

Recebido em 23/10/2025 e aprovado em 17/12/2025

FROM BRAZIL WITH HALLYU: FEMALE EMPOWERMENT AND RADICAL MIGRATION¹

Ingyu Oh²

Haerin Shin³

Virgine Borges de Castilho Sacoman^{4*}

Abstract: This study ventures into a new realm of research, delving into the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) in Brazil in promoting transnational migration based on popular culture, specifically Hallyu. We are particularly interested in the potential of these SMIs to engage in socially impactful for-profit activities that could significantly influence female empowerment and self-esteem. Our research questions specifically focus on the role of Hallyu SMIs in Brazil in encouraging their followers to migrate to Korea and how they are fostering gender empowerment by building communities and networks among women. We will also explore how their new media role is shaping social subversion in Brazil among female and LGBTQ+ communities on the one hand and encouraging radical migration to Korea in search of the 'safest' haven for women on the other. Using grounded theory, we aim to replace the less relevant concepts of 'commercial endorsing' and 'social comparison' in Hallyu migration with 'radical female migration'. Our unique contribution to literature is to demonstrate how pop culture can catalyse underrepresented populations toward radical female migration.

Keywords: Hallyu. Social Media Influencers (SMIs). Female Empowerment.

DO BRASIL, COM HALLYU: EMPODERAMENTO FEMININO E MIGRAÇÃO RADICAL

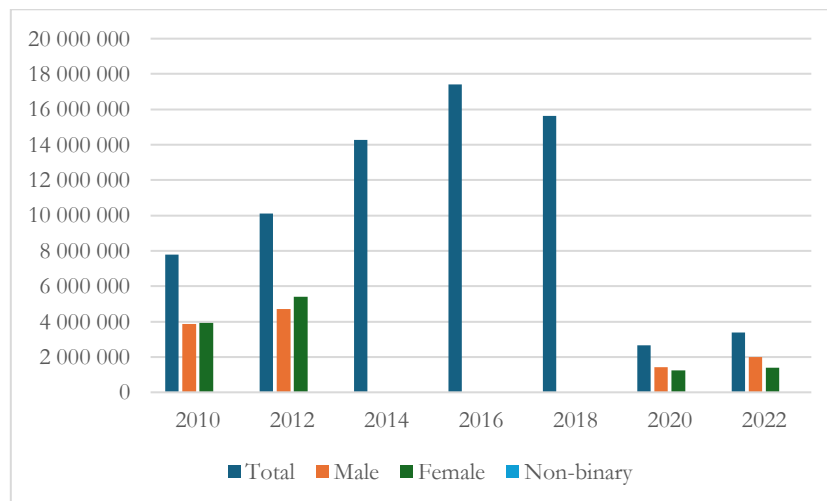
Resumo: Este estudo se aventura em um novo campo de pesquisa, investigando a influência dos influenciadores de mídia social (SMIs) no Brasil na promoção da migração transnacional baseada na cultura popular, especificamente na Hallyu. Estamos particularmente interessados no potencial desses influenciadores em desenvolver atividades comerciais com impacto social que possam influenciar significativamente o empoderamento e a autoestima feminina. Nossas perguntas de pesquisa concentram-se especificamente no papel dos SMIs da Hallyu no Brasil em incentivar seus seguidores a migrar para a Coreia e em como eles estão promovendo o empoderamento de gênero ao construir comunidades e redes entre mulheres. Também exploraremos como o novo papel desses influenciadores nas mídias digitais está moldando formas de subversão social no Brasil entre mulheres e comunidades LGBTQ+, ao mesmo tempo em que estimula uma migração radical para a Coreia em busca de um "refúgio" mais seguro para as mulheres. Utilizando a teoria fundamentada (*grounded theory*), buscamos substituir os conceitos menos relevantes de "endosso comercial" e "comparação social" na migração relacionada à Hallyu pelo conceito de "migração feminina radical". Nossa contribuição única para a literatura é demonstrar como a cultura pop pode catalisar populações sub-representadas rumo à migração feminina radical.

Palavras-chave: Hallyu. Influenciadores de Mídia Social (SMIs). Empoderamento Feminino.

Introduction

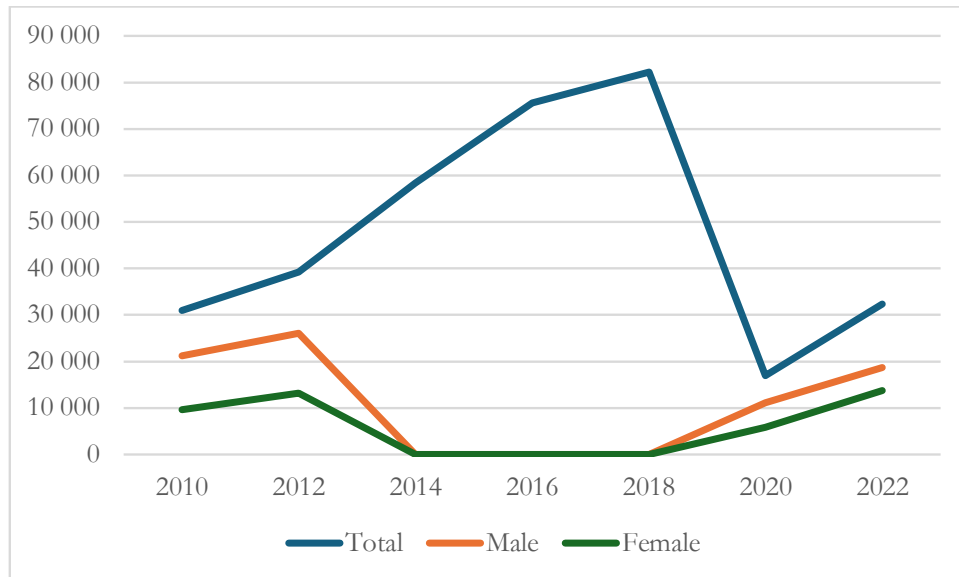
The trend of fan migrations to South Korea, particularly among female and LGBTQ+ fans of Hallyu (i.e., the Korean popular culture in the form of TV drama series and pop music called 'K-pop', which is globally rife among women), has experienced a significant upsurge in the past two decades (see Fig. 1). Fan migrations comprise short-term visits, repeated tours, long-term stays, study abroad programmes, marriage migrations, job migrations, immigration and others. What is remarkable is the steady increase of female and non-binary migrants from South America to Korea since the 2010s until the outbreak of the Covid 19 (see Fig. 2). In fact, the number of female migrants from South America who came to Korea for purposes of overseas study and marriage is surpassing that of their male counterparts (see Fig. 3) reflecting the gender structure of Hallyu fans who are predominantly women or LGBTQ+ (see Hwang, Seol and Oh's, no prelo). This new phenomenon warrants meticulous examination since South America is not relatively affluent or close to Korea. Therefore, our first research question is whether pop culture truly influences women's decision to migrate to the globalised and transnational world, a finding that could significantly impact the fields of cultural studies, gender studies, and migration studies.

Figure 1 - Migrants to Korea from All over the World (Short-term and long-term)



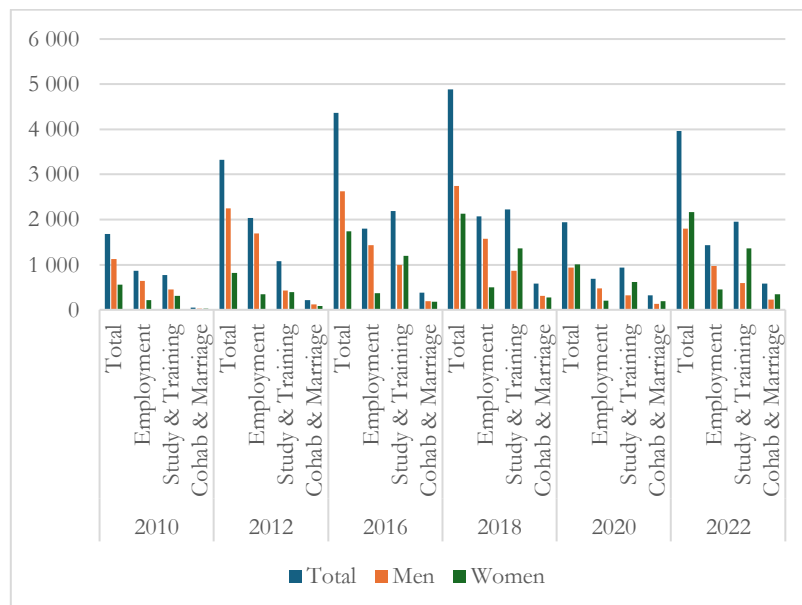
Source: Ministry of Justice, Korea (2024).

