

Building a Cultural Superpower: The Impact of South Korean Popular Culture in Romania

Abstract

In this article we aim to present the ways in which listening to K-pop music influences consumer behaviour. We examine how South Korean cultural exports have been adopted in Romania, but we also weigh the gender-wise benefits for the consumer. The theoretical framework is centered on the effect of K-pop music and deals with key-concepts such as gender, globalisation, hybridity, and influence. The methodology is mainly qualitative, as data were collected through telephone interviews. Our findings show that K-pop music has a major impact on the purchasing decisions and lifestyle of Romanian fans of South Korean popular culture.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, cultural export, gender, globalisation, influence, K-pop.

Introduction

The story of K-pop as cultural movement began in 1967, when local female trio “The Korean Kittens” started performing concerts for the American troops based in Korea. Characterized by upbeat music, modern choreography, and Korean lyrics sporadically altered with English words, K-pop gradually attracted a significant worldwide following. However, it was “Seo Taiji and the Boys” who really laid the foundation of K-pop as a musical genre, by combining elements of traditional and modern music, thus drawing attention to the creative potential of Korean music. This has led to a profitable entertainment industry through the appearance of several well-established acts, agencies that provide long-term training programmes, innovative choreographies, visual and vocal impact, eye-catching music videos, as well as consistent aesthetics, cinematography, and storytelling. The opening of borders, the advent of new media, and the progressive emergence of globalisation led to the widespread appreciation of this musical genre, becoming increasingly attractive to youngsters outside Asia. This became part of the “Hallyu” phenomenon,

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translated as “Korean Wave”, a term used to describe the increasing popularity of not just K-pop music, but also K-Drama, which includes South Korean televised dramas and films.⁴ The impact of the Korean Wave was steadily felt, leading to increases in the consumption of artist-endorsed exported cosmetics of up to \$1.1 billion and the relative suppression of related imports. Also, in terms of tourism, this influence resulted in an increase of up to \$68 billion.⁵

K-pop bands are known for their intricate choreography, as well as for the hard work invested in their training and the sophisticated stage design and direction that is prominent throughout their live appearances. Furthermore, it is customary for K-pop idols to be involved in promoting social causes in order to be a positive influence among their followers, but also to be appreciated by other age groups, notably when advocating the preservation of cultural values.⁶ As these cultural exports became increasingly abundant, groups of fans known as fandoms were created. These fans dedicate a good portion of their time to supporting their favourite band and often change their identity within the community referencing the band and their body of work. Furthermore, fans commonly associate themselves with band logos printed on clothing items, posters, and other objects which are proudly displayed at home or in public.⁷ This type of devotion has managed to break lasting social and cultural barriers, thus helping K-pop access mainstream media.

The Korean wave has not been overlooked in Romania either, where this musical genre has taken shape since 2009, when rights to broadcast Korean series began to be bought by Romanian television stations, namely TVR1, Euforia TV, and Național TV.⁸ As the ratings soared, further broadcasting rights were purchased. Both online and traditional press made room for K-pop and K-drama articles featuring star biographies and posters. A few Romanian radio stations also dedicated timeslots for airing the latest K-pop hits. The K-pop frenzy gave rise to the opening of brick-and-mortar shops intended strictly for the distribution of Korean products, food, clothing, cosmetics and body care products, media (albums, postcards, posters, light sticks for concerts, CDs and DVDs, stationery and accessories), but also Korean restaurants. Even during the 2020 pandemic, K-pop fans have been being kept active through online dance classes on video communication apps like Zoom.

4 Shim 2011.

5 Truong 2014.

6 Truong 2014.

7 Shim 2011.

8 Marinescu 2017.

The first objective of this study was to understand K-pop music as a cultural export in Romania. Another purpose was to establish the consequences of K-pop on Romanian consumer behaviour, videlicet the way in which this lifestyle affects purchasing decisions.

Consequently, we asked the following research questions:

RQ1: In what way is the cultural export adopted by Romanian K-pop listeners?

RQ2: How is the consumer behaviour of Romanian fans influenced by K-pop music in terms of purchasing decisions?

RQ3: What are the social and psychological effects on Romanian fans exposed to K-pop music?

RQ4: What are the gender-wise benefits and shortcomings of K-pop as a cultural export in Romania?

