

EMBRACING HALLYU: YOUNG INDONESIAN MUSLIMS NAVIGATING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how young Indonesian Muslims engage with Hallyu (the Korean Wave) and its impact on their religious and cultural identities. Through qualitative fieldwork in Yogyakarta, this research reveals that participants frequently employ the term 'modern' to describe their engagement with Hallyu, reflecting a nuanced embrace of modernity that transcends conventional secularization paradigms. Rather than undermining religious identity, this cultural engagement is perceived as integral to their modern Muslim identity, fostering self-determination and self-realization. The findings demonstrate that Hallyu engagement facilitates dialogue between individual and collective identities within global cultural flows, illuminating the complex interplay between cultural globalization, local identities, and the modernization of Indonesian Islam. This research contributes to scholarly understanding of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation among young Muslims within Indonesia's multicultural and religiously diverse context. Future research should examine diverse manifestations of modernity across various religious and cultural societies, moving beyond Western-centric analytical frameworks.

Keywords: Hallyu, Indonesian young Muslims, Modernity, Secularization, Cultural adaptation, Identity negotiation

INTRODUCTION

Since the 2000s, Korean modern popular culture, known as the 'K-culture,'ⁱ has achieved remarkable global dissemination throughout Asia and beyond, facilitated by globalization and advances in media technology and communication systems. While globalization has primarily enabled the spread of Western culture, Hallyu (the Korean Wave—the global popularity of Korean popular culture, including music, television dramas, and films) presents a unique case of cultural diffusion originating from East Asia (Cho & Sim, 2013; Shim, 2006; Yim and Chae, 2014). Consequently, there is a growing need for scholarly inquiry into the social implications of this phenomenon (Kim and Kim, 2016; Yoon, 2019).

Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest Muslim nation, has become one of the region's most dynamic Hallyu markets (Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, 2025). Korean popular culture has rapidly gained traction among young Indonesian Muslims, with K-pop cover dance culture emerging as a particularly prominent phenomenon. This involves young women forming teams to imitate K-pop artists' choreography, posting dance videos on social media, and participating in competitions (Billboard Korea Staff, 2011).ⁱⁱ While cover dance has created new forms of expression and community, it has also raised criticism for its revealing costumes and sexually suggestive choreography, viewed by some as conflicting with

Islamic expectations of modesty (Kim & Kim, 2016; Meidita, 2013; Miliana, 2018; Nasr, 2014; Yoon, 2019).

Concerns over Hallyu's influence have also given rise to anti-Hallyu movements, which seek both to protect local cultural industries from perceived "cultural imperialism" (Astuti, 2012; Phuong, 2016) and to resist content deemed incompatible with Indonesian Islamic norms (Nugroho, 2012; Zubaidah et al., 2015). In these discourses, young K-pop fans are often portrayed as having lost cultural tradition or as wasteful consumers of imported entertainment (Meidita, 2013).

Despite such criticisms, Hallyu fandom continues to flourish among Muslim youth. This paradox raises important questions: how do young Muslims sustain active engagement with K-pop while also upholding their religious commitments? Does this trend signal secularization, or does it represent a more complex negotiation of cultural and religious identity in contemporary Indonesia? To address these questions, how young Indonesian Muslims navigate between global cultural participation and religious identity through qualitative fieldwork in Yogyakarta. Rather than imposing external theoretical frameworks, this research prioritizes participants' own interpretations of their cultural engagement, exploring how they reconcile apparent contradictions between Islamic commitments and Hallyu fandom within their understanding of modern Muslim identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Alongside the global spread of Hallyu, scholarly attention to Hallyu has evolved from examining its economic and cultural dimensions to exploring its complex social implications. Research conducted by Korean institutions, particularly government-funded surveys like the Overseas Hallyu Survey, has predominantly adopted economic and market-oriented perspectives, focusing on "consumption status and trends of Hallyu content" and examining Korea's national image enhancement (Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, 2025). While these statistical surveys effectively capture overall trends and spread patterns, they remain limited to understanding Hallyu as a "commodity" rather than exploring the deeper meanings and mutual contexts of the phenomenon. Kim (2008) identifies this limitation, noting that Hallyu research has maintained a "Korea-centered perspective" and calling for research on the multidimensional meaning and influence from audience perspectives. Shim (2006) identified Hallyu as a unique case of non-Western cultural diffusion, arguing that Korean popular culture's global spread challenges traditional patterns of cultural globalization dominated by Western content. This foundational work established the need for scholarly inquiry into Hallyu's social implications beyond its commercial success.

