

***THE AGE OF THE TRANSCULTURATOR:  
THE ROLE OF TRANSCULTURATORS IN EAST ASIAN CULTURAL  
INDUSTRIES AND GLOBAL NORM-MAKING***

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**Abstract**

This study analyzes the presence of Korean and Japanese popular culture in East Asia within the context of global culture and the cultural industry, with a particular focus on digital media and the redefinition of cultural norms. The comparative framework juxtaposes Japanese popular culture with the Korean Hallyu, enabling an interpretation of the role of transculturators in the co-creation processes of fan communities. The study argues that fan activities—such as fanart, fanfiction, cosplay, or dance covers—are not merely consumer practices but new forms of artistic and cultural engagement that influence global norm-making. Methodologically, the research combines empirical data on the spread of Korean culture in Europe with secondary sources on the reception of Japanese pop culture in East Asia, supplemented by case studies to reveal the

characteristics of transcultural processes. The findings suggest that "transculturality" is becoming a newly defined concept in interpreting East Asian cultural dynamics, highlighting the capacity of East Asian pop culture to redefine the notions of art, community, and cultural identity, while shaping global norms through multimedia platforms. The findings suggest that "transculturality" is becoming a newly defined concept in interpreting East Asian cultural dynamics, highlighting the capacity of East Asian pop culture to redefine the notions of art, community, and cultural identity, while shaping global norms through multimedia platforms. In contrast, the European creative industries, while economically significant, tend to emphasize individual heroes and linear narratives, whereas East Asian models foreground collective emotions and communal identity. This methodological approach draws on analyses of Japan's Cool Japan strategy and South Korea's Hallyu policy, which illustrate how cultural industries have been mobilized as soft power tools fostering transnational identity formation (Iwabuchi, 2019; Kwon & Kim, 2014; Jin & Yoon, 2016).

**Keywords:** Transculturality, Global norm-making, Cultural industry, Creative economy, Fan economy

## **1. Introduction:**

Globalization and technological development have fundamentally transformed the dissemination and consumption of cultural content, as well as its conceptualization. Over the past two decades, with the emergence of online and OTT platforms, local cultures have broken out of their original contexts and reached global audiences. This process has created new hybrid forms and facilitated the rapid spread of cultural products that blend different national and regional elements. All this has contributed to a gradual shift away from the former dominance of American culture and an increase in the importance of the East Asian cultural industry.

The examples of Japan and South Korea (hereinafter referred to as Korea) illustrate the dynamics of this process particularly well. Japanese cultural products—anime, manga, film, and music—gained global recognition in the second half of the 20th century, but the "Cool Japan" strategy functioned more as a state- and industry-driven export model (Secretariat of Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters Cabinet Office, 2025), which relied less on community participation. The spread of Japanese culture was hampered by the country's "oppressive" role during and after World War II, which made it challenging to spread culture in neighboring countries in the late 1900s. In Korea, for example, the distribution of Japanese pop music was banned in the 1980s and 1990s (Parc, 2025). In contrast, the Korean Wave (Hallyu) began in the late 1990s, and it was built on the involvement of fan communities, consciously linking digital platforms with the development of the cultural industry and the economy (Jin, 2025). In contrast to Japan's state-led strategy for pop culture, Hallyu's decentralized model, based on fan co-creation, has resulted in stronger community engagement.

The works created by fan communities establish new cultural norms that not only help spread pop culture but also influence the functioning of the global cultural industry. In the creative and cultural industries, actors who create creative and artistic works are often not distinguished in the literature and are misdefined because they do not take into account the spread of CGC (customer-generated content) and the fact that consumers and fans actively participate in the creation of content and works. This process also highlights that the redefinition of art - as a communal, digital, and transcultural creation - has become one of the most important drivers of innovation in the cultural industry in the 21st century.

In this study, the authors summarize, based on the literature and their previous research, how changes that have taken place in recent decades - such as globalization, technological development, and the development of the creative and cultural industries - have transformed the interpretation of culture. Based on the literature, they also explore how the concept of transculturator can be defined and what factors influence the hybridization of culture and the spread of transculturators, raising the possibility of redefining and more precisely defining the conceptual framework for the future.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The conceptual framework of the transculturator as a cultural actor

This study primarily examines the phenomenon from an industrial perspective, where fan communities (such as K-pop fans) redefine modern cultural concepts and build communities.