Theoretical framework

In 2009-2011 we conducted research on a sample of 250 Romanian K-pop fans,⁹ the results showing that fans of this musical genre tend to be friendlier, have at least one good friend and can adapt to new situations much easier. When we asked our respondents what they think of first when they hear the word Korea, most of them answered with song titles or names of bands or artists, thus we could clearly observe the cultural impact that Korea has in terms of media consumption. Embracing the K-pop phenomenon progressively induces the concretisation of the globalisation factor. According to Waters,¹⁰ globalisation is the “social process in which geographical constraints on social and cultural arrangements fade and people are increasingly aware of this blurring”, thus Romanian fans’ perception and assimilation of Korean music and products is done in a conscious and deliberate manner. Globalisation can also be acknowledged as a comprehensive process of cause and effect, as well as a course of cross-cultural and transnational integration of human and non-human activities.¹¹ However, this concept of globalisation refers to the wide range of processes concerned with the way in which societies become homogeneous, although hybridity is becoming the most appropriate feature of this process.¹² Despite being initially attributed to “colonial racism” after it was readapted by social critics, the concept received a favourable definition of cultural change and it has since been used to challenge “immobile and existentialist approaches

9 Marinescu & Balica 2013: 113–135.

10 Waters 1995.

11 Khondker 2011.

12 Choi, Meza & Park 2014: 36–42.

to identity and culture¹³”. Thus, the influence becomes a homogeniser of this hybridity as an action that is exerted on a thing or person, ultimately changing its character, belief or form. These two concepts define what the research aims to analyse, namely the influence that K-pop music exerts on consumers and the processes by which it manages to determine the consumption of music and associated products on a regular basis. Similarly, this kind of social impact can also cause changes on a physical and mental level.

The research analysis also gives heed to the concept of gender, which refers to the “cultural component of our sexual identity (femininity – masculinity¹⁴)”, in order to assess whether gender plays a role in the production and consumption of Korean cultural exports. Regarding the attitudes or perceptions that K-pop manages to transform, the gender characteristic holds an essential function, particularly in the relationship between music fans, who are mainly young females, and the predominant boy-band scene.

Various studies on K-pop have been carried out since the 2010s, most of them referring to the music genre, as Korean fans are labeled as adopting a much more possessive attitude toward their beloved band, which in turn makes them increasingly aggressive and harmful over time, both towards fans of other bands, but also toward the band itself. This demeanour evolved into a phenomenon called “Hyeonsaengbulga”, referring to people who are unable to live their own lives, a meaningful definition derived from the fact that some fans get overzealous and forget about their own lives and priorities, tirelessly following their idols day and night. The relevance of the concept of gender inequality is shown through fan jokes that have ironically come true: “we raised idols” and “my bank card belongs to K-pop stars”; such ideas are self-characterised by aligning with traditional gender roles.¹⁵

The predominance of male groups, their impact and fanbase preferences impose a glass ceiling which makes it more difficult for female K-pop groups to reach the stage and even less likely to achieve superstardom. As a further consequence, this determines the emergence of beauty standards that are difficult to maintain through strict workout programmes, diets and beauty routines. Beauty standards thus become more and more exaggerated: flawless porcelain skin, hourglass body shape and a flat stomach are viewed as the norm, not just as a goal. This translates into more female bands pursuing beauty and attractiveness ideals in order to gain fans, top the charts, win awards, and ultimately fulfill their artistic dreams. Generally, female bands and idols gain

13 Marshall 2014.

14 Grünberg 2011.

15 Hentschel, Heilman & Peus 2019.

fame through posing as cute, innocent, and submissive. The preoccupation with beauty, for both male and female bands, incrementally determines the rise and concretisation of the concepts of sexualisation and feminisation of artists. In the case of sexualisation, the female gender is most affected by this process, as female pop stars are more often than not sexually objectified and promoted by the media exclusively for their sex appeal. Furthermore, female celebrities often receive beauty titles from gossip columnists that are based on certain parts of their bodies which are seen as attractive. Female celebrity objectification can be easily spotted in music videos, lyrics and choreography, as combinations of lascivious movements, self-touch, and sexual innuendo are seen as the norm. The beauty standards that these women are pressured to maintain and revealing or see-through clothing consolidate the idea of artistic value predicated on physical appearance.¹⁶

The double standard in the case of male sexualisation of South Korean boy-bands further accentuates the gender gap. If female performers wearing skimpy clothing are often chastised, the same does not apply for their male counterparts. In fact, male artists that show off their naked torsos, or wear skintight clothing, are praised by their fans who take every opportunity to bring up this subject. An explanation for this discrepancy can be the deeply rooted conservative criteria which are now manifested through codes of conduct that are rigorous for women, but somewhat malleable and permissive for men. All these factors diminish the popularity of female bands, while favouring the abundance of male acts.