Figure 2 - Migrants from South America (Short-term & Long-term)



Source: Ministry of Justice, Korea (2024).

Figure 3 - South American Migrants by Long-term Visa Statuses



Source: Ministry of Justice, Korea (2024).

Furthermore, in the Korean Hallyu scene, the role and influence of Hallyu Social Media Influencers (SMIs) are alarming and palpable. In some Hallyu-bashing articles, for example, researchers pointed their fingers at these SMIs for egregiously promoting the sale of K-pop music albums, CDs and other fan

goods among their followers to manipulate music chart rankings and boost revenues for the idols (Choi 2020; Abidin 2021). However, few other than our current study have discussed the potential of SMIs in encouraging female Hallyu fans to migrate to Korea.

In many previous studies, SMIs have also been assailed for their alleged role of commercial endorsements that would lead to all sorts of social malaises, including 'social loafing', 'social comparison' and 'body esteem' (Chae 2017; Chapman; Whitlock 2019; Seekis et al. 2020; Lee et al. 2022; Pedalino; Camerini 2022). However, are these SMIs all similar, even in pop culture communities? Are the SMIs for the Taylor Swift fan community deliberately carrying out commercial endorsements only in the name of selfishness and profits? Is it the same story in the K-pop community as well? While these are our second research question, we want to develop a new identity for the SMIs in the Hallyu community. What we deem essential but has often been set aside by the Hallyu critiques was the SMI's role in encouraging followers' gender empowerment and self-esteem through building Hallyu communities and social networks among women. In doing so, these SMIs also show their efforts to alleviate the negative aspects of social loafing, social comparison and body esteem.

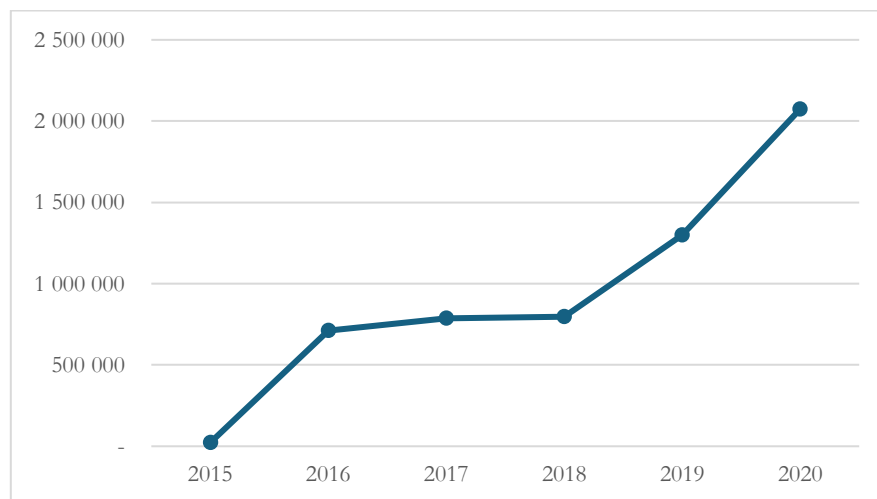
How can SMIs replace the social ailments associated with social media influencing with female empowerment and radical migration to Korea? To answer our final question, we want to assess the value of 'cultural branding' in explaining the phenomenon of Hallyu migration by female K-pop and K-drama fans. Although some previous studies have demonstrated the usefulness of cultural branding in explaining female empowerment and radical empathy among Hallyu fans (Oh; Kim 2023), we want to delve further into the possibility of expanding the identity of SMIs in the movement toward radical migration by female Hallyu fans.

1. Why Brazil?

Among South American Hallyu fans, Brazil represents the most extensive territory with a long history of political and migratory conflicts epitomised by an

image of 'strong' women amid persisting gender inequality, even though racism has already been diluted in most parts of social interludes in Brazilian society due to interracial amalgamation (Holanda 1995; Priore 2004). Not only in South America, where Brazilian women led the Southern Cone in various female social, political and economic struggles but in Korea as well, Brazil and its 'strong' women would never be imagined to envy Korean women for their female happiness in the 'safest' space for women. However, why do Brazilian women want to migrate to Korea badly after falling in love with Hallyu? In fact, as Fig. 4 shows, the number of Brazilian Hallyu fans has exponentially grown between 2016 and 2020 until the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 4 - Brazilian Hallyu Fans



Source: Korea Foundation (2015-2021).

Against this backdrop, what we assume to be a universal female fantasy about Korea and a ubiquitous female desire to migrate to the East Asian country, which to many sounds like a nightmare place for women, can be sharply highlighted by using the case of Brazil. We assume that female universalism is the fundamental basis of female infatuation with Hallyu as long as most women in the world, regardless of their ethnic, racial, economic and political backgrounds, share the fundamental female character of 'gendered melancholia' (see *inter alia* Oh; Kim 2023; Oh, Kim; Rowley 2023; Oh, Jang; Lim 2023). Like Brazil, a country full of 'strong' women seems to defy gendered

melancholia. However, a close look at it would reveal that these tough women are also victims of sexism and, thus, gendered melancholia.

2. Hallyu Social Media Influencers: A New Category in Migration Studies

Before sketching the theoretical backdrop surrounding Hallyu migration to Korea, we want to define Hallyu SMLs and explain why they are essential in current migration studies in Korean and global contexts. Briefly, Hallyu has the following characteristics: (1) K-pop and K-drama are the two most successful genres of Hallyu; (2) K-pop and K-dramas share the same fan base despite being two widely different genres, even as many K-pop singers are also K-drama actors; (3) Hallyu is not a regional affair, as it is one of the most successful pop culture genres in the world at the moment; (4) Hallyu's success is dependent on many factors, although its alternative message to male domination in most human societies could be its most crucial distinctive feature (Oh, Jang; Lim 2023; Oh; Kim 2023; Oh, Kim; Rowley 2023); and most importantly, therefore, (5) Hallyu fans are predominantly women of all ages, regardless of their racial, ethnic, national, and economic differences (Table 1).

Table 1 - Hallyu Fandom Census

	Country	Age	Gender
ARMY (n=562,280)	100+	Under 18 (30.30%)	Male (1.35%)
		18-29 (53.63%)	Female (96.23%)
		30-39 (9.31%)	Non-binary (2.42%)
		40-49 (4.49%)	
		50-59 (1.83%)	
		Over 60 (0.15%)	
KOR gov't sample (n=12,663)	111	n.a.	Male (0.58%)
			Female (94.2%)

Source: BTS ARMY CENSUS (2023); Korea Tourism Organization (2019).

In addition to this female fandom with a visible LGBTQ+ presence, these Hallyu fans have distinguished themselves from mere pop culture consumers by proactively participating in the fan activities of learning the Korean language and culture and participating in Hallyu tours to Korea while meticulously taking part in their local fan activities in their home countries, such as joining fan clubs, attending fan meetings, creating cover dance videos, providing free translation services for K-dramas, frequenting Korean shops and restaurants in Koreatowns and many others (Kim et al. 2009; Hu 2010; Oh 2011; Kim et al. 2013; Lyan; Levkowitz 2015; Kim 2018; King-O'Riain 2021).

Fan tourism or Hallyu pilgrimage as part of female universalism has served as a means of building physical and virtual camaraderie among female Hallyu fans all over the world since its onset by the Japanese middle-aged women in

the early 2000s, an aftermath of the so-called 'Yon-sama' sensation (Jung 2009; Oh 2011). Intended to be short-term sojourns to Korea to visit the location sites of the TV drama, these fan tours quickly developed into a learning experience of Korean lifestyle, language and history, which helped them overcome the national animosity between Japan and Korea (Oh 2009). Japanese female fans soon discovered the need to stay longer by frequently organising group tours or applying for long-term study abroad admissions at major universities in Korea. Finally, the rise of Hallyu pilgrimage tours and study abroad students to Korea was doubtlessly accompanied by the increasing tendency of marriage between migrant women and Korean men (see Oh; Seol; Hwang's paper, 2026).

Although some of the Hallyu bashers tend to argue that SMIs are there to manipulate music chart rankings, endorse products for sale, brainwash fans and commit other egregious acts (Choi 2020; Abidin 2021), they rarely highlight the above learning activities and group migratory behaviours by fans. As we can see, all of the proactive fandom behaviours we have described are relevant to SMI activities. Although they indeed do sell products and encourage album and single music sales among their followers, it is also undeniable that they promote learning, intercultural experiences, pop culture cosmopolitanism and, most importantly, migration. In this sense, SMIs are new players in the migration process, so we need to study them in depth.