In light of the above, it will be essential to redefine the framework of culture in the future in connection with the concept of the transculturator. In relation to the concept of the transculturator, we wish to clarify the roles of cultural mediators, curators, and transcultural actors.

In their study, Al-Krenawi and Graham (2001) define a cultural mediator as a person who mediates in a cultural context and encourages cooperation. In this context, a cultural mediator can be a legal, educational, or healthcare assistant. Cultural actors play a strategic role (Roig-Sanz & Meylaerts, 2018). The definition of the transcultural phenomenon was introduced in 1940 by Fernando Ortiz (1940), who believed that a new cultural future, neoculturation, i.e., the unification of cultures, was coming. The transculturator appears as the sum of all three highlighted definitions. An active person who reinterprets existing cultures in order to promote understanding, creating community dynamics in a hybrid unit, the community space. Herder's Legacy (2002) clearly states that cultures, like islands, coexist and occasionally interact with each other, just like fans (fandoms). They preserve their cultural identity but reinterpret it in space, thus making Korean culture universal, for example. Ortega y Gasset (1930/1993) interprets cultural processes in terms of community power and collective narrative. In this view, Korean culture is reinterpreted through fan experiences and stories. Gadamer's hermeneutics (2004) highlights that this shared understanding, in the form of dialogue, creates opportunities for two-way communication. This communication has become hybridized, creating a community that takes an active role in local-level interpretation/actions/movements. Foucault's theory of discourse (1972) sheds light on this cultural power struggle. This dynamism knows no temporal or spatial boundaries.

Fans transcend their role as cultural mediators, and a new, active, action-oriented cultural movement emerges: transculturalism.

Jin (2025) also attributes a major role to digital and online platforms in the mediation of culture. In his opinion, and according to other researchers (Kwon & Kim, 2014; Jin 2020; Dincer, 2023), social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, and later OTT platforms, played a major role in the spread of Korean culture. These globally accessible, simple, fast, and inexpensive platforms are ideal for bringing cultural content to the masses. In addition, it is in the interest of the companies operating these platforms to encourage fans to create new content based on the songs, videos, series, and films they broadcast. On the one hand, this new content increases the popularity of the original content - free of charge or at negligible cost to the company - and on the other hand, it actively conveys cultural values.

## **2.2. The transculturator as a new norm-setting player in the creative industry**

### **2.2.1. Comparison of the cultural industries in Japan and Korea**

The concept of the transculturator<sup>1</sup> refers to a creative and mediating role that goes beyond that of the artist: it creates norms, forms communities, and generates social change in the cultural industry. Although its precursors could be found in the classical arts—painting, literature, theater—the spread of digital platforms has radically accelerated and expanded this role. In the 21st century, the transculturator is not only a cultural but also an economic player who directly influences the competitiveness of the creative industry.

The examples of Japan and South Korea illustrate particularly well the economic and social significance of transculturation. Japan has an extremely rich cultural industry, with anime, manga, contemporary visual arts, and performance art enjoying global recognition. However, Japan's national strategy - such as the "Cool Japan" program

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<sup>1</sup> A "transculturator" is a social actor who is capable of creating new norms, values, and community meanings through language, communication, and creativity. Originally linked to artistic dimensions (painters, sculptors, writers), this role has expanded in the digital age: today, anyone who transforms their creation into a community value can be a transculturator. Cf. Jenkins et al. (2009).

(Secretariat of Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters Cabinet Office (2025)) - has approached cultural expansion as a top-down, industrial export model. This strategy has given less scope to the role of the transculturator, i.e., community participation, fan co-creation, and norm-creating mediation. As a result, although Japan's cultural exports have remained significant, they have not become a key driver of industrial GDP growth. (Tamaki, 2019.)

