

‘Hallyu’ Wave & Women Fandom in Darjeeling Town: A Study on Binge Watching, User’s Satisfaction and Participatory Culture

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Abstract:

Background: As we move towards the convergence phenomenon where the old and new media collide, binge watching has become a recognizable jargon among the internet users. With the increase in the internet connectivity in India, viewers binge watch on movies, documentaries, web series and TV shows at their discretion. “Hallyu” - The Korean Wave has already made its cultural impact especially in the Northeast India. A steep increase in the easy availability and accessibility of content from Korean entertainment industry owing to the technological growth via the online platforms has accelerated the growth in cultural impact, fandom and popularity of the Hallyu Wave in Darjeeling town too. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to analyze the user’s satisfaction, participatory culture, binge watching behavior and the evolvement of fandom in Darjeeling town along with the use of popular online platforms to access these contents.

Methods: The methodology used is Focus Group Discussion using Framework Analysis using User’s and Gratification theory as the theoretical framework for the study.

Results: The results also show that the fandom is involved in the participatory culture and hence there is strong evolution of Hallyu fandom in Darjeeling town. The findings also indicate that there are different forms of satisfaction derived from binge watching Korean dramas and songs.

Keywords: Hallyu, Binge watching, Fandom, Online platforms, Darjeeling town

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the foothills of the Himalayas, a group of 25 Korean women served tea in the elaborate tea drinking ceremony called ‘dayre’ in the traditional costume of “ham book” in Darjeeling. The program had been organised by Indo –Korean foundation, in association with Korean Embassy supported by Tocklai Tea Research Institute and Korean Cultural Centre to India. The group comprised of ladies belonging to tea business industry (Chettri, 2015).Darjeeling, often recognized by its tea, witnessed a Korean diplomacy in one of its most popular and internationally recognized commercial commodity.

The commercial success of the Darjeeling tea industry in the Korean market may have proliferated commercially (Ghoshal,2013), but the Hallyu wave is creating a stronger cultural impact in Darjeeling. The relationship between the cultures of Korea and Darjeeling has been desolate in the academic field. However, there has been a sharp growth the adaptation of Hallyu wave in the recent years in Darjeeling. Fans from Darjeeling have been attending the K-Pop events in India and giving an overwhelming response upon meeting favorite K-Pop idol ALEXA in IN2IT, who was performing on a Bollywood dance number organized by NAMAS-K (Gupta, 2019).

As put forward by Chakraborty (2017), female K-pop fans in Darjeeling prefer to watch 16 episodes of Korean dramas in comparison to overly stretched Indian soap operas. The easy accessibility and cost effective international content viewing has added to the growth of the Hallyu wave in Darjeeling .The fans from, Darjeeling, Sikkim and Kalimpong have made contributions to short stories and illustrations on the influence of Korean culture called *A Hidden Valley Of Rice:Short Stories And Illustrations From The Hills Of Sikkim, Kalimpong And Darjeeling* (Redendron,2017).As Yolmo (2018) aptly points out that in the absence of mainstream media in Darjeeling, natives of the place often feel left out, as the media puts its focus only on the commercial values. The inclusion of Darjeeling as a part of India and North East has come into limelight only during violent agitations which had taken place in yesteryears. Therefore, the online platforms have tried to fill the void of the mainstream media and become the mouthpiece of Darjeeling.

Addressing to relationship of cultural affinity and affection towards the Hallyu stars, this study will explore underlying intrinsic reasons towards the increase in the popularity of the Hallyu wave in Darjeeling.

Although Jenkins (2006) exhibits his understanding that the growth of the internet has changed the way the consumers consume, produce and create the media content. The 'transmedia storytelling' owing to the convergence phenomenon has evolved as a new narrative on the activities of fan in online and offline medium. For Cunningham & Craig (2016), these online platforms create a variety of innovative content which have crossed barriers creating artistic freedom, cultural diversity, user generated contents without the global media dominance. Nakano (2002), has explicitly put forward the notion that the growth of the online platforms adds to wider reach of the foreign contents. Jin (2013) argues that these forms of free content with intellectual property rights will soon be looked upon as cultural imperialism from the dominated countries and soon, hegemony will begin from the cultural products which are now looked upon as entertainment. Thus study will highlight reason of cultural proximity, satisfaction derived by accessing the Korean wave contents online, in the absence of the broadcast of Korean contents in Darjeeling town.

