluded that K-pop has had an impact in South Korea's and Seoul's visitor numbers. The author predicts that without Covid-19 the visitor numbers would have kept rising after the 2019 peak, and that Hallyu will keep increasing inbound visitor numbers even faster in the future.

There has also been changes in Hallyu's contribution to South Korea's gross domestic product (GDP), with an increase from 0,2% in 2004 to 0,7% in 2019. This proves that it is not merely coincidental that both the popularity of K-pop and the number of visitors in South Korea have increased, but that Hallyu has had an effect on the tourist arrivals.
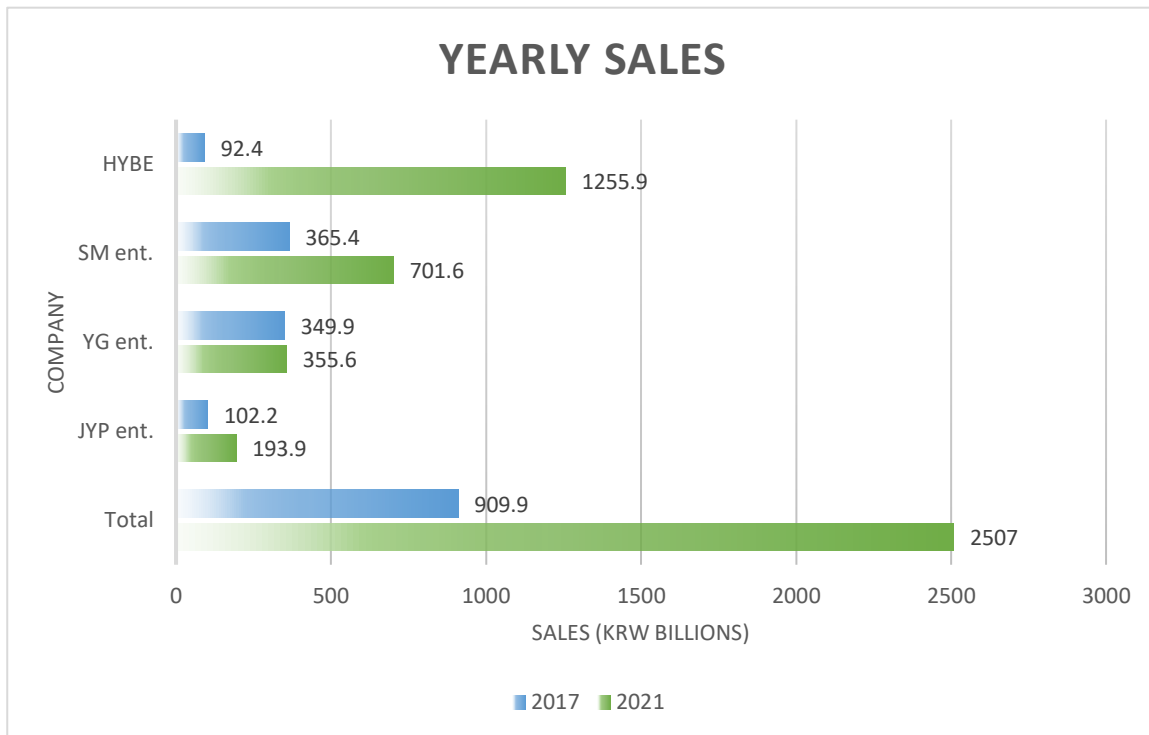
Hallyu's impacts on K-pop

Figure 6. Yearly sales of big four companies in billions (Korean Won, KRW).

The number of annual sales has increased significantly from the years 2017 to 2021, as shown in Figure 6. The total sales of the big four companies increased from 909,9 billion KRW (635 million EUR) to 2,5 trillion KRW (1,8 billion EUR). The total percentual increase is 175,5%. The largest change was at HYBE Labels, which had a remarkable 1259,2 percent increase, from 92,4 billion Korean Won (KRW) to nearly 1,3 trillion KRW. In 2017, HYBE's contribution to the total sales was 10,1%, and increased to be responsible for over half of the total sales in 2021 (50,09%). On the other hand, the biggest decrease in contribution to total sales is with YG Entertainment, as it was responsible for 38,5% of the total sales in 2017, but only 14,2% in 2021.