Recent studies have begun to shift focus from Hallyu itself to its audiences, though such research remains relatively scarce, particularly regarding Indonesian contexts. Yoon (2019) conducted ethnographic research examining K-pop fandom among young Muslims in Indonesia, exploring the motivations and cultural practices of fans who maintain both religious piety and passionate engagement with Korean popular music. Park (2016) investigated Indonesia's first Hallyu fan community 'HANSAMO,' analyzing how this self-organized group actively constructed meaning beyond simple consumption of cultural products, demonstrating what Fiske (1992) termed fan culture's productivity in creating independent meanings and reproducing new texts. Kim and Kim (2016) examined anti-Korean Wave phenomena in Indonesia and Vietnam, revealing the complex cultural conflicts that emerge alongside Hallyu's popularity. These studies, while limited in number, represent important attempts to understand audience contexts and the multifaceted nature of Hallyu reception in specific cultural settings

Within the Indonesian context, responses to Hallyu have evolved from initial concerns about cultural imperialism to more nuanced engagement strategies. While early research emphasized nationalist concerns and cultural imperialism discourse (Astuti, 2012; Nugroho, 2012), recent studies reveal more adaptive approaches. Mutiarani et al. (2024) document how Islamic communities have developed innovative da'wah strategies targeting Hallyu fans through Korean-themed content, using Korean culture as an approach to make Islamic teachings more accessible and attractive to Korean culture enthusiasts without judging or rejecting Korean cultural elements. Miliana (2018) explored how veiled women in Yogyakarta negotiate their identity as K-pop fans, while Wijaya Mulya (2021) investigated faith and fandom among young Indonesian Muslims. While some studies have started to look at fans' views and the ways they find their identities, most research has focused on people's individual experiences and has not looked at the wider social, cultural and religious situations where these processes happen.

Despite recent progress, there are still significant limitations on both the Korean and Indonesian sides. Most studies adopt a binary approach, either promoting cultural consumption or emphasizing religious concerns, without examining how young Muslims actively negotiate between these domains. This study addresses this gap by exploring how Indonesian Muslim youth construct modern religious identities that accommodate both Islamic commitments and global cultural engagement. It moves beyond individual experiences to examine broader social and religious contexts.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the Hallyu phenomenon among young Indonesian Muslims requires a multi-dimensional theoretical approach that moves beyond traditional Western-centric models of modernization and secularization. This study employs the following interconnected frameworks to analyze how global cultural flows, local religious practice, and personal identity formation interact in contemporary Indonesia.

Modernization without Secularization

Drawing on Casanova's (2013) framework of secularization and Chaves' (1994) focus on declining religious authority, this study applies an understanding of secularization that does not assume uniform religious decline. Rather than simplistically attributing Hallyu fandom to religious weakening, this framework considers complex social, cultural, and contextual factors intertwined with the phenomenon. Particularly given Indonesia's concurrent Islamic resurgence and increasing global cultural integration, this approach enables analysis of how young Muslims navigate modernity while maintaining religious commitment.

Building on Shin and Choi's (2007) concept of 'Asian modernity,' this study treats modernity as compatible with sustained religious identity, explaining how young Muslims can embrace global cultural practices without abandoning their faith commitments. This framework draws on Hoffstaedter's (2011) understanding of 'modern Muslim identities,' which emphasizes flexibility and multi-layered negotiation in identity formation, where individuals actively adapt and interpret changes within social and political contexts. Hoffstaedter conceptualizes modernity not as a rupture from tradition but as a process where individuals and communities interpret, accept, and adjust to changed environments while creating new forms of religious expression. This non-Western approach to modernity operates through processes of individualization, which enable young Muslims to negotiate multiple identities while maintaining religious foundations.

Individualization and Identity Negotiation

The individualization processes inherent in Asian modernity manifest through specific mechanisms of identity formation and negotiation. Beck (2002) identifies individualization as a fundamental characteristic of modern society, where individuals increasingly become central actors in constructing their identities through personal choices. This process aligns with Casanova's (2013) third category of secularization—the privatization of religion—where religious practice becomes a matter of individual choice rather than collective obligation.

In the Indonesian Islamic context, this manifests as young Muslims developing autonomous individuality and self-actualization within religious frameworks. Identity formation becomes a dynamic process of "being and becoming" (Dillon, 1999), where individuals possess multiple salient identities that become activated in specific contexts (Jones and McEwen, 2000; Peek, 2005). When participating in K-pop activities, aspects related to self-expression may become more salient than religious norms, representing strategic identity negotiation rather than religious compromise. Peek's (2005) three-stage framework proves particularly relevant: from ascribed religious identity at birth, through chosen identity as individuals encounter diverse experiences, to declared identity where religion becomes actively integrated into self-concept. This process enables young Muslims to balance religious commitment with global cultural participation while maintaining core Islamic foundations.

Together, these frameworks enable multi-layered analysis of how young Indonesian Muslims construct modern religious identities that embrace both local Islamic traditions and global cultural participation.

Research Site: Yogyakarta's Distinctive Cultural Landscape

This study was conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, selected for its unique combination of educational, cultural, and commercial characteristics that distinguish it from other Indonesian cities. Yogyakarta hosts approximately 110 universities with over 300,000 students, creating an exceptionally high concentration of young people from across Indonesia.ⁱⁱⁱ This educational foundation, combined with the city's cultural ethos emphasizing tolerance and diversity, generates a distinctive atmosphere unlike other Indonesian urban centers (Beatty, 1999; Zubaidah et al., 2015).^{iv}

Crucially, Yogyakarta's concurrent development as a tourist destination and its increasing commercialization have created ideal conditions for Hallyu proliferation.^v The convergence of these factors—a large student population (Hallyu's primary consumers), commercial infrastructure, and cultural openness—has enabled regular K-pop events, concerts, and competitions, making Yogyakarta a unique hub for Korean cultural activities in Indonesia.