The Hallyu wave

According to Kim (2012), 'Hallyu', or the Korean Wave, has been coined by Chinese media in 2001, which is now a term used for the highly popular and widely disseminated South Korea's cultural products ever since the 1990s. With *My Sassy Girl* in 2001 becoming a global super hit film and PSY's *Gangnam Style* in 2012 topping the international music charts, the Hallyu phenomenon hit the international borders who in turn were accepting Asian produced cultural product as a part of pop culture market (Jung-Kim, 2014; Lee & Kuwahara, 2014).

The potentiality of the Korean Wave as put across by Chua (2012) and Ibawuchi (2002) is that it has functioned as a means to discover and find commonness among the other Asian countries which adds to existing in a common environment engulfed by consumerism. This is similar to the concept of US led global hegemony replaced by East Asian hegemony expanding Korean traditional cultures around the world. Neeves & Sarkar (2017) in their study however critically reviews Korean Pop Culture as relatively new and borrowed from other established pop cultures of Japan, China and Taiwan. Instead of being the contributors to the pop culture, for a very long time Korean market has just been "observers". Supported by the Korean government since 1990s, Korean wave has been seen as the aggressive maker of identity in order to build up the image of Korea. The contents of the popular dramas and pop music are regularly highlight to put across the values, culture and resilience of the country which helps them to advertise and endorse the positive image of the nation (Jang & Song, 2017).

The beginning of Hallyu wave in India can be traced to September 2000 in Manipur according to Reimeingam (2015), owing to the banning of Hindi Satellite channels by Revolutionary People's Front (RPF). The easily accessible pirated DVDS and CDS of Korean films, dramas and songs became the source of entertainment for youth. This led to the adaption and acculturation of Korean culture among the youths of Manipur who were fascinated by the Hallyu stars. As Kaisii (2017) notes that the first hit drama in India was "the Classic in 2003 in Manipur, followed by "A Moment to Remember" and "Full House." Soon, the Hallyu wave spread to Nagaland and Mizoram. This study showed that people of North East India are culturally distinct from the mainland India. Therefore, it was only evident that they were attracted to the Korean culture, by developing a sense of attachment with the Korean stars that have close and similar cultural attributes like them. This has been further explained by Straubhaar (1991:51) who brought in the concept of "cultural proximity". He emphasized on the fact that production of the contents in the international, national or local level which strengthens the ethnicity, language, religions, identities and traditions have a more influence on the genres of the program content.

Dhawan (2017,2019:565) in his studies critically looks at the growth of Hallyu wave in India, which has not seen an exponential growth in mainland India, like the North East India. The study revealed the Korean diplomacy to spread the Hallyu wave in India. Their insistence to talk about instilling of ancient Korean Text *Samguk Yusa* which talks about the marriage between "Kim Suro" of Gaya Kingdom (42 CE- 562 CE) to "Heo-Hwang-ok" an Indian princess in Ayodhya through the creation a monument in association with the Indian Government, explains their intentions to push the Korean cultural market in India.

The Korean Cultural Centre India in New Delhi (KCCI) on the other hand has been organizing yearly K-Pop Contests with increasing number of participants every year. These contests were held in Guntur, Dehradun and Bhopal for the first time in India (Deb, 2019). KCCI also holds an annual Cherry Blossom Festivals in Shillong and Meghalaya filled with Korean Culture events. The Language Speech Contest, Taekwondo Contest, International Seminars on Korean Wave etc are to name a few of the events which the KCCI has been promoting and focusing on in India (KCCI, 2019).

However, the success of the Korean wave as a culture industry is dependant on the factors such as "cultural hybridity", merging of global and local concepts, providing the tool of cultural imperialism into the global market (Kwon & Kim, 2013; Bok-rae, 2015). Dhawan (2017) again in his studies criticizes the economic growth and dependence of South Korea on the export of cultural products. As a result of this, tourists flock into

the South Korea making it the most popular tourist destination in Asia. Kim (2007) in this study however views that although the Korean Wave can have various critical discourses, one cannot deny the popularity of it as a flourishing political and economic success of cultural product.

