



JANUARY 2022

Regional Influence:

The rise of influence in South Korea and beyond





Figure 1. Source: Los Angeles Times - BTS

Hallyu, the name used to describe Korean popular culture, is a Chinese term that literally translates to ‘Korean Wave’. The term was coined to describe the recent spread of Korean culture across Asia and the rest of the world. Now, demand for Hallyu is at an all-time high, with TV-series like Netflix’s Squid Game, Oscar award-winning Korean film Parasite and K-Pop stars such as BTS and BlackPink dominating entertainment across the globe. From the US to the Philippines and Thailand to the United Kingdom, the Korean cultural economy is on the rise, showing no signs of slowing down anytime soon. But what is it about these Korean hits that makes them so appealing to the Western world and beyond?

It does not come as a great surprise that Korean culture would be so successful considering the Western world has been obsessed with Asian entertainment for quite some time. In the 90s and early noughties, Japan had some of its most successful moments with Anime, Manga, the J-pop scene, and cultural hits like the Studio Ghibli, Pokémon, Ring and Audition. Yet, these cultural exports usually only reached a fairly niche audience.

Now, the recent popularity of certain South Korean cultural exports, largely driven by K-Pop and more recently Netflix’s smash hit Squid Game, has sparked a huge interest in South Korean popular culture all across the globe.

Western self-declared ‘dominance’ in global popular culture seems to be gracefully stepping aside in the wake of several recent South Korean cultural exports that have taken the world by storm. There is a crystal clear call for more diverse content across the globe, with Western consumers becoming eager to engage with new and exciting content that offers a different cultural perspective. Today’s consumers are easily bored, so looking outside of one’s own cultural experiences for entertainment, fashion, music, and TV is quickly becoming the new norm. In particular, South Korean culture has transcended borders to make a huge name for itself across the world. This can largely be attributed to the global phenomena that is K-Pop. **Our statistics show #kpop received an average engagement rate of 12% on Instagram for Q1 2020 compared to a significant increase to 25% in Q1 2021 globally.**



Brands who are paying attention to these shifting trends and staying one step ahead have seen heightened success in their marketing campaigns. In 2020, advertising firm GREYnJ United, based in Thailand, launched a campaign with K-pop girl group Black Pink for their client Kbank. They saw a surge of more than 500K new accounts within the first four weeks as well as introducing branded debit cards resulting in a successful one million cards issued.

Major global brands have also realised the benefits of partnering up with K-pop stars. In April of 2021 McDonald's announced 'The BTS Meal' and the 'Famous Order' launch blew up on social media. Their partnership quickly became the number one trend in the US and number two globally. Between the time frame of the campaign launch and the end of the month (1st April 2021 - 30th April 2021) **#TheBTSMeal received a 107% engagement rate across all platforms globally. Indonesian TikTok vlogger Elgrithe Laurensia (@elgrithelaurensia) gained 200% engagement rate on one video on TikTok where she spoke about the launch.** Shortly after, in June 2021, BTS featured on the cover of Rolling Stones, solidifying their undisputed title as the biggest boy band in the world.



Figure 2. Source: South China Morning Post - BTS



Regurgitating old, familiar tactics will no longer do in the age of marketing globalisation and paying attention to these trends and cultural changes has clearly worked well for several global brands. Additionally, Luxury brand YSL recently appointed K-Pop Band Black Pink's Rosie as a global ambassador. This has been a big success for the brand with Rosie's Instagram posts mentioning @ysl receiving 5M average Engagement. **Not only does Rosie receive an average Engagement Rate of 11%, but her followers continue to consistently grow, increasing by 11M in the last six months.** More Western brands would do well to pay attention to these cultural shifts and realign their strategies for a more globalised approach.

