

Korean Television Drama in Attracting Malaysian Audiences: Media Strategy Perspective

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Abstract— Korean TV drama series have reached a wide range of Asian audiences and have become a beloved regional media form, including Malaysian audiences. As consequences, Malaysian viewers are prone to Korean dramas compared to other Asian dramas. The purpose of this study is to explore the Korean drama in attracting Malaysian audiences. Why Korean drama is so popular in Malaysia. What is the factor that influence Malaysian viewer. Korean believes in culture and human touch. Korean television drama has its own approaches which is fresh and unique without so much influence from Western, Japanese or China. Korean shows a comfortable daily life drama which focusing on family value, love and a small violence that presented in interesting way which is different from western drama. This is something impressive as Korean dramas do not imitate any other dramas of certain countries instead they try to create dramas that close to humans life and self-explanatory. The Korean drama is using their cultural values excitement as a weapon to demonstrate and influence the audience interest.

Index Terms— Korean drama, media strategy, cultural value, Malaysian audience, human touch

I. INTRODUCTION

TV drama series in Korea have become the most favourite media genre. As far as directing styles, formats, and narratives are concerned, Korean TV drama series are very different from the U.S. TV soap operas and other Western TV drama series (Ju, 2010). The flow of Korea media content into Asia means that the Asian mediascape (visual cultural or visual imaginary impact) is no longer dominated by American TV programs and films. The current consequences is that Korean TV drama series have reached a wide range of Asian audiences and have become a beloved regional media form, including Japanese media audiences (Tunstall, 2008; Ju, 2010)

Studies on Malaysian drama indicate that Malaysian viewers are very much influenced in terms of fashion and music as well as other nations culture (Jalaluddin & Ahmad, 2011). To date, Malaysian television dramas are made with the intention of screening it specifically to Malaysian viewers. There are no actions to review strategies to produce dramas that have the capabilities to be marketed abroad. To be able to reach to that extent, a number of factors that are related to the study of drama broadcast television need to be reviewed and implemented. One of the most important factors that has not yet been studied and discussed widely is the influence and effectiveness of media strategy. Currently, there has been no

comprehensive study that can be used as guidance in terms of media strategies. Md Ibrahim & Syed (2012) noticed that to date, majority of drama researches in Malaysia only relate to the impact of family values, religious beliefs and national integration on contents, impact, as well as audiences acceptance.

Drama studies in Malaysia have yet investigate the impact of media strategy in terms of how the strategy could be applied to the market and promoting the drama itself. For example, Md Syed and Hamzah (2012), mentioned that Malaysian government has tried to utilize popular culture as a vehicle to mobilize its "nation-building and cultural objectives". Soap operas sponsored by the government have not been able to capture local audiences due to lack of technical and creative prowess. In fact Malaysian audiences are, therefore, still attracted to and enjoy watching Western drama series. Again, none of it has discussed about the role of media and how it could be used to facilitate and improve our drama industry. Apart from that, it is also worth to study that Malaysian drama should also realize the significant of gaining and maintaining the popularity as the Korean government did to their creative industry.

Therefore, it is notable to address that there is a lack of media strategy from the standpoint of Malaysian drama. Malaysian media has limited freedom to draw their own media strategy and to realize the role of media beyond the situation. Consequently, it is important for Malaysia to investigate the strategies adopted by the Korean media broadcasters in promoting Korean television dramas, particularly on their ability to reach global success. Behind this immense success, there surely will be a model that Malaysia can apply following in the footsteps of Korean television dramas.

II. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The rising in popularity of Korean entertainment contents in Asia has created a boom in the entertainment industry. This term is called Hanryu or Hallyu which literally means 'Korean Wave'. As Dator and Seo (2004), Endo and Matsumoto (2004), Seo (2005), Hanaki et al. (2007) explained, Hanryu refers to the current fad for all aspects of South Korean popular culture - movies, music, online games, hip-hop clothes, hairstyles and cosmetic - is sweeping across East Asia like a cultural tsunami.