These numbers show that there has been a great increase in the total yearly sales, financially proving the growing interest in K-pop. These numbers don't represent the whole K-pop industry, as many smaller companies and groups haven't been taken into count. Additionally, K-dramas and changes in their financial numbers haven't been researched. Nevertheless, the growth in sales in the big four K-pop companies provides sufficient data to show financial results of Hallyu's effects.
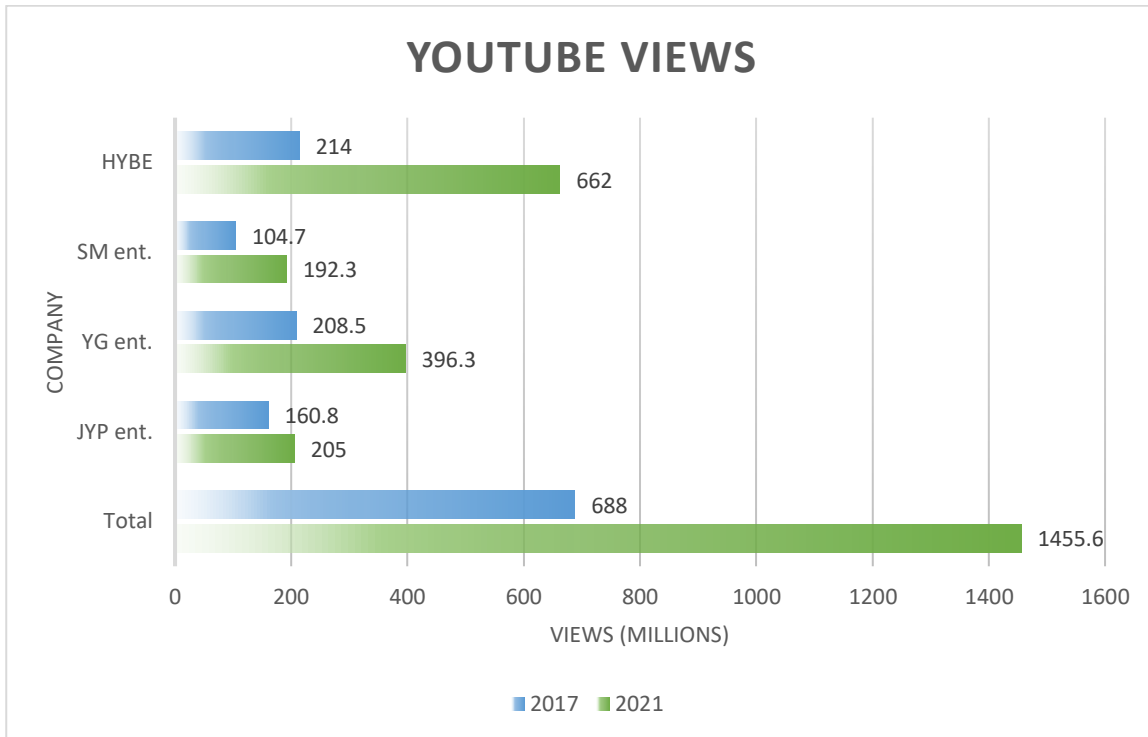
Figure 7. Number of views of the most viewed YouTube videos of big 4 companies.

Company	HYBE Labels	SM Ent.	YG Ent.	JYP Ent.
Artist	BTS	EXO	BLACKPINK	TWICE
Song	DNA	KO KO BOP	As If It's Your Last	Knock Knock
Views	214 million	104,7 million	208,5 million	160,8 million

Figure 8. Most viewed YouTube videos of big four companies in 2017.

Company	HYBE Labels	SM Ent.	YG Ent.	JYP Ent.
Artist	BTS	Aespa	LISA	TWICE
Song	Butter	Next Level	Lalisa	Alcohol-Free
Views	662 million	192,3 million	396,3 million	205 million

Figure 9. Most viewed YouTube videos of big four companies in 2021.