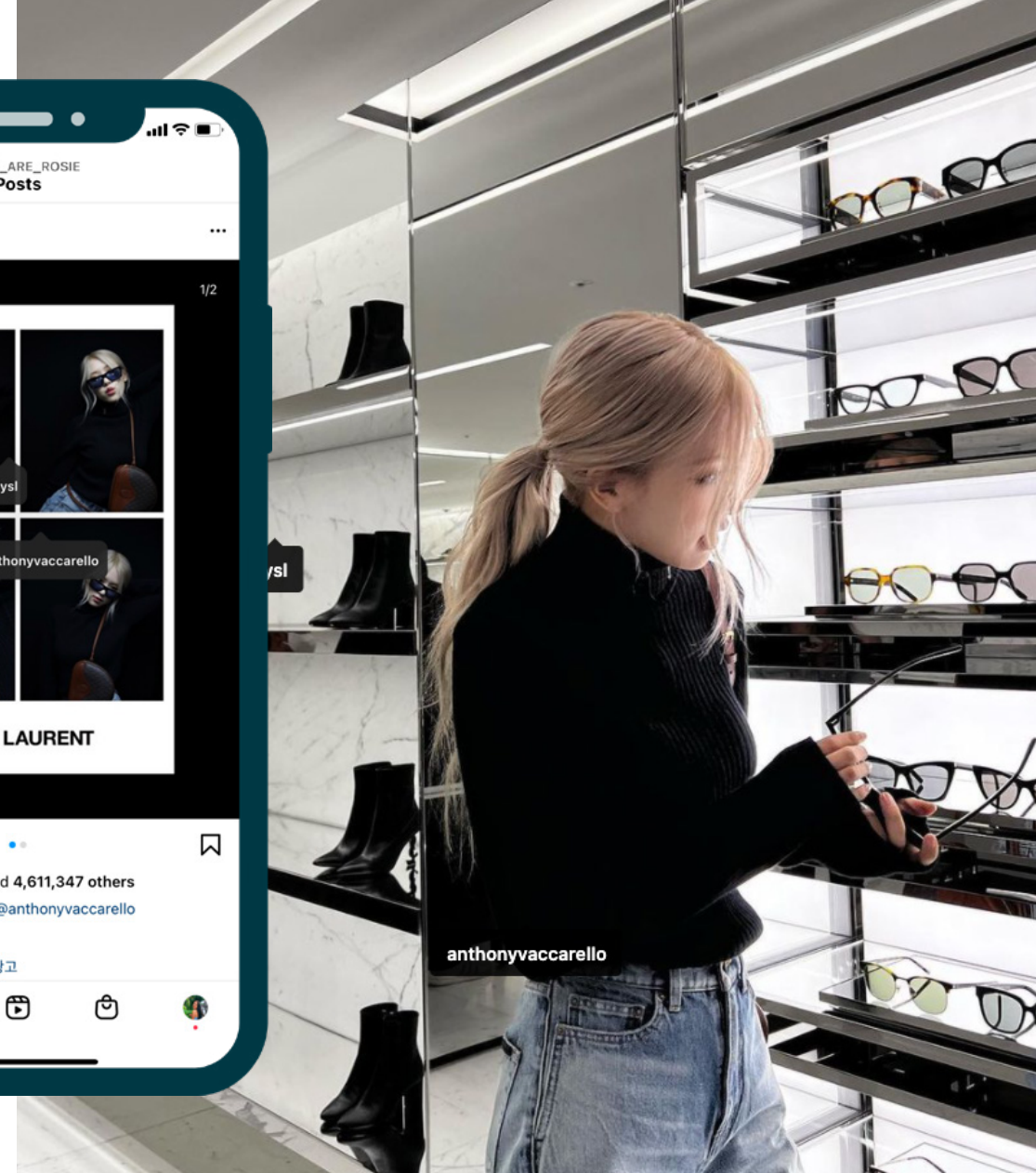
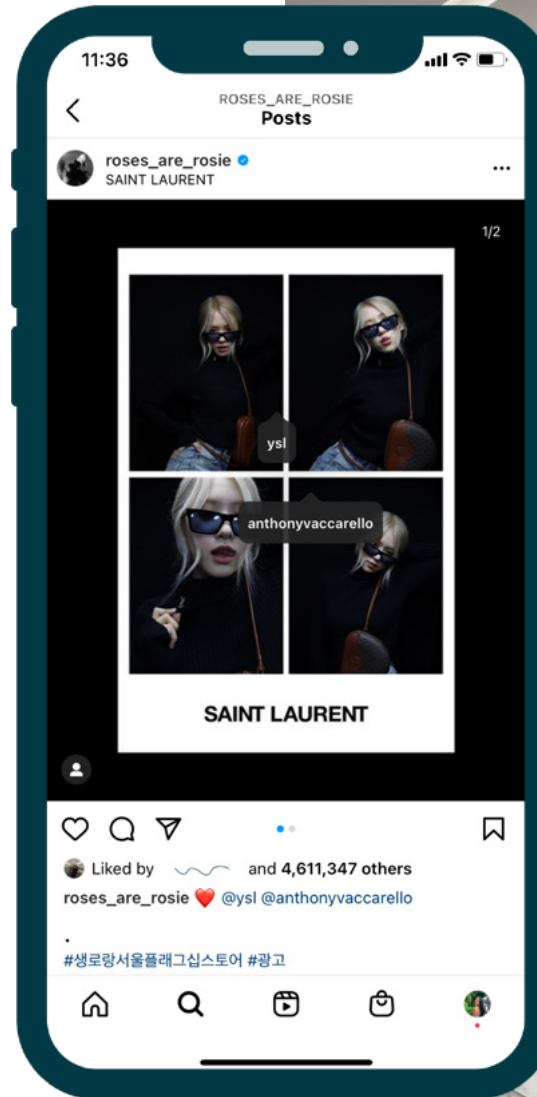