Binge watching, participatory culture and understanding the “fan” –dom

The fundamental concept of fan as defined by Merriam-Webster is an enthusiastic devotee, an ardent admirer of a celebrity, sports person etc. However, Iwabuchi (2016: 86, 87) has described fans as a “discursively taxonomy” of people sharing similar cultural characteristics. Studies have shown that fandom has been looked upon from a pessimistic approach. But now the participatory approach of fans has turned them as “prosumer” (Producer- Consumer) and “approreader” (appropriator- reader) making them culturally significant. Jenkins (1992) who coined the term “participatory culture” differentiated the passive viewing of contents from other fan-based activities. Jenkins et. al (2013) observes that the fans have gone beyond the “passive spectatorship” to now participative in the fan culture. The participative culture has facilitated the spreadable media content crossing the barriers of companies and borders in the grass root level, as the audience is no longer bonded to the companies for the release of new episodes facilitated by the new technologies.

Keith (2019) observes that fans can be categorized into two types- participatory and passive. While the active fans are more engaging where they are participating in organizing events, cover dances, social media activities, forum moderating, and creating fan fiction, etc, the passive fans may just limit themselves to watching online videos. Both active and passive fans have a substantial role to play as a part of the fandom. As per the study conducted by Kaisii (2017), it suggests that, it becomes imperative for the youth not to loose their cultural identity amidst the portrayal of Hallyu stars in a hybrid global influence of the Hallyu wave. Jenner (2017) puts forward that the concept of binge watching may have originated from television, the practice has now been adopted by online streaming platforms and video on demand platforms too. It provides an approach on fan studies and understanding the relationship between binge watching and fandom. As Kang (2017) asserts Korean dramas are specially designed to release over online platforms, giving full and unlimited access to the content irrespective of time and place. The audience access Korean dramas more over the online platforms as they mainly target the youth and adults indulging in binge watching of these series.

As observed by Pearson (2010) the “symbiotic” relationship between the fans and the producers in the digital age has brought in the concept of “gift economy”. The fans engage in “giving,” “receiving” and “reciprocating” the gifts consequences in the formation of fan social networks. Gee (2005) emphasizes that the participation level depends on the degree of ability and significance of sharing the activities among the peers. Active participation has led to the emancipated knowledge about Korea. The gratification on the uses and accessing the media contents focuses on the goals and needs of the audiences which they seek through various media activities.(Elliott & Quattlebaum,1979). Considering the studies of Kang (2017), Pearson (2010), Gee (2005), Elliott & Quattlebaum,(1979), this study focuses in finding the causal relationship between the fans, online viewing/streaming patterns, participation and acceptance of the Hallyu wave in Darjeeling town.

User’s satisfaction

As put forward by del Pilar Álvarez (2013) the fact that many Hallyu wave fans cannot travel to Korea to see their favorite actors and idols, encourages them to build their own connotation about Korea. Amaran & Wen (2018) cogently points out that studies have shown audiences are motivated to watch the Korean dramas in particular because they feel a sense of “connectedness” towards drama series. This determines the audience’s satisfaction they experience while watching the drama alone, with company and thus determining their viewing pattern. Watching Korean dramas have led to the satisfaction of the cognitive and affective needs of the audiences while they try to withdraw from their daily routine and stress. Won-jun,(2015) further asserts that the commitment of the audiences is directly proportional to the satisfaction derived from the drama as the Korean stars are attractive and reliable hence bringing about the effect of satisfaction among the audience An (2014) explicates that one of the reason to be drawn towards Korean culture was entertainment, stars, relaxation and active practices behavior.

The previous studies have all indicated a significant contribution of women in user’s satisfaction, study of Hallyu wave as cultural products, participatory culture of women in Hallyu fandom in Austria, Middle East and Philippines (Malik,2019; Sung,2014; Marinescu & Balica,2013). The academic discussion on the participation and gratification of women fandom has not shifted to Darjeeling from mainland India and rest of the North East India. Therefore, it is essential to understand the impact, adoption and acceptance of the Hallyu wave from the perspective of women fandom in Darjeeling who contribute to the growth of the Hallyu wave.

