

Korean Wave and South Korea's Perception in Southeast Asia: The Case of Vietnam

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Globalisation has brought challenges to international relations. Marked the 30th anniversary of Korea-Vietnam relations in 2022, Korea and Vietnam established closer diplomatic relations by establishing a comprehensive and strategic partnership. Based on this development, it is worth investigating how the image of Korea has been formed among the Vietnamese public. Against this backdrop, this study examines Vietnam's perceptions of South Korea and Hallyu using 580 YouTube videos created between 2012 and 2023. For exploring such images, this study employed semantic network analysis. Results show three major framings about Korea—'lifestyle', 'cultural contents' and 'global affairs'—which underpin subordinate perceptions and images of South Korea in Vietnam. The findings suggest Vietnamese perceptions of South Korea can be summarised into three thematic framings—lifestyle, cultural contents and global affairs. In particular, Hallyu plays a vital role in forming Vietnamese perceptions of Korea. Finally, this research underscores the necessity for additional research to examine South Korean attitudes towards Vietnam, assess Vietnamese expectations towards South Korea, and delve deeper into bilateral cultural relations.

Keywords: South Korea, Vietnam, Korean Wave, Hallyu, Perceptions, bilateral relations

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Introduction

The relationship between South Korea (Korea, hereafter) and Vietnam has greatly developed over the past 30 years, not only through economic cooperation but also through cultural exchanges since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992. Particularly, the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*), which began in the late 1990s, has had a profound impact on Vietnamese society and played a significant role in shaping the perception of Korea. *Hallyu*, encompassing K-pop, K-dramas, Korean films, as well as Korean fashion, beauty, and food, has garnered the interest and affection of the Vietnamese public, establishing Korea as a prominent cultural power. According to a 2022 survey conducted by KOFICE, the images associated with Korea in Vietnam were ranked as follows: 'Korean food' (16.2%), 'K-pop' (11.4%), 'dramas' (7.9%), '*Hallyu* stars' (6.3%), 'IT products/brands' (5.7%), and 'beauty products' (5.3%) (KOFICE, 2023, p. 38).

The spread of *Hallyu*, especially among the younger generation in Vietnam, has not only led to the consumption of Korean culture but also played a crucial role in forming a positive image of Korea in Vietnam. The music and fashion of K-pop idols, as well as the sophisticated lifestyles depicted in Korean dramas, have made Koreans a subject of admiration for the Vietnamese public, portraying Korea as a modern and progressive nation. Moreover, Korea's achievements in education, technology, and economics have led the Vietnamese people to perceive Korea as a developed country, fostering expectations of greater exchanges and cooperation between the two nations. According to a 2022 KOFICE survey conducted in 26 countries worldwide, while the average positive perception of Korea among respondents was 70.7%, the figure for Vietnamese respondents stood at 90%, the highest among the 26 countries surveyed (KOFICE, 2023, p. 40). Specifically, Vietnamese respondents perceived Korea as an 'economically advanced country' (93.2%), not as a competitor but as a 'cooperative country' (85.4%), and a 'favorable country' (82.9%) (KOFICE, 2023, p. 40). Therefore, the spread of *Hallyu* in Vietnam is likely to have a direct impact on enhancing Korea-Vietnam relations.

This study focuses on examining the impact of *Hallyu* on the perception of Korea among the Vietnamese people. It is known that various *Hallyu* content, such as dramas, films, music, beauty, and fashion, is primarily accessed through online platforms (KOFICE, 2023, p. 53). Consumers who experience this content actively express their experiences or opinions through online platforms. In this study, we aim to analyse the image of Korea as reflected in *Hallyu* videos produced and distributed in Vietnamese on YouTube, a representative online platform, recognising the repeated consumption and dissemination of *Hallyu* content through such channels.

Literature Review and Research Questions

This study investigates the perceptions of South Korea and *Hallyu* among the Vietnamese population through an analysis of YouTube videos. The literature review comprises two sections that examine empirical research conducted by Korean and Vietnamese researchers on relevant subjects. This study aims to identify gaps in the literature and justify its research by thoroughly examining prominent themes and situating itself within the academic context.

