

The Co-Rise of Korean Wave and Korean Brands: The Dynamics of National Design Identity and Brand Building

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Abstract

Introduction and the Purpose of the Study: The global success of Korean cultural products, known as the Korean Wave (Hallyu), has impacted South Korea's economy, extending its influence beyond the entertainment industry to consumer goods. Since 1997, Korean dramas, films, and music have transcended East Asian borders, creating a synergy between cultural exports and international success of South Korean brands such as Samsung, Hyundai, LG, and Kia. This study aims to answer these questions: What are the drivers behind the rise of Korean popular culture, and how can the co-rise of popular culture and major South Korean brands be explained?

Literature Review/Background: This article explores the intersection of cultural production, product design and marketing strategies with mutual reinforcement effect between cultural and industrial exports, illustrating how media and design play a catalytic role in economic and cultural globalization.

Method: By incorporating historical and descriptive analysis and examining co-branding strategies and design as a competitive advantage, the study focuses on major South Korean brands such as Samsung, Hyundai, LG, and Kia and their collaborations with K-pop groups BTS and BLACKPINK. In this context, the study analyzes the role of co-branding strategies and design in achieving cultural and commercial success.

Results: Hallyu not only influences cultural exports but also strengthens industrial exports, creating a mutually supportive effect. Product design and marketing strategies have enabled South Korean brands to reach broader global audiences, influencing consumer perception and brand loyalty by incorporating popular culture. The findings contribute to discussions in visual communication design, media studies and consumer culture.

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Conclusion: This study offers an interdisciplinary perspective on the role of media and design in economic and cultural globalization. By focusing on the co-rise of Hallyu and South Korean brands, it presents a valuable example of building national brand identity and market expansion strategies.

Keywords: Korean Wave, South Korean Entertainment Industry, Competitive Advantage, Popular Culture, Co-Branding, K-Pop

Kore Dalgası ve Kore Markalarının Birlikte Yükselişi: Ulusal Tasarım Kimliği ve Marka İnşasının Dinamikleri

Öz

Giriş ve Çalışmanın Amacı: Kore kültürel ürünlerinin küresel başarısı, Kore Dalgası (Hallyu) olarak bilinen olgu, Güney Kore ekonomisini önemli ölçüde etkilemiş ve etkisini eğlence sektörünün ötesine, tüketim mallarına kadar genişletmiştir. 1997'den bu yana, Kore televizyon dizileri, filmleri ve müzikleri Doğu Asya sınırlarını aşarak, kültürel ihracat ile Samsung, Hyundai, LG ve Kia gibi Güney Kore markalarının uluslararası başarısı arasında benzersiz bir sinerji yaratmıştır. Şu sorulara cevap aranmaktadır: Kore popüler kültürünün yükselişinin ardındaki etkenler nelerdir ve popüler kültür ile büyük Güney Kore markalarının eş zamanlı yükselişi nasıl açıklanabilir?

Kavramsal/Kuramsal Çerçeve: Bu makale, kültürel üretim, ürün tasarımı ve pazarlama stratejilerinin kesişimini inceleyerek Hallyu'nun marka kimliğini ve pazar genişlemesini nasıl desteklediğini analiz etmektedir. Kültürel ve endüstriyel ihracatlar arasındaki karşılıklı güçlendirme etkisine dikkat çeken çalışma, medya ve tasarımın ekonomik ve kültürel küreselleşme için nasıl birer katalizör rolü üstlendiklerini ortaya koymaktadır.

Yöntem: Tarihsel ve betimleyici analizler ile örnek araştırmalarını bir araya getirerek, ortak markalama stratejilerini ve tasarımı bir rekabet avantajı olarak inceleyen bu çalışma, Samsung, Hyundai, LG ve Kia gibi büyük Güney Kore markalarına odaklanmaktadır. Bu markaların BTS ve BLACKPINK gibi popüler K-pop gruplarıyla gerçekleştirdikleri iş birlikleri ele alınmaktadır. Böylece, ortak markalama stratejilerinin ve tasarımın kültürel ve ticari başarıyı sağlamadaki rolü analiz edilmektedir.