In contending with the global and local practices of the activities of the fandom, this paper will focus on the binge-watching behavior among the Hallyu fans in Darjeeling town. It will also focus on the usage of online platforms, user’s satisfaction and participatory activities. Further, the paper will analyze and understand the fandom activities and gratifications derived.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study has been done using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to understand the nature of the meanings that lie embedded in the shared perspectives of a group. This helps in producing a thorough understanding about the experiences, acceptance of various norms and meanings pertaining to the group. The participants of FGD belonged to different sections of the society for producing a rich data. Further, framework analysis has been used to analyze the data collected from FGD. The research aims to answer the following research questions:

- What has led to the evolvement of Hallyu Wave fans to proliferate in Darjeeling?
- Which are the preferred online platforms to watch Korean dramas and videos?
- What is the nature of binge watching Korean dramas and K Pop Videos?
- What are different kinds of gratifications derived from binge watching Korean dramas and listening to K Pop songs?
- What are the participatory activities of Hallyu wave fans in Darjeeling?

Sample

The purposive sampling technique has been used for the sampling. The participants have purposively been selected for possessing homogenized group characteristics like gender, socio economic background and ethnicity needed for the study. The FGD consisted of 16 participants with the age groups of: 13-19, 20- 26 and 27-33 and 34-40. FGD consisted of all female respondents from Darjeeling town. The participants have been recruited by the local contacts.

The participants consisted of fans of K-Pop songs, Korean Dramas and K-Pop fest event organizers and administrators of social networking sites of K-Pop fan base in Darjeeling.

Tools

This research was conducted using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with exploratory and open-ended questions and a total of 35 questions were asked and the questionnaire was divided into five sections. First section included the demographic of the participants. The second part consisted of evolvement of Hallyu wave fandom in Darjeeling, the third comprised of questions regarding the usage of online platforms for Hallyu wave content. The fourth consisted of motivations deriving user's satisfaction and binge-watching behavior and the fifth consisted of participatory culture of the fans in Darjeeling.

FGD has been used because it facilitates interaction with a group. Each participant in FGD is interactive and their involvement helps to add more value to the discussions regarding the topic.

The research was conducted in four rounds of FGD with open ended questionnaires which were handed to the participants beforehand. Each focus group consisted of 4 participants from different age group and the duration on each discussion lasted 70 minutes per session. Individual sessions were recorded in audio.

Table 1 : List of FGD Female Participants and their Age Groups

Sl.No.	Name (Initials)	Age	Occupation	Belonging to fan Club
1.	S.R	Teens	Student	No
2.	P.S	Teens	Student	Yes
3.	N.C	Teens	Student	No
4.	S.S	Teens	Student	Yes
5.	L.R	20s	Student	Yes
6.	N.S	20s	Working	Yes
7.	M.H.S	20s	Student	Yes
8.	T.M	20s	Working	Yes
9.	N.B	30s	Working	No
10.	M.R	30s	Student	No
11.	R.G	30s	Working	No
12.	S.L	30s	Working	No
13.	R.L	40s	Working	No
14.	P.L	40s	Working	No

15.	N.S	40s	Working	No
16.	S.T	40s	Working	No

Procedure

The data has been analyzed using Framework Analysis, which is “an analytical process that involves a number of distinct though highly interconnected stages” (Ritchie & Spencer, 1991:177). The key elements that are used to outline the analysis process are: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation. This analysis uses a thematic approach which allows themes and narratives to develop both from the researcher and the research participants (Rabbie,2004).

The data has been collected by facilitating discussion from the group which was familiarized by listening and re-listening the recorded discussions for making the transcripts. The four, text based typed transcripts were made of the interview from approximately seventy (70) minutes of each FGD.

After organizing the data, the transcripts were analyzed to generate and represent the objectives of the research. The collected data were categorized into major themes like: binge watching, preference of online platforms, user’s satisfaction and participatory culture. The other subthemes which emerged during the analysis were: cultural proximity, health issues, fan loyalty and social activities.