Research Methods and Sampling

This research constitutes a qualitative study examining young Muslims who actively embrace and participate in Hallyu culture. Employing an interpretive methodological approach, this study utilizes ethnography to examine the culture-sharing behavior of individuals or groups (Creswell, 2009, p. 201). Rather than engaging in quantitative analysis, this study aims to understand and interpret phenomena by exploring the 'context' and 'meaning' inherent in natural settings (Creswell, 2009; Emerson et al., 2013; LeCompte, Margaret and Schensul, 1999).

Fieldwork was conducted during two periods: March and August 2019. Study participants were Muslim college students, graduates, and prospective university entrants in Yogyakarta who fell into one of the following categories: 1) those learning Korean language ; 2) those who had studied in Korea ; or 3) those participating in Hallyu-related activities. The age range of participants extended from 18 years to the early to mid-twenties, with no particular restrictions applied to participants' religiosity levels.

This study employed methodological triangulation through three data collection approaches. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 36 individual participants, supplemented by two group interviews, using snowball sampling technique. The interview questionnaire addressed three main areas corresponding to the research questions: first, participants' initial attraction to Hallyu and ongoing motivations for participation, including factors that enabled their engagement; second, their awareness of potential conflicts between Hallyu activities (particularly dance performances and attire) and Islamic dress codes or social expectations from family and community; third, how they reconcile their religious identity with global cultural engagement through hypothetical scenarios about future life choices such as marriage, career decisions, and religious practice. Interviews ranged from 30 to 68 minutes, examining participants' personal experiences and perspectives on balancing cultural interests with religious commitments.

Non-participant observation was conducted at K-pop events and dance team activities, while social media monitoring focused on the Instagram account 'jogjakpopersmedia' to observe community dynamics. This community, with over 9,000 followers, serves as a central platform for Yogyakarta K-pop fans to share interests and exchange information. Analysis of 2019 posts revealed that three to four major K-pop concerts or competitions occur monthly, alongside smaller gatherings organized by fans in cafes and restaurants, demonstrating the vibrant and systematic nature of Hallyu activities in the research location.

Data analysis followed Creswell's (2009) framework through systematic coding that identified four main thematic categories: *Hallyu* engagement (including cultural comparisons and personal meanings), issues in cultural adaptation (costume compromises, family responses, conflict resolution), religious identity formation (Islamic obligations, personal choices, hijab decisions), and cultural-religious context (Indonesian values, globalization effects). Each category contained multiple sub-themes that emerged through iterative analysis using NVivo software to identify recurring patterns and facilitate systematic interpretation of findings.

FINDINGS

Social Controversy on Hallyu

Hallyu's spread in Indonesia has provoked varied reactions from the Muslim community. This section delineates the social controversies arising from this cultural phenomenon as observed through fieldwork conducted during the specified research period. The controversies are broadly categorized into three domains: 1) perceived violations of Islamic norms ; 2) the conceptualization of Hallyu as '*Ghazwul Fikri*' or cultural invasion ; and 3) its interpretation as a variant of neo-imperialism.

Violation of Islamic Norms in K-pop Cover Dance Events: During fieldwork in August 2019, a K-pop competition event was held at a large shopping mall in Yogyakarta. Of the 32 participating teams, 30 were female groups, with only two male groups participating. Notably, among the female teams, only one group included dancers wearing hijabs, while the majority wore revealing outfits that exposed their bodies. It is worth noting that the majority of K-pop fans and cover dance teams consist of teenage girls and young women, meaning that the audience for these events is also predominantly female.

This gender imbalance in K-pop cover dance teams and events is not isolated to Yogyakarta but reflects a broader trend across Indonesia, where K-pop has gained popularity among young people, particularly teenage girls and young women. While multiple interpretations and explanations for this phenomenon exist, it is crucial to underscore that in

Indonesia—where Islam is the predominant religion—Muslim girls' participation in these events often triggers social discourse within Muslim communities.

Three primary criticisms emerged from the study of K-pop dance teams and their fans in Indonesia through participant observation and in-depth interviews with Hallyu fans. First, the revealing attire worn by K-pop dancers, who are primarily Muslim, was found to violate Islamic law and norms. Despite Indonesia's multicultural Islamic practice, consensus exists that such attire is religiously inappropriate—a sentiment reaffirmed through in-depth interviews:

'...in fact, they(K-pop cover dance teams) are not allowed to dress sexy style because in Islam (women) must cover their 'aurat'...' (Interviewee 35)

'...actually in Islam it(not covering her head and body) is a 'dosa'(sin).' (Interviewee 02)

In interviews, the concept of '*dosa*' (sin) was discussed in relation to Muslim women participating in K-pop dance covers. Several interviewees highlighted that not covering their heads or exposing their '*aurat*' (body), particularly in men's presence, contravened Islamic teachings, categorizing these actions as '*dosa*' (sin) (mentioned by 13 participants). These Muslim Hallyu fans did not dismiss external criticisms directed at them or their fellow Muslim K-pop dance cover team members as unfounded. Instead, they acknowledged the importance of adhering to Islamic law regarding attire and behavior.