For Korean researchers, the phenomenon of *Hallyu* has been widely explored in academic investigations. Numerous research studies focused on the attitudes of Vietnamese consumers

towards the purchase of products originating from Korea or *Hallyu* (examples, Jung, Jin & Yang (2017), Kim (2019), and Jeong (2020). Lee & Chae (2019) investigate the influence of *Hallyu* on the positive purchasing attitudes of Vietnamese consumers towards Korean or *Hallyu*-related products. Han & Jo (2019) conducted a study on how the Korean national image influences consumers' preference for Korean or *Hallyu*-related media content. Lee, Chae, & Jeong (2022) investigated the impact of the *Hallyu* phenomenon on the inclination of Vietnamese consumers towards K-Beauty-related online media content on YouTube. Chang & Kang (2023) explored the impact of *Hallyu* content on Vietnamese consumer perceptions and their purchase intentions towards Korean health food. These commerce-oriented researches certainly create benefits such as the growth of economic interaction, cooperation, and helpful applications. However, these research items could restrict the outlook by neglecting other aspects of the impact of *Hallyu* such as political (public diplomacy) and cultural exchange.

Relatively, Korean researchers are less likely to pay attention to how Korea or *Hallyu* are represented in the media or perceived by Vietnamese people. Lee (2018) discussed the spread of the *Hallyu* wave and the expansion of *Hallyu*-related media content in Vietnam. Jung (2019) analyzed the impact of the *Hallyu* phenomenon on Vietnamese students residing in Korea through a study of their patronage of Korean restaurants. Nguyen & Oh (2021) conducted a study on the perceptions of *Hallyu* among Vietnamese university students. By considering these cases, reviewing media representation or public perception of Korea in Vietnam is currently underresearched. By investigating media representation, the findings of this research might widen the view of Korea and *Hallyu*. Also, the research might contribute to support how South Korea's soft power is effective outside of Korea (Vietnam as one of the example case).

Regardless of the successful achievements between Korea and Vietnam, the researchers have recently paid less attention towards their diplomatic ties. Lee (2020) and Choi & Kwon (2021) emphasised the diplomatic normalization between South Korea and Vietnam. Nguyen (2020) explored Vietnamese attitudes toward South Korea and its people. Ngo & Han (2021) reviewed Vietnamese perceptions of the Korean Army during the Vietnam War period. Most empirical studies focus on drawing constructive suggestions for improving Korea-Vietnam bilateral relations. In the previous works, the bilateral historical pasts, especially war and conflicts, were the starting point of the core arguments. Their findings suggested that they need to overcome their historical pasts to improve their bilateral relations. However, considering their commitment towards making sincere efforts to improve the bilateral relations, we need a different starting point for the constructive argument. Nguyen (2020) suggested that Korean culture can be a future-oriented topic because it would promote bilateral exchanges in many ways. Ha (2023) examines Korea-Vietnam relations in the context of a middle-power agency, and she illuminates the potential of bilateral relations, such as diversification strategy and economic security against the competition between the superpowers. In Vietnam, there are a number of researches on bilateral diplomatic ties but fewer studies on how Vietnamese perceive South Korea or the effects of *Hallyu* in the context of bilateral relations. Consequently, exploring such perceptions might fill the gap in existing studies. Based on reviewing empirical studies, this research would like to suggest the following research questions.

Research Question 1 (RQ1) How is *Hallyu* visible within Vietnamese perceptions of Korea?

Research Question 2 (RQ2) How did *Hallyu* impact the Vietnamese attitudes toward Korea?

Research Question 3 (RQ3) How could *Hallyu* contribute to developing Korea-Vietnam bilateral relations?

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Globalisation has brought profound challenges and changes to international relations. This phenomenon encompasses a significantly heightened interdependence in areas such as technology, culture, politics and the relationships between non-state and state institutions (Haynes, Hough, Malik & Pettiford, 2017, p. 4). It has far-reaching implications that extend beyond every area of our society. It enables the escalating and intensified exchange of capital, commodities, ideas, information, people and services between nation-states across borders (Reddy, 2012, p. 60).

The advent of globalised communication has precipitated an upsurge in the construction of national images for two reasons—generating domestic political support and expanding the international influence of a nation-state (Li & Chitty, 2009). Due to an advance in media technology, international relations are increasingly influenced by ‘cultural factors’ (Dai & Cheng, 2022). Culture is an unpredictable yet indispensable factor, which has a direct effect on decision-makers’ perceived values. Depending on their perceptions, their international relations would create either harmonies or conflicts (Lane & Ersson, 2019). Hence, this study pays specific attention to three aspects of international relations: images, framing and culture for establishing theoretical frameworks and drawing relevant hypotheses.

1) Image Theory of International Relations

Nimmo & Savage (1976) defined image as a human construction imposed on a collection of perceived qualities that are projected by an individual, event or object. Image has substantial importance in the functioning of human activities including social, political and cultural aspects. Moreover, these notions heavily influence our widely acknowledged perceptions of societal structure (Kapferer, 2012, p. 1). Especially, perceptions have a huge influence on behaviours. This link results in individuals engaging in instinctive behavioural responses based on their perceptions (Chartrand, Maddux & Lakin, 2004, p. 334).