The data was then sifted to get quotes, comparisons, different and common answers that were relevant to the research. The quotes and answers were further evaluated to fit into the objectives of the research from the transcripts. During the analysis, there were a number of answers that deviated from the main research objectives. Those answers that did not suit the requirements of the research objectives have been eliminated. Hence, the answers have been specifically chosen from the overall analysis from the transcripts in finding the relationship between the questions, answers and research objectives. The context, content and the meanings derived out of the words and tone of the voice has been analyzed through transcripts, notes and audio recordings which have generated context related to the research questions which the study aimed at answering.

III. RESULTS

Ha (2017) has aptly put across that Hallyu Wave spread with genres which had highly packed entertainment beginning with Korean TV Dramas, then spread to pop music, Korean films and language. The cultural product was packaged with “exoticizing” appeal of the Korean and Asian cultural values. In this study too, it has been found that entertainment, star appeals, values, traditions and food culture has been an important aspect for women fandom to accept and adopt the Hallyu wave in Darjeeling town.

According to Katz, Blummer & Gurevitch, (1974:510), Uses & Gratification research focuses on the following gratifications: (1) “the social and psychological origins” (2) producing the “needs”(3) by creating “expectations” (4) for the “media” to acknowledge the needs which “leads” to (5) gap in the “exposure” of media, restricting further “engagements”, that “result” in (6) “need gratifications” and (7) further adding to unintentional extra consequences”.

This study has highlighted the social and psychological origins of the proliferation of Hallyu wave in Darjeeling town owing to the lack of mainstream media which has generated the need to access the Korean cultural products via online mediums to fulfill the needs of gratifications through actively participating in the fandom activities. This study has therefore, used socializing, affection, relaxation, escape, easy accessibility and entertainment as the required gratifications to fulfill the research objectives.

The results of this study has also focused on the women also have built around them the perception of a desired male partner as portrayed in the films and dramas. The depiction of efficient and women centric law and order in the Korean cultural products have affected the women who look forward to their town being a safe haven like the portrayals of ideal town in Korean dramas. As the Korean cultural products pushes their way into the mindset of women through various projections of the country, this study has also revealed that the fandom envisions visiting South Korea once in their lifetime to have similar experiences in encountering the fashion, food and work cultures of the country.

The cultural proximity of the people in Darjeeling and their ability to relate to the Hallyu stars have been the driving factor in the process of the spread of the Hallyu Wave. The available of the free content over the internet. The internationally inter-connected fandom over the internet and the involvement of extreme connectivity among the fandom with Hallyu Stars has made a major impact in the proliferation of Hallyu Wave in Darjeeling town.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

In Darjeeling, the Korean Wave began with watching Korean films like The Classic, My Sassy Girl, My Little Bride etc from the early 2000 via DVDs by renting DVD players and CDs as per the FGD participants. Participants were introduced to Korean dramas and songs by their friends and family members then

becoming fans themselves. Now the medium of accessing the contents has been primarily mobile phones because it was easily accessible. Korean Stars and idols gave evoked a sense of connectivity it as an escapism in watching the songs and videos. Darjeeling, like the other North East State of India, remains culturally and ethnically different from main land India.

According to the respondents from the K-Pop fans, it was found that Darjeeling has a strong and dedicated emerging fandom for the boy band BTS (Bangtan Boys). BTS is the K-Pop boy band consisting of seven members who have paved their way to become the first ever K- Pop band to reach the US Billboards with 12 million subscribers on YouTube with a fan base in 65 countries (BBC, 2018). The other fan base consisted of Black Pink, EXO and Big Bang.

The participants of the Korean drama however varied in range in following the Hallyu stars and there was no distinct Hallyu stars which was followed in particular. However, the common stars included Lee Min Ho, Ji Sung, Ji Chang Wook, Kim Soo-Hyun, Song Joon-ki, Jo In Sung, Park Seo- Boon and Lee Jong-Suk. The study reveals that female leads were equally popular among the fans and they are Park Min Young, Park Shin-Hye, Jun Ji-Hun, IU and Son Ye Jin. It was difficult to choose and idolize only one Hallyu star because of the portrayal of various roles in an array of genres. However, this study highlighted the inclination towards the Hallyu stars as a result of cultural similarities between the youths of Darjeeling and Hallyu stars. One of the participants said "Like every boy can play a guitar and sing in Darjeeling, likewise, these Korean stars too are multi-talented in singing, dancing, playing instruments and acting."