The success of male pop bands can also be interpreted through the concept of feminisation. An increasing number of agencies are sexualising and, at the same time, feminising artists. From the use of excessive make-up to skin whitening and from assuming typical feminine gestures to wearing lace, mesh, or latex garments and flashy accessories, these idols effectively emulate the female allure. The image of male idols, however, has an aesthetic duality. Most of the time, they seem to be “bipolar”, as they can swiftly go from angelic pretty boy to devilish bad boy. While male careers are set on a clear path, women working in this industry are subject to criticism from agencies, jealous female fans and a society who expects them to be pure and innocent.

Undoubtedly, gender differences are also examined by marketers and agencies in order to generate more income, as young female fans are believed to be more predisposed to spending larger amounts of money than male fans, who are not generally credited with much attention to detail. At the same time, the female category tends to buy more personal care products. From

16 Choe & Lee 2019: 1–10.

a mercantile point of view, it is notable that trade between Romania and South Korea is not unilateral and according to statistics from 2016, the annual trade between the two countries was over \$1.1 billion.¹⁷ However, the differences are noticeable on almost any level. But it is this very fact makes K-pop fans find both the music and associated merchandise to be more appealing.

Although foreign fans are miles away from their idols, the physical distance is neglected, mainly due to the Internet, which gives the impression of closeness. Many fans use certain apps or websites solely because their favourite band is more active there.¹⁸ In this way, K-pop groups differentiate themselves from other fan communities and manage to boost both the band and the fan group's reputation.¹⁹ The social identity of the group borrows the values fostered by South Korean artists. As a consequence, they tend to imitate behaviours and general outlooks regarding men's makeup, cosmetic surgery, sexual minorities, or beauty standards. Fans recognise themselves by the name of the fandom they are members of. Over time, the name turns in to a brand in its own right. Similar to band logos, the fandom labels are printed on a wide range of fashion and household items and casually displayed in plain sight.²⁰ Cultural critic Kim Jak-Ga considers the power of a fandom structure to be similar to the authority the police have, due to the surveillance and power over the actions of their members.²¹

Examples of such endeavors repeatedly set hourly and daily viewing records on YouTube often overloading global servers. An example is the case of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement, where joint efforts by K-pop fans and artists have raised donations in the millions of dollars. The expansion and development of telecommunications and social media systems has favoured the spread of the Korean Wave. The most frequent apps for updates on K-pop bands are YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, or Vlive, though it is not unusual for artists to engage with their fans on messaging apps such as SNS, Line, and KakaoTalk.

All the concepts and theories stated above are integrated in the interview guide in order to uncover the changes that K-pop fans went through as a result of the cultural export process. We are interested in investigating what these fans find fascinating about South Korean culture and why they feel so represented by it. Furthermore, we look at how the process of cultural export influences

17 Park 2020.

18 Choi, Meza & Park 2014: 36–42.

19 Scardaville 2005: 881–901.

20 Shim 2011.

21 Jung 2012.

their purchasing decisions, how they are viewed by others and whether they feel judged. We also asked the Romanian K-pop fans who participated in this study whether they suffered behavioural or physical changes as a result of their musical preference or lifestyle, and whether they faced bullying, discrimination, and racism. It was also interesting to learn some of their opinions about South Korean fans and how they are different from those in Romania. We also registered some spontaneous details revealed during interviews.

Elements of methodology

The present study is a qualitative one, using the interview as the method of obtaining primary data. The research tool employed was the interview guide. The research tool, the interview guide, is a semi-structured one, which includes open short length questions organised by topics, which are discussed informally and then based on the research topic. Sampling is non-probabilistic, based on an “intentional” sampling technique,²² which will identify individuals suitable for the research topic.

The minimum selection criteria for the people in the sample are: they must have been listening to K-pop for at least 2 years, they must have some knowledge about this industry and culture, and they must be at least 18 years old.

The interviews were conducted by phone call, as to comply with local state of emergency safety regulations and recommendations set in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewees were chosen from the Romanian online K-pop group on Facebook. Ultimately, our sample comprised 16 people. The interviews lasted between 49 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes, with an average of about 50 minutes. The age of the interviewees is between 18 and 24 years old. Out of 16 participants, 11 were female and 5 were male.