A series of historical events also weakened the global spread of Japanese culture. During and after World War II, Japan's aggressive behavior prevented it from successfully spreading its own culture among the "subjugated" nations (Iwabuchi, 2010, Chua 2012) As a result, it was unable to exploit the markets of neighboring countries as early and as effectively as South Korea, for example, to spread its cultural content. Hallyu had already conquered East Asia by the late 1990s. At the same time, Japan, despite the global popularity of anime and manga content at the time, was unable to conquer the region with such complex content in an effective manner (Tamaki, 2019; Hill & Kawashima, Eds., 2018) - probably due to perceived resistance in neighboring countries.

In contrast, South Korea has treated the cultural sector as an industry since the early 2000s through Hallyu (Korean Wave) (Kwon & Kim, 2014; Jin & Yoon, 2016), consciously linking soft power, digital communities, online platforms, and economic development. Korean creative and cultural industry enterprises place great emphasis on fans and maintaining contact with them. Today, the spread of CGC (customer-generated content) has also changed Hallyu, so K-pop and K-drama no longer function solely as products, but have become community processes mediated by active transculturators: fan communities themselves have contributed to the global spread of norms and cultural patterns through cover dance competitions, translations, and digital activism (Iwabuchi, 2019). Hallyu is not merely a cultural phenomenon, but has become an exportable industry that has directly contributed to South Korea's GDP growth and global competitiveness.

Among Southeast Asian countries, Vietnam and Indonesia also have a rich cultural heritage. However, their film and cultural industries have not been able to break into the global market, with a few exceptions (such as the Thai BL series). This is partly because

their cultural products were not linked to transculturator-driven processes that would have enabled norm-creating community participation (Bisping, 2022). Most films and series were built for local audiences, without global distribution and fan activity through digital media. This clearly shows that the role of the transculturator is not an optional extra, but the key to global success (Secretariat of Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters Cabinet Office, 2025).

### **2.2.2. The creative and cultural industries and the “Eastern soul”**

#### *Cultural significance and “seeing differently”*

Over the past two decades, the global creative and cultural industries have clearly demonstrated that the value of cultural products (music, film, fashion, literature) is not determined solely by their aesthetic form or technical quality, but also by the cultural meaning they convey. When Korean K-pop, Japanese anime, or Indonesian batik enter the international market, they appear not only as products, but as coded expressions of a particular attitude towards life, collective experience, and philosophical background. The concept of "han" is central to the Korean creative industry: a mixture of pain, sadness, and patient calmness, which is both collective trauma and shared processing. According to Byung-Chul Han (2015), the Western world is based on the logic of performance and productivity, while "han" is more of a processing that stems from inner calm and can be transformed into communal energy. This spiritual attitude explains how Korean culture has been able to create narratives in the creative and cultural industries (K-pop, K-dramas, films) that show both suffering and hope. "Han" is not passive resignation, but transformation—this is what makes Korean content universally relatable. Jin D. Y. and Yoon, K. (2016) also support this with their theory on the stages of Hallyu. He identifies the third and fourth phases of the Korean Wave with the spread of Korean culture and lifestyle. Shim and Gajzágó's (2023) research also shows that fans of Korean culture were able to understand and master the deeper layers of Korean culture within five years. Today they like this culture not only because it is special or different

from their own culture, but also because they can see into everyday Korean life and like the respectfulness and respectful behavior towards the elderly.

Japan's cultural industry is taking a different path. Here, the approach stems from Zen Buddhism and aesthetic traditions (e.g., wabi-sabi: the beauty of imperfection and transience). Japanese anime, literature, and films are often fragmentary, metaphorical, and work with open endings (Dirir, 2022). Compared to the European linear narrative, this "different way of seeing" conveys a perception of the world in which silence, absence, and emptiness are just as meaningful as spoken words. While the Korean creative industry has become a global soft power, Japan has remained more closed, and although it has strong cultural exports, its GDP growth has not seen the same breakthrough as Korea (Garcia, 2025).

The Vietnamese and Indonesian film industries, literature, and music have rich cultural traditions. However, they have not been able to break into the global industry, as confirmed by a report from the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2024) and a study by RMIT University (Quoc 2025). The reason for this is partly economic—there has been no conscious state strategy, as in South Korea—and partly cultural: local content has not been translated into a form that would make it understandable to a global audience. Yet the Vietnamese concept of “karma” or Indonesian community spirituality (for example, in the Javanese tradition) could convey deep, universal experiences. However, the creative industry here was less connected to state policy and global digital platforms, so “seeing differently” did not become a marketable product.

