

Original Article

Media Coverage of K-pop by BBC and CNN:
A Corpus-Assisted Discourse AnalysisMiri Moon ¹ Institute for Far Eastern
Studies, Kyungnam
University

Corresponding to

Miri Moon
Institute for Far Eastern
Studies at Kyungnam
University, 2(Samcheong-
dong) Bukchon-ro 15-gil,
Jongno-gu, Seoul, 03053,
Republic of Korea
Email: Miri.Moon1@gmail.com

Disclosure Statement

Disclosure Statement
There is no potential conflict
of interest. The study did
not receive any external
funding.

Received

12 Oct 2023

Revised

1 Nov 2023

Accepted

7 Dec 2023

ABSTRACT

Considering the significant role of global media in shaping public discourse on international phenomena, this research examines the representation of K-pop in global news media. A corpus-assisted discourse analysis was conducted on news reports about K-pop from 2005 to 2021, focusing on two major global news outlets: BBC and CNN. The study uncovers key agendas and dominant patterns in the portrayal of K-pop by these news sources. The findings indicate that K-pop was presented as a 'cultural commodity,' strategically crafted and promoted by the South Korean government, which utilized the country's advanced technology to enhance its export potential and national image. Furthermore, the analysis reveals a tendency towards conflict-centric narratives in the global news discourse about K-pop, addressing a variety of issues. While BBC news tended to emphasize disputes, highlighting the reactions of the Chinese public on Weibo to controversial incidents involving K-pop stars and South Korea's military advancements, CNN's discourse centered on K-pop fans as socio-political agents, engaging in significant events such as Trump's rallies and the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. Drawing on these insights, this article critically assesses the role and impact of global news media in constructing the narrative of 'non-Western' popular culture.

KEYWORDS

K-pop, BTS, global media, news discourse, celebrity, Hallyu

The international acclaim of K-pop groups like BLACKPINK and BTS, Bong Joon Ho's film "*Parasite*" (2019), and Netflix's blockbuster drama series "*Squid Game*" (2021) have perpetuated the phenomenon commonly termed the 'Korean wave' or 'Hallyu'. Substantial research approaches to analyzing the popularity of Korean cultural products are twofold. One approach examines why Korean cultural products are gaining popularity not only in neighbouring Asian countries but also in North America and Europe, which have lower degrees of cultural proximity to Korea. Stemming from audience

reception studies, many scholars explore why viewers watch what they watch, a phenomenon that does not seem to conform to hegemonic, conventional, and, therefore, stereotypical codes (Hall, 1973).

As widely acknowledged, Ang's (1985) groundbreaking audience reception study on "Dallas" marked the beginning of a new era in research that explores the multifaceted ways audiences perceive and engage with soap operas. Similarly, in the field of audience decoding and fandom studies, the Korean drama "Winter Sonata" (Fuyu no Sonata in Japanese) represents a significant milestone, sparking academic inquiries into the reception of Korean popular culture abroad. These studies have examined the transnational appeal of this drama, especially among middle-aged Japanese women. Research findings indicate that the series evoked a poignant sense of nostalgia in Japanese women in their 40s, awakening fond memories. Further investigations have probed how global fans interact with and integrate Korean media content into their daily lives (Baudinette, 2021; Hanaki et al., 2007; Iwabuchi, 2008).

The other approach involves international communication scholars who have examined the factors contributing to transnational audiences' embrace of Korean cultural products and explored the reasons behind the phenomenon of contra-flows from the global South to the global North (Thussu, 2006; Wasserman, 2014). This scholarship focuses on how South Korean popular culture became a global phenomenon and its impact on tourism and the marketing industry, leveraging the nation's image and soft power in foreign countries (Bae et al., 2017; Han & Lee, 2008; Jin, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2010; Nye & Kim, 2013). These scholars have examined the factors that influence the worldwide spread of Korean pop culture and have considered the actions necessary for the Korean government, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, to enhance Korean cultural

engagement. This includes promoting the export of Korean cultural productions and improving Korea's image.

Regarding new phenomena or global issues, audiences often rely on international news media (Boudana, 2016). Moreover, the media not only convey information and knowledge but also influence public perceptions of other nations, forming "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991). In other words, the framing of issues by news outlets significantly influences the reality audiences construct in their minds through the process of imagination after exposure to media texts, a phenomenon described by Lippmann as "pictures in our heads." However, only a few studies have been conducted on the global news coverage of K-pop, and the ways in which international news media represent 'non-Western' popular culture, particularly K-pop, have been controversial.