Data analysis

In this section, the answers of the 16 interviewees will be analysed on the basis of the topics of the interview guide. The questions in the first topic of the interview guide, which refer to how and when they discovered this musical genre, show that most of the participants (12 out of 16) have been introduced to K-pop by other friends. From the remaining four participants, one learned about K-pop world through videogame soundtracks (VM, 18 years old, female), and the other three subjects found out about it by watching K-Dramas (GM, 18 years old, female / DD, 18 years old, female / VV, 19 years old, female).

22 Jupp 2010.

The determination to listen to this musical genre comes predominantly from the fact that it is different, which is why in almost all interviews, the word “different” is most often pronounced. Other words frequently used by the participants are: “originality”, “aesthetics”, “quality”, “vivid colors”, “choreography” and “effort” (of the bands), “performance”, “vibe” and “rhythm”, the “literature” used in the “stories” of the videos and the “messages” transmitted, or the “curiosity” towards the culture.

With respect to the period for which they have been listening to K-pop, the shortest time is 2 years and 6 months (CD, 21 years old, male), and the longest time is about 11 years (DL, 24 years old, female), other listening periods being 2, 4, 6 years actively, the rest mentioning break periods. Regarding the characteristics that make a listener become a fan of the band (whether they are acknowledged by other fans or not), the most common arguments are: “streaming”, “tracking”, “distribution”, “involvement” (in online band community projects), “promotion”, “purchase of band products” or advertisement that results in recruiting new people to their groups.

As for their favourite bands, the participants mentioned BTS, Big Bang, EXO, Ateez, GOT7, Super Junior, 2PM and Shinee most frequently, which are bands with predominantly male members. Only 4 (all female) out of 16 participants also listed a few female names and bands, which were mostly placed at the end of the list. After insisting on the presence of female bands, a few participants mentioned: IU, Sunmi, Hwasa and Red Velvet. From our attempt to capture some aspects related to the favourite Romanian bands, it was a surprising discovery that none of the 16 participants had a favourite Romanian band nor did they listen to local music acts. Thus, a small creative experiment was used, which makes the subjects imagine the feeling they might have if they were to see their favourite band live in concert in Romania or in South Korea. The answers revolved predominantly around the idea of “a unique moment in life” and “a sea of energy”. Distance and opportunity (of interaction) were also invoked.

Going deeper into the topic of consumption, culture and influence, all interviewees stated that they bought products related to the bands: albums, postcards, plush mascots, light sticks, artist-endorsed products, or branded smartphone cases. But there were also mentions of indirect purchases in which one of the participants declared that they observed the idol using a certain care product, which they immediately bought, just because they wanted to have something that her idol uses. When asked if the decision would be the same if a Romanian star were to promote the same product, one of the participants was quick to respond: “Aaa! No, no! By no means!” (G.M., 23 years old, female).

There are two ways in which subjects purchase products: physically, from stores located in Bucharest or Cluj-Napoca, and online, from distributors or original sites, the latter being considered a higher quality choice. The purchased products are: stationery, objects inscribed with the name or logo of the band, food, cosmetics, clothing, accessories and books.

When asked what motivates them to buy these products, the first and foremost reason is that they come from South Korea and this makes them feel closer to their idols and their culture. The second most frequent response was the quality of the products, especially in the case of cosmetics, because such products cannot low quality, taking into account the high beauty standards most South Koreans would praise. Other answers include “uniqueness”, “difference” and “unavailability” on the Romanian market. Even though their active consumption is predominantly K-pop, their interest is not only strictly shown for South Korean culture, but also for Asian culture in general, often migrating from one to another, “through one, we discover another” (DO, 20 years old, male).

Only a few of the participants (6 people, 5 female and 1 male) can read and write at a basic conversational level in this language (with no transliteration). But some of them point out that K-pop music helped them improve the quality of their English, as they needed to understand the lyrics that international fans had previously translated from Korean.

In the field of media and social media, all subjects have at least one account made especially on a certain application just to follow their idols. Among the top social media platforms and websites on which K-pop stars are active, we can name Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Facebook, Vlive, or WeVerse, as well as KakaoTalk, Line and SNS, which are used more for direct messaging.

The fans’ perception of other fans ranges from the regular fans who really support their idols and actively participate in their events, to the fans who are obsessed with their idols and violate their rights to privacy.