### ***The European aspect***

The mass products of Europe's cultural industry often think in terms of linear narratives and individual-centered heroes. The emphasis on individual struggle and the rise to prominence reflects the individualistic outlook of the Western world. At the same time, European philosophy and art are essentially more complex. Schopenhauer (Copleston, 1990) saw the resolution of suffering in Buddhism, Heidegger sought the "silence of being" (May, 1996) in the Taoist conception of existence, and in literature, Kafka and Musil, and Camus explored the crisis of the individual. The culture of pain, silence, and

self-reflection is also present in Europe. Byung-Chul Han's (2015) reception in the West also shows that Westerners are seeking the Eastern experience of inner silence, patience, and pain processing.

The Eastern creative and cultural industry, on the other hand, constructs this narrative differently: it is not the individual hero, the individual, but the collective emotional experience, the community, and unity with nature that take center stage. This is what gives Hallyu its cultural significance, building bridges between nations around the world. This shows that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

The creative industry is globally successful when the cultural meaning behind it can evoke universal identification. This is precisely why the Korean industry was able to break through: the pain and hope of "han," the collective trauma and transformation, is not only a Korean experience, but a universal human experience that can be related to anywhere in the world. Japan's more closed aesthetic and Vietnam/Indonesia's less exported cultural meaning show that the Eastern soul is present everywhere. However, it only becomes an industrial force where cultural codes can be translated globally.

### **2.2.3. The relationship between transculturation and public policies**

South Korea viewed the cultural industry as a strategic economic and diplomatic tool, a form of soft power. After the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the country's leadership recognized that pop culture products such as K-pop, films, and TV series were a low-capital-intensive but high-value-added export that could support the spread of products from other industries and thus generate rapid economic recovery (Kwon & Kim, 2014; Dincer, 2023). The government and government-supported organizations such as KOCCA (Korean Creative Content Agency) and KOFICE (Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange), as well as other state institutions, provided funding, loans, and tax breaks, while respecting creative freedom (the "arm's length principle") (Parc, 2025). As a result of Hallyu, in 2022, the Korean content industry was worth 151 trillion won (\$109 billion), while exports attributable to Hallyu generated \$13.2 billion

in revenue for the country (Lee, 2025). The success of Hallyu shows that the development of cultural and creative industries—if well structured, financially supported, and built on global consumer channels—can bring significant economic benefits. The use of online and digital platforms also played a role in the success of Hallyu (Jin & Yoon, 2016; Kwon & Kim, 2014). On the one hand, South Korea built a fast digital infrastructure relatively early on, which was key to collaborating with global social media and streaming platforms (Netflix, YouTube, etc.). On the other hand, the success is also due to the strategic considerations of Korean companies, which built on online and digital channels from the very beginning (Parc, 2025).

Japan also recognized the potential of its pop culture, but its strategic support was less consistent and results-oriented. Under the Cool Japan program (Secretariat of Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters Cabinet Office, 2025), the government allocated larger sums to the creative industries (e.g., 50 billion yen over 20 years). However, the investments often ended up losing money and were more promotional in nature than structural economic support. The emphasis was more on heritage protection and highlighting traditional culture, for example, through the "Living National Treasure" system. As a result, industrial-style support for the cultural industry remained weaker.

In Vietnam, industry support is weak, and the state system makes little structural investment in cultural exports. According to community forums, a lack of cultural confidence and a "foreign is better" mentality are also obstacles, and the local film and music industries remain underdeveloped.

Other countries, such as Japan and Vietnam, may also be able to embark on this path if they highlight their own cultural strengths and manage them with a consolidated state strategy, opening up to global channels.