Glynn and Kim (2013) conducted a study on the portrayal of the Asian singer PSY and his song 'Gangnam Style' in the British press. They uncovered a prevalence of negative attitudes towards Asians, evidenced by the portrayal of non-Western music as having "low cultural status" (p. 9). Conversely, Gibson engaged in a qualitative analysis scrutinizing Western news and entertainment content from 2009 to 2019, with an emphasis on K-pop as presented in Google News and Google Video, platforms that predominantly prioritize high-traffic websites. This study inferred that, despite the critical and stereotypical perspectives of K-pop and its idols prevalent in Western mainstream media, the overall sentiment of news reporting was predominantly positive. However, the extent to which international news media have reported on K-pop over time, particularly into the 2020s, remains unexplored. Moreover, given the major role of transnational news media in disseminating information and shaping global perspectives (Chouliaraki, 2008; Curran et al., 2017; McPhail, 2016), it is imperative to examine how international media

representations of K-pop have evolved since its inception. Consequently, this study endeavors firstly to investigate historical tropes and secondly, to identify how Western news media currently articulate K-pop in their narratives. Thirdly, it aims to evaluate whether these stereotypes have evolved.

Background: The Korean Wave, *Hallyu*

The term ‘the Korean Wave,’ also known as *Hallyu*, denotes the international popularity of South Korean culture (Shim, 2020, p. 56). Research indicates that the term *Hallyu* is derived from the Chinese characters *han* (寒), which can mean both “cold” and “Korea” (韓), and *liu* (流), meaning “wave.” The term ‘cold wave,’ serving as a pun, emerged in China in 1999 to symbolize the influx of Korean culture into the country (Han & Lee, 2008, p. 115; Kim, 2015; Yook et al., 2014, p. 6). Jin (2016, 2021) notes that *Hallyu* was introduced in 1999 by South Korea’s Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, initially for labeling music CDs containing Korean pop songs to promote in China. It gained broader recognition in the late 1990s, with extensive Chinese media coverage of Korean culture’s rising popularity (Jin, 2021; Kim, 2015).

Hallyu 1.0 (Mid-1990s-mid-2000s) is distinctly represented by the flourishing of Korean television dramas (Jang, 2012; Jin, 2021; Kim, 2015). *Jealousy* (1992) and *Eyes at Daybreak* (1992) marked China’s initial official drama imports. *What is Love All About* (1991~1992), broadcast on China Global Television Network (CGTN, formerly CCTV), achieved the second-highest viewership in China in 1997 (McPhail, 2016, p. 264). *Jewel in the Palace* (2003~2004) garnered viewership from half of Taiwan’s population and emerged as the most-watched television drama in East and Southeast Asia, sparking the Korean Wave (Jang, 2012; McPhail, 2016; Thussu, 2000, p. 185). Furthermore, *Winter Sonata* (2002) contributed to the rise of Korean entertainment

and celebrities in Japan. Simultaneously, BoA achieved Oricon chart-topping success in Japan with her debut album, “Listen to My Heart” (McPhail, 2016, p. 265; Miyazaki, 2004). Starting in the 1990s, boy bands such as H.O.T., Seo Taiji, and Shinhwa gained popularity and established a cultural phenomenon of idol groups, primarily in East and Southeast Asia (Jin, 2021; Kim, 2015; McPhail, 2016).

The commencement of *Hallyu* 2.0 (2007-mid-2010s) varies among scholars. Whilst Jin (2021) places its beginning between 2008 and 2017, corresponding to the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, signifying a shift in the Korean government’s approach from active cultural promotion to a more laissez-faire stance, Kim (2015) starts it in 2006 when Japanese media first used the term *Hallyu* 2.0. Despite the disagreement, *Hallyu* 2.0 saw girl groups like Girls’ Generation and Wonder Girls gaining attention in North America. Particularly, SM Entertainment actively promoted Girls’ Generation in the US market, and the group appeared on the *David Letterman Show* in 2012, while Wonder Girls’ “Nobody” music video gained popularity among American social media users (Kim, 2015). Additionally, the most illustrative example of this era is Psy’s “Gangnam Style,” a YouTube phenomenon surpassing a billion views, further amplified by Britney Spears’s Facebook video about Spears’ learning of Psy’s dance on The Ellen DeGeneres Show, garnering six million likes (Lee & Nornes, 2015; Lovell, 2013). In this period, new media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube played a pivotal role in facilitating the Korean Wave (Lee & Nornes, 2015).

