

Assessing the Threat and Vulnerability of Hallyu among Indonesian Generation Z

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Abstract

Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, has evolved into a global cultural phenomenon that shapes consumption patterns, identity formation, and lifestyle orientations across national boundaries. In Indonesia, the extensive exposure of Generation Z to Korean popular culture through digital platforms positions this cohort as a strategically significant audience within transnational cultural flows. This study examines the threat and vulnerability of Hallyu exposure among Indonesian Generation Z and examines its implications for cultural resilience in a rapidly globalizing cultural environment. Employing a qualitative descriptive analytical approach, the study draws on non-participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with institutional stakeholders, cultural actors, and youth communities, and analysis of official cultural documents. Data were interpreted using Prundkun's threat and vulnerability assessment framework and an intelligence-informed analytical perspective. The findings indicate a moderate threat level with a total threat coefficient of 13, driven primarily by high capability factors, particularly knowledge and resource mobilization supporting Hallyu dissemination. The vulnerability assessment yields a moderate vulnerability profile (coefficient score: 9), reflecting strong attractiveness, facilitated digital penetration, and cumulative cultural impact. The study argues that Hallyu constitutes an invisible cultural security challenge that does not manifest through coercion, but through gradual normalization and asymmetry in cultural influence. Strengthening cultural resilience through governance, literacy, and competitive local cultural ecosystems is therefore essential to ensure balanced cultural development without securitizing popular cultural consumption.

1. Introduction

The global rise of Hallyu has positioned South Korea as a major exporter of cultural products that circulate through music, television dramas, film, beauty, fashion, and lifestyle consumption. Beyond entertainment, these products increasingly operate as instruments of cultural diplomacy and soft power, shaping foreign audiences' perceptions and preferences while expanding the reach of Korea's creative economy (Jin, 2016; Lux, 2021). In contemporary cultural politics, this matters because popular culture is not only widely consumed but also capable of influencing norms, tastes, and everyday practices, particularly when amplified by digital media infrastructures (Storey, 2018; Strinati, 2004).

Indonesia stands among the countries with high levels of Korean cultural consumption, especially among youth. Survey-based reporting has suggested strong exposure to Korean entertainment and lifestyle products, while public digital traces also indicate intensive engagement with K-pop-related content and fandom discourse (Snapcart, 2022; The ASEAN Post, 2020). Previous accounts have further argued that K-pop and Korean dramas have become embedded in youth leisure patterns, influencing language practices,

fashion preferences, and mediated identities (Jeong et al., 2017; The Jakarta Post, 2020). Such patterns are relevant to Generation Z, a cohort whose social life is deeply intertwined with platform ecosystems and participatory media cultures.

While transnational pop culture can generate positive outcomes, including intercultural exchange and creative industry opportunities, it may also pose risks to cultural resilience when local cultural ecosystems face unequal competition and when identity formation becomes strongly oriented toward external cultural references (Rastati, 2022; Singh, 2022). Scholarship has long cautioned that popular culture may reshape cultural identities through commercialized and repetitive cultural forms, and can produce asymmetries when global flows overwhelm local production and cultural confidence (Strinati, 2004; Gómez García & Birkinbine, 2018). In youth contexts, concerns often emerge when cultural adoption becomes uncritical, displacing local values or narrowing cultural imagination into standardized global templates (Vyomakesisri et al., 2020; Yan, 2021).

Despite a growing body of studies on pop culture impacts, limited research has applied a structured threat framework to examine how cultural influence may translate into a measurable security-relevant concern, particularly from an intelligence-oriented perspective. Addressing this gap, the present study asks: how can the threat and vulnerability of Hallyu among Indonesian Generation Z be assessed in a structured manner, and what are the implications for national cultural stability? The study applies Prunckun's threat assessment logic to cultural influence, and then interprets the resulting risk profile through a cultural security lens.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hallyu as Transnational Popular Culture and Soft Power

Hallyu refers to the expanding global circulation of Korean cultural products that has developed through multiple waves, increasingly driven by digital media distribution and fandom-based participation (Jin, 2016). As a soft power strategy, cultural exports can enhance national image, expand cultural markets, and strengthen the attractiveness of a state's social model and lifestyle branding (Lux, 2021; Desideri, 2013). In Southeast Asia, the diffusion of Korean pop culture has often been facilitated by platform economies that enable rapid content circulation and community formation. Indonesian audiences, particularly youth, are frequently described as among the most enthusiastic consumers in the region (Jeong et al., 2017; Snapcart, 2022).