In international relations, image and perceptions are considered one of the important aspects of leaders’ decision-making process. The determinants of leaders’ foreign policy decision-making include the antagonism or friendliness exhibited by other governments and their perceived strengths or weaknesses (Boulding, 1959). The concept of national image encompasses the amalgamation of an individual’s descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs about a certain country (Kunczik, 1997). Image theory focuses on the structural relations between national images, perceptions, interpretations and policy implementations (Herrmann, Voss, Schooler & Ciarrochi, 1997).

Applying the theoretical perspective to this study, Korea-Vietnam relations have been significantly improved due to positive perceptions towards each other. Considering the image

theory, whether the image or perceptions are positive or negative, the recipients would have shown proper responses. Hence, below is the hypothesis based on this theoretical position.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) *Hallyu* phenomenon had the potential to foster favourable perceptions of Korea within the Vietnamese populace.

2) Frames

Frames are mainly concerned with how people recognise their situations and activities. Frame theory establishes cognitive frameworks through which humans interpret and understand the world (Volkmer 2009, p. 408). Frame helps analyse cognitive processes related to human activities and behaviours (Matthes, 2009). Goffman explained frames as cognitive processes which culturally construct or shape individuals' understandings of the world and enable them to interpret and comprehend various phenomena (Goffman, 1974). Gitlin defined 'frames' as "principles of selection and presentations... about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Volkmer (2009) claims that, in the past, the meanings of the world were transmitted through the socialisation process, but in modern times, media and communication play a vital role in shaping how we see the world.

The frame is a commonly employed technique in international relations and foreign policy discourses, such as Reagan's characterisation of the Soviet Union as the "evil empire" (Mintz & Redd, 2003, p. 193). Frame plays a significant role in constructing "discursive communities" in which frames specify the limits of the discussion on a particular problem and classify the relevant participants according to a predetermined system of social categorisation (Pan & Kosicki, 2001, p. 41). Establishing such discursive communities could create the images of international relations. Entman (2004) contended that these frames can create or shape news, public opinion and even foreign policy. Manor (2015) investigated the generic frames of the US, Russia and Iran from the US SNS contents. These frames are helpful in promoting national image by enhancing communication with their audiences, which can be understood as one aspect of public and digital diplomacy (Manor, 2015). Applying this theoretical perspective, Vietnamese perceptions of Korea and *Hallyu* could be examined by investigating media frames. By examining the media framings, the results might illustrate the Vietnamese people's perceptions of Korea more in detail. Thus, we could draw these possible hypotheses for this research.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) Vietnamese perceptions of *Hallyu* might be the most effective frame within Vietnamese perceptions of Korea.

3) Hallyu

The content that first sparked the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) in Vietnam was K-dramas. In 1986, Nguyễn Văn Linh, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, introduced the "Đổi Mới" (Renovation) policy, aiming to expose the Vietnamese people to various foreign cultures by broadcasting dramas and films produced in countries like Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, and Iran (Lee & Le, 2013, p. 62). Korean dramas started airing in Vietnamese households in this context. Up to May 1999, 14 Korean dramas were aired in Vietnam (Lee & Le, 2013, pp. 23-24). Among these, the 1998 airing of "Medical Brothers" in Ho Chi Minh City marked the beginning of *Hallyu*'s influence in Vietnam (Pham, 2015). "Dae Jang Geum"

(Jewel in the Palace), which aired in 2004, helped solidify the foundation of Hallyu in Vietnam (Kwak *et al.*, 2021, p. 132). Various dramas, both historical and modern, such as "Jumong," "Moon Embracing the Sun," "Boys Over Flowers," "My Love from the Star," "Descendants of the Sun," and "Sky Castle," gained popularity. While many Korean films were favored by Vietnamese audiences, notable ones include "My Sassy Girl," "The King and the Clown," and "Parasite."