Bulgular: Araştırma, Hallyu'nun yalnızca kültürel ihracatları etkilemekle kalmayıp, aynı zamanda endüstriyel ihracatları da güçlendirdiğini ve karşılıklı bir destek etkisi yarattığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ürün tasarımı ve pazarlama stratejileri, Güney Kore markalarının küresel pazarlarda daha geniş bir kitleye ulaşmasını sağlamış; popüler kültürü kullanarak tüketici algısını ve marka sadakatini olumlu yönde etkilemiştir. Bu bulgular, görsel iletişim tasarımı, medya çalışmaları ve tüketici kültürü konularındaki tartışmalara katkı sağlamaktadır.

Sonuç: Bu çalışma, medya ve tasarımın ekonomik ve kültürel küreselleşmedeki rolüne disiplinlerarası bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Hallyu ve Güney Kore markalarının birlikte yükselişine dikkat çekerek, ulusal marka kimliği ve pazar genişletme stratejisi oluşturmanın değerli bir örneğini sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kore Dalgası, Güney Kore Eğlence Endüstrisi, Rekabet Avantajı, Popüler Kültür, Ortak Markalaşma, K-Pop

1. Introduction

The rise of South Korean popular culture has placed South Korea as a leading cultural powerhouse that can compete with globalized countries. The success of the entertainment industry has surged the business profits and international success of South Korean brands such as Samsung, Hyundai, Kia and LG. The link between the South Korean popular culture and the rise of the consumer goods industry is worth analyzing as it offers an insight into the interplay between the success of cultural products and consumer goods. This article examines how cultural exports can serve as a form of soft power that enhances the global visibility and desirability of national products. By analyzing the synergy between cultural production, product design, and co-branding strategies, this study aims to shed light on the ways in which South Korea's creative industries have contributed to its economic and cultural influence on a global scale.

By incorporating historical and descriptive analysis and case study research of the co-branding strategies the aim of this article is to explore the factors behind the global success of South Korean popular culture, particularly the Korean Wave (Hallyu), and to analyze how co-branding strategies, especially those incorporating design elements, have contributed to the rise of both Korean cultural products and major South Korean brands. By examining the historical context, government policies, economic conditions, and specific co-branding examples, the article seeks to highlight how the synergy between entertainment and corporate industries has created a powerful national brand identity for South Korea on the global stage.

2. A Brief History of South Korea's Popular Culture

The South Korean film industry underwent some significant changes in the 1980s with governmental policies and the shifts in the global media dynamics. Before 1984, only South Korean companies were permitted to distribute the films within the country. However, following the media liberalization decision in 1984, Hollywood films entered the market, leading to a decline in the domestic Korean film industry (Shim, 2006). The popularity of the Hollywood films were contrasted with the relatively poorly produced and less appealing domestic productions. However, the foreign entry also had some positive effects that were to be realized years later. The expansion of the market with the foreign entry resulted in the increased variety and competition. The broadcast channels as well as new producers and filmmakers increased (Shim, 2006). While the entry of a dominant global entertainment force initially caused a distress for the domestic industry, the disruption was short-lived. Over time, Korea adapted and changed the circumstances in favor of the domestic economy.

It is impossible to neglect the effect of the political, economic, social, technological and institutional forces that help the creation, dissemination and the consumption of popular

cultural products. The media has played an important role in economic and political developments. The shifts in the media industry may reasonably suggest that the relationship between the state and the corporations is linked to state policies and South Korea's economic growth (Ryoo, 2008). A government report in 1994 might have played a crucial role in changing the perspective about media and marketing in the whole country. The report of the Presidential Advisory Board of Science and Technology compared the net worth of the Hollywood film *Jurassic Park* with the foreign sales of the Hyundai cars (Shim, 2006). Shortly after this realization, the Ministry of Culture was established and divisions of the ministry started to specialize in the specific sectors in the film and entertainment industry. This recognition of the power of popular culture, film and media industry changed the media policy of the government and directed the chaebols (family-owned business conglomerates) like Hyundai, Samsung and Daewoo to get into the media sector. It was the 1990s when the major Korean conglomerates ambitiously invested in and acquired media assets (Ryoo, 2005).