Figure 3. (left) and Figure 4. (right) Source: Instagram, @roses_are_rosie



The major worldwide success of Squid Game has further cemented Korean popular culture as one of the most sought after cultural exports of the past few decades. In 2021, across the four months after the shows launch on Netflix, **#squidgame received a high 46% engagement rate globally across all social platforms, accumulating an incredible 6 billion total engagements.** The show is Netflix's biggest debut release by far, reaching 111 million viewers in its first month and topping charts across the globe; in the UK, it was the first South Korean show to ever reach the Top 10 list. In fact, subscribers across the world have now watched more than 2.1 billion hours of the series

since it was released, accumulating to 239K years of viewing.

The niche, localised references to Korean children's games may seem at odds with the shows global success considering some of these cultural references would be lost on viewers who did not grow up in South Korea. Yet, these unique cultural traditions actually drive the show's success, speaking to a growing demand for diverse, multicultural stories that can provide an exciting new experience for viewers as well as unique insight into global cultures.

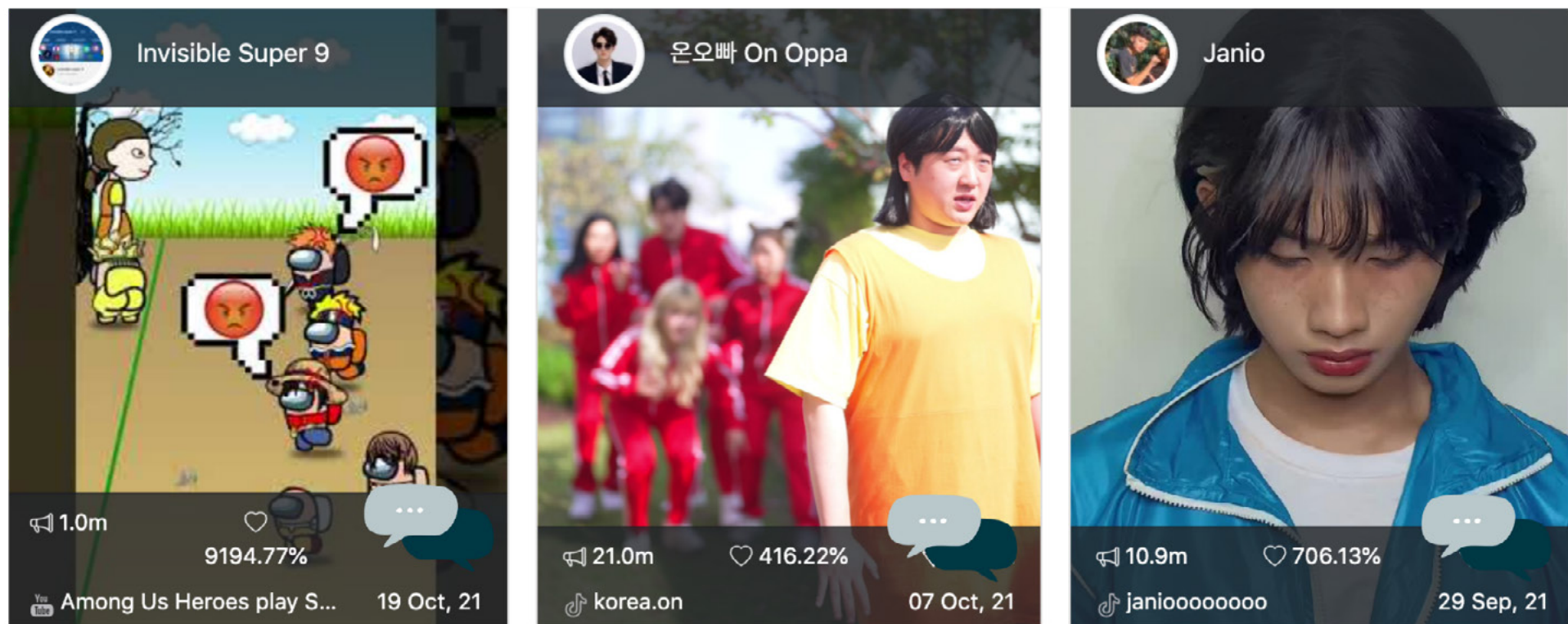


Figure 5. Source: Wearisma Data, Instagram, Invisible Super 9, Korea.on, Janio



How Social Media catapulted Korean culture across the globe

The rise of TikTok, with a huge fan base from China as well as the U.S, has allowed brands and content creators alike to reach a global audience, rather than separately focusing on building visibility in the East and the West. TikTok's whirlwind global popularity, now the most downloaded app worldwide with 615M downloads in 2021 alone, brings people together from all over the world and encourages consumers