In the penultimate topic of the interview guide, the most used keywords with regard to Korean culture are “respect”, followed by “education”, “politeness”, “effort”, “civilisation”. As for the manner in which they adopt these traits as their own, the answers range from not adopting them, but not ignoring them, to how they began to influence them, wanting to become better, more polite and work harder to learn.

K-pop music, although seen differently by people outside this phenomenon, does not cause the participants to feel different from non-listeners. However,

seven interviewees discuss the fact that they do not feel different because they listen to this musical genre, but those who “point the finger” at them (P.C., 24 years old, male), and make them feel different. Concerning the changes that take place at the mental and behavioural level, as well as the physical level, the participants acknowledge that they have been influenced by certain norms and standards or trends, which they have adopted in their current lifestyle. Thus, at a psychic and behavioural level, they consider themselves more sociable and even friendlier, arguments that came as a consolidation of the research in the theoretical framework about K-pop in Romania. They assert that they became more creative and made close friends based on this affinity, believing that it has a close effect. Two respondents, (DB, 21 years old, female and DL, 24 years old, female), consider that they adopted the behavioural influences promoted by female bands or by Korean girls in general, by trying to be as nice as possible and to seem fragile, adding a somewhat “superficial fragility” to their behaviour (DL, 24 years old, female).

There is also another feature of influence on the standards of the life partner, many of the respondents seeming to be attracted to Korean men rather than Romanians, or preferring the masculine standards promoted by those in K-Drama. One of the respondents, who is in a relationship with a Romanian man, states that her own mother often says that her boyfriend “looks a bit Korean” (RG, 23 years old, female).

At the physical level, almost all respondents made a change in their appearance, be it the clothing style, the haircut (especially bangs, just because it was very common in Korean fashion at one point), as well as the makeup. In observing changes in attitudes, we can observe four main directions, namely: men’s makeup, cosmetic surgery, sexual minority communities and beauty standards. Thus, the participants were asked to say which character would act more normal in each of the four given directions, a Romanian or a Korean. In the case of make-up, a greater normality is highlighted in the Korean man than in the Romanian one, the arguments being focused on the idea of habit. In cosmetic surgery, another fact is emphasised, that Korean surgeries tend to give and “create a porcelain doll, while cosmetic surgeries in Romania create an inflatable doll” (R.G, 24 years old, female).

Being asked to provide reasons as to why they would prefer to keep their musical preference hidden from others, certain subjects declared that this is due to judgment they might receive from those around them who do not consume this type of music. With the exception of three cases, everyone else was criticised and judged for listening to K-pop, or for adopting changes to their physical appearance, from makeup to haircut and hair color change. The

most frequent arguments regarding the judgment of others were related to the change of hair colour, opting for nonconformist colours such as pink, blue, green, or purple. All these colours made them the target of allusions to their sexual orientation, while they had no inclinations in that direction.

Several respondents stated that they felt offended and discriminated against by the behaviour of various people towards them, including their own parents, relatives and even teachers. Those who consider themselves as the most criticised by others are the five male interviewees, who are humiliated because they would “listen to music by girls or guys who look like girls” (SA, 20 years old, male), and this makes others call them gay.

The last topic covered in the interview guide refers to gender and how certain factors represented in K-pop. Asked what category they think is predominant among fans from a gender perspective, the majority of participants clearly indicated the female category. Arguments in favour of their statement are based on the fact that girls are more receptive and adaptable. At the same time, the participants established that K-pop boy-bands have the greatest impact because their target audience (i.e., the female audience) is easier to reach and impress.

With regard to question of the behaviour of K-pop fans and whether it differs in any way from that of non-listeners, the answers are divided into two: a) it does not affect anyone, they are the same, and their possessiveness is rarely triggered; b) sometimes fans tend to adopt those behaviours of false fragility and innocence.

Regarding the feminisation and sexualisation of artists by their companies, there is a positive unanimity which criticises the way companies treat their idols and force them to dress, behave and pose. The predominant view is that this factor is only used as a marketing strategy to sell more, a sex doll meant to satisfy the fantasies of fans, who will spend more and more in order to sell their image and attract as much publicity and attention as possible, especially in the case of girls' bands, where the public considers themselves harder to get, thus a strong sexualisation is required to attract men to them.