From the mid-2000s, the focus of Hallyu began shifting toward K-pop. Following the success of H.O.T., Kangta gained popularity, followed by groups like Baby Vox, Wonder Girls, TVXQ, Super Junior, Big Bang, Girls' Generation, and 2NE1. Toward the end of the 2000s, cover songs and cover dances of Korean artists became popular (Kwak *et al.*, 2021, p. 135). As of 2022, the most popular K-pop artists in Vietnam are BTS (27.6%), Black Pink (15.9%), and Big Bang (9.3%) (KOFICE, 2023, p. 98). Recently, there has been growing interest in Korean food. After the introduction of Korean dishes like *Bulgogi*, *Kimchi*, and *Tteokbokki* through dramas depicting Korean cuisine, such as "Dae Jang Geum" (2004), "Bread, Love and Dreams" (2010), and "Feast of the Gods" (2013), Korean restaurants have been springing up across Vietnam. The Korean Wave is no longer limited to a preference for Korean culture but has expanded into an interest in the overall Korean lifestyle. From Korea's café culture and lifestyle to trends in the use of mobile phones and electronic devices, Hallyu has increasingly influenced the daily lives of Vietnamese people, and a culture of admiration for Korea has begun to take root.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) Vietnamese perceptions of *Hallyu* might play a role in the growing appeal of Korea across various domains.

Data and Methodology

1) Data Profile

The relevant data of this study is collected and established by NodeXL, an add-on tool for data collection and analysis of the data on the internet. The keyword for this study was *Làn sóng Hàn Quốc*, which means 'Hallyu' in Vietnamese. The data set for this study consists of 580 YouTube videos in total, created from 2 December 2012 to 8 December 2023. For the initial stage of data collection, the coder set the beginning of the data period as January 2010 and the end of the data period as December 2023. However, the available videos for analysis were created as the dates given above. All videos gathered were sourced from YouTube and were produced in the Vietnamese language. The majority of collected videos pertained to topics such as K-Culture, K-Drama, K-Pop, and social issues related to South Korea. It is assumed that the majority of the videos were produced by Vietnamese individuals, however, there were also videos created by individuals from Korea who possess proficiency in Vietnamese. This study concentrated on the decade of the 2010s, during which the phenomenon of the Korean Wave gained significant prominence. Additionally, the availability of data was another significant factor. This study established that the data pertaining to this time frame were thoroughly collected and well-suited for analysis.

2) Semantic Network Analysis

Images and perceptions come from human beings' cognitive processes. Language and perceptions are inherently interconnected, and they can be attributed to the ability to articulate our perceptual experiences through linguistic expressions. The perceptual expressions in the physical world are often employed in languages to convey more abstract concepts (Vulchanova, Vulchanov, Fritz & Milburn, 2019, p. 104). Hence, language is a useful source of information to explore the structure of perceptions and images.

The investigation of the correlation between words and their meanings has been a prominent scholarly inquiry. Semantic Networks are useful in exploring knowledge representations by exploring the semantic relations between words and their meanings. They describe semantic links by using a graph structure consisting of 'nodes' (dots) and 'edges' (lines) that are appropriately labelled (Drieger, 2013). Network Analysis, sometimes referred to as 'graph theory', has been widely applied across many academic disciplines in natural and social sciences. The integration of content analysis based on network analysis is a recent development in academic research (Segev, 2021, p. 5). They have provided a flexible and formal framework for scientific advancements and practical applications (Helbig, 2005). In the context of visual analytics, extracting semantic networks from unstructured textual data may be automated, enabling their use as a means for visual text analytics. Semantic Network Analysis allows researchers to investigate the contextual relationships inside semantic structures and enhances the synergistic combination of quantitative ('automatic') and qualitative ('heuristic') examination of the network structure (Drieger, 2013). Semantic network analysis has been employed to identify prominent frames, evaluate their impact on public perceptions and visually represent interconnections between framings, which indicate the frequency and significance of frames (Shin, 2020, p. 121).

This study employs Semantic Network Analysis to explore Vietnamese public knowledge representations of Korea's image and *Hallyu*. For the linguistic source, we collected the relevant texts from Korea- and *Hallyu*-related video clips filmed in Vietnamese on YouTube. For the software, we employed NodeXL, which enables conducting data collection and semantic network analysis. The results will be presented visually by network mappings. Based on their salience, the results will present the visual representations of thematic framings attached to Korea and *Hallyu*. Subsequently, based on the results, we are going to assess these prominent frames and assess their meaning and significance.

Results

The results of this study will be first presented by the semantic network mapping (Figure 1). It presents the overall framing of Vietnamese people's perceptions of Korea and *Hallyu*. Some nodes are coded as 'word1' and 'word2'. For example, *Văn Hóa* means 'culture' in Vietnamese. For labelling this word in English, it is coded as 'culture1' and 'culture2'. Subsequently, by looking into the videos by impact (by 'views' (popularity), 'likes' (positive influence) and 'comments' (responsiveness)), this study will be able to explore which framing has the biggest impact on Vietnamese viewers (Tables 1 to 3).