Hallyu 3.0, spanning from the mid-2010s to the present, witnessed a remarkable surge in the global appeal of K-pop, notably making inroads into markets in the United States and Europe. Enhanced by various social media platforms, the flow from the global North to the global South was exemplified through BTS and BLACKPINK, reaching its peak in 2018 (Boman, 2019; Jin & Yi,

2020, p. 11; Moon, 2019, p. 179). Furthermore, the proliferation of streaming and over-the-top (OTT) services, exemplified by Netflix's launch in South Korea in 2016 and the continued prominence of YouTube, expedited the worldwide dissemination of transmedia content (Boman, 2019; Jin & Yi, 2020).

News as “Media Event”

The news media serve as a primary source of information for the general public, covering a wide range of sectors, including politics, the economy, scientific knowledge, health, and entertainment (Moon & Park, 2017; Nisbet et al., 2003; Rojek, 2013; Soroka, 2012; Thussu, 2006). However, the news media do not merely reflect reality; rather, they actively shape reality through gatekeeping and agenda-building (Nisbet et al., 2003; Soroka, 2012; Tuchman, 1978). Van Dijk (1983) asserts, “News is not merely an incomplete description of the facts; it is a specific kind of reconstruction of reality” (p. 28). He highlights that news involves interpreting and representing various discourses. In essence, the media construct events to convey either actual occurrences or pseudo-events that are manufactured to attract mass audiences (Boorstin, 1961; Rojek, 2013). This phenomenon is referred to as a “media event” (Couldry et al., 2010).

In the construction of these events, the media often emphasize high-profile figures, such as national leaders or celebrities. This strategy has proven highly effective in capturing the public's attention (Rojek, 2013). The significance of this reality construction process lies in two key aspects. Firstly, with the advent of advanced digital technologies and the proliferation of media platforms, the concept of pseudo-events has become central to the contemporary media-saturated world, accelerating the sensationalization and tabloidization of news (Chouliaraki, 2006; Couldry et al., 2010; Thussu, 2006; Rojek, 2013). Secondly, the media not only contribute to the attributed and achieved celebrity categories but

also create a select group of ascribed celebrities with extensive media attention such as Kim Kardashian (Rojek, 2004). The complex interplay between media and the public in constructing events for the audience can yield both positive and negative impacts, such as the butterfly effects of suicides or enhanced public support for celebrity campaigns to help children in need (Rojek, 2013). Thus, understanding the ways in which the media constructs reality is crucial.

The concept of a ‘frame’ has been a topic of scholarly discussion for decades, especially in the realm of media and communication. Drawing from Goffman's seminal work, a frame can be understood as the principles of organization which govern the subjective meanings we assign to social events (Goffman, 1974). Goffman posited that these frames help individuals to “locate, perceive, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). In essence, frames are cognitive shortcuts that people employ to understand and interpret the vast amount of information they encounter in their daily lives. They operate within discourses, shaping the narratives that construct our understanding of reality.

Discourse analysis, as conceptualized by Van Dijk (1997), offers a multifaceted approach to examining the complex relationship between language use, the communication of beliefs, and social interaction. This approach is particularly significant in the context of news media discourse, where language plays a key role in shaping public perception and understanding of diverse issues. Van Dijk's work emphasizes that discourse encompasses both written and spoken language, and it accounts for the contexts of language production and reception (Van Dijk, 1997). He posits that discourses are mediated ideologies shared by specific groups or members and can be reproduced through their use. He also asserts that ideologies are cognitive systems or beliefs of a social group, which are in turn embedded in discourses. Additionally, van Dijk points out that

news narratives and rhetoric play a pivotal role in either reinforcing or challenging prevailing societal beliefs and values, thereby either maintaining the status quo or facilitating change (Van Dijk, 1998). Building on the framework, Wood and Kroger's (2000) research offers further insights into the intricate role of language in communication. They explore how language used by speakers is treated as actions, described as "meaningful, social doing" (p. 12). This concept is particularly evident in the use of metaphors in press discourse, shedding light on how specific groups conceptualize events and entities. Wood and Kroger emphasize language as a 'social practice' and a means of executing certain actions (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 4). This approach complements van Dijk's, further illustrating the dynamic and influential role of language in shaping social realities within news media.