Kim and Ryoo (2007) noted "Hallyu (or the Korean Wave) and other cultural trends from Asia have gained popularity in the region since they represent something that is closer to home without racial or ethnic stigmatizing of their race and ethnic groups often found in cultural products from the West. The yearning to belong and to become a part of the mainstream drives the popularity of Hallyu in Asia. Though

there may be different forms of suffering and exploitation in Hallyu dramas and movies, but they are different from what we see in Hollywood movies, which tend to parallel discrimination based on race and ethnicities present in the US" (Kim and Ryoo, 2007, pg. 134).

Korea has developed a new sense of globalization, the culture industry and newly forming Asia in a short time span. The emergence of the Korean popularity news has moved forward to European countries and spread as a new culture phenomena around the world. In the past few years, the popularity of Korean television dramas, songs and movies skyrocketed across North and Southeast Asia, more so in countries such as Japan, China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand.

As noticed by Lee (2004), Cho (2005), Tunstall (2008) and Ju (2010), TV drama series in Korea have become the most favourite media genre. Ju (2010) also added that, as far as directing styles, formats, and narratives are concerned, Korean TV drama series are very different from the U.S. TV soap operas and other Western TV drama series. The flow of Korea media content into Asia means that the Asian mediascape (visual cultural or visual imaginary impact) is no longer dominated by American TV programs and films. The current consequences is that Korean TV drama series have reached a wide range of Asian audiences and have become a beloved regional media form, including Japanese media audiences (Tunstall, 2008; Ju, 2010)

The popularity of Korean music and dramas are also noticeable in Malaysia through the immense flow of their singers and actors into the country. This is due to the fact that Malaysian radio and television stations have begun to subscribe to and incorporated Korean music and dramas into their local programmes. Looking back, Korean drama TV series have become popular since 2002 with the production of highly acclaimed traditional romantic drama "Winter Sonata". Since then, there are a number of dramas that have emerged and have become favourites of Malaysian audiences such as "Dejanggum, Boys Over Flowers", "Full House" and "City Hunter".

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTIONS

The success of the Korean drama industry can provide inspiration and motivation as well as encouragement to propel the Malaysian drama industry to emulate the glorious future as what the Korean Wave has achieved. The strategy and approach of the Korean drama industry then could be applied and exploited for the Malaysian drama industry to be successful globally.

- To explore the Korean dramas in attracting Malaysian audiences
- To investigate the strategies of Korean media broadcasters in promoting Korean dramas

Based on the above gap, the following research questions are:
RQ1: How Korean dramas attract the Malaysian audiences?
RQ2: What are the strategies adopted by Korean media broadcasters in promoting Korean television dramas?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The popularity of Korean dramas has attracted a great amount of attention from researchers recently. Most studies show that Korean dramas is now part of a globalizing world and that Korean popular culture has substantial number of followers

outside the country. This debate can be categorized into two types.

The first type of research on Korean drama was related to the market and pricing of Korean dramas. Kim (2007) noted that the story of compressed industrialization is an experience shared by many Asian nations, and thus helps to explain the popularity of dramas such as 'Winter Sonata' among so many people throughout Asia. He then reiterated that Korean dramas that depict a modern exterior with traditional values provide a nostalgic relief for the Seoulites' ultra-modern cosmopolitan life.

Yeon (2008), continued that the reasonable price of Korean popular culture, such as music, television dramas, and movies was one of the main factors that attracted Asian production companies to purchase Korean products at the beginning of the Korean Wave. In 2000, Korean television dramas were cheaper by a quarter of the price of Japanese ones, and a tenth of the price of Hong Kong television dramas. In contribution to this, the economic crisis in Asia quickly led Asian buyers to prefer cheaper Korean products compared to Japanese products. Yeon also mentioned that the popularity of Korean dramas in Malaysia has in fact, contributed to a high appreciation towards Korean culture, language and fashion amongst the younger generation.