Reviewing the semantic mapping of Vietnamese perception of Korea, there are three major framings about Korea. The biggest framing was about 'lifestyle' which indicates the life in

Korea. The second biggest framing was about their bilateral affairs'. The final framing indicates 'cultural contents'. The results indicate that the Vietnamese mainly perceive South Korea as a place to visit or to live. Also, the Vietnamese certainly recognise South Korea as a global partner in political and economic cooperation. Finally, the cultural contents framing indicates that film review and Korean Wave were the major sub-themes. However, suggesting these framings only indicate the thematic prevalence. Consequently, to supplement the results presented by the semantic network, this study attempts to suggest the top ten videos by the number of views, likes and comments for measuring which framing had more impact on the Vietnamese viewers.

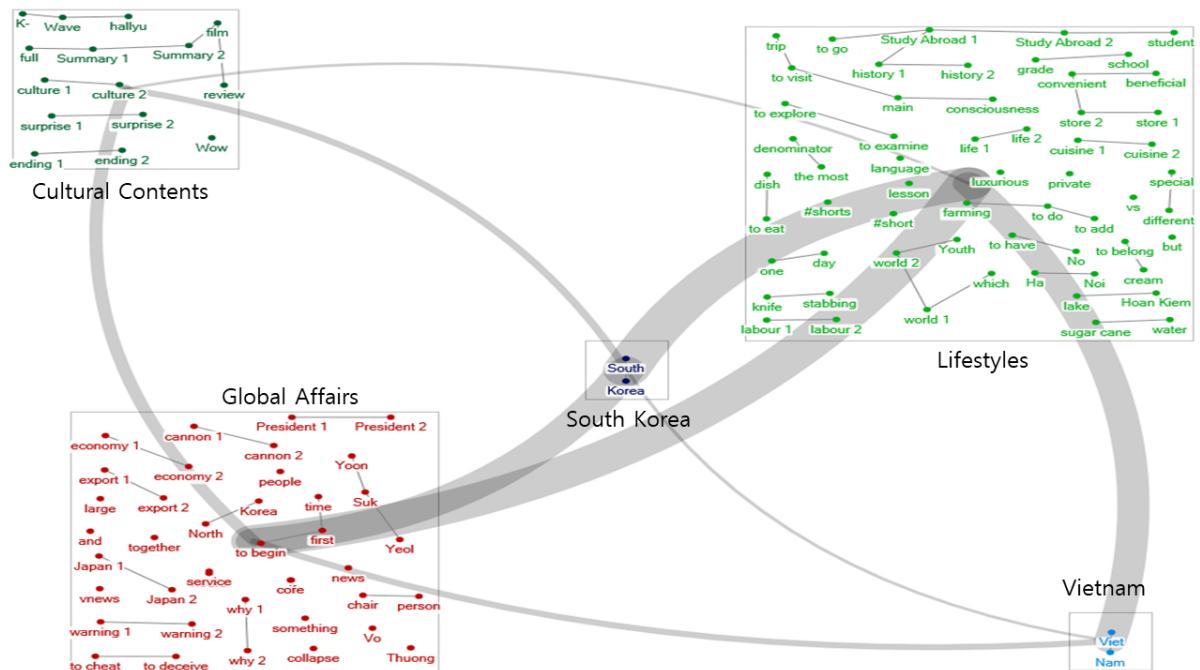


Figure 1. Semantic Network of Vietnamese Perception of Korea.

Reviewing the semantic mapping of Vietnamese perception of Korea, there are three major framings about Korea. The biggest framing was about 'lifestyle' which indicates the life in Korea. The second biggest framing was about their bilateral affairs'. The final framing indicates 'cultural contents'. The results indicate that the Vietnamese mainly perceive South Korea as a place to visit or to live. Also, the Vietnamese certainly recognise South Korea as a global partner in political and economic cooperation. Finally, the cultural contents framing indicates that film review and Korean Wave were the major sub-themes. However, suggesting these framings only indicate the thematic prevalence. Consequently, to supplement the results presented by the semantic network, this study attempts to suggest the top ten videos by the number of views, likes and comments for measuring which framing had more impact on the Vietnamese viewers.