Statistics and previous studies indicate that Hallyu fandom is predominantly feminine and LGBTQ+. It has a proactive fandom ideology that preaches fans to learn the Korean language and culture and visit or live in Korea as part of their long-term commitment to the Hallyu ideals held and shared firmly among female Hallyu fans. These facts differentiate them from passive fans *qua* consumers who do not question why they like Korean pop culture and, therefore, why they must study the Korean language and culture, not to mention why they prefer to live in Korea, an imaginary homeland, over their real one. If the role of SMIs in this proactive fandom or an 'imaginary' passive fandom is critical, we need to spell out the nuts and bolts of their thoughts, activities and impacts on the female fans.

Having identified our research questions, explained the significance of our single country case, and sketched the new role played by SMLs in migration, we present a short literature review that serves as the theoretical stepping stone for our study. This is followed by a grounded theory (GT) analysis of our in-depth interview data with Brazilian Hallyu SMLs. We also provide our theoretical interpretation of the findings.

3. Pop Culture and Migration: Significance of Study

The use of GT requires caution when dealing with the extant theory on the research topic because the methodology is inductive and aims to arrive at a new theory at the end of the inductive enquiry. However, some GT scholars later realised the importance of being guided by previous theoretical studies to avoid being left alone barefoot in fieldwork – viz. constructivist GT (Charmaz 2006). Furthermore, we must check the theoretical significance of our topic before engaging in any inductive enquiry using qualitative data. In this paper, we use theoretical reviews to check the importance of our research questions and to get guidance on constructing semi-structured interview questions and conducting the theoretical coding process.

Recent debates on pop culture and migration provide a foundational context for this investigation. Diana Yeh (2014) argues that pop culture acts as a re-migration determinant for second and later-generation children, suggesting that cultural affiliations formed through media consumption can drive migratory movements. Similarly, Phina Werbner (2004, 2013) posits that pop culture is an economic means for postcolonial populations to migrate into the first world, thereby softening the edges of diasporic nationalism. Henry Jenkins (forthcoming) also introduces the concept of 'imaginary homelands', which includes transculturation, cultural migration, fan pilgrimage and transcultural fandom. In the context of Hallyu, Korea as an imaginary homeland symbolises both a safe and enjoyable space for its female fans, driving them to migrate to the East Asian country.

However, few studies shed light on the relationship between SMLs and migration. What is visible these days is how hatred against migrants and the subsequent right-wing realignment in Europe against immigration, in general, is brewed up heatedly in social media, where SMLs generate and propagate racist ideologies as a dominant mode of thinking for European white people (Suuronen et al. 2022; Maneri et al. 2023). On the other hand, SMLs in developing economies that rely on outward migration for work overseas and their remittance back home utilise SMLs to encourage migration to Europe (Okunade; Bakare 2020; Jayadeva 2024). These SMLs are politically or economically charged and are not directly relevant to our question of how pop culture motivates the migration of people, especially women and other marginalised populations.

Insights on SMLs' role in cyberspace can be gleaned from previous studies focusing on the cultural messages these influencers generate and propagate to cultivate their cultural community. For example, although SMLs act as commercial endorsers openly, they create a new cultural message for the followers, such as the widely impactful discourses of 'body esteem' and 'social comparison' (Chae 2017, 2018; Seekis et al. 2020; Pedalino; and Camerini 2022). These two are opposite sets of discourse that commodify a person's physical body in cyberspace in tandem with actual commodities SMLs want to endorse and sell (i.e. body esteem), whereas those who failed to be compared with those successful SMLs who have already achieved their self-esteem and had to be dropped out of this competitive arena of physical fitness and beauty (i.e. social comparison and its losers). Exclusion and alienation occur not because one's body is commodified but because it failed to be commercialised. Evidence of social inclusion through body esteem is the fact that it fosters self-esteem, facilitates social connections among peers and weak ties and creates fun and happy experiences for their followers (Chae, 2018; Chapman; Whitlock 2019). Finally, those who were alienated from this social media or those who find themselves addicted to social media broadcasting and fail to empower themselves to participate in normal livelihoods are the final group of victims called 'social loafers'. The infamous labels of 'otaku' or

'hikikomori' may qualify as social loafers, clearly indicating the unequal and exploitative relationships apparent in social media (Chae 2017, 2018; Seekis et al. 2020; Pedalino, Camerini 2022).

Again, these studies share more similarities than differences from the Hallyu-bashing articles that accuse Hallyu SMIs of chart manipulations. Instead of focusing on the nature of new identity politics among female Hallyu fans that necessitate a novel type of cultural cosmopolitanism reserved for women vis-à-vis white males, they assail the entire social media-based fandom as corrupt and passive. Against this backdrop, Douglas Holt (2004) envisages a different cyberspace where female empowerment through SMIs can be possible. According to his cultural branding theory, SMIs can serve as promoters of social subversion among women, offering a new performing myth that challenges mainstream ideologies such as sexism and male domination. This subversive potential positions SMIs as critical agents in the cultural branding of Korea, making it an attractive and empowering destination for female and LGBTQ+ fans seeking personal and social transformation.

As our quick review of the extant studies reveals, our current study is theoretically significant because it has the potential to bridge the chasm that previous studies have left unfilled. The intersection of pop culture and migration, along with the cultural branding activities of social media influencers, represents an affluent area of academic inquiry. These phenomena highlight the dynamic and complex ways cultural consumption and digital media influence contemporary migration patterns and social identities. By understanding these processes, which the SMIs impact in their everyday relationships with their followers, scholars can better appreciate the evolving landscape of global cultural interactions and the role of digital platforms in shaping modern migratory experiences and cultural affiliations. Through our study, we seek to understand how these influencers promote cultural narratives encouraging migration and empowerment among their followers while realising their social potential as influencers and profit generators. By examining the role of Hallyu SMIs in Brazil, we aim to provide a comprehensive

understanding of the motivations behind fan migrations and the broader implications of pop culture in contemporary migration studies.

4. Grounded Theory Method

This research employs grounded theory as the primary methodological framework, beginning with existing theories and constructing codes based on relevant research findings. Grounded theory, as conceptualised by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), allows for a systematic generation of theory from data, which is particularly useful in exploring complex social phenomena such as the influence of Hallyu social media influencers (SMIs) on migration patterns. To ensure the robustness of our findings, we utilise theoretical sampling. This technique involves selecting groups for comparison based on theoretical criteria rather than random sampling. Specifically, we focus on Hallyu SMIs in Brazil to draw implications for female fan migration to Korea. This targeted approach allows us to delve deeply into Brazilian Hallyu influencers' specific ideologies and thoughts regarding pop culture and migration. During our interviews, we are particularly interested in identifying core concepts in the highest order among visible and often articulated discourse patterns.

Based on the literature review and theoretical analysis presented in the previous sections, our goal of the GT method is to eliminate less relevant concepts such as 'commercial endorsing', 'social comparison', 'body esteem' and 'social loafing'. Furthermore, we also want to eliminate the negative role of SMIs in promoting semi-forced music album sales to jack up the music chart rankings. Instead, we use grounded theory to replace these with the core concept of 'radical female migration'. By doing so, we shift the focus from more superficial aspects of influencer activities to a deeper understanding of their role in promoting significant life changes among their followers.

Our research adopts a directed content analysis approach, as outlined by Kathy Charmaz (2006) and further developed by Chara Makri and Andy Neely (2021). This method involves starting from existing theories and constructing codes that align with the research findings. The process begins

with a theoretical framework, from which codes are derived and then applied to the data. This iterative process ensures that the codes are grounded in theory and reflect the data. The potential for multiple comparisons in this study is infinite, necessitating a careful selection of groups based on theoretical criteria. This approach allows us to make meaningful comparisons and draw robust conclusions about the phenomena under study. By focusing on Hallyu SMIs in Brazil, we can analyse their specific ideologies and thoughts about pop culture and migration as an alternative performing myth in their cultural branding and provide a nuanced understanding of their influence.

Ultimately, we intend to draw theoretical implications regarding the role of Hallyu SMIs in facilitating female fan migration to Korea. We contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between digital media, pop culture, and migration by examining how these influencers promote radical migration. This research highlights the significant role of SMIs in shaping migration patterns and underscores the importance of cultural branding and community building in contemporary migratory experiences.