Second, the concern involves Muslim women dancing in public, often in provocative costumes while wearing heavy makeup. This aligns with previous controversies faced by some professional Muslim singers and celebrities (Yuilius, 2016), who have been criticized for their sexualized dance routines on stage—a sensitive topic within Islam. Such instances present additional challenges for conservative Muslims in accepting ordinary Muslim girls performing K-pop dances on stage in similar attire.

Third, the criticism underscores the portrayal of Muslim K-pop fans as 'fanatical,' perceived as a negative influence of Hallyu or K-pop (Astuti, 2012; Herlina et al., 2017; Irmanto and Tjiptono, 2013; Meidita, 2013; Nastiti, 2010). In this context, 'fanatic' signifies losing '*seimbang*' (balance) and becoming '*berlebihan*' (excessive) compared to normal behavior—a characterization often attributed to some Hallyu fans' behavior:

'...I... Twitter is one of the social media I often read... 'Ah, Korean fans are too much fanatical...blah blah blah' like this. And sometimes it makes me uncomfortable, but it's only on social media, for me, it might not be so influential to the real world...' (Interviewee 29)

Furthermore, interviewees were cognizant of external criticisms and highlighted negative aspects associated with Hallyu. Based on analysis of interview transcripts, participants most frequently mentioned concerns about sexy dance and attire (24 participants), followed by alcohol consumption (17 participants), plastic surgery (10 participants), pork consumption (7 participants), and other issues including relationship problems between men and women, idolization, and the perceived effeminate style of male K-pop idols. These factors contribute to perceptions within the Muslim community that embracing Hallyu or K-pop constitutes endorsing elements conflicting with Islamic norms. This judgment views the adoption of non-Islamic cultures, such as Hallyu or K-pop, as an ideological incursion termed '*Ghazwul fikri*' (intellectual or cultural invasion).

Hallyu as 'Ghazwul fikri' - A Form of Neo-Imperialism : In Indonesia, persistent tension exists between two prominent Islamic tendencies: one favoring orthodox interpretation of Islam centered on the Arab world, and another aspiring to establish a modern, localized

version of the faith (Boland, 1971; Bruinessen, 2014; Hefner, 1997; Lukens-Bull, 2001). Central to this ideological struggle is the concept of ‘Islamization,’ pursued by groups concerned with safeguarding the Muslim community from exposure to non-Islamic or anti-Islamic cultures and ideologies (Bujuri et al., 2020; Hamayotsu, 2015; Kersten, 2012; Kim, 2013). In the post-colonial era, this has evolved into vigilant opposition to ‘Western ideas’ infiltration—a stance that extends to Hallyu's reception in Indonesia.

The concept of *‘ghazwul fikri’* epitomizes this apprehension toward westernization, portraying anti-Islamic forces as adversarial ‘invaders,’ often linked with the West. This notion associates terms such as ‘secularization,’ ‘liberalism,’ and ‘pluralism’ with skepticism, reflecting broader anxiety toward ideologies perceived as foreign or threatening (Duile, 2017; Gillespie, 2007). Hallyu's spread in Indonesia, while distinct from traditional ‘westernization,’ is not exempt from these ideological examinations. Within Islamic circles, Hallyu is viewed not merely as cultural entertainment but as a symbol of ‘Koreanization’ or ‘soft power’ (Wahyudiya, 2012; Yudhantara and Dra. Ilien Halina, 2012), potentially perceived as ‘brainwashing’ targeting young Muslims. This has raised concerns from both nationalist and Islamic perspectives.

Consequently, Hallyu fans find themselves accused of secularization and engaging in activities labeled as *haram* (forbidden) by devout Muslims. This juxtaposition illustrates the complex cultural and ideological landscape within which Hallyu is received and interpreted in Indonesia, highlighting the multifaceted challenges Hallyu faces in aligning with local Islamic norms and national identity narratives. This Islamic perspective toward Hallyu can generate more intense reactions than nationalist stances, as it connects cultural ‘differences’ to matters of ‘faith’ and ‘belief’ in Islam, thereby becoming a significant concern regarding religious identity. For instance, Interviewee 23 recalled *Ustad Somad*, a prominent religious figure, labeling Hallyu as *‘kafir’* (pagan/infidel/apostate), critiquing Hallyu adoption as pursuit of *‘kafir’* culture (CNN Indonesia, 2019). *Ustad Somad*'s perspective, while personal, reflects broader sentiment within the Muslim community, amplified by his influence, particularly on social media.