However, some scholars viewed that the factor of cheaper prices of Korean dramas is not sufficient enough to bring about their popularity. This is as the actors and actresses' good-looks also play an important role towards the upsurge of Korean dramas popularity. According to Ryoo (2009), initially, as the regional exposure to South Korean drama increased, the programming has resonated with Asian audiences and their popularity has grown. Therefore, many Asian television companies started to be interested in broadcasting South Korean shows as their productions were impressive-looking and their syndication was inexpensive.

The second type of research looks into the cultural aspects that reinforced the Korean wave. Ching (2000) said that the importance of conceptualizing the Korean Wave is not only to understand its unique characteristics, but also to investigate integrated industrial conjunctures within and outside the region. In fact, Ching asserts that the Korean Wave is "a transnational form of cultural production and consumption very different from cultural forms heretofore associated with nation states."

Adding to that, Ju (2010), said that the spread of Korean pop culture throughout Asia has been accelerated in a large part of media commodification. The nationally-supported commercial drive in Korea took advantage of demands for media content by the Asian region and this has created new outlets for Korea's cultural products (Ju, 2010). Asian media often view the Korean wave as a celebrated national triumph. This media content has had a significant impact on the regional media scene. This has made Asians actively rethink what Korean Wave is.

Based on the previous studies mentioned above, the researcher came with the knowledge that there needs to further study and explain not only the media content and cultural perspectives but also the Korean media strategy approaches. It has; in fact, fail to highlight the type of media strategies that are implemented by South Korean productions for their drama series that has enabled them to attract a vast amount of Asian audiences, mainly in Malaysia. The strategies and approaches used by the South Korean media are

significantly important to understand the virtues of Korean media in penetrating international market including Malaysia.

V. THEORITRICAL FRAMEWORK

Television effects have been the most researched among media studies (Livingstone, 1998). Methodologically, mass communication scholars have created various models for researching television effects. Straubharr's theory of cultural proximity (1991, 1996) illuminates existing region-centered media flows. Cultural proximity defines how transnational media content from an adjacent geographic region or a region similar in other aspects, has greater influence on audiences residing in that particular region. Therefore as for this study, the theoretical journey into the Korean media strategy conducted from the perspective of the theory of Cultural Proximity.

VI. THE STUDY

This research aims to address the strategies of Korean media strategy in focusing Korean television dramas in Malaysia. Thus for this particular research, the researcher uses qualitative method to address the research problems. This method is best used as it aims to solve research problems in which the variables are unknown and needed to be explored (Creswell, 2012). In order to fulfil the objectives of this study, the researcher decided to use the method of in-depth interviews in the form of face-to-face interview with four respondents from Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) and Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS).

VII. FINDING

To explore the Korean television dramas in attracting Malaysian audiences, this finding will look into the role of culture and to understand the phenomenon of Korean dramas in relations with Asian sentiments.

For the finding, the researcher organized the emerging themes according to the research questions. Research question one aims to collect data in order to explore the Korean drama in attracting Malaysian audiences. The researcher identified two (2) major themes that are culture and audience to answer research question one (RQ1)

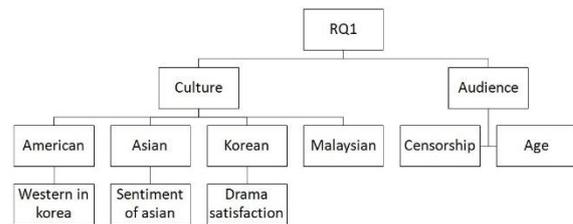
The theme of culture then can be divided into four sub-themes known as: a) American, b) Asian, c) Korean, and; d) Malaysian. Whilst the theme of audience can be divided into two (2) which are Censorship and Age.

Asian has its own value of practise and therefore the exposure of American dramas bring an uncomfortable and dissatisfied feeling. Due to Asian cultures and values, the respondent believes that Korean dramas are constantly producing dramas that simulate very closely to the Asian way of life. These dramas commonly touch the daily life aspects of Asians such as family-oriented storylines that differ from the American style.