Following are the major findings of the study:

- *What has led to the evolution of Hallyu Wave fans to proliferate in Darjeeling?*

Darjeeling lacks the broadcasting of main stream media in its native language Nepali. This has become the main reason why the Hallyu Wave fandom has proliferated and evolved in the town. Resemblance of the natives of Darjeeling town to the cultural proximity of the Hallyu stars having similar facial features, physical characteristics and traditions have made the evolution of Hallyu Fandom in Darjeeling. The participants unanimously expressed that the fandom will increase in the times to come because of the quantity of Korean content which are easily available through number of platforms made easily accessible available through the internet.

Food was one of the main cultural resemblances which the participants admitted to have similarity between cultures in Darjeeling and South Korea. Darjeeling is a rice eating community which is similar to the Korean culture too. However, this study shows that if the Korean dramas and films had not promoted the Korean food, it would not have been one of the major appeals to try the Korean food.

Similarly, tradition of worshipping nature and ancestors which is also prevalent in different parts of the community in Darjeeling was another factor for the acceptance and increase in the Hallyu Fandom in Darjeeling town. The family values which both cultures share too were relatable which the participants found the similarities in. The study reveals that although the fashion statements could be "borrowed" from Korean culture, but there has not been a change in the core traditions of the place and hence, Korean cultural products are not seen as form of cultural imperialism by the participants.

A close cultural proximity, realistic characterization and similar family values have evoked sense of belonging among the fandom, which has increased the affection towards the Hallyu stars. The participants could affectionately relate to the idols on the screen as "they find them as one of them" as said by one of the participant. This made them extremely close as a part of the Hallyu Fandom across the globe. Hence, it is one of the major reasons for the increase in the fandom in Darjeeling town.

- *Which are the preferred online platforms to watch Korean dramas and videos?*

This study reveals that BTS fans used V-Live, We Verse, Spotify and YouTube for live streaming music and videos. V-Live was preferred for exclusive concert videos of BTS called Muster which they got through subscriptions. Spotify was used for streaming of BTS songs officially and also to give it a status of highest streaming songs in the app.

For the participants of Korean drama fans, the commonly used platforms were Netflix, Viu, Viki-Rakuten and YouTube. This study shows that Korean Dramas were accessed more through the websites like KissAsian, Dramacool and Dramanice than the easily accessible applications in the mobile phones. These were preferred because of the cataloguing of the contents catering especially to Korean dramas. It was also preferred as these free accessible online platforms had less or no advertisements while streaming, streamed full episodes, has download facilities and are subscription free.

The preferred device to watch the Korean contents with easy accessibility was mobile phones. On an average, each participant had 2-3 applications and browsers freely available for download in the mobile phones to access these contents.

- *What is the nature of binge-watching Korean dramas and K Pop Videos?*

Each drama consists of 45-60 minutes on an average with 16-24 episodes per season. This study shows that a complete drama has been watched on an average of 2-3 days time. It has also been watched at a stretch of 10 episodes in a day if the drama was found to be interesting, ability to connect, find a means of escapism and relaxation. On an average, 5-6 episodes are watched every day at one sitting as participants claim that technique of episode hooking makes the show addictive and one episode does not satisfy the need and sometimes goes to the extent of missing their classes to watch Korean dramas.

K-Pop fans revealed to watch 1-2 Hours of video in V-live and YouTube as the online platforms provided short videos. Fans of BTS watched V-live which streams prerecorded reality program of Run BTS once a week which on an average of 35-40 minutes. BTS fan participants agreed to watch an average of 55-60 minutes of live programs of BTS on YouTube and V-live which included watching 2-3 hours of K-Pop Videos on YouTube.

There has been a concern related to health among the participants for their binge-watching behavior like erratic sleep timings and disturbed sleep patterns sometime leading to insomnia. The other health concerns were: obesity, regular head ache, poor eye sights, reduced metabolism, neck and back pains.