This viewpoint aligns with *‘ghazwul fikri’* discourse among Indonesians, where Hallyu is perceived within broader neo-imperialism narratives (Astuti, 2012; Nasr, 2014). Nugroho (2012) from Gadjah Mada University noted that anti-Korean sentiment in Indonesian society is intertwined with nationalism and has been amplified over time:

‘... presumably anti-K-pop movements with the media theory of nationalism might be explained in a sense of national pride which is provoked by mass media...’(pp. 6-7)

This sentiment was echoed in interviews, with Interviewee 29 highlighting societal pressure to prioritize Indonesian culture over foreign influences like Hallyu:

‘...sometimes what I’m not comfortable with is not the Korean culture, but it is a stigma on me... people around me are like this... ‘Eh, why don’t you go to...’, I mean, ‘we have our Indonesian culture, haven’t we? But why do you not explore Indonesian culture more?’ like this. ‘You are an Indonesian, aren’t you?’ (People) often say like this.’ (Interviewee 29)

In conclusion, Hallyu perception in Indonesia transitions from ideological invasion, as framed by *‘ghazwul fikri,’* to neo-imperialism. This view presents Hallyu as a channel of cultural and economic colonization, leading to negative perceptions of Hallyu fans as disloyal to their own culture and engaging in wasteful consumption. Such adversarial viewpoints hinder

constructive discourse around the phenomenon, creating tension, particularly when these views intersect with religious principles in Islam.

Meaning of Hallyu(K-pop) According to Hallyu Fans

The preliminary analysis reveals a mixture of criticism and caution in the Islamic perspective toward Hallyu/K-pop and its audiences. While interviewees acknowledged some community concerns, the study raises an important question: Does engagement with K-pop culture indicate diminished commitment to Islamic faith or weakening religious identity among young Muslims? To address this question, this study adopted an emic perspective that, while acknowledging the importance of outsiders' religious judgments and viewpoints, first examines how participants themselves understand and articulate their experiences. The findings reveal that participants maintain distinct views about their Hallyu engagement that differ significantly from external criticisms.

What they say about Hallyu: Interviews revealed that the physical appeal of idols and celebrities is a significant factor attracting participants to Hallyu/K-pop. Interviewee 12, reflecting on their initial interest, noted the attractiveness of Korean drama actors:

'Well, I forgot, but it was drama. I remember it was drama. At that time, (I was) a child, a child is child, still think of... 'Oh, how nice(looking)! Like this, 'see they are so handsome!'' (Interviewee 12).

However, this allure extends beyond mere physical attractiveness, encompassing the 'valuable' impressions and meanings fans associate with these figures. Analysis of interview transcripts revealed that participants consistently used positive descriptive terms when discussing K-pop idols or Korean artists, including:

'Working hard, professional, responsible, honest, well-valued, practicing, fulfilling their duties, new, high-quality, organized, agile, creative, motivating'.

This admiration is not perceived as rejection of their own culture or religion; instead, it is viewed as a means to explore new and diverse experiences within their cultural and religious framework. The frequent use of the term '*baru*' (new) to describe Hallyu by participants indicates its role in filling a perceived void in Indonesia.

In conclusion, despite acknowledging cultural and religious differences between Indonesia and Korea, these young Muslims identify universal and positive values in Hallyu. Their perspectives suggest Hallyu's potential to bridge cultural and religious divides, highlighting its capacity to resonate with universal themes that transcend traditional cultural and religious boundaries.

What the Dance members say about K-pop and themselves: K-pop cover dance team members express profound appreciation and enthusiasm for K-pop, driving their participation. This passion is further fueled by desires to share their love for K-pop with others, fostering camaraderie, belonging, and self-expression while contributing to their well-being. Despite some criticism, they view this involvement as enriching and harmonious with their cultural and religious values.

The interviewees' experiences highlight the affirmative impact and personal growth achieved through K-pop cover dance involvement. The dancers expressed: '*It makes me feel I become an idol*' (Interviewee 22), while another discovered hidden talent (Interviewee 13). Others described the joy of dancing and performing (Interviewee 19), an addictive thrill of being on stage (Interviewee 33), formation of new friendships and sense of refreshment (Interviewee 37), and transformative confidence gains (Interviewee 37). The sentiment of happiness while performing was also echoed (Interviewee 38). As articulated, K-pop dance

teams serve as conduits for self-actualization and expression, allowing participants to uncover talents and gain affirmative feedback and support.

An interesting finding from this study is that participants, including those adhering strictly to Islamic customs, showed reluctance to criticize the attire or dance movements of K-pop cover dancers. All 36 respondents considered it inappropriate to judge individual choices, despite some attire and dance moves potentially straying from Islamic norms. This reflects Indonesian values of tolerance and diversity (Beatty, 1999; Boland, 1971; Kriyantono and McKenna, 2017).

K-pop cover dancers emphasize that their on-stage choices should not be tied to their religious identity or religiosity level. They assert that their artistic choices, influenced by K-pop, do not mirror their everyday attire or behavior. They exercise self-censorship, ensuring that their costumes and dances are not perceived as excessive or inappropriate:

'No! (It is) just on stage. And if (our dance costumes) seen by ordinary people (on the street), (it is probably) awkward, for instance, wearing such revealing clothes. So (we usually wear) normal clothes.' (Interviewee 22)

In contrast, these participants perceive Western culture as 'vulgar,' associating it with 'free sex' and behaviors that contravene social and religious norms within the Indonesian context (Interviewees 07, 10, 18, 26, 36, 33, 28, 35). They regard Korean culture as more acceptable and within their boundaries, creating clear contrast from their views on Western culture (Interviewee 03). This differentiation leads to self-imposed moderation in their artistic expressions. As a result, they often adopt an attitude of '*cuek*' (indifference) toward external criticisms, viewing such critiques as unwarranted (Interviewees 17, 28, 34).