5. Theoretical Sampling

In this study, we used the theoretical sampling method to select the interviewees, and our focused group of sampling were the highly popular Hallyu SMIs from Brazil (for this method, see Glaser 2004; Qureshi; Ünlü 2020). They were selected mainly for the sheer number of followers, the focus of their discourse, Hallyu, and the use of Portuguese in their media broadcasting. Theoretically, however, they also satisfied the basic requirements of social media influencers in that they all relied heavily on social media for message creation and dissemination and enjoyed a high number of faithful followers who voluntarily wanted to receive influence for their opinions, decisions and actions. Finally, they are all interactively involved in sharing information and knowledge and maintaining discourse about Hallyu. The potential for multiple comparisons in this study is vast, necessitating a strategic approach to selecting groups based on theoretical criteria. Given the infinite possibilities for

comparison, it is crucial to establish clear guidelines to ensure that the selected groups are relevant and provide meaningful insights into the research questions. By examining this particular cohort, we aim to understand how Hallyu SMIs influence their followers, particularly in promoting migration to Korea.

Theoretical sampling allows us to supplement our research with the constant comparative method, which ensures that incidents are compared to other incidents to establish underlying uniformity and varying conditions. The comparison of 20 SMIs from Brazil with similar contextual backgrounds (e.g. Brazilian culture, Portuguese, similar social institutions, political and economic conditions, etc.), which we designed in this study, fulfilled the constant comparative requirements. The complete list of our sample in this study is presented in Table 2. As Table 2 shows, we conducted structured interviews with 20 participants, primarily women, from various cities in Brazil between July 10th and September 8th.

Table 2 - The List of Interviewees

	Name	Age	Gender	Race	Place
1	Maya	23	W	White	Brasília - DF
2	Anna	25	W	White	São Paulo
3	Samuel	23	M	Mixed	São Paulo
4	Amanda	30	W	White	São Paulo
5	Priscila	30	W	Asian	Minas Gerais
6	Carol	36	W	White	São Paulo
7	Georgia	27	W	Black	Rio Grande do Sul
8	Juliana	36	W	White	Rio Grande do Sul
9	Bruna	38	W	White	Paraíba
10	Luiza	26	W	Asian	Brasília - DF
11	Lais	34	W	Mixed	Maranhão
12	Lukas	21	M	Black	São Paulo
13	Isadora	24	W	White	Goiás
14	Thais	28	W	Asian	São Paulo
15	Luke	17	M	Mixed	São Paulo
16	Larissa	27	W	Black	São Paulo
17	Camila	34	W	White	Rio Grande do Sul
18	Guilherme	30	M	Mixed	Rio de Janeiro
19	Jaqueline	44	W	Mixed	Maranhão
20	Yudin	21	W	Asian	Bahia

Source: Author's own elaboration, based on interview data collected by Virgine Borges (2023).

6. Theoretical Coding

In their seminal work, Melanie Birks and Jane Mills (2015, p. 181) describe 'the use of advanced abstractions to provide a framework for enhancing the explanatory power of a grounded theory'. This study leverages such advanced abstractions derived from competing theories to develop a robust theoretical framework for understanding the role of Hallyu social media influencers (SMIs) in female fan migration to Korea.

Several concepts from competing theories are considered to refine and advance the theoretical framework. Firstly, the notion of SMIs as commodity endorsers, grounded in marketing theories, is deemed less relevant and thus will be eliminated from the core concept candidates. This marketing view of SMIs focuses primarily on the commercial aspect of influencers, which does not fully capture their broader socio-cultural impact on their followers.

Secondly, sociological theories that position SMIs as promoters of social loafing, social comparison and body esteem will also be eliminated from the core concept group. While these aspects are significant in understanding the broader influence of SMIs, they do not directly address the migration phenomena under study, particularly why pop culture from a post- or decolonial society like Korea motivates female fans worldwide who want to migrate to the East Asian country. Suppose all these female Hallyu fans are brainwashed by SMIs in each country in the world. In that case, the whole theoretical contour becomes impossible to defend unless one accepts a global conspiracy theory that allows the Korean government to be a supranational entity that brainwashes SMIs in each country, who then lobotomise their followers.

Thirdly, by elevating cultural branding to a potential core concept group, we will advance and corroborate the theory of cultural branding. This theory emphasises the role of influencers in creating and promoting cultural symbols and narratives that resonate deeply with their followers. It provides a critical lens through which to examine how Hallyu SMIs foster a sense of cultural belonging among their female followers, who commonly subscribe to the

proactive consumption of Hallyu as their primary pop culture. At the instruction and encouragement of the SMIs, these women will embark on a journey that would identify them as universal women who suffer from gendered melancholia and terminate their journey in Korea, a country they newly discover as a safe haven for women.

Finally, the gender divide in pop culture, as explored through cultural and gender theories, will be advanced and refined. These theories offer insights into how gender dynamics shape the consumption and production of pop culture, highlighting the unique experiences and motivations of female Hallyu fans in Brazil and the rest of the world. At the heart of this study is the concept of 'radical female migration', which will emerge as our core concept in this study. The new core concept will encapsulate the transformative journey of female fans who, influenced by Hallyu SMIs, migrate to Korea to pursue cultural, social and personal empowerment. The study will demonstrate how 'radical female migration' sheds light on the intricate interplay between digital influence, cultural identity and migration.

To achieve this study's goals, a questionnaire with clear and comprehensive conceptual criteria must be constructed (see Table 3). The questionnaire was drawn from five conceptual criteria: (1) cultural icons and iconic brands, (2) performing myths, (3) identity, (4) contradictions in society and (5) migration. The first, the second and the third criteria derived from cultural branding theory, whereas the third criterion came from gender theory. The fifth criterion is the dependent variable.

Cultural icons and iconic brands specifically investigate the degree of one's understanding of Hallyu among the sample SMIs from Brazil. According to cultural branding theory, icons and iconic brands transcend their product categories and become deeply woven into the cultural fabric of society. They achieve this by tapping into powerful cultural myths and narratives that resonate with people's desires, anxieties and ideological tensions (Holt 2004). This means that performing myths must be present in all iconic brands, such as Hallyu and the goods and services that come with it. One important performing myth of Hallyu as an iconic brand is its female universalism (Oh; Jang; Lim 2023).

To understand Hallyu's performing myth, a Hallyu SMI must understand contradictions in their society, such as sexism and gender discrimination, which are deeply rooted in each society. The criterion of 'identity' asks each SMI whether they realise their followers' gender composition. Many scholars who have just begun their investigation of Hallyu in their society often do not realise the femininity of Hallyu fandom. Without realising this, SMIs cannot discover social contradictions in their society. Finally, migration asks if SMIs are genuinely interested in migrating to Korea, unlike many deceptive marketing tactics that intend to trick customers.

7. Conditional Relationship Guide

Our interviews with the 20 Brazilian SMIs summarised below provided sufficient ethnographic data that enabled theoretical saturation, which indicates that all the conceptual categories we have selected for this study based on the extant theoretical debates have exhausted their need for further investigation because gathering more data would shed no additional light on the properties of each theoretical category. This also means our theoretical sampling fulfilled its initial purposes (Charmaz 2006). With the interview results, we proceeded with theoretical coding processes to find out the core concept of our research question (for theoretical coding, see Glaser 1978) – why do Hallyu SMIs in Brazil, and probably elsewhere, encourage their followers to migrate to Korea against all odds?