Korean drama is a family oriented drama. Most of Korean dramas are focusing on family value whereby the values are the ones that every viewers in Asian countries including Malaysia are having in common. Korean dramas have values that can be shared with other cultures. It was carefully selected to best suit the taste of Asian.

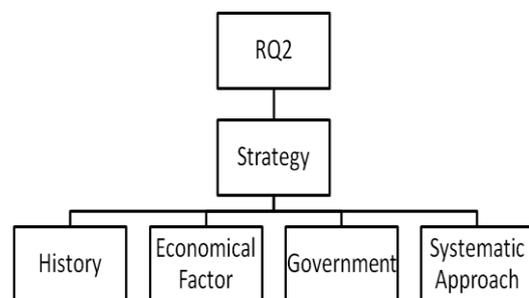
Although some aspects of the traditional and family values can be found in certain western drama's storyline, audiences

found that they are more comfortable watching Korean dramas as it relates well with Asian cultures. Thus, audiences could easily understand and perceived the story with ease. In addition to this, the success of Korean dramas in Malaysia is contributed by the advantage of its ability to draw nostalgic feelings to the audiences. Although the Korean culture may be



new to Malaysian audiences, the diversity of Malaysian culture itself is a large contributing factor for the acceptance of Korean culture in the country.

From the standpoint of the audiences, in order to give satisfaction to the audiences, their sensitivities are given priority in Korean dramas including respecting those Islamic country such as Malaysia. Due to the fact that the majority of Malaysians are Muslim and are guided by Islamic values. Korean believes having respect for religions and audiences' beliefs is very important as it is related to the sensitivity of a country. This way, the audience will feel comfortable and at ease of accepting Korean dramas. In addition they will also identify the form of drama that will best suited and most attract all level of ages that is enjoyable for everyone to watch. In research question two (RQ2), there are four (4) dimensions of strategy found in the data explaining the Korean media broadcasting approaches in promoting Korean television drama. The dimensions can be categorized as a) history, b) economy, c) government, and d) systematic approach.



Korea had to start from scratch in almost everything. Economically, Korea began to embark on tremendous efforts in order to catch up with developed countries around the world. Korean was such a field that is full of characters of history and conflict. The history of Korea and Japan plays a crucial role in the Korean broadcasting strategy. The ideological and conflict has taught Korean of two things, first is to understand the human will widely and then try to recognize the meaning of life and beliefs of others. The history had realized them of their own strengths and has enabled them to rise up and fight to rebuild the country and their people out of hardship and poverty.

Korean is not a country that come with a lot of resources but Korean development is based on the people's hard work. As a result, everyone must show their best and this has caused them to work hard and diligently in order to generate and increase

their income. Having said that, every television station needs to produce programs that can be globally marketed, demanded and universally attracted using various available approaches. As a result of these and other economic developments, "South Korea is now the twelfth largest economy in the world, and its' entertainment companies are able to finance shows and movies with production values much higher than in most of Asia" (Ryoo, 2007, p. 140).

The Korean government has recognized that a vibrant range of cultural industries, ranging from film and television dramas, to gaming, animation and music have the potential to create ripple effects into other industries because of their reliance on the latest developments in electronics and ICT. This demand from firms in the cultural industries, in turn, stimulated and promoted innovation and new product development in Korea's electronics and ICT industries (Kwon & Kim, 2013).

The Korean government has their own supporting body called Korean Creative Content Agency (KOCCA). KOCCA is a South Korean government agency which is affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and is in-charged with governing cultural content. These government supports were designed to promote the business activities of cultural firms through the establishment of quasi-governmental organizations that cooperated with the private sector (Baek 2009).

In the interview conducted, it is surprising to grasp that all respondents said that they did not have a whole promotion strategy. They admitted that proper strategies are crucial, however, in the case of Korean Wave especially Korean dramas, the pressure of life history and self-awareness have caused them to have several different approaches leading to serious work. The experience of a hard life that they had gone through has lead them to live and respond accordingly. Through the various life experiences and challenges, such as history (Jang & Paik, 2012) and economy problem (Paik, 2001) the Korean media then have a confidence to compete and explore the creative industry. All the experiences they had been through had created courage for them to face any difficulties.