K-pop dance cover team members reported that their families did not object to their involvement in K-pop activities or their choice not to wear a jilbab (traditional Islamic headscarf), understanding these activities as temporary. The members themselves plan to revert to traditional Islamic practices after marriage, distinguishing their on-stage persona from their religious identity. This distinction enables them to balance personal interests with religious duties:

'Hobbies are just hobbies, and religious obligations are religious obligations. I think I have the right to do what I want.' (Interviewee 12)

Echoing this sentiment, Interviewee 28 remarked:

'K-pop is entertainment, not a deviation from faith. Every culture is different, but that doesn't mean it's wrong.'

Such remarks illustrate how participants actively separated cultural participation from religious practice. This perspective aligns with Miliana (2018), who shows how veiled female K-pop fans in Yogyakarta negotiated their religious identity amid public criticism while finding empowerment and new social opportunities through fandom. Similarly, Wijaya Mulya (2021) demonstrates that young Indonesians understood the Korean Wave both as a global cultural trend and as a stimulus for the local creative industry, while also expressing expectations for stronger support of national culture. The present findings align with these insights, as participants in this study regarded K-pop events as festive and global platforms for self-expression and talent development, while simultaneously maintaining their religious commitments.

Norms vs Values: The discourse on Hallyu in Indonesia vividly highlights tension between societal 'norms' and individual 'values.' Societal norms, acting as behavioral guides, sometimes conflict with personal values. This clash is especially noticeable among Hallyu enthusiasts and critics, shedding light on how Hallyu and K-pop intersect with Islamic norms. Critics often judge Hallyu fans' compliance with Islamic norms. However, Hallyu fans, notably

in K-pop cover dance groups, emphasize deeper values and see their Hallyu involvement as aligning with their Muslim identity. Interviewee 29 stated:

'...even though we who are Muslims do have a culture that is different from Korean culture, but as long as we can still open ourselves to new cultures, Korean culture has actually a lot of good and can... what... for example, for Muslim young people, 'working hard' like that and the quality of content that is so popular, this is really wonderful, teacher!'

This respect for Korean culture's universal values stands in contrast to those who dismiss Hallyu as 'cultural imperialism' or '*kafir* culture' (non-Muslim culture). Hallyu fans are redefining perceptions of 'secularization' or 'deviance.' They view their involvement as an opportunity to adopt values that align with their Muslim identity. This represents a shift from a given Muslim identity to an actively chosen one, reflecting complex identity evolution in the context of cultural assimilation. While this development could be read as corresponding to Casanova's (2013) third category of secularization—religion as a private choice and practice—it also reflects broader dynamics of differentiation and the diversification of religious authority (Chaves, 1994). The Hallyu phenomenon in Indonesian Islam thus represents a complex mixture of cultural and religious factors, requiring a comprehensive approach to understanding how Muslim youth balance cultural involvement with religious commitment.

K-pop and Muslim Identity: A Coexistence

This study has explored how participants, who have inherited Muslim 'identity' from their families, navigate their religious identity amidst cultural assimilation and engagement with K-pop. Growing up with Islamic teachings in their homes and communities, their involvement with K-pop has initiated a process of cultural assimilation and self-exploration. This has led them to actively reflect on what it means to be 'Islamic' and 'Muslim.'

Despite different levels of religious devotion and family spiritual environments, common patterns emerge in their identity formation. Primarily, nearly all participants identify strongly as Muslims, with only one exception. Secondly, their exposure to Korean culture acts as a catalyst, prompting introspection about their religious self. Thirdly, this introspection aids in developing a nuanced understanding of their Islamic identity—one that aligns with their individual beliefs and expectations.

Maintaining a Muslim Identity - Religious Self-Identification: Despite Korean culture's appeal, most young participants in this study retain strong Muslim identity. They perceive no fundamental conflict between this identity and their interest in Korean culture, except for Interviewee 04. Some admit to occasional deviations from Islamic practices. A few of the 36 interviewees acknowledged not consistently fulfilling Islamic obligations (Interviewees 05, 34, 28, 23) or selectively observing religious duties, particularly those primarily involved in K-pop dance covers (Interviewee 26 and others).

For instance, Interviewee 26 does not strictly adhere to Islamic dress codes, such as covering the '*aurat*,' but remains committed to other religious practices. Interviewee 05 stated:

'...indeed I have not fully obeyed Islamic rules, what I know is that the consequences are sinful hehe...' and *'...I believe in my religion and I am confident that those religious norms are given for my good.'*

Coming from a Minang family with strong Islamic values, Interviewee 05 acknowledged differences in her religious practice compared to her family but maintained unwavering faith in Islam, despite a more relaxed approach to religious norms.