#### **2.2.4. The transculturator as a norm-setting actor above artists**

When clarifying the conceptual framework of the transculturator, it became clear that participatory art practices—especially in the digital space—no longer represent only

innovations in content, but also promote the creation of new cultural norms. For example, Dal Yong Jin and Kyong Yoon (2016) emphasize in relation to the Hallyu phenomenon that fans are not passive consumers, but active participants who share, rewrite, and “remix” content in new contexts, thereby creating new cultural conventions: “social media facilitate the process of retranslation … fans keep translating and circulating Hallyu materials … revised, recommended … shared, reframed, and remixed by numerous … participants” (Jin & Yoon, 2016, pp. 1277-1292).

#### **2.2.5. The modern transculturator as a social actor**

The concept of transculturator was interpreted initially in an artistic dimension, as painters, sculptors, writers, and performers made it clear through their norm-creating activities that art is capable of initiating social processes and transforming community rules and regulations. At the same time, in the digital age, the role of the transculturator has expanded beyond traditional art: today, anyone who creates and whose activities become a community value can be a transculturator. According to Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture (Jenkins 2006), social media and digital platforms have created new creative spaces where people are no longer just consumers but active shapers of cultural processes. Thus, the transculturator is not merely an artist but a community actor who contributes to the reproduction of norms, values, and identities, strengthening community cohesion and transcultural dialogue (Roig-Sanz & Meylaerts, 2018; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001).

As a result, modern society has seen a growing demand for individuals to be not only observers but also creators of their own cultural environment. Creation thus becomes a means of achieving fulfilment in life, experiencing self-identity, and exerting social influence. This "added value" has become particularly pronounced in the digital age, where platforms accelerate the creation and dissemination of cultural content. The transculturator is thus not merely an artist, but a mediator who can generate real social activity and change through creation.

## 2.3. Three models of the transculturator phenomenon: Korea, Japan, Vietnam

Based on the analysis presented in the previous chapter, the examples of the three countries highlight the role of the transculturator and its separation from fans, co-creators, and cultural mediators.

In the case of Korea, the Hallyu model proves that the involvement of fan communities, co-creation, and state support can together generate global norm creation.

The example of Japan shows that cultural exports can be successful even without fan participation, but their impact is more aesthetic than norm-creating, and more limited in economic terms.

The example of Vietnam highlights that the lack of transculturator-driven mediation keeps cultural content at the local level and hinders global breakthrough.

Together, these examples prove that the transculturator is not an optional choice, but a fundamental prerequisite for the success of the global cultural industry.

## 3. Research methodology

### *Hallyu as the starting point for the transcultural model*

The research highlights the Hallyu phenomenon because South Korea was the first to create a cultural and economic model in which state strategy, the creative industry, and a complex system of digital platforms worked together. With Hallyu, they created a cultural actor that reshaped communities and society, creating norm-following behavior patterns (Jin, 2016). Thus, this economic and social actor generated value systems through social media (Kim, 2024).

This type of community trust generated a new kind of economic value. The cultural ecosystem that emerged on these platforms created a new economic logic, which presented participation, creation, identification, and re-creation as economic growth, with social capital as its main driving force (Lee, 2020).

Based on the analysis presented in the previous chapter, the examples of the three countries highlight the role of the transculturator and its separation from fans, co-creators, and cultural mediators.

The impact of Hallyu spread explosively throughout East Asia: Japan, Vietnam, China, and Indonesia (Jin, 2016; Kim, 2024). Its role as a transnational norm mediator has been enriched with adaptations and cultural colors (Lee, 2020). Based on the above studies, it can be said that the Hallyu pattern, with its creative norm-creating power, has developed into an economic actor. Therefore, when clarifying the concept of transculturator, the Hallyu phenomenon can be considered a reference model, which integrates the complex empirical and theoretical basis. Thus it is justified to examine the process of norm creation in the European context as well. The research results that we introduce in this paper are a part of a complex research project, supported by the Korean Studies Grant 2024 Program. The project examined the fandom of Korean culture in twelve countries of Europe and examined the fandom and Korean CCI actors with personal structured interviews. The project consisted of four phases (see Table 1): a secondary data analysis, a series of preliminary professional interviews with European Hallyu experts, a primary online questionnaire spread in twelve countries, and another phase of professional interviews with Korean company representatives.