- *What are different kinds of gratifications derived from binge watching Korean dramas and listening to K Pop songs?*

The participants of the Korean dramas use it to derive relaxation from their stressed life and as withdrawal from the daily routine. The portrayal of male characters in the dramas and songs has shaped the notions of an ideal partner. The reason cited behind this was due to the realistic portrayal of lead characters in the dramas and the representation of Korean idols in the media. The indulgence of watching the Korean dramas has been seen as medium of fun and entertainment. The over involvement in the characters while watching the Korean dramas leads the develop affection and connectivity long after the drama is complete.

However, the participants of the K-Pop felt happy and elated while listening to the K-Pop songs. Relating deeply to the songs sung although in Korean language but understanding the context and content of the lyrics by obtaining translated English version from YouTube and websites. . One of the participant said that "BTS songs teaches to love yourself and accept yourself they way you are". Another participant said that "being a BTS ARMY keeps her and her friend academically motivated. During exam, her promised to herself that if she is a true ARMY, she will score 99% in Nepali (vernacular) language. With this motivation, she scored 99 % in the subject. This made me feel accomplished." BTS band members are regularly engaging themselves in social responsible behaviors like charity and event. The study revealed that BTS ARMY in Darjeeling too adopt the social behavior and hence they promote social well being. Socialization was another important satisfaction that was derived among the interactions between the fans. Some participants claimed that the introvert nature had been transformed into a social nature during the promotions and interaction among other fan members during the fan gatherings and meetings. K-Pop BTS fans, derives sense of gratitude and identity to be recognized as an ARMY (universal name for BTS Fan). Being part of the BTS ARMY has given social recognition and bigger friend circle resulting in greater connectivity. The term ARMY is associated with social recognition, affection, sense of pride, happiness and comfort.

- *What are the participatory activities of Hallyu wave fans in Darjeeling?*

The study revealed that the Korean drama fans have no engagement in active participatory offline activities with fan clubs, events and managing a fan base. The promotions of the Korean dramas usually are done through the word of mouth to family and friends, however not disagreeing to being agents of cultural products trying to sell. The cultural product in turn has been seen and accepted it in the form of fine arts. Some of the active participatory activities involved listening to original sound tracks (OST) of Korean dramas, extensive discussion about the dramas with friends, participating in online activities in social networking sites like subscribing to official Social Networking Sites (SNS) handles of Hallyu stars, changing profile pictures in SNS with pictures of Hallyu stars, updating SNS status, tweeting, liking, forwarding, sharing and posting about the actors of Korean dramas.

The K-Pop (BTS) fans however, have managed to keep both their online and offline activities successfully. The offline participatory activities include organizing a K-Pop fest in July 2019 featuring cover dance, songs and sale of merchandise, hosting events on occasion of birthdays and anniversaries of the band members. Special screening of two BTS movies "*Burn the Stage*" in 2018, "*Bring The Soul*" in 2019 and "*Break the Silence*" in 2020 has been one of the major achievements of the mangers of BTS ARMY SNS fan base in Darjeeling. Other activities include fund raising and charity projects.

The online activities include trending BTS song in India from Darjeeling, managing fan base through social networking sites, creating artworks for social media and online voting for official awards for Billboards,

Grammy Awards, Golden Disc Awards, Seoul Music Awards, Melon Music Awards, MNET Asia Music Awards, Asia Artist Awards, Goan Chart Music Awards.

The BTS fans encourage live streaming of songs rather than downloading to increase the popularity of band. At the age of rampant and unavoidable digital piracy, BTS fans avoid downloading songs from any illegal websites and links, thus valuing the artistic content and effort of BTS. The fan base promotes ethical listening of the songs through official online or offline platforms. Fans purchase the exclusive DVDS of BTS songs which may cost between 6000-7000 INR. These exclusive collections of DVDs can be availed only in Korea via the official distributors. The study revealed that the BTS fandom in Darjeeling often participates in YouTube Streaming Party with the purpose of socializing and bringing the fan base to closer proximity in the town. This study also highlighted that seven band members of BTS commonly are called as "OT-7" and closely knit band. Fans identify them as a group rather than celebrating individuality in the band. The fans are affectionate towards BTS as a complete band and do not perceive the band through individual band member's recognition and contribution. Every band member contributes equally towards the growth of the band. However, if any fan has a personal favorite band member, then that particular favorite band member is called "bias wrecker". The study brought to light the fact that BTS Army has a portmanteau of two words consisting of one's own name and other belonging to favorite individual band member. By merging and making them into one name, fans create separate identity and also social recognition as an ARMY with a bias wrecker.