2.2. Pop Culture, Youth Identity, and Cultural Risk

Popular culture is commonly understood as widely consumed cultural production that shapes everyday meaning-making through music, television, fashion, and social media practices (Storey, 2018). For youth, pop culture becomes a space of identity experimentation and belonging, often mediated through fandom communities that provide recognition, symbolic capital, and social cohesion (Singh, 2022; Vyomakesisri et al., 2020). However, studies also suggest that unbalanced cultural inflows may generate concerns over cultural dependency, value shifts, and the marginalization of local cultural products (Istiqomah & Widiyanto, 2020; Strinati, 2004).

2.3. Threat and Vulnerability Assessment in Non-Traditional Domains

Threat assessment frameworks are typically applied to evaluate harmful intent and capability, but they can be adapted to non-traditional contexts where the mechanism of harm is indirect and incremental. Prunckun conceptualizes threat through intent and capability, operationalized through desire, expectation, knowledge, and resources, while vulnerability reflects conditions that enable a target to be affected through attractiveness, ease of influence, and impact (Prunckun, 2015). In cultural domains, the "harm" is rarely immediate; it often manifests as gradual shifts in preferences, values, identity orientation, and cultural market structures. Intelligence-informed analysis can therefore be used as an interpretive tool to understand how cultural influence may accumulate into strategic-level concerns, particularly when cultural resilience is treated as a component of national stability (Sukarno, 2014).

3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach to examine the diffusion of Hallyu and its influence on Indonesian Generation Z within contemporary cultural contexts. Primary data were collected through non-participatory observation and semi-structured interviews with individuals actively engaged in Hallyu-related activities as well as institutional and academic stakeholders selected through purposive sampling. Secondary data were drawn from relevant literature and institutional reports. Data analysis followed qualitative procedures of thematic interpretation and was structured using Prunckun's threat and vulnerability assessment framework, complemented by an intelligence-informed perspective to evaluate non-traditional cultural security implications under current conditions.

4. Results

The analysis of empirical data indicates that the influence of Hallyu among Indonesian Generation Z is neither incidental nor short lived, but systemic and sustained through digitally mediated cultural environments. Rather than operating merely as a form of entertainment consumption, Hallyu functions within an organized and well resourced transnational cultural structure that enables continuous exposure, normalization, and reinforcement of cultural preferences and lifestyle orientations. This section presents the findings through a structured discussion that examines the assessed threat profile of Hallyu, the vulnerability conditions shaping Generation Z's susceptibility, the cumulative cultural impacts on local cultural resilience, and the broader implications for cultural security.

4.1. Threat Profile of Hallyu as Transnational Pop Culture

The threat assessment indicates a moderate overall threat level, with a total threat coefficient of 13, derived from relatively low intent but high capability components. This profile suggests that Hallyu is not driven by explicit hostile objectives toward Indonesia, yet its structural capacity enables significant cultural influence over time.

From the intent dimension, the findings show that Hallyu is strategically deployed as a form of cultural soft power through state-supported and industry-linked Korean cultural institutions. The primary intent is to expand cultural appeal, strengthen diplomatic relations, and support the global expansion of Korea's creative economy. While this intent does not explicitly aim to undermine Indonesian cultural interests, it nonetheless reflects a deliberate effort to establish long-term cultural presence and influence among foreign youth audiences, including Indonesian Generation Z. In this sense, intent is understood not as malicious desire, but as a sustained drive to normalize Korean cultural standards within target societies.

The capability dimension constitutes the most significant source of threat. High levels of knowledge enable Korean cultural institutions to understand audience preferences, consumption habits, and platform dynamics within Indonesia, allowing for effective localization and adaptive dissemination strategies. Cultural products are systematically tailored to resonate with Indonesian youth through language accessibility, glocalised narratives, and community-based engagement. This knowledge-driven approach enhances the precision and persistence of cultural penetration.