However, this media policy in 1995 to include the big business groups in the media industry was challenged with the 1997 crisis. To cope with the financial crisis, firms had to set a new agenda that included supporting the media industry. The 1997 Asian economic crisis had a significant impact on numerous Asian countries, challenging their economic growth strategies. South Korea borrowed 97 billion dollars from the IMF but they used only 19.5 billion and then paid back the loan in a record time in three years (Roll, 2020). The Asian countries turned to the more affordable media content, and South Korea was ready to meet this demand.

3. The Rise of Hallyu

Although it is not that clear to pinpoint the exact start of the Korean Wave, it is possible to claim that the Korean popular culture products turned into an international craze around 1997. The Asian economic crisis, while a regional misfortune, presented an opportunity for South Korea. As the country recovered faster than its neighbors, it began to export Korean Dramas, marking the early stages of its cultural expansion.

South Korea benefited from the economic and political changes in the East Asian countries. Economic liberalization and developments, along with political democratization cultivated a population that is eager for popular culture with modified tastes. The audience were ready for new content but most countries were lagging behind the Western contents. It was then Korean popular culture started to take off. Since East Asian countries were still distant to the Japanese popular culture because of the past imperialism experience, South Korea represented a new breath in the popular culture, blending Western influences with traditional elements (Kim, 2016). Most Asian countries were colonized by Japan, which left many with a negative perception of the country. However, South Korea, also a colonized nation, shared a

more relatable or familiar image, fostering a sense of cultural affinity among many Asian countries. This sense of connection has been one of the factors driving China's interest in Korean cultural products (Roll, 2020). Thus, the political situations in Asia have helped Korea and the popular culture produced by South Korea could easily find ways to expand to other countries and be accepted by them. South Korea also benefited from the economic conditions in its neighbouring countries. On the economic side, the Asian countries were looking for affordable contents that would substitute the expensive Western alternatives (Howard, 2013). Since Korea was ahead of the game to start producing variety contents in the early 1990s, the contents were ready to charm the East Asian countries with its affordable and familiar contents especially after the economic crisis.

South Korea was determined to manage the rise of the economy and the image of the country so it took crucial steps politically in the domestic arena. Travel ban and censorship were two significant obstacles to the growth of popular culture and related industries, and South Korea addressed these challenges. Stopping the travel ban ensured the young generation to travel abroad and experience the Western world. The young generation who knows the Western way of living returned to the country and took part in the development of South Korea in terms of economics and the image of the country. Meanwhile, releasing the censorship helped creation of new stories and music because formerly censored topics were now discovered with interest (Roll, 2020). Many successful movies and music that raised interests in neighboring countries were developed around these times. The television series *Jewel in the Palace* (2003) (a series that tells the story of the first female physician for the king) became very popular in East Asia, Middle East and even in Eastern Europe. Another notable Korean drama *Winter Sonata* (2002) was gaining popularity and breaking records in audience ratings in Japan. Then the music became the central element of the Korean Wave as K-Pop (Ahn, Oh and Kim, 2013). The music was specifically tailored to be used as cultural exports.