Table 3 - Questionnaire Constructs

Conceptual Criteria	Question Items	Follow-up Questions
Cultural Icons & Iconic Brands	1) What is K-pop (or Hallyu) to you?	1) When you think of Hallyu, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?
	2) Do you think K-pop (Hallyu) is a cultural icon? If so, what does it symbolise?	2) What makes you think your answer is the most important image of Hallyu?
	3) Do you think K-pop (Hallyu) is an important cultural brand? If so, what do you think it sells to the public in Brazil (mostly women)?	3) Which of the following do you think is the iconic image of Hallyu: girl group, girlish boy group, dance, music, food, cosmetics, fashion, drama actors who are women?
	4) By consuming K-pop (Hallyu), what kind of image/idea do you have about it and Korea in general?	4) What makes you think your choice is correct?
	5) By consuming K-pop (Hallyu), what other pop culture genres do you like and consume?	
	6) By consuming K-pop (Hallyu), what other products from Korea do you like and consume?	
Performing myths	1) As a K-pop (Hallyu) influencer, what are you trying to do to help your followers?	1) What is the most important message you get from K-drama and K-pop?
	2) As a K-pop (Hallyu) influencer, what do you think is the most important aspect of K-pop (Hallyu) for your followers?	2) What makes you think so? Do you convey your ideas about this to your followers?
	3) Do you think K-pop (Hallyu) sends messages different from other pop culture genres, such as Anglo-American, Latin, or Brazilian pop? If so, what makes K-pop (Hallyu) different from them? Do you want to emphasise these differences to your followers?	3) Which of the following is the prominent message you get from Hallyu: (1) strong women, (2) girlish boys who help strong women, (3) female fandom that allows women to enjoy Hallyu, (4) Asian/Korean women who are strong and (5) men who are soft and kind?
	4) Why did you become a K-pop (Hallyu) influencer? Explain to us the motivation behind your choice to become an influencer.	
	5) Can K-pop (Hallyu) change your and your followers' lives? If so, why? What is the most important message that you think is helping your life? Do your followers also believe in this?	
Contradictions in society	1) What are some important social problems you face in Brazil?	1) Have you ever experienced gender or sex discrimination in your society?
	2) Do you think gender discrimination or any other forms of discrimination against women are one of the major social contradictions in Brazil?	2) Do you think it is a serious social problem in your society?
	3) Do you think K-pop (Hallyu) addresses the gender issue for you and your followers?	
	4) What are some of the most memorable examples that would support your belief that K-pop (Hallyu) addresses the gender issue?	
	5) What other social issues do you think K-pop (Hallyu) is addressing? Give me examples.	
	6) In your social media broadcasting, do you emphasise these social issues for your followers? Why do you think mentioning these social issues is important in your influencing career?	
Identity	1) What kind of people are your main followers who are loyal to you?	1) Do you think Hallyu is a good bonding medium for you and your followers?
	2) Why do you think they're loyal to you?	2) What makes you think so?
	3) Do you want more diverse followers, not just women who love K-pop (Hallyu)? Why not?	3) Can you give examples?
	4) What's a common characteristic between you and your followers? What is the most important bonding mechanism between you and your followers?	
	5) What do you do to buttress the bond between you and your followers besides social media programs?	
	6) Do you think your bond with your followers is getting stronger due to K-pop (Hallyu)? What's the reason for the answer?	
	7) What else do you want to do to enhance the bond between you and your followers? Are you going to be a more ardent fan of K-pop (Hallyu) because it helps build bonding between you and your followers?	
Migration	1) Do you or your followers want to visit Korea to witness and experience K-pop (Hallyu) personally? Does this help buttress your identity as a K-pop (Hallyu) fan?	1) Have you become more interested in visiting or living in Korea after becoming a Hallyu fan?
		2) Can you explain the process of this happening to your life?
		3) Is your desire to travel to Korea becoming stronger every day?

The first important finding of our ethnographic investigation can be summarised by a conditional Relationship Guide (CRG). This table logically connects all these germane concepts according to the three main features of 'conditions', 'actions-interactions' and 'consequences or outcomes' (Corbin; Strauss 2015). According to GT theorists, our CRG can logically connect

previously unconnected concepts in the following way (see also Scott 2004, p. 204; Scott; Howell 2008):

- What is [Hallyu SMI, radical female migration]? (Using a participant's words helps avoid bias)
- When does [Hallyu SMI, radical female migration] occur? (Using 'during . . .' helps form the answer)
- Where does [Hallyu SMI, radical female migration] occur? (Using 'in . . .' helps form the answer)
- Why does [Hallyu SMI, radical female migration] occur? (Using 'because . . .' helps form the answer)
- How does [Hallyu SMI, radical female migration] occur? (Using 'by . . .' helps form the answer)
- With what consequence does [Hallyu SMI, radical female migration] occur, or is [Hallyu SMI, radical female migration] understood?

Each category in our CRG Table (Table 4 below) was derived from the literature on the topic, which we explored to develop the questionnaire, as shown in the previous section. Therefore, the categories in CRG are the same as the conceptual categories. As Table 4 indicates, all the Hallyu SMIs we interviewed had a semi-consensual perception of the logical relationship between the concepts from the category in the far-left column and their consequence in the far right. What counts as the most significant from the CRG Table is the fact that SMIs had a clear, logical explanation for (1) why they think Hallyu provides them with an alternative performing myth to the dominant ideology in Brazil and (2) why they pursue migration to Korea as a consequence.

The interviewees' most frequent responses regarding their view of Hallyu as a cultural icon or iconic brand (i.e., the alternative myth in which the brand is anchored) were: 'Hallyu motivated me', 'Hallyu changed my life', 'Hallyu empowered me', 'I became interested in learning and succeeding in my life' (Fonte: Dados de entrevistas coletados por Virgine Borges em 2023), and similar comments. Likewise, these SMIs knew very well about the social contradictions

in Brazil in the form of sexism, racism, the hypersexualisation of women, socioeconomic problems, suicides and others. At the same time, they admitted to realising all these problems when they visited Korea, a country that seemed free from such social problems they encounter daily in Brazil. While these unhappy experiences made them feel 'unsafe', 'angry', 'powerless' and 'depressed', their new encounter with Korea assured them of a sense of 'safety' for women and LGBTQ+ identifiers.

When they noticed that their depression disappeared miraculously by exposing them to Hallyu on the one hand but more miraculously by visiting Korea on the other, they concluded that Korea was a new migration destination for them as it represents 'space for fun' (vis-à-vis depression in Brazil), 'space for trust', 'a safe place' for women, and all other positive connotations. They then meticulously search for ways to migrate to, not simply visit, Korea through study abroad programs, marriages and employment. It is also noticeable that they invest substantial efforts in learning the Korean language and culture to realise their migration dream to a new imaginary homeland. It is clear from Table 4, therefore, that they fully understood their gender divide experience in the Hallyu fandom and constructed their migration to Korea as the 'fulfilment' of their dream, even though that required gender empowerment with other Hallyu fans who were primarily female and LGBTQ+ (i.e. gender divide).

Table 4 - Results 1: Conditional Relationship Guide

Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequences
Cultural icons & Iconic brands	Korean culture; K-drama; K-pop	Since teenager; during university	Mostly in Brazil; visit to Korea	Collaboration with Japanese culture; hybridity; anime	My idols; BTS; androgyny; gentle boys; pure; youth; beauty; skin care; food; fashion; soft power	Motivation; changed my life
Performing myths	Messages of K-pop	When listening to K-pop; watching K-drama	On streaming OTT	Happy, happiness	It raises self-esteem; makes me realise my dream; and inspires me; it's a great self-help method	Empowerment; learning knowledge; success
Contradictions in society	Sexism, racism, hypersexualisation of women, socioeconomic problems, suicides	When living in Brazil; visiting Korea; visiting foreign countries	Brazil; Korea; and some other countries	Unsafe, angry, powerless, depressed	Frequently observing in Brazil	Became a Hallyu fan; a strong desire to migrate to Korea
Identity	Female; women; gay foreigner; artists for feminism	During fandom	Fandom spaces, physical or virtual	Contradictions in society	Skin care; food; fashion; share information; community; connection; bonding; social media; empathy	It saves me from depression
Migration	Visit to Korea; Hallyu pilgrimage; study in Korea; living in Korea	During fandom	Seoul, Busan, Han river	Curiosities; space for fun; space for trust; safe place; soft power; branding power	Exploring possible ways to realise our migration dreams; marrying a Korean man	Strong women; knowledge; success

Now that our CRG Table has satisfactorily contextualised the logical connectedness among the categories and concepts, our next task is to find the core concept among all categories.

8. Reflective Coding Matrix

Based on the CRG Table we have constructed above, which has supported our understanding that Hallyu SMLs are not simple commodity endorsers or music chart manipulators but are deeply involved in the gender divide and social contradiction experienced in Brazil (and for that matter, any country different SMLs belong to). Their conscious commitment to liberating themselves and their followers from gendered melancholia by first proactively consuming Hallyu and later migrating to Korea, a safe haven for women, became the core meaning of their SML activities. RCM can analyse this process to find the core activity.

Whereas the purpose of CRG was to carry out the theoretical coding procedure, which involves 'condition', 'actions-interactions' and 'consequences or outcome' (Corbin; Strauss 2015), which combines both the axial and selective coding procedures, RCM intends to integrate the emerging relationships between the elaborated concepts into an overarching framework with one core category (Glaser 1978; Corbin; Strauss 2015; Scott; Howell 2008). When RCM successfully specifies the core category, we will know the central phenomenon of our research and can finally answer our research question.