In discussions about religious identity, participants also shared their views on religion and society, including perspectives on Islamic dress codes for women. None of the participants

expressed skeptical or critical views toward Islam or viewed different norms for men and women as discriminatory. Regardless of their religiosity or family backgrounds, all but one firmly identified as Muslim. Their interest in Hallyu and K-pop activities did not seem to challenge their religious identity or diminish their faith, demonstrating resilient Muslim self-identification amidst external judgments.

Inherited Identity, Not Constrained by Local Culture: A second key observation among interviewees is their perspective on harmonizing their Muslim identity with Hallyu acceptance. Far from being restrictive, these individuals display openness to engaging with non-Islamic cultures. This engagement facilitates critical examination of their own religious identity and cultural roots. For instance, Interviewee 35 articulates this mindset:

'...even though I like Korean music or culture and others, I try to fortify myself as much as possible. So, I did wear this hijab because that is the order. Until now, from 2011 until now there is no intention to let go.'

Their stories reveal that embracing aspects of other cultures, like Hallyu, does not mean rejecting or diminishing their own, particularly in Islamic adherence. Interviewee 17 clarifies this:

'This is not because I'm arrogant, sir. But I don't feel affected (from Hallyu). Em... for example, when I watch a scene in a Korean drama, they were praying according to their beliefs. But I myself do not feel my faith is shaken, I have firm faith.'

These responses indicate that participants are not merely absorbing foreign cultures passively. Instead, they actively compare and acknowledge cultural differences, thereby enriching their comprehension of religion, society, and themselves. Although their initial identities were shaped by religious and cultural heritage, these young individuals, especially as college students in Yogyakarta, are navigating various experiences and embracing Hallyu, transcending solely local cultural perspectives.

This analysis highlights an important aspect: while this study focuses on Hallyu enthusiasts' perspectives, it does not imply that their views are more valid than those of external critics. Instead, it emphasizes the dynamic, evolving nature of identity formation, referred to as 'becoming,' among Hallyu enthusiasts. This process is markedly different from outsiders' perceptions.

From an 'Ascribed' to a 'Self-defined' Muslim Identity : The stories from this study illustrate a shift from an 'ascribed' Muslim identity, inherited from family and community, to a 'self-defined' Muslim identity, influenced by personal judgment and cultural experiences, particularly with Hallyu. Across various interpretations of culture and religion, a common vision emerges: a Muslim identity that values diversity, distinguishes between cultural practices and religious principles, and prioritizes personal beliefs over rigid adherence to external customs. This outlook stems not from secular or liberal views but from their personalized understanding of Islamic tenets. Interviewee 11's experience exemplifies this transformation:

'...I used to think that yes, women should wear the hijab like that, meaning when (I see) someone takes off their headscarf. When I was still at the Islamic boarding school, it influenced (me) to think 'why does she take off jilbab?' But now I know how various religious experiences are, people are different. When she takes off the jilbab, okay that's okay.'

This reflects a growing acceptance and respect for individual religious choices, such as wearing the hijab. It is clear that for young Muslim fans of Hallyu, their identity journey is not a straightforward shift from externally 'ascribed' identity to self-realized 'becoming.' Rather, it

is a dynamic, introspective process. Hallyu acts as more than a cultural influence; it prompts a proactive, continual process of 'becoming' by encouraging thoughtful reassessment and broadening of their Islamic understanding, fueled by their engagement with Hallyu. This leads to a more open, reflective, and personalized approach to their Muslim identity, often differing from external expectations.

DISCUSSION

Embracing 'Modernity', Beyond Secularization

In the field research, the term 'modern' was frequently used by young Muslims to describe their attraction to Hallyu. These Indonesian enthusiasts perceive both Hallyu and Korean society's depiction as 'modern,' associating their appreciation for Hallyu with embracing diverse cultures and the notion of being a 'modern Muslim.' This aspect of 'modern' serves as a key factor for understanding Hallyu's appeal among young Muslims. It is crucial to interpret 'modern' based on the actual experiences and insights of Hallyu fans rather than relying solely on external academic definitions. This perspective, considering interviewees' views on 'modern,' reveals that their engagement with Hallyu reflects a complex process that operates across multiple dimensions of Casanova's secularization framework. While Indonesia experiences the concurrent rise of fundamentalist Islamic movements, the phenomenon among young Muslim Hallyu fans can be understood primarily through differentiation of secular spheres (Category 1), where religious and cultural domains become distinct without implying religious decline. Furthermore, these young Muslims' exercise of self-determination regarding their religious identity—evident in their personal choices about religious practice and cultural engagement—aligns with aspects of privatization of religion (Category 3). This complex understanding of modernity manifests in several key ways in participants' experiences and interpretations of their Hallyu engagement.

Firstly, participants differentiate Hallyu from Western modernity, rendering it more compatible within an Islamic framework. Hallyu is perceived not merely as entertainment but as a reflection of appealing social and cultural progression. This influences their aspirations for modern society in Indonesia akin to Korea's, particularly among youth seeking global cultural integration. Their cultural explorations lead to critical assessment of their own societal context. The social and cultural environment of Yogyakarta and their university student status are key factors in this acculturation process, fostering proactive embrace of novelty and diversity. However, their pursuit of 'modernization' is not one-sided 'assimilation' into other cultures. It is not about 'Koreanization' or 'Westernization' as some critics may suggest. They continue to value Islamic principles, seeking growth within their traditions. For them, modern Korean society represents a form of modernity more aligned with Islamic values compared to Western examples.