Until the 1980s, Korean radios were mostly playing American music, because after the liberation in 1945 the barriers to enter the music market were so low that the Korean music industry was not protected (Kim J., 2016). There was an export substitution model for the music industry, where the major companies like Sony, Universal and Warner were entering the Korean market through small companies. Those small businesses were licensing the international music products which was keeping the major music companies at distance from the Korean music market. Meanwhile Korean music was seen as inferior because it was copying popular foreign music (Howard, 2013). This copying turned into appropriation and then to glocalization of the music that led the formation of a successful music industry, slowly. It was 1993 when South Korean music outran Western music with K-pop. The percentages were as high as 63% to 23% when compared to Western popular music in the Korean music market share. This gap

increased in 2004 with 80% for K-pop and 17% for Western pop music (Kim, 2016). What factors enabled Korea to surpass Western music in its domestic market?

Government support is a crucial factor in the spread of South Korean music in East Asia. In 1996, the government started to create a budget to advertise South Korean Music in the international market through attending international music fairs. In 1999, the Ministry of Culture led the creation of South Korean Pop Music compilation CDs in Japanese, Chinese and English that were to be sent to important distribution channels overseas. A year later, the ministry sponsored a large music concert of H.O.T. in China (Kim, 2016). Although governmental support alone cannot be the sole reason for the success of K-Pop now, these efforts benefited the spread of the music overseas effectively.

The South Korean government has supported the cultural production and the entertainment industry in many ways. Yet the helpful actions are not limited to economic, legal and political adjustments. South Korea has a Ministry of Culture, and a division of this ministry is the Popular Culture Industry Division. There is a Cultural Content Office that has three divisions under this ministry and there is a large budget that supports the cultural product export industry (Roll, 2020). Establishing an office specifically for the cultural contents shows how committed and ambitious goals can be achieved in a short time.

The organizational structure of the ministry includes a Content Policy Bureau and under this Bureau, Hallyu Content Cooperation Division exists. There are other bureaus and divisions under the ministry such as Digital Media Communication Bureau, PR Analysis Division, Cultural Trade and Cooperation Division and Popular Culture Industry Division (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, n.d.). All these bureaus and divisions are working for better popular culture contents and supporting the creative industry locally and internationally. While creating a national brand power, these governmental efforts are important because they all work towards building a national brand power.

On the other hand, even though the governmental efforts were significant in the rising popularity of the cultural goods it would be lacking to attribute all the reasons to the policies. Shin and Kim (2013) suggests that the government support is not the leading but a lagging factor in the popularity of K-Pop. The technological advancements that lead to the decentralization of the music distribution from the record label contracts and television and radio airtime was another important factor that helped the music industry. However, technological developments were happening all over the world with the increasing use of the internet for music distribution and this could not be a reason alone to lead to the success of K-Pop. Large Korean entertainment houses are also responsible for the success of the rising popularity of South Korean music. (Shin and Kim, 2013). The support of the government was accompanied by the legal circumstances in the country that created a favorable

environment for new agreements in music. The strong intellectual property rights in South Korea for the music industry protected the popular music produced and enabled the dominance of South Korean music in the area. By this way the multinational production companies choose to partner with South Korean producers to co-produce music (Geun, 2009). Right steps brought success in the music industry and influential bands were formed. These K-Pop bands like BTS and BLACKPINK are so influential that many brands want to partner with them to increase brand awareness overseas.

4. The Role of Design and Co-Branding in Creating a Competitive Advantage

The rise of Hallyu is a complex phenomenon shaped by a combination of societal dynamics and market forces, involving numerous cultural and economic stakeholders. While various elements have driven the global popularity of South Korean popular content, it is evident that this success was leveraged as a competitive advantage, leading to the strengthening of South Korea's cultural influence and its position in the global entertainment industry. Competitive advantage refers to the capabilities that allow a company to outperform its rivals in the market, often leading to increased profitability and market share (Porter, 1990). Competitive advantage can be inferred from the success of a firm which has a different strategy than its rivals (Mukerjee, 2016). While understanding why certain nations achieve in particular industries, it is important to look at the firms. But firms are existing and thriving in a particular national context and proximity (Grant, 1991). According to Porter (1990, p. 476) chance has been a heavy influencer of the pattern of competitive advantage of Korean industry. The economic conditions of the neighboring and rival countries like Japan, the effect of war and aid and the stance of the government in decision making are among the other factors that determined the success of the industries in South Korea.