In constructing our RCM, we borrow action-interactions (processes), conditions (dimensions and situational and environmental factors) and consequences from the CRG Table. If we start from the consequences, we can reversely trace the processes, dimensions and factors from the process outcomes. Therefore, the consequences selected in our RCM are: 'Hallyu motivation', 'Hallyu changed my life', 'empowerment', 'Hallyu saves me from depression', 'strong women', 'desiring to obtain new knowledge', 'imagining success', and a strong desire to migrate to Korea'. On the other hand, the processes of these outcomes are: 'sharing information', 'connection', 'social media', 'female bonding', 'empathy', 'raising self-esteem', 'realising my dream', 'inspiring me', 'helping myself', 'reinforcing performing myths through interactions with female fans', 'reinforcing curiosities', 'conceiving Korea as a space for fun', 'trust and safety' and 'idealising a Korean man'. We identified the dimensions and factors between these processes and outcomes using the interviewees' words and reasoning.

Filling up the easy cells first (or picking lower-hanging grapes first) on the table, we finally came up with the core concept. Analysing the interview data and the CRG and RCM tables, we quickly noticed that what most SMLs had consensually in mind regarding their decision to encourage fan migration to Korea were the following five characteristics:

- (1) They were active in building a female community for Hallyu
- (2) They all shared female empathy (i.e. empathising with female issues; emotional attachment to Hallyu for its femininity)

(3) They all suffered from gendered melancholia due to sexism and gender discrimination

(4) They were interested in social subversion, although no one took part in organised violence; and

(5) They all considered Korea as a new imaginary home.

These five 'characteristics' imply one concept: 'radical female migration'.

Table 5 below presents all these concepts, with the core concept at the apex.

Table 5 - Results 2: Reflective Coding Matrix

Core category	Radical Female Migration				
Properties (characteristics of category)	Female community building	Female empathy	Gendered melancholia	Social subversion	Imaginary home
Processes (action/interaction)	Sharing information; connection; social media	Female bonding; empathy	Raising self-esteem; realising my dream; inspiring me; Helping myself	Reinforcing performing myths through interactions with female fans	Reinforcing curiosities; conceiving Korea as a space for fun, trust & safety; idealising a Korean man
Dimensions (degree of properties)	Hallyu influencing; the number of followers	Empathising with female issues; emotional attachment to Korean pop culture; strong & weak ties	One's cognition about her gender identity; future worries; vulnerability	Degree of sharing core messages of Hallyu	Attitude toward learning the Korean language and culture; loyalty to Korean soft power; cultural branding
Contexts (situational, environmental factors)	Advancement of cyber technologies and community building	A new opportunity to meet and form female communities who share similar cultural traits	Sexism and social inequality that enhance female vulnerability in Brazil	The wide availability of Japanese and Korean pop culture in Brazil with alternative (subversive) messages to the Brazilian mainstream	Digital intimacy; promotion of Korea as a new safe country for women by Hallyu influencers and friends
Modes for Understanding the Consequences (process outcome)	Hallyu motivation; changed my life	Empowerment	It saves me from depression	Strong women; desiring to obtain new knowledge; imagine success	Strong desire to migrate to Korea

Our findings suggest that there may be commercially motivated interaction between Hallyu SMLs and their followers in Brazil. However, their digital intimacy is anchored more in socially motivated female universalism for migration to Korea than politically induced anti-migration. Furthermore, it is also corroborated that Hallyu SMLs in Brazil, possibly like their counterparts in other parts of the world, are active promoters of radical Hallyu migration for their

female followers. These SMLs are victims of sexism, glass ceiling or any other hard or soft forms of gender discrimination in Brazil, just like their followers. Even though Brazil is known for her social progressiveness, where racism and sexism had been much diluted more than in other postcolonial societies, Hallyu influencers and their followers notice the chasm between what is socially packaged and what is real. In this sense, the term 'Hallyu migration' warrants new attention from migration scholars who tend to disregard the importance of pop culture in migration studies.

Hallyu migration, conceptualised as 'female radical migration', contains pertinent characteristics, processes, factors and consequences. Firstly, to regurgitate, it is motivated by a strong gender identity as women or LGBTQ+ in the shaping of fans' desire to migrate to Korea. Additionally, their strong gender identity is correlated with proactive Hallyu consumption and fandom activities, an essential aspect of Hallyu fandom that is based on the idea of female universalism and gendered melancholia (for this, see Oh; Jang; Lim 2023; Oh; Kim 2023; Oh; Kim Rowley 2023). Their interactions with sexism and later overcoming sexism and participating in Hallyu fandom leads to the process of constructing fandom fantasies, including imagining new faraway homelands, being attracted to Hallyu icons or iconic brands, including androgynous K-pop male idols and K-drama actors, feeling infatuated with beautiful K-pop girl bands and K-drama actresses and interacting with fandom culture in general. However, it is noted that these female Hallyu fans have felt insecurity in their homeland for fear of sexism, social violence, crimes and any other threats posed to women in general. The discovery of Korea as a new safe haven for women constitutes the core image of Hallyu and its motherland, Korea, intensely arousing their desire for migration, which the Hallyu SMLs also catalyse.

Secondly, the dimensions (degrees) of radical female migration have varying degrees of depth and magnitude in each of the five processes. Female community building by Hallyu SMLs is easily measured by the number of online followers and the strength of their impact (i.e. Hallyu influencing) on their followers. These SMLs can feel the effect when the number of followers increases daily and when they receive many enquiries and affective comments from the

followers. Female empathy can be understood in terms of SMLs' capability to emphasise female and LGBTQ+ issues, including sexism and the subsequent gendered melancholia. Their affectionate attachment to Hallyu is a good sign that shows their followers how sensitive these SMLs are to and appreciative of female issues. Once connected through the common emotional attachment to Hallyu, strong and weak ties are relevant to female empathy as it escalates into a socially subversive cultural movement. Psychological wounds from sexism apply to the degree of one's consciousness and activism of her gender identity and sexism, along with one's perception of her personal and social vulnerability as a woman (for vulnerability, see Given 2021; Oh; Kim; Rowley 2023). This social vulnerability will quickly become one's anxiety about her future in her society. The degree of social subversion among the SMLs can be gleaned from their penchant for interpreting and sharing the core message of Hallyu – the alternative performing myth that the free will of women enlivens them up for their newly acquired hope of succeeding in this world, no matter what that means to each woman (but certainly not to continue to be subservient to male needs). On the other hand, constructing imaginary homelands and breeding fandom fantasies would create tension with their original cultural background or other mainstream cultures if the degree of the process gets heightened. The love of postcolonial culture vis-à-vis Chinese, Japanese, European and Hollywood culture could be one example of recent political radicalism among cultural diasporic groups. The love of Korean pop culture as postcolonial, for instance, could exacerbate the hatred against US, European or Japanese pop culture.

Thirdly, the contexts (i.e. the situational and environmental factors) surrounding each process are fivefold. For female community building, the advancement of cyber technologies is a contextual background. For female empathy, the availability of Hallyu in Brazil (vis-à-vis some countries that ban Hallyu officially) in tandem with the preexisting cosmopolitan group of people who had already been exposed to Japanese pop culture since the 1980s (i.e. female communities who share similar cultural traits) works as a context. For gendered melancholia, most women should experience and be well aware of

sexism and social inequality that enhance female vulnerability. For social subversion, the wide availability of feminist ideology, feminist politics and foreign pop culture in Brazil with alternative (subversive) messages to the Brazilian cultural mainstream is a contextual pre-condition. For imaginary homelands, the digital intimacy that easily allows the propagation of the idea that Korea is a new safe country for women by Hallyu influencers and friends in the digital community works as a background context.

Having completed our GT analysis using our qualitative interview data, we present our interpretation of the findings with a new conceptual model and conclude this paper with our final thoughts.