The numbers of most viewed YouTube videos from each of the big four companies are presented in Figures 7, 8 and 9. The total number of views from four videos, one from each company, was 688 million views in 2017. In 2021, this number was 1455,6 million views, meaning a 111,6% increase. The HYBE Labels group BTS saw the biggest increase, with its most-watched video receiving 214 million views in 2017 and 662 million views in 2021—an increase of 209,3%.

These figures demonstrate how K-pop has gained greater attention and appeal over the last five years in addition to the sales figures. As with the sales, these videos are only a small instance of the growing interest, as it only takes into account four videos from each year. Smaller companies haven't been considered in this study, even though they have some successful groups and artists too. Moreover, other forms of Korean pop culture aren't presented in these figures. As they all have significant roles in Seoul's pop culture, it would provide a wider picture of the whole pop culture sector if all forms were taken into account, and also provide information on which cultural form has had the biggest changes, and what impacts Seoul's pop culture the most.

Hallyu's impact on inbound visitors to South Korea

Figure 8. Inbound visitors to South Korea in millions.

Presented in figure 8 is the numbers of inbound visitors in South Korea. The numbers have been presented from year 2008 to 2021. The steady rise in the numbers of tourism can be seen until 2014, with a dip in 2015 from 14,2 million in the previous year to 12,2 million, 2 million visitors less. However, there is a big increase of 5 million travellers in year 2016, with 17,2 million visitors. The highest peak so far has been 2019, when South Korea received 17,5 million international arrivals. The reason for the huge drop in visitor numbers from 2020 to 2021 was caused by the global pandemic coronavirus COVID-19, which resulted in heavy travel bans and restrictions in South Korea. However, in spring 2022 most of these restrictions were lifted which will presumably increase visitor numbers again. The author believes that without COVID-19, the number of visitors would have kept increasing after 2019.

To compare the rising number of visitors before COVID-19 with the rising interest in K-pop presented in figures 6 and 7, it can be concluded that Hallyu and especially K-pop have indeed had a role in tourism numbers in South Korea and cannot be ignored as a pull factor. This is also confirmed in existing studies (Lee & How 2022, Lim & Giouvris 2020), which studied Hallyu as a pull factor in South Korea, focusing on arrivals from Asian countries.

It is not a coincidence that K-pop has increased tourism in South Korea. By comparing South Korea's GDP between 2004 and 2019, Hallyu's contribution to the gross domestic product increased from 0,2% to 0,7%.

9 Discussion

As presented, it can be seen there is a growing interest in Hallyu, K-pop more specifically in this research-based thesis. Only figures representing the K-pop sector of Hallyu were presented in the research results, but the importance and popularity of K-dramas and Korean movies were discussed in chapter 2: Hallyu Shaping Korean Culture – Hallyu's Growing Role in Korean Culture. This proved that also other elements of Korean pop culture are gaining popularity, as the most viewed Netflix series in 28 days is a Korean drama, and a Korean movie was the first ever non-English movie to win the Oscar for Best Picture in the Academy Awards. Therefore, it can be said that Hallyu's pop culture sector doesn't rely only on K-pop, but also K-dramas and movies. Other than pop culture, Hallyu also consists of Korean food, cosmetics and fashion, for instance. The author has observed Korean culture gaining popularity even in Finland, where the number of Korean restaurants and cosmetics shops is rising.

9.1 Conclusions

This research proves that there is a rising interest in K-pop by presenting total sales and YouTube views of the four biggest K-pop entertainment companies in the past five years. South Korea's incoming visitor numbers were also studied and presented, and while data regarding Seoul's inbound visitors was not readily available, the number of South Korea's visitors gives us insight into Seoul's tourism as well, as it is the most popular tourism destination in Seoul. Additionally, other elements of Hallyu's pop culture sector weren't studied and presented, as there was no feasible existing data. Nevertheless, K-pop is currently providing the biggest impact through Hallyu, which once again provides a good overall understanding of the growing phenomenon.