Mukerjee (2016, p.4) suggests that Hyundai, Samsung and Haier are among the firms that focused "resources on improvement of quality and better product design" to gain competitive advantage. Korean brands' willingness to take risks (Porter, 1990, p. 471) is apparent in the product design and branding strategies. Product design is an important factor to elevate the brand image and customer interest. South Korean brands like Samsung, Hyundai, Kia and LG have been working on their design and marketing activities to sharpen the global image and to increase the market share. Partnering or co-branding with the popular K-Pop bands has become a prevalent choice by these brands. Co-branding is often implemented by integrating elements that are associated with these popular bands into product designs. In doing so, brands expand their reach, enhance brand awareness and foster brand loyalty.

By implementing the design elements in the marketing activity and incorporating the product design for limited edition products, Samsung establishes a successful name in the global market. According to Farahani et al. 's study (2020) on Samsung and its marketing

activities, advertising has a positive and direct impact on the brand popularity and competitive advantage for Samsung Company. Competitive advantage extends beyond marketing or advertising; it encompasses a brand's attractiveness and popularity, managerial strategies, value potential and distinguishing characteristics about the brand when positioned next to the rival brands. Therefore, when the brands follow a co-branding strategy with already popular names, they establish an emotional connection with consumers, ensuring a successful competitive advantage.

Co-branding does not usually bring equal benefits to both brands involved. However, especially while going international, these alliances help both sides. Market penetration, lowering the risks and costs, complementing the expertise and activities, expanding the customer base and client portfolio, extra value creation, brand reputation and credibility are among the important benefits of co-branding strategies (Rodrigues et al., 2011). A research done on Hallyu (Korean Wave) related products found "that Hallyu exports have had a measurable positive effect on consumer goods exports" (Huh and Wu, 2017, p.1402). The relationship between popular cultural products and international trade is very intriguing and the positive impact of the Korean Wave in the exports of South Korea shows that the focus of the country is well-placed. The government report comparing Hyundai's car sales to the box office revenue of *Jurassic Park* in 2004 appears to have played a significant role in redirecting economic priorities toward the creative industries.

5. The Global Strategies of the Large South Korean Brands

Export markets offer a vibrant and competitive environment when compared to domestic markets (Er, 1997) and offer incentives to firms to innovate and differentiate their products. The strategic appeal of the export markets encouraged firms to upgrade their production models. Between 1960 and 1990s both Taiwan and South Korea were relying on foreign direct investment from the developed countries. This period was when the companies of these countries were switching from original equipment manufacturing (OEM) to original design manufacturing (ODM) and eventually to original brand manufacturing (OBM), progressively increasing their control over product design and branding to enhance global competitiveness. Figure 1 explains the systems visually: OEM is a system where the companies manufacture the products based on another firm's design and specifications and it provides advantages for the export focused companies such as learning the foreign buyers and their preferences, standards of quality and supply chain management (Gereffi, 1999). ODM firms handle their own design and manufacturing processes, leaving the customer firms to handle the marketing, whereas OBM firms oversee the value chain, the design, manufacturing and marketing, and distribution, because they operate the brand name (Lee, C. S., Ho, & Hsu, 2015).



Figure 1: Visual representation of OEM, ODM and OBM manufacturing systems

Source: Created by the author.

This shift towards OBM encouraged large companies in South Korea, such as Hyundai, LG, Kia and Samsung, as well as Taiwanese firms such as Asus and HTC, to increasingly focus on innovation and branding strategies to create extra value for their products. However, South Korea brands are more successful and make into the global top brands in 2014 as an emerging market with its three brands: Samsung, Hyundai and Kia (Lee, K., Song, & Kwak, 2015). Apparently South Korea is following an effective strategy to promote its brands and elevate them into global market standards.