Resources further amplify this capability. Strong institutional infrastructure, substantial state funding, and close coordination between government agencies and private cultural industries provide Korea with a durable competitive advantage. Large-scale cultural events, sustained content production, influencer mobilization, and platform partnerships enable Hallyu to maintain dominance in digital cultural spaces. As a result, even without adversarial intent, the imbalance of cultural resources creates asymmetrical conditions that can marginalize local cultural production and visibility.

4.2. Vulnerability of Indonesian Generation Z to Cultural Penetration

The vulnerability assessment yields a moderate vulnerability coefficient of 9, indicating that Indonesian Generation Z is susceptible to cultural influence due to structural and environmental conditions rather than individual weakness. Vulnerability emerges from the interaction between attractiveness, ease of penetration, and cumulative impact.

Attractiveness is high because Generation Z represents a large, digitally native population with strong engagement in global popular culture. Korean cultural products offer visually appealing aesthetics, emotionally resonant narratives, and aspirational lifestyle models that align closely with youth identity exploration. This appeal is reinforced by fandom cultures that provide social belonging, symbolic capital, and recognition within peer networks, making Hallyu not only consumable but socially rewarding.

Ease of penetration is facilitated by digital ecosystems characterized by unrestricted access, algorithmic amplification, and limited cultural regulation. Platform-based dissemination allows Hallyu content to circulate continuously without geographic or institutional barriers. At the same time, local cultural products often lack comparable promotional strategies, technological sophistication, or visibility within the same digital spaces. The absence of strong cultural safeguards or competitive domestic alternatives lowers resistance to sustained exposure.

The impact of Hallyu is primarily indirect and cumulative. Rather than producing immediate cultural disruption, its influence manifests through gradual shifts in preferences, consumption patterns, and lifestyle orientations. Over time, this may reduce engagement with local cultural expressions, weaken cultural confidence, and reinforce dependency on foreign cultural references. However, the impact is not unidirectional. The findings also acknowledge potential positive effects, such as increased creativity, openness to global collaboration, and learning opportunities within the creative economy. The critical issue lies in whether these benefits are balanced by adequate strategies to protect and promote domestic cultural resilience.

4.3. Cultural Threat as an Invisible Security Challenge

The combined threat and vulnerability profiles position Hallyu as an invisible cultural security challenge. Its influence operates below the threshold of conventional security concerns, lacking coercion or illegality, yet capable of producing long-term strategic effects. The threat does not originate from individual fans or cultural enjoyment, but from structural asymmetries in cultural production, distribution, and visibility. From an intelligence-oriented perspective, this form of threat is significant precisely because it is normalized and rarely perceived as problematic. Low awareness among both target populations and institutional stakeholders reduces the likelihood of early intervention. Consequently, cultural influence accumulates quietly, shaping identity narratives and cultural hierarchies without triggering immediate resistance. Recognizing this pattern is essential for developing proportionate and non-securitizing policy responses.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Hallyu's influence on Indonesian Generation Z constitutes a moderate cultural threat, driven primarily by high capability rather than hostile intent. The threat coefficient of 13 reflects strong institutional knowledge and extensive resources that enable sustained cultural dissemination and dominance in digital spaces. While Hallyu functions largely as soft power and creative-economic strategy, its structural advantages create conditions for cultural asymmetry that may gradually affect cultural resilience. These conditions indicate that cultural influence becomes security-relevant not through intent, but through sustained structural advantage and unequal cultural capacity.

The vulnerability assessment further indicates that Generation Z faces moderate susceptibility due to high exposure, platform-mediated diffusion, and limited protective mechanisms for local culture. Vulnerability arises not from a lack of agency among youth, but from environmental configurations that privilege globally dominant cultural products. The impact of Hallyu is therefore best understood as cumulative and long-term, with potential implications for identity orientation, cultural confidence, and domestic creative competitiveness.

Importantly, the findings do not support cultural alarmism or restrictive cultural securitization. Instead, they highlight the need for cultural resilience governance, emphasizing strategic investment in local creative industries, competitive cultural promotion, and critical cultural literacy among youth. By strengthening domestic cultural ecosystems while maintaining openness to global exchange, Indonesia can mitigate cultural security risks without undermining intercultural engagement. Such an approach positions

culture not as a vulnerability to be closed off, but as a strategic asset to be actively cultivated within an open and globally connected cultural landscape.

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