9.2 Reflection to theoretical framework

As travel motivation is a key topic discussed in all parts of the theoretical framework, more detailed in chapter 3, it can be explained that pop culture is a major motivator for pop culture tourists in Seoul. This is seen in all the key findings of this research, where the rising popularity in K-pop and numbers of visitors in South Korea are presented, as well as Hallyu's contribution to South Korea's GDP. This research failed to target especially special interest tourists and the niche travel sector in Seoul's tourism, but nevertheless provides a good overall understanding of Hallyu's power and how Seoul benefits from it. While Seoul's destination image isn't studied more thoroughly using qualitative methods in the research part of this project, it is mentioned in the theoretical framework how Hallyu is changing Korean culture, and how it has caused Korea's destination image to change from an industrial and military country to a more culturally rich destination. As the growing number of visitors is presented representing the whole number of incoming visitors in South Korea,

it also proves that more people are interested in travelling to the destination, without necessarily being interested in Korean pop culture.

9.3   Proposals for further research

Further research regarding this topic needs to be done to further improve knowledge of Hallyu's effects. Especially the role of K-dramas, K-style and other forms of Korean culture are a valuable part of Seoul's tourism sector, which weren't researched in this thesis. Additionally, qualitative research should be done on Hallyu's effects, as this quantitative research is more limited to numerical analysis.

While quantitative research is useful in proving the growing popularity of Korean culture through Hallyu, it doesn't go more in-depth of why people are interested in Hallyu itself, how the growing popularity affects tourist behaviours and what changes is it causing in Seoul for example. For more thorough results, the author would use qualitative methods to research tourists motives, needs and wants more deeply and if Hallyu has caused changes in them.

Qualitative research aims to increase the overall understanding of the quality, characteristics, and meanings of the researched object. Typical to qualitative research is the use of qualitative data, meaning the use of empirical sources such as texts, discussions and pictures (Juhila s.a.). Therefore, the perception that tourists have of Seoul as a pop culture tourist destination should be studied using qualitative methods in order to comprehend the factors that influence travellers' choices to visit Seoul and to determine whether the rising popularity of Korean pop culture has any impact on these choices. Using qualitative methods means that the sources won't typically be edited to a numerical form, meaning for example that the results are not based on how many people see Seoul as a suitable destination choice, but rather explains their motivations and more in-depth reasons for choosing to travel to Seoul. It is more convenient to use the qualitative method when analysing Hallyu's effects on Seoul's destination image, as it would be challenging to use numbers to analyse destination image.

9.4   Evaluation of thesis project and learning

As the author, I enjoyed analysing and discussing the research results the most. Most difficult however was finding sources, narrowing the references, and finding data about other parts of Hallyu, which resulted in only presenting the K-pop numbers and South Korea's tourist numbers. I would have also liked to use qualitative methods more to see the results of Hallyu in travel motivations and destination image, but due to time limitations I was unable to conduct more

thorough qualitative analysis too. Writing the thesis after finding my sources was quite easy to me, but as said the most time-consuming part was definitely gathering data for the research and information for the theoretical framework. It turned out to be challenging to narrow down the target groups of the research to pop culture tourists and only visitors in Seoul, which is why I chose to present numbers of all inbound visitors in South Korea. What I would do differently and improve myself in next time is studying different research methods in a more detailed way, schedule more time for data collection and have a back-up plan in case the data I need isn't available, which is what occurred in this thesis. I would also like to conduct some questionnaire study or interviews and create data and information myself, rather than relying in already existing data as it proved to not be completely practical.

However, I did learn that quantitative and qualitative methods would form a valuable pair of research methods, as they support one another, rather than being completely separate. While working on the theoretical framework, I learned a lot about the Hallyu phenomenon itself, as well as destination image formation, which was more of a new aspect of tourism for me. While I was already more familiar with travel motivations and niche tourism as a Hospitality, Tourism and Experience Management student, I found many new theories and frameworks that I found very useful in this thesis process. While some of the sources are old, I decided to keep them as they have basic frameworks and theories that can be used and related to when studying Hallyu's effects on tourism.

The whole process was a challenging but rewarding experience, and I was happy with my decision to give myself time and create a more comfortable schedule, rather than rushing and trying to finish as quickly as possible. I took a few breaks during the writing of this thesis, that gave me more energy and motivation to finish. Although I'm not completely happy with the research part of this thesis due to the reasons mentioned earlier, I enjoyed researching and writing about this topic. I am especially happy with the theoretical framework and the topics I chose for that, as I believe they are important while studying this topic and support the research.

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