Table 1

Top 10 Videos by the Number of Views

Rank	Title (translated in English)	Views	Created Date	Framing
1	Film Review: The Summary of My Golden Life	21,475,750	10/12/2022	Cultural Contents
2	Learn Elementary Korean 1 Online – Lesson 1 Korean Alphabet Part 1	6,080,006	26/10/2017	Cultural Contents
3	Cheap in Vietnam, Expensive in Korea #short	5,898,160	04/10/2022	Lifestyle
4	Things that Vietnam has but Korea doesn't have? International Students in Korea.	5,562,265	19/11/2022	Lifestyle
5	A young man murders his wife to follow his rival and the end is shocking / Movie Review * The Vanished (2018)	4,954,229	05/04/2022	Cultural Contents
6	From a special student to the richest tycoon in Korea – the summary of the movie Itaewon Class	4,952,045	16/07/2023	Cultural Contents
7	Vietnamese Students vs. Korean Students #short	4,807,651	17/10/2022	Lifestyle
8	Gwangjang Market – Food Paradise / Korean Culinary Travel #4	4,015,685	25/12/2022	Lifestyle
9	Learn Korean for Beginners	3,873,146	28/10/2019	Cultural Contents
10	Bombarding the “incredibly delicious” Korean Bakery Convenience Store Girl	3,602,386	19/06/2021	Lifestyle

Table 1 indicates the top 10 videos which are related to South Korea in Vietnamese. By looking at these videos, we are able to figure out which themes or framings drew more attentions or interests from the Vietnamese viewers. Table 1 indicates three videos related to Hallyu (Ranks 1, 5 & 6) and seven videos related to South Korea's lifestyle (Ranks 2,3,4,7,8,9 & 10). The results show that the cultural contents were the most attractive thematic framing for Vietnamese viewers. However, they are generally more likely to be interested in South Korea's lifestyles.

Table 2

Top 10 Videos by the Number of Likes

Rank	Title (translated in English)	Likes	Created Date	Framing
1	Cheap in Vietnam, Expensive in Korea #short	247,317	04/10/2022	Lifestyle
2	Vietnamese Students vs. Korean Students #short	177,985	17/10/2022	Lifestyle
3	Things that Vietnam has but Korea doesn't have? International Students in Korea.	125,792	29/11/2022	Lifestyle
4	Vietnamese people will be shocked when they come to Korea #short	125,161	14/11/2022	Lifestyle

5	International Children – What do Vietnamese and Korean Children play? #short	116,769	01/06/2022	Lifestyle
6	Most Famous Vietnamese dish in Korea #short	97,568	12/06/2022	Lifestyle
7	Is Hanoi as cold as Korea #short	84,592	16/12/2022	Lifestyle
8	When seeing pregnant women in Vietnam vs Korea # short	83,400	10/11/2022	Lifestyle
9	Learn Elementary Korean 1 Online – Lesson 1 Korean Alphabet Part 1	82,491	26/10/2017	Cultural Contents
10	Difference between Vietnam and Korea # short	80,288	28/06/2022	Lifestyle

Table 2 presents the top ten videos with the most ‘likes’. It roughly refers to the viewers’ recommendation of certain content to other potential viewers. All ten videos were about the Korean lifestyle, such as living costs, studying in Korea, cultural differences, weather and language. Also, eight out of ten videos were shorts, which are short videos. It means the viewers prefer longer videos to shorter ones.