The influence of gender on consumption is materialised based upon the question about the tendency to buy products promoted by South Korean celebrities. Also to be noted is the male gender influence on purchasing decisions. Even if placed alongside a female idol, most of the participants stated that they would buy from the male idol. There were also two participants who declared that they would be convinced by a female idol if the advertised

products would be cosmetics, as they trust women more when it comes to beauty tips.

The last question in the guide pointed to the category of fans with the highest gender vulnerability of becoming targets for discrimination, bullying, and racism. Apart from feeling embarrassed, intimidated, harassed and offended by the changes they have adopted, being called “gay” and making racist comments about their beloved bands, other situations were not mentioned. However, each of the participants knows, or had at least heard of, cases that have ended in serious acts, such as suicide, moving out of town/school, or marginalisation. Regarding the socio-demographic data, they can be concretised and represented: as a home environment: 11 (eight female, three male) are from urban areas and five (three female, two male) are from rural areas; as a civil status, nine people are in a relationship (five female, four male), the rest being single; the current level of education varies from high school (two participants) and higher education (14 participants) and to professional status, 12 interviewees are employed and attend college at the same time, while the other four people are unemployed.

Conclusions

Referring to the impact of South Korea’s popular products worldwide, Shin²³ stressed the fact that the paradox of globalisation in South Korea is the existence of two (seemingly) contradictory trends: the co-existence between “nationalist appropriation of globalisation” and “intensification of ethnic/national identity in reaction to globalisation”. Shin’s conceptualisation of globalisation and the South Korean response to it can be extended to the globalisation of culture, in which South Korea finds both the forces of homogenisation and heterogenisation in play.

Following the analysis of the 16 interviews, one can finally answer the research questions as follows.

RQ1: In what way is the cultural export adopted by Romanian K-pop listeners?

Answer to RQ1. South Korean cultural exports are adopted in a gradual manner in the consumer behaviour of Romanian K-pop fans. These fans are influenced by curiosity and the desire to be closer to their favourite bands/idols and Korean culture. The main exports, in order of consumption are: music, television series, cosmetics, food, clothing and literature, as well as the Korean language. In the field of media and social media, consumption is presented

23 Shin 2006.

through their activity, in groups or individually, on applications that allow direct interaction with other fans and their idols. They are integrated into the routine of Romanian fans and become a consumer habit.

RQ2: How is the consumer behaviour of Romanian fans influenced by K-pop music in terms of purchasing decisions?

Answer at RQ2: The fans' buying decisions are directly influenced by the music they listen to, as well as by the desire to be perceived as a real fan, avidly buying albums and products related to or endorsed by idols. These idols have a major decision-making power over their consumption, their fans being willing to buy everything they can, thus showing their loyalty. Romanian fans are especially predisposed to such strategies, as they cannot have a direct interaction with their idols, so products become a sort of surrogate.

RQ3: What are the social and psychological effects on Romanian fans exposed to K-pop music?

Answer at RQ3: Changes at the social, physical, and mental level do not massively impact Romanian fans, but some features that can be highlighted are: increased sociability, creativity, self-investments, and learning English and/or Korean. They are also influenced in choosing a life partner, who has to accept the music they listen to, or at least resemble Korean physical features. Furthermore, on a physical level, fans often adopt certain haircuts or hair colours, clothing style or makeup used by their idols. Lastly, from a social point of view, they run the risk of becoming a target of criticism or prejudice from others.

RQ4: What are the gender-wise benefits and shortcomings of K-pop as a cultural export in Romania?

Answer at RQ4: The benefits of cultural exports are cultural diversity and the new information that fans assimilate about Asian cultures. But at the same time, it can attract the hatred of those around it, judgment and criticism of those who do not agree with this type of culture. Thus, fans are in danger of becoming targets for racist behaviours, bullying and discrimination. Male fans, in particular, are at greater risk of being harassed, as their presence is very rare in the bands' fanbases, and the music and promoted aesthetics are opposed to Romanian ideals and standards.

In conclusion, the research questions received an affirmative answer for the way in which the cultural export is transmitted and adopted. This also applies to the influence that K-pop music has on the fans and their consumption

behaviour. In our opinion, if Hallyu should be understood as an alternative to the U.S. or West-dominated cultural globalisation²⁴ its new hybrid forms of popular culture enclosed elements of both the West and the East.²⁵ As shown by our data, this was the case of the K-pop export in Romania.

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24 Kim & Ryoo 2007: 117–152.

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