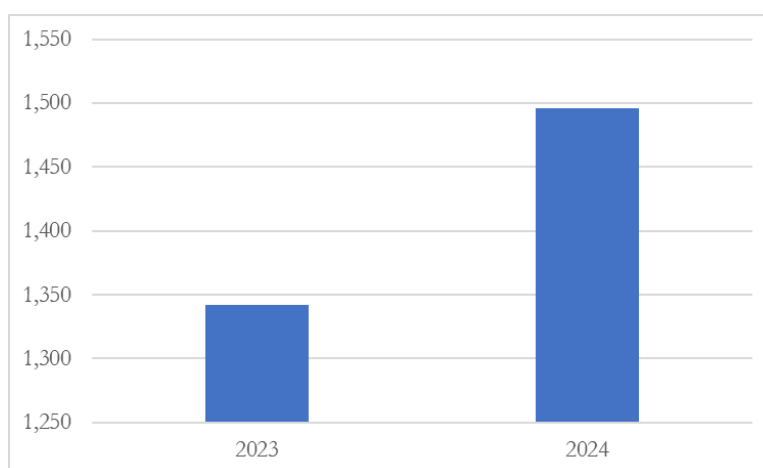
9. Interpretation and Theory

A GT analysis aims to develop theoretical interpretations of the observed phenomena. We aimed to devise a fresh understanding of pop culture SMI-induced radical female migration in general and Hallyu migration in particular. We deemed this small project of ours to be significant because it would fill the theoretical lacuna of not connecting the dots of migration on the one hand and pop culture on the other. We postulated that the two would be closely related regarding migration motivation and the subsequent development of migrant pop culture in the host cultures. The religious diaspora of the Puritans in the 17th century, pilgrimage trips to the holy land in the Middle East by the faith holders and the large scale of trans-Atlantic movements by European pop artists to the US all but signify culturally motivated migrations in history and current times (Breen; Foster 1973; Starr; Waterman 2007; Wilkinson; Hill 2017).

Furthermore, the rise of ethnic restaurants, minority television broadcasting stations, pop culture performances and many other culturally conscious activities by the migrants in each hosting society in Europe, North America and the rest of the world may well imply the incessant cultural activities that are associated with human diaspora (Yilmaz 2016; Foner 2023). Recently, the rise of Hallyu from Korea, unlike other postcolonial pop culture genres like reggae, hip hop or Bollywood, has motivated a massive migration from the rest of the world

to Korea, not just by the ethnic Korean U-turners but by non-Korean fans of the Korean pop culture since its global onset in the early 2000s. As documented throughout this paper, most Hallyu fan migrants to Korea are women. However, this important cultural phenomenon originating from Korea has escaped the attention of many pundits, both in cultural and migration studies. Focusing on the concepts of femininity and gender empowerment in both Hallyu fandom and Hallyu migration, we found the following theoretical tendencies among the sample subjects we studied in this study.

Figure 5 - Brazilian Residents in Korea



Source: Ministry of Justice, Korea (2024).

As Fig. 5 above demonstrates, our model, based on the GT analysis, rests on the assumption that the interaction between Hallyu SMIs and their followers is shaped by the role of SMIs (e.g. social vs. commercial) on the one hand and whether female empowerment among Hallyu fans and followers is divided into those who want to change their society internally or those who want to find a new imaginary homeland (i.e. migration). We find that in radical female migration, this new combination of two different sets of motives is crucial in unpacking the core concept of this study, especially regarding pertinent questions such as 'Why pop culture SMIs are not always commercial?' and 'Why are these promote and preach their followers to migrate to Korea'. Four possible cells of two-by-two combinations can thus be conceptualised in the following fashion: (1) body esteem, a match between commercially motivated

SMLs and female empowerment toward 'stay home and change women's fortune'; (2) American dream, a match between commercially motivated SMLs and female empowerment toward 'migrate and change women's fortune'; (3) social subversion, a match between socially motivated SMLs and female empowerment toward 'stay home and change our society for women'; and (4) radical migration, a match between socially motivated SMLs and female empowerment toward 'migrate to a safe country for women'.

Table 5 is evidence of why culturally oriented SMLs are not mere commercial product endorsers, even as they are deeply aware of and conscious of social contradictions, often leading proactive interactions with their followers to better their community. However, unlike some of the politically motivated SMLs who preach racism and hatred against migrants, these culturally oriented SMLs highlight social contradictions, social marginalisation and social inequalities of all kinds. Of course, this may sound like a gross generalisation. However, we want to underline that we are interested only in conceptualising how some, but not all, of the culturally motivated SMLs are prosocial and proactively involved in social causes.

In this sense, these four types of outcomes of the interplay between SMLs and female empowerment are ideal-typical, even as each of these four types highlights representative characteristics of its cultural-migratory outcome. For example, radical female migration is conceived as an ideal-typical combination of solid motives for social roles reserved for SMLs and their gender empowerment toward migration. However, they may have varying strengths and weaknesses, dissimilar perceptions of social roles, and a penchant for migration. In our sample, most subjects defined their social roles as 'reducing their female vulnerability' and 'enhancing female freedom and happiness' through 'proactive fandom and migration to Korea'. To them, Korea was perceived as the 'safest' place for women, where they could pursue their dreams without any sense of vulnerability. In this sense, migration was part of gender empowerment, not vice versa.

In addition, these four outcomes are not static at all costs, as they remain dynamic concepts that allow intentional or unintentional movements from one

cell to another. An SMI can start from the 'body esteem' position and then transform herself into a 'radical migrant'. The regression of moving from a radical migrant position to a body esteem position is also possible. As mentioned above, other factors, such as gendered melancholia, naturally intervene in this process (Oh; Kim 2023). We posit that this dynamic process of role transformations among pop culture SMIs constitutes a semi-constant process of radical migration among female and LGBTQ+ Hallyu fans worldwide.

As seen so far, pop culture emerges as a crucial point of departure for theory development in migration studies, particularly in the context of women and the Hallyu wave. The concept of an 'imaginary homeland' serves as a novel framework for understanding transculturation, cultural migration, fan pilgrimage and transcultural fandom. Within the Hallyu context, Korea as an imaginary homeland symbolises enjoyment and entertainment and represents a 'safe space for women'. This dual metaphor highlights Korea's appeal as a fun and secure environment for female fans. Our discussion so far also affirms our conviction that Hallyu Social Media Influencers (SMIs) play a pivotal role in promoting the cultural branding of Korea through an alternative narrative that emphasises social subversion and radical migration. As an alternative performing myth, this narrative involves the idea of female migration to an imaginary homeland — Korea — that offers a safer environment for women compared to their home country, Brazil. By fostering this myth, Hallyu SMIs encourage radical female (LGBTQ+) migration, positioning Korea as a desirable and empowering destination for women seeking refuge from societal challenges.

Based on the two-by-two table above, the implications can be further developed into testable hypotheses with quantitative and qualitative data. However, such an ambitious task is beyond the goal we adopted for this paper. Future studies can undoubtedly utilise our conceptual tool to generalise pop culture migration, radical migration, or any similar migratory phenomenon. Having provided interpretations of our GT analysis results, we provide our final thoughts below.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the significant role of Hallyu Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in promoting radical female migration and empowerment. By employing grounded theory, we underscore the importance of cultural branding and community building within this context. The findings demonstrate how Hallyu SMIs can influence their followers, particularly women, to consider migration a means of personal and social empowerment.

Despite the valuable insights gained, this study has some limitations. First, robust, grounded theory has inherent constraints that must be acknowledged. Our findings are not, therefore, generalisable without further empirical analysis with larger data sets. Second, our sample was not randomly selected, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the implications derived from this sample provide a foundation for future research.

Future studies should aim to expand on these findings by utilising more extensive and diverse samples to validate further and refine the insights presented. Researchers can develop more generalisable data and enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between pop culture, social media influence, and migration patterns. This expanded research will contribute a more profound and comprehensive knowledge of Hallyu's transformative potential and impact on global migration trends.

REFERENCES

- ABIDIN, Crystal. From "networked publics" to "refracted publics": a companion framework for researching "below the radar" studies. **Social Media + Society**, v. 7, n. 1, p. 1–13, 2021.
- BIRKS, Melanie; MILLS, Jane. *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2015.
- BREEN, Timothy H.; FOSTER, Stephen. Moving to the New World: the character of early Massachusetts immigration. **William and Mary Quarterly: A Magazine of Early American History**, v. 30, n. 2, p. 190–222, 1973.
- BTS ARMY CENSUS. **BTS Army Census 2023**. Disponível em: <https://www.btsarmycensus.com>. Acesso em: 22 dez. 2022.
- CORBIN, Juliet; STRAUSS, Anselm. **Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory**. 4. ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2015.
- CHAE, Jiyoung. Explaining females' envy toward social media influencers. **Journal of Communication Research**, v. 45, n. 6, p. 647–662, 2017.
- CHAE, Jiyoung. Reexamining the relationship between social media and happiness: the effects of various social media platforms on reconceptualized happiness. **Media Psychology**, v. 21, n. 1, p. 1–24, 2018.
- CHAPMAN, Julia; WHITLOCK, Janis. Social media influencers: followers' perceptions and self-concept. In: **Society for Personality and Social Psychology**. New York: Cornell University, 2019.
- CHARMAZ, Kathy. **Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis**. London: Sage, 2006.
- CHOI, Sun Jung. **Gender, Labour and the Commodification of Intimacy in K-pop**. Tese (Doutorado em Música) – University of California, Santa Barbara, 2020.
- FONER, Nancy. Immigration and the transformation of American society: politics, the economy, and popular culture. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies**, v. 50, n. 1, p. 114–131, 2023.
- GIVENS, Terri. **Radical Empathy: Finding a Path to Bridging Racial Divides**. Bristol: Policy Press, 2021.
- GLASER, Barney G. **Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory: Theoretical Sensitivity**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- GLASER, Barney G. Remodeling grounded theory. **Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research**, v. 5, n. 2, 2004. Disponível em: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs040245>. Acesso em: 02 de dez. de 2023.