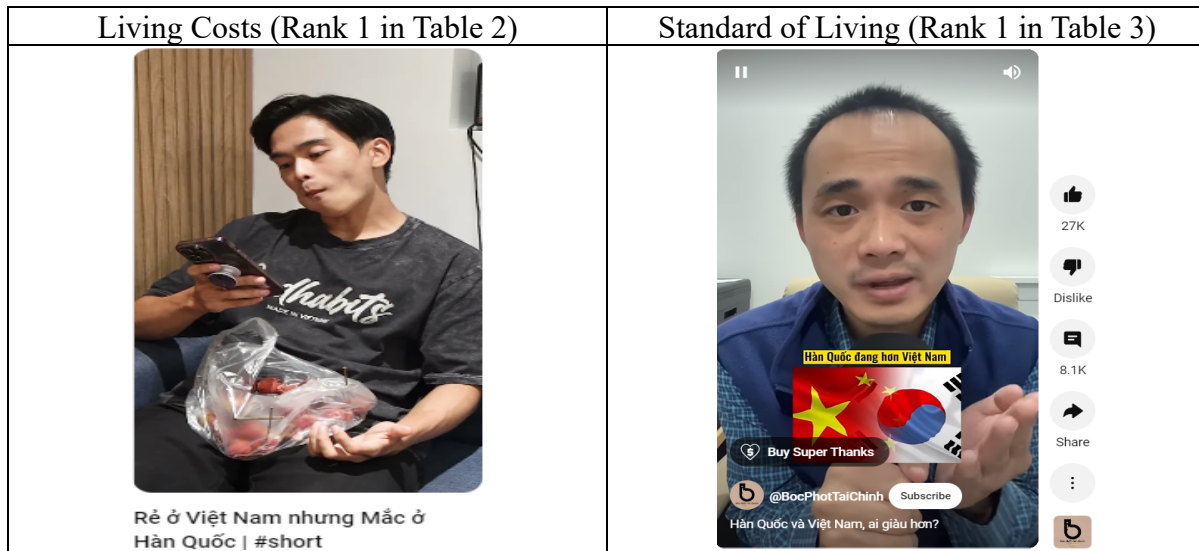
Table 3

Top 10 Videos by the Number of Comments

Rank	Title (translated in English)	Comments	Created Date	Framing
1	Korea or Vietnam, who is richer?	7,687	25/06/2023	Lifestyle
2	Learn Elementary Korean 1 Online – Lesson 1 Korean Alphabet Part 1	6,979	26/10/2017	Cultural Contents
3	Learn Korean for Beginners	5,782	28/10/2019	Cultural Contents
4	Film Review: The Summary of My Golden Life	3,771	10/12/2023	Cultural Contents
5	230729 BLACKPINK @ BORN PINK WORLD TOUR HANOI - VIETNAM Full Concert	3,287	30/07/2023	Cultural Contents
6	10 Photos showing the huge difference between South Korea and North Korea and 40 little-known facts	3,280	12/09/2021	Lifestyle
7	Do Koreans really know what country Vietnam is and where it is located?	3,123	06/01/2019	Lifestyle
8	South Korea doesn’t have the North, so why can’t it be united?	2,839	27/06/2023	Global Affairs
9	South Korea – Let’s look back at the path they have taken and how to become a great power	2,635	03/11/2021	Global Affairs
10	The dark side of Korea – When poor people are just ‘pigs’	2,368	26/08/2021	Lifestyle

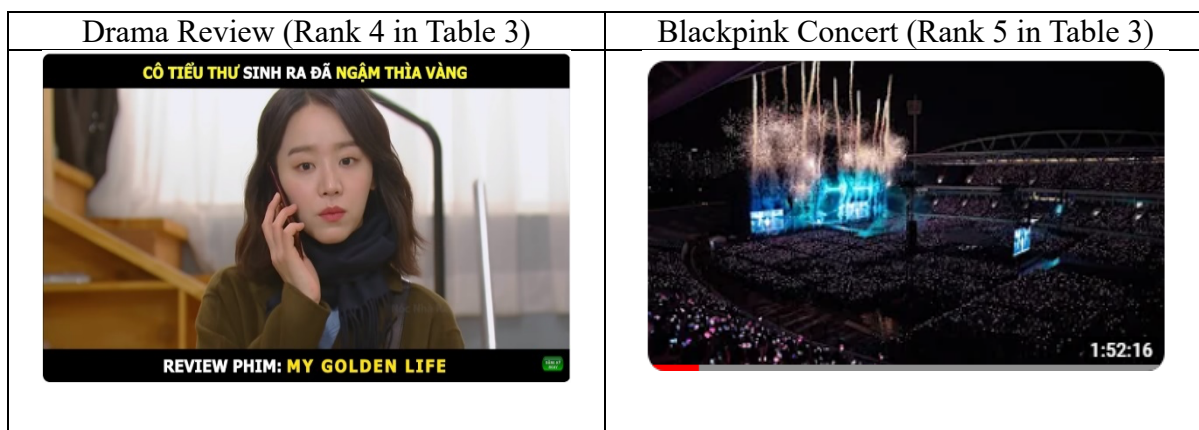
Table 3 illustrates the top 10 videos by the number of comments. The number of comments can be generally interpreted as a certain item drawing the viewers’ active responses from their feedback and attempts to communicate with the creator or other viewers. Also, certain content

became the forum of discussion among the viewers. Among these videos, four videos are related to the Korean lifestyle (Ranks 1,6,7& 10),and four are related to cultural contents (Ranks 2,3,4 & 5) and two are related to global affairs (Ranks 8 & 9). . The results present that Korean lifestyle (see Figure 2) and Korean cultural contents (see Figure 3) are major thematic framings which attract Vietnamese viewers’ active responses rather than global affairs.



Sources: HanQuocBros (2022) (Left); Bóc Phốt Tài Chính (2023) (Right)

Figure 2. Snapshots of Lifestyle-Related Top-Videos.



Sources: *Nóc Nhà Review* (2022) (Left); Nguyễn Xuân Trường (2023) (Right)

Figure 3. Snapshots of Cultural Cotents-Related Top-Videos.