Secondly, 'Modern' also implies decision-making autonomy, which aligns with Beck's (2002) concept of individualization in modern society, where individuals become central actors across various social fields. Through Hallyu, they aim to embody values such as professionalism, as observed in Korean idols. K-pop events offer unique spaces for Muslim women, providing platforms for self-expression and individualistic pursuits while upholding their collective Islamic identity. Furthermore, these events create environments where Muslim women enjoy majority presence, offering distinctive outlets for self-expression through K-pop. This supports both performers and audiences in balancing their Islamic collective identity with personal 'self-realization' and 'self-determination.'

Thirdly, Hallyu serves as a gateway to global communities, promoting recognition and appreciation of pluralism without abandoning Islamic beliefs. This challenges the notion that

religious commitment equates to adherence to Middle Eastern interpretations of Islam. Participants do not perceive cultures outside Islam as incompatible with their Muslim identity. Instead, they recognize value in other cultural insights while discerning between cultural and religious practices. They prioritize value-centered religiosity, emphasizing that being a 'true' Muslim or 'Muslim *Kaffah*' does not necessitate adherence to specific interpretations of Islam associated with the Middle East, but rather focuses on the faith's core values.

Lastly, participants view identity as flexible, adapting to modern society's needs and roles. Increasing social differentiation in modern society encourages them to embrace multiple identities, not confined to single traditional religious identity. For example, not wearing a jilbab during K-pop performances is seen as acceptable, reflecting Islam's adaptability to various contexts. This flexibility in cultural and religious expression considers their multifaceted identities and diverse life situations.

CONCLUSION

This study challenges existing assumptions about modernization and religious change by demonstrating that engagement with global popular culture can coexist with religious devotion among young Muslims. Rather than following Western secularization patterns as external concerns suggest, these Muslim K-pop fans actively engage in global cultural participation while developing strategies to maintain their religious identity. This suggests that modernity can be understood and experienced differently across different cultural and religious contexts. The study's focus on 'lived religion' reveals how ordinary believers actively negotiate meaning and practice, often in ways that differ from official religious discourse. The findings suggest that globalization does not uniformly lead to religious decline but may foster new forms of religious expression that maintain core spiritual commitments while engaging with global cultural flows.

This research demonstrates the analytical value of studying the 'Hallyu phenomenon' rather than simply 'Hallyu' itself. By using Hallyu as a lens to examine broader social dynamics, this study reveals complex negotiations between religion and culture that might otherwise remain invisible. This approach shows how global cultural phenomena can serve as windows into understanding local religious and cultural transformations within specific societal contexts. While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research was conducted in Yogyakarta, which may not represent all Indonesian contexts due to its unique educational and cultural environment. Additionally, the focus on Hallyu fans may not capture the experiences of young Muslims who are not engaged with Korean popular culture.

This study demonstrates that young Indonesian Muslims are not passive recipients of either religious tradition or global culture. Instead, they are active agents who creatively negotiate between these influences to construct meaningful identities that honor both their faith commitments and their global cultural engagements. Understanding these processes is crucial for scholars, policymakers, and religious leaders seeking to understand the evolving landscape of religious identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

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END NOTE

¹ The term "K-culture" has emerged as an umbrella term encompassing various forms of Korean popular culture including K-dramas, K-pop, K-food, K-beauty, and other cultural products (Korean Culture and Information Service, 2012). While not strictly an academic term, it is increasingly used in industry and media discourse to refer to the comprehensive Korean cultural wave. In academic literature, this phenomenon is more commonly referred to as "Hallyu" (Korean Wave).

ⁱⁱ There is no standardized dictionary definition of ‘cover dance.’ Both ‘cover dance’ and ‘dance cover’ are used interchangeably in popular discourse. For detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Billboard Korea Staff (2011), ‘A Look Inside the ‘K-Pop Cover Dance’ Trend,’ Billboard, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/a-look-inside-the-k-pop-cover-dance-trend-465675/>

ⁱⁱⁱ (“Badan Pusat Statistik,” n.d.) Available at: <https://www.bps.go.id/statictable/2009/04/06/1373/jumlah-akomodasi-rata-rata-pekerja-dan-jumlah-tamu-per-hari-menurut-provinsi-2009-2018-hotel-bintang-.html> (Retrieved June 2, 2020)

^{iv} Although Yogyakarta has a smaller student population than Jakarta, the concentration of college students within specific areas of Yogyakarta makes the ratio of university students to the overall population (city population: 422,732—2017 census) much higher than in other cities and regions.

^v For tourism development references, see (“Pembangunan Hotel dan Mall di Yogyakarta: Konflik Lingkungan yang Tak Berkesudahan, Dibutuhkan Peran Pemda Halaman 1 - Kompasiana.com,” n.d.), Retrieved June 2, 2020, <http://tataruangpertanahan.com/kliping-330-10-hotel-langgar-perda.html>.