The large companies of South Korea are working on special designs for their products that taps into the interests and fandom of the K-Pop groups. By this way, the younger generation is targeted and reached with a new market segment that features specially designed products. These limited-edition products, sponsoring world tours and making a song with the name of the new car are among the co-branding strategies of the big brands. By adopting strategies that are customer oriented, the brands reach out to the consumers who are willing to buy even if they do not need the product. In this case the special design of the product acts like an incentive for the customers to make that spending. The special edition phone becomes a necessity for the fandom rather than a luxury item. Similarly, when the image of a luxury car is paired with a popular song of a band, the fans perceive the car and the brand

of the car so positively that the brand awareness is increased even if the fans do not actually buy the car. Sponsoring the world tour benefits the brand by pairing the image of a popular band with the car in the global market. When the fans, or their families are making a decision to buy a car, they would be inclined to buy the one that they have the affinity to.

Some examples of co-branding strategies that are used by the big companies with their designs include but not limited to Samsung *Galaxy S20+ BTS Edition*, *Galaxy A80 Blackpink Edition*, LG *Q7+ BTS limited edition*, Hyundai *IONIQ X BTS*, and *BLACKPINK World Tour 2019 with KIA*. All these examples have different co-branding strategies and bring out different design patterns that try to increase brand awareness and loyalty with more exposure globally. Partnering with popular cultural figures like BTS and BLACKPINK, big brands extend the market reach and can create market demand through the fans of these groups.

Samsung seems to be the leading brand that effectively co-brands with BTS. With *Galaxy S20+ BTS Edition* Samsung incorporated the special details of BTS in the design of the phone, from the box to the interface, that only the true fans would understand. The purple heart shape near the lenses, seven stickers that come in the box, earbuds that have the purple heart and the group logo, welcoming animation, and special themes are among the product and interface design details of the phone (Samsung Singapore, 2020). "The purple color, milky way and whale" (Yonhap News Agency, 2020) are among these details that excite the fans of BTS, who call themselves ARMY, which is an acronym for "Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth" (Lee, 2019). All the special jargon and visual triggers are included in the design of the phone, including the interface design. The members of the ARMY claim that Samsung's BTS edition is so successful that there are rumors that the Samsung team is also a BTS fan (Yonhap News Agency, 2020).

Recently, BTS has become the most sought-after band for brand partnerships; however, not every collaboration achieves the same level of success. LG also worked with BTS in 2019 for *LG Q7+ BTS limited edition* and included details like special wallpapers, messages from the band members, BTS emojis and themes (LG, n.d.). These details are appealing to the fans but the co-branding strategy was not as successful as the Samsung *Galaxy S20+ BTS edition* because the product design is not really crafted with fandom details. Samsung and BLACKPINK partnered in 2019 for the *Samsung Galaxy A80 Blackpink Edition* and it was similarly aimed at the product design for the fans of the band. The special edition items are appealing because the color is the exact color code of the band, there are animated messages and stickers and exclusive themes that are unique to the fans of the group (Samsung, 2019). Samsung appears to manage the product design more efficiently because it incorporates the visual aspects with the interface details.

Hyundai and Kia's co-branding strategies to work with BTS and BLACKPINK are different from those of Samsung and LG because the cars are more expensive and luxurious products than phones. It is impractical to make special edition cars that are specially designed for the fans because the car design is distinctive and complex. Therefore, instead of creating new car designs for the fans, the advertisements are specially designed. Co-branding strategies here become really important because the competencies of both sides come into the picture. In these cases, fans are the main target of the special designs while the spillover effects enhance the national design identity and brand image.