Apart of the experiences that lead to Korean media approach, the respondent also explained that they do have a plan which is called as activities of Korean dramas abroad. In the activity, they present the actors closer to the audiences by introducing them to countries that have a potential to be a spectator Korean drama. In addition, the measure of efficiency of a production is to be able to provide the latest drama to the audience.

Looking at the above findings, it shows that Korean media broadcasting strategies are mainly based on the grassroots such as history, economics, government support and systematic approach. In fact, their life experiences and historical backgrounds have also contributed to their drama success. These features led to the success of promoting Korean television drama.

As Hogarth (2013) said, Korean television dramas deal with universal human themes that speak to many viewers of different cultural backgrounds. That is one of the reasons why the Korean Wave has reached a larger audience and continues to grow even further (Hogarth, 2013).

VIII. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The study sought to answer three questions: First, on how Korean drama able to attract Malaysian audiences. Secondly, the strategies applied by the Korean media broadcasting in promoting Korean television dramas.

This study will fill the gap in Malaysian media to plan and organize their works according to the Asian taste to attract other neighborhoods broadcasting network. It will also help Malaysian government in determining the future planning of Malaysian media working plan and furthermore, the findings is also relevant for academics, in particular, media and drama distribution studies in understanding more on media strategies.

Consequently, the revelation of the data has indicated the essence of practical implication. This findings has in fact would be contributing a significant knowledge to:

First, the Korean believes in culture and human touch. Korean television drama has its own approaches which is fresh and unique without so much influence from Western, Japanese or China. Korean shows a comfortable daily life drama which focusing on family value, love and a small violence that presented in interesting way which is different from western drama. This is something impressive as Korean dramas do not imitate any other dramas of certain countries instead they try to create dramas that close to humans life and self-explanatory. To be exact, the Korean drama is using their cultural values excitement as a weapon to demonstrate and influence the audience interest.

Second, language is not an obstacle. Korean dramas are primarily concerned with the use of their own language. Although the Korean language is something new to most countries compared to English or even Japanese or Chinese language, Korea has demonstrated that language is not a barrier to success. In fact, they are so proud of using their own language.

Third, historical suffering could evoke a stronger and ready to compete. Korean has been gone through a hard life time and therefore, they rose and learn how to survive and protect their own country. The history taught them to continue to work hard without looking back. They must rise up and fight to rebuild the country and out of hardship and poverty. For them, history has taught them enough and therefore they have to rearrange and rebuild their country and their people. They also struggle to prove their ability to move forward with other developing countries.

Fourth, the badly suffering country economy has stimulated Korean to turn into creative industry. Due to the economic situation in Korea in fact has opened up an opportunity for them to realize their own ability in creative industry. As a result, Korean become serious in the creative industries and making its popular as well as strategically executed.

In the context of the strategy of Korean media broadcaster in television drama, we could see clearly that of all the cultural proximity factors, one element that really became the main factor of the success in Korean drama is the element of human touch. Although human touch is one of the elements of cultural proximity, previous studied had mentioned it as Asian sympathy. As for that, Kim (2004), concluded the preference of Korean programs showed that Asians express sympathy for Asian cultural frames including family morals, highly morality and love & sacrifice. Thus, he added the Korean programs satisfy Asian emotional needs by being easy to

assimilate to a similar life style, cultural proximity and expressiveness.

This study has also revealed implications for future research. Qualitative approaches have proven to be a rich foundation to discover Korean media strategy. This study focused on individual interviews to discover in-depth on promotion and strategy of Korean media broadcasting. A suggestion for future study would be to introduce a new instrument such as focus groups to provide information on acceptance of Korean drama in Malaysia as it related to Korean media strategy. The information would become the central studies on the Malaysian audiences as Malaysia is a country with a different culture and ethnicity. This would help to explain in details to the popularity of Korean dramas in Malaysia as opinion will be obtained behind those differences.

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