GLASER, Barney G.; STRAUSS, Anselm L. **The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research**. Chicago: Aldine, 1967.

HOLANDA, Sérgio Buarque de. **Raízes do Brasil**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995.

HOLT, Douglas B. **How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding**. Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2004.

HU, Brian. Korean TV serials in the English-language diaspora: translating difference online and making it racial. **The Velvet Light Trap**, n. 66, p. 36–49, 2010.

JAYADEVA, Sazana. Study-abroad influencers' and insider knowledge: how new forms of study-abroad expertise on social media mediate student mobility from India to Germany. **Mobilities**, v. 19, n. 1, p. 1–17, 2024.

JENKINS, Henry. Imaginary homelands: transculturation, cultural migration, fan pilgrimage, and transcultural fandom. **Journal of Asian Sociology**, (forthcoming).

JUNG, Eun Y. Transnational Korea: a critical assessment of the Korean wave in Asia and the United States. **Southeast Review of Asian Studies**, v. 31, p. 69–80, 2009.

KIM, Andrew E.; MAYASARI, Fitria; OH, Ingyu. When tourist audiences encounter each other: diverging learning behaviors of K-pop fans from Japan and Indonesia. **Korea Journal**, v. 53, n. 4, p. 59–82, 2013.

KIM, Jinwon. Manhattan's Koreatown as a transclave: the emergence of a new ethnic enclave in a global city. **City & Community**, v. 17, n. 1, p. 276–295, 2018.

KIM, Sangkyun; LONG, Philip; ROBINSON, Mike. Small screen, big tourism: the role of popular Korean television dramas in South Korean tourism. **Tourism Geographies**, v. 11, n. 3, p. 308–333, 2009.

KING-O'RIAIN, Rebecca C. They were having so much fun, so genuinely...: K-pop fan online affect and corroborated authenticity. **New Media & Society**, v. 23, n. 9, p. 2820–2838, 2021.

KOREA TOURISM ORGANIZATION. **2019 Survey on Hallyu Tourism**. Disponível em: <https://kto.visitkorea.or.kr>. Acesso em: 26 fev. 2026.

LEE, J.Y.; YOO, J. H.; PARK, J. Social Media Influencers and the Development of Female Fans' Self-Esteem. **International Journal of Communication**, 16, 350–371.

LYAN, Irina; LEVKOWITZ, Alon. From Holy Land to “Hallyu Land”: the symbolic journey following the Korean wave in Israel. **Journal of Fandom Studies**, v. 3, n. 1, p. 7–21, 2015.

MAKRI, Chara; NEELY, Andy. Grounded theory: a guide for exploratory studies in management research. **International Journal of Qualitative Methods**, v. 20, p. 1–14, 2021.

MANERI, Marcelo; POGLIANO, Andrea; PICCOLI, Flavio; ANSELM, Guido. Migration narratives in media and social media: the case of Italy. **BRIDGES**, p. 1–90, 2023. Disponível em: <https://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8009758>. Acesso em: 15 de out. de 2023.

OH, Ingyu. Hallyu: the rise of transnational cultural consumers in China and Japan. **Korea Observer**, v. 40, n. 3, p. 425–459, 2009.

OH, Ingyu. Torn between two lovers: retrospective learning and melancholia among Japanese women. **Korea Observer**, v. 42, n. 2, p. 223–254, 2011.

OH, Ingyu; KIM, Kyeong J. Gendered melancholia as cultural branding: fandom participation in the K-pop community. **Asia Pacific Business Review**, v. 29, n. 5, p. 1300–1323, 2023.

OH, Ingyu; JANG, Wonho; LIM, Hyun. What is female universalism in Hallyu? a theoretical and empirical exploration with a focus on Japanese fans. **Journal of Asian Sociology**, v. 52, n. 4, p. 299–328, 2023.

OH, Ingyu; KIM, Kyeong-Jun; ROWLEY, Chris. Female empowerment and radical empathy for the sustainability of creative industries: the case of K-pop. **Sustainability**, v. 15, n. 3098, p. 1–18, 2023.

OH, Ingyu; SEOL, Dong-Hoon; HWANG, Hyeseon. South Korea or bust: from fan nationalism to pop culture migration through new media. **Emerging Media**, p. 1–27, (2026). Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.1177/27523543261426616>. Acesso em: 26 de fev. de 2026.

OKUNADE, Samuel; BAKARE, Oluwabunmi. Youth out-migration in Nigeria: the dual role of social media as a cause and solution. **Commonwealth Youth & Development**, v. 18, n. 2, 2020. Disponível em: <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-cydev-v18-n1-a1>. Acesso em: 27 de set. de 2023.

PEDALINO, Federica; CAMERINI, Anne-Linda. The role of social media influencers in shaping body esteem and social comparison among adolescents. **Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking**, v. 25, n. 1, p. 51–58, 2022.

PRIORE, Mary del. **História das Mulheres no Brasil**. São Paulo: Contexto, 2004.

QURESHI, Henna A.; ÜNLÜ, Züleyha. Beyond the paradigm conflicts: a four-step coding instrument for grounded theory. **International Journal of Qualitative Methods**, v. 19, p. 1–19, 2020. DOI: 10.1177/1609406920928188.

SCOTT, Karen W. Relating categories in grounded theory analysis: using a conditional relationship guide and reflective coding matrix. **The Qualitative Report**, v. 9, n. 1, p. 113–126, 2004.

SCOTT, Karen W.; HOWELL, Dana. Clarifying analysis and interpretation in grounded theory: using a conditional relationship guide and reflective coding matrix. **International Journal of Qualitative Methods**, v. 7, n. 2, p. 1–15, 2008.

SEEKIS, Veya; BRADLEY, Graham L.; DUFFY, Amanda L. Appearance-related social networking sites and body image in young women: testing an objectification-social comparison model. **Psychology of Women Quarterly**, v. 44, n. 3, p. 377–392, 2020.

STARR, Larry; WATERMAN, Christopher. **American Popular Music**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

SUURONEN, Aleski; REINIKAINEN, Hanna; BORCHERS, Nils S.; STRANDBERG, Kim. When social media influencers go political: an exploratory analysis on the emergence of political topics among Finnish influencers. **Javnost – The Public**, v. 29, n. 3, p. 301–317, 2022.

WERBNER, Pnina. Theorizing complex diasporas: purity and hybridity in the South Asian public sphere in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, v. 30, n. 5, p. 895–911, 2004.

WERBNER, Pnina. **Diasporic Nationalism: Transformations and Challenges**. London: Routledge, 2013.

WILKINSON, John; HILL, Joyce. **Jerusalem Pilgrimage: 1099–1185**. London: Routledge, 2017.

YEH, Diana. Pop culture as a re-migration determinant for second and later generation children. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies**, v. 40, n. 4, p. 611–628, 2014.

YILMAZ, Ferruh. **How the Workers Became Muslims: Immigration, Culture, and Hegemonic Transformation in Europe**. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.

NOTES

¹ This essay was written with the support of the College of Media & Communication at Korea University.

² Ingyu Oh is a Professor at Kansai Gaidai University (Japan). He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Oregon (USA) and is currently the Deputy Editor of the *Hallyu Journal*. Email: ohingyu@kansai-gaidai.ac.jp. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1645-8767>.

³ Haerin Shin is an Associate Professor at Korea University. She holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Stanford University. Email: helenshin@korea.ac.kr. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6766-2529>.

⁴ *Corresponding author – Virgine Borges de Castilho Sacoman is a Graduate Student in Sociology at the University of North Texas (USA) and a Teaching Assistant in the same department. Email: Virgine.BorgesdeCastilhoSacoman@unt.edu. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9318-909X>.