In this paper, the authors use the results of the *professional interviews* of the 2nd and the 4th phase and the *primary research results* of the 3rd phase of the research. The second phase of structured interviews aimed to gain basic knowledge of the fandom of Korean culture. The interview consisted of three main topics: the characteristics of the Korean culture fans in the country of the interviewee, the specific attributes, and the digital and online media consumption of fans. The target group consisted of experts of Korean culture who are researchers and scholars who were asked to freely explain their answers to the main topics of the interviews, based on their own experiences and research results. The 4th phase of the research consisted of 18 professional interviews implemented in Korea (Seoul and Busan) from 15 May to 10 June 2024. The goal of the

interviews was to understand the strategies and operations of Korean companies related to Hallyu – mainly creative and cultural industrial companies. The structured interviews covered the following main topics: the relation of the company with Hallyu, their strategies and operations related to Europe, and their online and digital media usage to reach their target group. The overall structure and schedule of the research phases are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Details of the complex research's phases**

<b>Research phase</b>	<b>Type of research and description</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
1st	Secondary research, Data analysis  Analysis of related literature and related data published in journals and official databases (such as the data from KOFICE or KOCCA).	September - November 2023.
2nd	Preliminary interviews, with six Hallyu experts from Central and Eastern Europe from Bosnia Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia	October 2023.
3rd	Online questionnaire targeting only Korean culture fans in twelve countries in Europe.  The questionnaire was spread through social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Respondents were reached through the personal channels of the Hallyu researchers involved in the first interview phase, and Korean institutions (such as Korean Cultural Centers) platforms.	June - October 2024.
4th	Professional interviews with eight Korean CCI company representatives and experts (e.g. film producer, online language app company CEO, research company CEO, etc.)	15 May - 10 June 2024.

As shown in Table 1, the research applied both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the multi-layered effects of the Korean Wave in Europe. The questionnaires spread over twelve countries resulted in 2028 responses. In this paper, we sorted out answers and selected only those respondents who participated in any creation and creative process. The questionnaire contained two questions about content creation; 1. how the fans support their favourite K-pop group (e.g. they participate in community events by creating a hashtag or streaming party, engage with the group on social media by commenting or posting, create fan content), 2. what kind of additional activities do the fans do (e.g. practice traditional Korean arts, engage with Korean culture online communities or forums, collect traditional Korean items or artifacts, practice cover dance or folk dance, sing or performing cover songs, translate movies and dramas, write blogs or managing vlogs related to Korean culture, manage a social media site dedicated to Korean culture and write fanfiction based on Korean artists or dramas). The total number of those respondents who are engaged in the previously mentioned creative activities was 706. The answers of these 706 respondents were analysed in this paper. During the analysis, we aimed to describe these creators with frequencies and regression.

## **4. Research results**

### **4.1. From art to transculture: the process of reproducing norms**

It is important to emphasize that the transculturator did not come out of nowhere. Its precursors can be found in various fields of art: the works of the Japanese Kyun-Chome collective, Hikaru Fujii, and Bontarō Dokuyama provoked social reflection, while the Korean Minjung Art movement activated communities by combining traditional and popular styles. These creators went beyond the traditional role of the artist and acted as mediators capable of creating new norms. Japanese and Korean artists are not lone geniuses, but catalysts for collective experiences. Digital platforms have made participation denser and richer. They have multiplied it. The audience has become fans who have emerged from different social strata and become creators. These groups have

become easily accessible and thus more inclusive. Their unwritten rules are the conditions for belonging to the group. Failure to comply with them results in immediate sanctions. Thus, starting from the artistic sphere, they have reached the world of norms, to which they are actively participating in shaping society.

Future research should examine the economic dimensions of this phenomenon and the language used by the transculturator to activate and mediate while also participating in the process. This *dual role distinguishes the transculturator from the classical artist*.

However, in the digital age, all this has changed: today, anyone capable of creating value and activating communities in the online space can become a transculturator. The concept of transculturation allows us to understand the functioning of the global cultural industry from a new perspective. It is not just that East Asian cultural products have become successful on the world market, but that intermediaries—artists, fan communities, activist creators—have created new norms that impact social and economic systems. Art and culture have thus become not merely a form of representation, but one of the most important arenas for global norm creation. This realization is particularly important in a changing world order, where economic competitiveness cannot be separated from cultural innovation and the recreation of norms.