In Darjeeling, managers of BTS SNS fan base- Darjeeling Chapter are often called to restaurants, shops, printing press to promote the BTS merchandise, Korean food and products. Social Networking Sites in Darjeeling are seen as a tool to promote the band the Hallyu wave and at the same time increasing the fan base via linking and interconnectivity.

V. CONCLUSION

The Hallyu wave has been taking the world by storm. The fandom of Hallyu wave has evolved in a prolific way in Darjeeling town. They now have a niche and growing fandom engaging in the binge-watching behavior and user's satisfaction along with participatory activities. Like every fan base, some critics might have cited it off as a passing phase, but the attempt of South Korean influence through its cultural commodity to influence as soft power has a significant and impressive impact among the women in Darjeeling town. The trends of this popular culture and the South Korean Government's efforts to increase the popularity of this trend in India has added more to inspire the women of Darjeeling town to immerse themselves in it.

However, the fandom is adapting to the Korean culture which in turn is a hybrid culture consisting of Korean and western that has been popularized by songs, films and dramas. Nevertheless, it seems to have a high influence among the peers. The Korean culture in Darjeeling relates to the adoption of modern lifestyles, yet adhering to the deep roots of cultural and traditional values of the past which the people in Darjeeling follow. The women in Darjeeling town may not have adopted the Korean fashion culture, but they are highly influenced by the food culture. The usage of simple, aesthetically rich language has added to the cultural ethos which influences the narratives of the perception of an ideal partner among women Hallyu fandom in Darjeeling.

The usage of Korean language by the fandom like "saranghae", "kamsamida", "chingu", "oppa", "unni", "shincha" and words to describe foods like "kimchi", "ramyun", "kimbap", "teokbokki", "dakgangjeong", "yakshik", "kimchi jjiggae", "bulgogi" and "jjangmeon" during text conversations, social media updates and face to face interactions has been a highlighted finding of this study. The fandom has been actively participating in the usage of Korean language and incorporating its usages in the conversations has been revealing. The study has also highlighted that fans use Korean alphabets to write their names and update the social media sites.

The K-Pop fans have crossed the cultural barriers where, the term ARMY provides a regional, national and global recognition and connection. This remains absent in the mainstream Indian media which somehow seems detached towards the representations of the North East to a great extent. The futile efforts of the representation in few web series, films, advertisement and videos in the recent context add little or no value to bridge the gap of cultural proximity and differences. The ironic fact remains that Indian mainstream media itself generates a huge amount of cultural content where the natives of Darjeeling have little or no cultural connection with mainland India. Despite the exclusion in the main stream Indian media, the ability of the Hallyu fandom in Darjeeling to participate in the fan activities adding connection to a greater matrix evokes strong sense affection, sense of belonging and the relationship with local and global culture of K-Pop fandom which has followed the pattern of inclusiveness among the otherness despite the national and global appeal of India's cultural product.

The study has addressed the population, which has rarely been focused and examined on the Asian flow of cultural consumption in the previous analysis of the Hallyu wave. This study has helped to reveal the fans' relationship in the local context adding to the rapidly increasing popularity of Hallyu wave globally. This study also underlines the key gratifications derived through socializing, affection, relaxation, escape, easy

accessibility and entertainment by the Hallyu wave women fans of Darjeeling. The need to be associated, an identity to linked on recognition in the global fandom met by the Korean Dramas and K-Pop, thereby asserts the increasing popularity of the Hallyu wave despite its criticisms as a cultural hegemony trying to establish its regime globally.

Although as active audiences, the women fandom has been participative in online activities, however, in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the offline activities were minimum in Darjeeling town due to the lockdown, apart from screening of the movie *"Break the Silence"* of BTS in the local theatre in 2020.

The study however suggests that it does not exemplify the para-social relationship between fans and local stars of Darjeeling town. It also does not explore the spread of local cultural products and establishing it in the mainstream Indian media to find its due recognition. There is gap in understanding the relationship between local cultural product and institutionalization of it in the mainstream Indian media in the existence of the transcultural phenomenon.

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