Hyundai partnered with BTS in 2020 for *Hyundai IONIQ X BTS* and the car was launched with the new song of BTS IONIQ, which had the same name of the car. The song was released on the website of Hyundai with a special video of the car and the band. The song lyrics include "feelings of discovery, curiosity, hope, creativity, and inspiration for the future" that are linked to the new car concept of Hyundai with clean energy (Ong, 2020). The new electric vehicle brand IONIQ was first launched in 2016, and tried to expand the market in Southeast Asia in 2018 with different partnerships, but partnering with BTS appears to be a particularly effective strategy, as it leverages the band's global popularity to increase awareness of the car worldwide. Hyundai aimed to penetrate the global electric vehicle market, and target the millennials and Generation Z consumers who are interested in clean mobility (Ong, 2020). The lyrics and the campaign is specially designed to reach the younger generation who are more likely to be interested in a new car segment in Hyundai. The brand awareness is achieved through the song that reflects the values of the new electric vehicle and clean energy.

A year before Hyundai and BTS partnership, Kia partnered with BLACKPINK for their World Tour. The aim is similar to Hyundai's aim; to reach the young generation and increase the brand awareness globally. Special exhibition booths and events are catered towards the fans of the group to maximize the exposure of the KIA brand that is paired with the beloved girl band. Engaging with the popular culture ensures that the fans of the group can enjoy the "quality and the design" of the Kia cars (Alexiev, 2019). This strategic collaboration not only strengthens Kia's global brand presence but also deepens its connection with younger, trend conscious consumers through the power of cultural relevance.

Strategic renewal and customer orientation focus are important elements to keep the competitive advantage sustainable (Mukerjee, 2016). The large companies of South Korea manage to use the product design and marketing activities as a competitive advantage against the rival brands. By aligning with the trends and collaborating with popular culture figures, these brands effectively promote their new launches, generate international buzz and build a strong brand recognition and loyalty, particularly among the fans of those cultural icons.

6. Conclusion

The global popularity of South Korean culture, particularly through the Korean Wave, can be attributed to a combination of factors, including government policies, economic conditions, technological advancements, societal expectations, strategic market positioning and the influence of major entertainment companies. The South Korean government has played an important role in promoting cultural exports by implementing policies that support the entertainment industry. These include financial and policy incentives for film and music production, investments in technology, and efforts to improve international market access. However, government support alone cannot be the driver of the success. The country's robust economic conditions and the fast recovery from the economic crises have also facilitated the growth of cultural industries, with a focus on innovation, infrastructure, and global trade. Additionally, the rise of South Korea's entertainment giants, such as SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, has been effective in shaping the global appeal of K-pop, television dramas and films. These large entertainment houses have successfully developed and marketed South Korean content, ensuring that it resonates with diverse global audiences while maintaining its distinct cultural identity. This synergy between government support, economic stability, strategic market engagement, and the influence of entertainment companies has created a perfect storm for the global rise of South Korean popular culture.

South Korea has emerged as one of the global leaders in creative industries and popular cultural products, with the influence of the Korean Wave extending beyond Southeast Asia to reach countries on the other side of the world. The potential of South Korean cultural products is limitless, due to the enthusiastic and loyal fan bases that drive global demand. In particular, K-Pop has gained immense global appeal, with major brands eager to partner with popular groups like BTS and BLACKPINK. Through strategic co-branding with these iconic bands, companies aim to expand their market reach and enhance their brand visibility. Design plays a key role in aligning products with popular culture, making it an effective tool for brands to reach the global market.

Large South Korean brands of consumer electronics and automotive industries like Samsung, Hyundai, Kia and LG take part in the spread of the Korean Wave around the world. These corporations not only contribute to the success of South Korean popular culture but also strategically use it to influence their own global market positions. By collaborating with music groups, these brands co-brand their image, reducing the opportunity cost of entering global markets and tapping into the growing demand of the fans. By adding specially designed products tailored to the interests of fan groups, these companies implement co-branding strategies that enhance the popularity of both the brand and the fans. As a result, South Korea has successfully turned its cultural exports into a comparative advantage, positioning itself as

a powerful force on the global stage. The co-rise of the Korean Wave and Korean Brands show a good example of creating a national brand identity that other countries look up to. The success of this co-evolution of cultural and corporate power serves as a model for other countries aiming to cultivate their own national identities and global influence.

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