Our primary research results show that the total number of creators - the number of those respondents who are engaged in creative activities - is relatively high among fans; it reached 706 respondents, 34.81% in our sample. 13.3% of the respondents are engaged with Korean art, for instance, they practice traditional Korean arts (e.g., calligraphy). Others sing or perform cover songs (12.5%), practice cover dance or folk dance (9.3%), translate movies and dramas (9.1%), write fanfiction based on Korean culture or dramas (6.7%), or write blogs or manage vlogs (3.8%) related to Korean culture.

Analysing the characteristics of our respondent creator fans, we found that most of them (226 persons) live in Hungary, the Czech Republic (118 persons), and Romania (93 respondents). The rate of women respondents was high (92.8%) among them; however, if we examine the results of other Hallyu-related research and databases, we see they had similar results (for instance, Um ...; Escolar and Arias ...). In our results, the

creative respondents were young; most of them (45.5%) were born between 1997 and 2012 (they represent Gen Z), and 29.6% belonged to the age group of Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996). Surprisingly, some of the older age groups also reached a higher ratio among creators; boomers II (1955-1964) had 3.0% and Gen X (1965-1980) reached a ratio of 16.3%. Post-war, boomers I. (1946-1954) and alpha generations represented less than 1% in the sample. Around 40% of the creator fans live in big cities (with more than 1 million inhabitants); however, most of them, 42.6% have a place of living in a smaller city. They either had a full-time job (42.4%) or were still studying (39.0%). More than 60% of them were single, but 20.1% were married or lived in a partnership.

Through a multiple-choice question, we examined why creator fans like Korean culture. The answers showed that creator fans were not only engaged with one part of culture (e.g., K-dramas or K-pop) but were more closely connected to the deeper aspects of culture and followed cultural Korean norms in their lifestyles. For instance, 81.3% liked Korean culture because of the language, and 69.3% liked the history and traditions. This shift of cultural consumption shows that Hallyu entered its 4th stage (Jin, 2021), where K-style became important.

Other questions in the questionnaire referred to the customer behaviour and norms of the respondent creators. When asked if they are multi-stans or only follow one K-pop group, most of the fans (68.41%) stated that they belong to the first group. Besides, 35.27% of the respondent creators followed two or three K-pop groups, and 35.84% followed more than four bands. Thus, Korean culture fans and content creators are mostly not loyal to one group and are engaged in many types of content.

The transformations in cultural communities—where fans become active creators—show that norms are transformed through participation. In other words, in groups where community action becomes meaning-making, transculturalization and norm creation occur.

Our creator respondents form a specific community. 67.13% communicate or are in touch with other Korean culture fans, and 38.10% connect more than once a day. 67.42% of the creator respondents are engaged in other Korean culture-related activities.

Our respondents also mentioned the importance of content creator fans during the professional interviews. The KBS producer interviewee thinks that customers have the main role in Hallyu. He said, “The real protagonists of the Korean Wave are not the Korean producers, BTS, or Korean movie stars. The real protagonists are the receptionists all around the world. They make the Korean Wave happen.” He also referred to the popularity of Japanese content. During our talk, the producer interviewee explained the changes in cultural consumption. He referred to an analogy from diet, saying, ‘you are what you eat’. According to his opinion, content and culture have recently had similar roles; content can define someone's personality.

Regarding the norms, one of our interviewees, the CEO of a touristic service company, mentioned that the home culture of the fans influences their preferences for content consumption. For instance, in Muslim countries, fans accept K-dramas due to their slight and subtly phrased sexuality compared to Western content. Besides, in South East Asia, Chinese-speaking diaspora members show more interest in Korean content, influencing the consumption in these countries.

These data show that not just cultural consumption takes place, but new identities and cultural norms are created through self-regulating community practices based on collective values (Roig-Sanz & Meylaerts, 2018; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001).

## **4.2. The digital age and the importance of CGC**

CGC (customer-generated content) is one of the defining trends in contemporary marketing communication (and CCI). In a broad sense, it refers to a marketing communication tool that aims to involve consumers in the creation of communication tools in order to increase the popularity of a product or brand. Kim (2023) explains that buyers can engage in countless activities on online platforms, such as voting, writing reviews, and making recommendations, which influence the decisions of other buyers.