to engage with wider cultural trends from the comfort of their own homes. The app has played a significant role in the globalisation of K-Pop music. Artists use TikTok to spread their music by creating dance moves which become popular 'trends', inviting people from all over the world to emulate their moves and subsequently engage with their content.

Wearisma's data reveals an increased interest in South Korean culture which can be tracked across social media trends. **Across all platforms globally between 1st January-Dec 31st 2021, #southkorea gained 40M total engagements, compared to 33M across the same period in 2020.** This is an incredible jump compared to 2019, when **#southkorea gained a mere 15M engagements across this period, in comparison to 2020 and 2021 respectively.** Influencer [@hello_dongwon](#) on TikTok uses #southkorea and #traveltiktok to video her local area, attracting viewers from around the world. This has allowed global viewers to explore South Korea from miles away, which is particularly relevant during the global pandemic, and has clearly resonated with an **incredible 320% engagement rate** for this post.

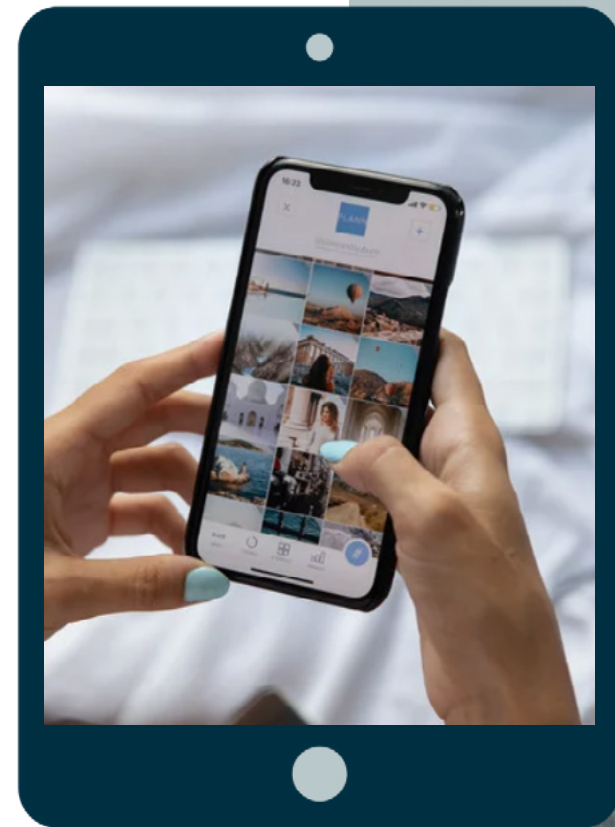


Figure 6. (left) and Figure 7. (right) Source: Unsplash





Figure 8. Source: Unsplash

Live streaming on social media has also been popular in Asia, offering consumers the opportunity to engage with Korean culture in real-time. Interest in real-time connection has emulated across the globe, encouraging influencers and celebrities alike to build a strong, authentic relationship with their fans by hosting ‘lives’, a feature which has only been possible in recent years. These aspects of technological development have encouraged the globalisation of diverse forms of popular culture, allowing influencers to connect with people from across the world all at the same time.