The findings demonstrate the representation of Vietnamese perceptions towards South Korea through the visualization of a semantic network. This study indicates that lifestyle played a crucial role in reflecting the appeal and consequent impacts of *Hallyu*. The bilateral relations reflected the global cooperation and partnerships between the two countries, highlighting Vietnam's interests in South Korea. Ultimately, cultural contents emerged as a significant

phenomenon that captured the attention of Vietnamese viewers. These findings demonstrate that Vietnamese perceptions are reflected in YouTube videos by examining individuals' interests in Korea. Nevertheless, these findings may be limited as they do not take into account the perspectives of Vietnamese professionals or experts on South Korea or *Hallyu*. Future research could potentially contribute to illustrating these aspects. This research could consistently yield additional insights into the bilateral relations between South Korea and Vietnam.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This study investigates Vietnamese perceptions of South Korea and Hallyu by focusing on the relevant YouTube videos. These states have established their sound bilateral relations, so the perceptions could be considered positive. Since establishing diplomatic relations in 1992, South Korea and Vietnam have mutually supported each other to become prominent partners in the global arena. As Hallyu grows in influence, its bilateral relations have also significantly expanded into a strategic partner, prominent trade partner, and future-oriented partner. The results show different aspects of such perceptions. The semantic network (Figure 1) shows that Vietnamese perceptions of Korea can be summarised as three major framings—Lifestyle, Cultural Contents and Global Affairs. The videos by views, likes and comments (Tables 1, 2 & 3) indicate that the Korean lifestyle was the most appealing thematic framing to the Vietnamese viewers. Cultural Contents, which is related to Hallyu, drew some degree of attention, but not as much as the previous one.

Responding to the above-mentioned research questions (RQ1, 2 & 3), there are three relevant findings. First, Cultural Contents framing did not have much visibility from the semantic network (Figure 1). However, the numbers of ‘views’, ‘likes’, and ‘comments’ indicate that cultural content, such as drama reviews or concert live shows, strongly attracted Vietnamese viewers’ interest. As mentioned earlier, the results of empirical studies show that Hallyu has a significant impact on preferences and lifestyle (K-Beauty, clothing items, health food and tourism). Consequently, we could interpret that lifestyle framing is also closely related to Cultural Contents framing in light of Hallyu. Considering cultural contents and lifestyle framings together, Hallyu has a huge latent concept within Vietnamese perceptions of Korea. Second, Hallyu promotes Vietnamese attitudes toward Korea by boosting their travels to Korea and willingness to enhance bilateral cooperation. The Hallyu phenomenon has greatly impacted young Vietnamese people’s decision to travel to Korea (Vietnam.vn, 2023). On 23 October 2023, the Korean Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Chairman of the Economic Commission of the Vietnamese Party Central Committee met in Seoul to pledge stronger cooperation between Korea and Vietnam (Korea.net, 2023). Finally, the results possibly show that Hallyu increased the people-to-people exchange between these two nations—from tourism to settlement.

Reviewing three hypotheses individually, the findings can suggest new implications. From the first hypothesis (H1), Hallyu turned out to be a key component of the positive image of Korea in Vietnam. Furthermore, Vietnamese perceptions might lead to more possible and constructive responses. By engaging with the semantic network outlined in this study, the Vietnamese people gain an understanding of their interactions with South Korea on the global stage, particularly in the political and economic spheres. Echoing the recent upgrading of bilateral relations to a strategic partnership, such an image does not stay within their

understanding. Their cooperation can be understood as the tangible consequences of Vietnamese positive perceptions of Korea. The second hypothesis (H2) suggests that Hallyu was a compelling concept within the cultural contents framing Vietnamese perceptions of Korea. Korean cultural content amplifies the impact of Hallyu and increases the attraction to the Korean lifestyle afterwards. Finally, the last hypothesis (H3) implies that the attraction stemming from Hallyu will lead to more Vietnamese individuals interacting with South Korea through activities such as tourism, studying, working, and migration. In conclusion, the findings can indicate the need for future research in the field. Most of all, it may be worthwhile to examine the attitudes of South Koreans towards Vietnam to assess the level of mutual awareness. It would be beneficial to assess the present state of the bilateral relations or to investigate potential misunderstandings. Additionally, it would be advantageous to consider the Vietnamese public's expectations of Korea. It suggests that it is worthwhile to investigate further the subordinate beliefs that comprise a positive image of Korea in Vietnam. Conducting a thorough examination of bilateral cultural connections could be an advantageous initial measure for assessing the quality of the bilateral interactions. Subsequent research could shed light on the extent of reciprocal regard and comprehension. It is hoped that in the future, there will be more opportunities to explore the worldwide perceptions between Korea and Vietnam.

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