Nowadays, not only written works but also graphic works can appear in CGC. In addition, many consumers create unique works through poetry, paintings, electronic graphics, or film.

As Otmažgin (2008) pointed out, Japanese characters such as Hello Kitty and Pokémon are not just cultural products, but have become platforms that, in addition to participation, also require active consumer creativity. Thus, fandom and consumption give rise to active participation and cultural exchange.

Jenkins (2006) explains that the conception of participatory culture changed in the age of digitalization and social media. Implementing and elaborating cultural contents by the fans is not happening in a closed subculture with a hierarchical structure, but has become a multi-dimensional process (Dávida, 2025). Participatory culture - and fandom - is not a personal activity but is closely related to the community. Due to the development of digital platforms and channels, fans can organize specific groups and communities where they can express their personality and share their artistic activity and experiences (Jin, 2024).

Dávida's research (2025) clearly explains the role of social media and digitization in content creation and the content industry. She calls attention to the algorithms of social media platforms, which form the activity of the fandom. Besides algorithms, AI technology can also mean a gate to fandom (of Korean culture). However, using AI technology in fan art might be contradictory, as some fans see this content as lacking artistic intent and specific personality.

*The results of our research support all of the above as follows:*

Our questionnaire included three topics related to platform usage; it examined how the fans use platforms to consume K-drama and related content, the second group focused on K-pop listening platforms and K-pop-related content consumption, while the third group explored the platform usage for communication between fans. The results show that fans actively use social media platforms and OTT/streaming platforms to reach content (such as K-drama or K-pop), around 80% of our creator respondents use Netflix,

and 38% prefer Disney. Spotify (70.7%), YouTube (68.6%), and Soundcloud (22.9%) are the most popular channels for K-pop consumption. When we examined the platforms for content creation, we found that creator fans used Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok the most to create and post content about K-dramas or K-pop.

A lot of interviewees also mentioned the importance of digitalization and online platforms in the Korean Wave. The KBS producer, for example, emphasized the role of OTT platforms such as Netflix, which changed not only consumption but also production and content. He mentioned that the cooperation in production and Netflix's global strategy changed the style of K-dramas, and - for instance - from romantic comedy, dramas shifted to different stories to serve the global taste and satisfy global consumers. According to his opinion, due to the popularity of digital platforms, "the media has been globalised and some content has been globalised" too, such as Korean content. Besides, advanced technology made it easier for consumers to reach cultural content, which changed consumption patterns too. As the producer interviewee said, "twenty or thirty years ago, people were more univores—individuals who consume only one type of cultural content. " Nowadays, European or American fans can easily enjoy Japanese and Chinese content too.

Our findings also show that digitization and online platforms have transformed not only consumer habits but also the norms of creation. This has particularly affected younger generations, who have become not only recipients and participants but also creators and reinterpreters. This resonates with Otmaigin's (2008) observation that social media blurs the boundaries between consumption and creation and engages in a new kind of transnational cultural mediation that sets new standards.

## 5. Conclusions and discussion

The transculturator concept goes beyond the cultural industry framework: it refers to a social actor who simultaneously engages in norm creation, community building, and the reframing of cultural identity. Based on the examples examined, it can be stated that the competitiveness of the cultural industry stems not only from economic factors, but also

from deeply social and community dimensions. This suggests that future cultural strategies should be based not only on content production, but also on the conscious strengthening of mechanisms of mediation and participation.

While the Korean Wave is based on community elements and phenomena, it constantly changes based on transcultural interactions. A new phenomenon has emerged worldwide, raising the question of social, market, and state trust between East and West. While the East (Japan, Korea) trusts in cultural self-regulation, America emphasizes cultural control. Paradoxically, in the name of freedom, it takes away the power of art as a regulatory system over social norms. While the Cool Japan policy and Hallyu place trust in community norms, thus making the greatest cultural leap, Europe follows a similar pattern. The creative industry is thus more economically dynamic and appears as a living fabric. Because where development is entrusted to community norms, society flourishes and innovation becomes a natural process.

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