K-Pop fandoms are a great example of how to utilise social media to build a meaningful two-way relationship with those who engage with your content, creating a powerful force behind your brand. The K-Pop fandoms are impassioned and incredibly influential, transcending borders as a community to promote social or political goals. Whether it is raising money for Black Lives Matter, hijacking racist hashtags, or encouraging others to get vaccinated, K-Pop fans have made their mark. BTS recently accompanied South Korean President Moon Jae-in to the UN General Assembly, where they spoke about vaccinations and climate change. In order to support their idols, the self-named BTS Army launched a new Twitter campaign called #ARMYvaccinatedtoo, where they shared their vaccination stories.





Figure 9. Source: Unsplash

The main takeaway for brands

Brands can learn from how influencers in this region have utilised social media to foster a strong online presence across all platforms. Ultimately, building online influence always comes down to the **real people who are driving trends and conversations**. Understanding the power of the everyday consumer is invaluable and encouraging your consumers to recognise their influence is an essential aspect of fostering a committed online community. **The realisation that it is everyday consumers who are driving trends and conversations is essential and can impact how brands engage with their audience.** Korean popular culture fans have a lot of collective power and expect to have influence over brands, corporations and trends. The time has come for brands to realise they must recognise this power and move with the trends rather than trying to dictate them.



Wondering what makes Wearisma a must-have within your influencer marketing strategy?

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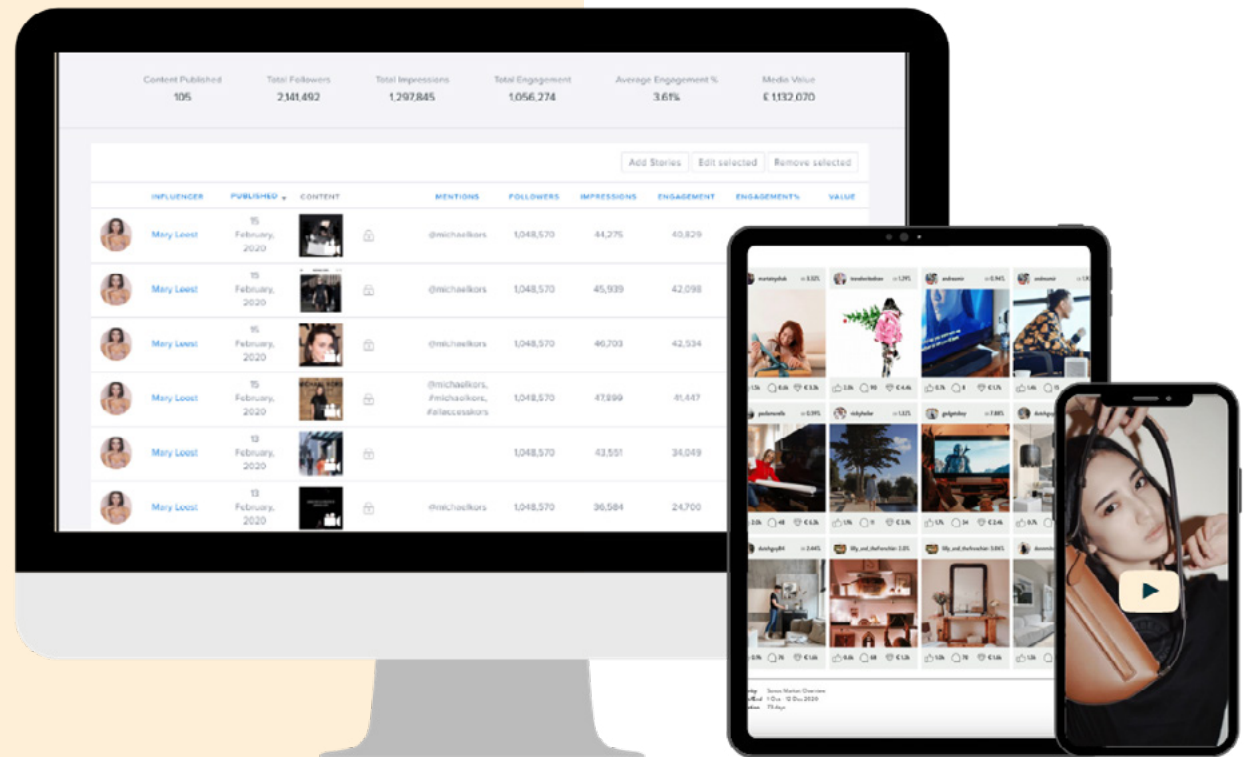


Figure 10. Wearisma platform. Front cover image. Source: Pexels