Furthermore, discourse analysis highlights the interactional nature of language in social contexts. Echoing and extending the perspectives of van Dijk, Wood and Kroger (2000) note that discourse analysis is "not only about method; it is also a perspective on the nature of language and its relations to the central issues of the social sciences. More specifically, we see discourse analysis as a related collection of approaches to discourse, approaches that entail not only practices of data collection and analysis, but also a set of metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions" (p. x). This perspective underscores the role of interaction in social situations through the negotiation and challenging of social norms and values. Wood and Kroger (2000) emphasize how language operates within specific social contexts and how these contexts shape the meanings of language, underlining its significance in understanding the formation and perpetuation of social power relations and identities.

Moreover, discourse analysis, particularly in the form of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as described by Van Dijk (2008), investigates language's multifaceted role in social contexts,

emphasizing its importance in constructing social power relations and identities. CDA perceives language as a social practice that both mirrors and generates ideologies, requiring interdisciplinary approaches for an in-depth understanding of language's role in knowledge dissemination, organization of social institutions, and exertion of power. Such an approach, as noted by Fairclough (2013) and Wodak & Meyer (2009), focuses on how language reflects and produces ideologies, advocating for interdisciplinary methods to grasp its impact on knowledge transmission and societal structures. Ultimately, discourse analysis offers a profound understanding of the intricate ways language is used to construct and reinforce social reality, influenced by broader social structures and power dynamics.

The public relies on international news media for understanding new phenomena or global issues. Therefore, as agenda-setters, global networks are crucial in shaping the perspectives of global audiences. (Curran et al., 2017; McPhail, 2016; Thussu, 2000).

Western Media Portrayals of the 'non-West'

A vast body of research illustrates the portrayal of the 'non-West' by Western media. Reese (2001) elucidates that news broadcasts frequently generate content lacking in diversity, thereby neglecting cultural nuances and rendering the "non-West" through a monolithic lens. This aligns with Said's Orientalism, which notes that Western media often portrays "the East" negatively, depicting them as stereotyped distant others (Chouliaraki, 2006; Said, 1978; Wang, 2019). Some scholarly research examines the portrayal of non-Western societies and cultures, like China, Japan, and Korea, as "the other" in Western media narratives. In early 2000s, Liss (2003) examined the ways in which China is portrayed in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. The findings show that the news tone in the US

press tended to highlight China's negative images, identifying China as "aggressive and dangerous" (p. 303).

Ban et al. (2013) found three dominant themes in The New York Times' portrayal of China: Neoliberalism, Confucianism, and "high-tech" modernity. The newspaper emphasized Chinese prosperity, depicting them as extravagant consumers of luxury goods, subtly urging China to adopt a liberal-democratic stance to balance the global economy. Hilton (2015) examined the representation of Japanese men in the British media. The study reveals that British media's portrayal of Japanese men tends to stereotype them as being associated with deviant sexuality. This depiction is influenced by a specific cultural perspective that often highlights the "unconventional" aspects of Japanese culture. The media frequently links certain manga content with sexual abuse without providing a contextualized understanding of the significant risk factors, despite variations in child sexual abuse rates between the UK and Japan.

Glynn and Kim (2013) analyzed over 500 British newspaper articles from sources like *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*, focusing on Psy, the Korean pop star. They found that the British press often negatively depicted Psy, using terms like "chubby" and "fat man," and presented him more as an oddity than a serious musician. His hit "Gangnam Style" was trivialized as just a "catchy tune," overshadowing his status as a global music icon, and portraying Korea in a less favorable light. Building on this, K-pop, as noted by Jin and Yoon (2017), has emerged as a powerful cultural force, symbolized by the global recognition of groups such as BTS and BLACKPINK. Given the depth of this discussion and the increasing cultural significance of K-pop, this research aims to analyze the Western media's perspectives on K-pop, particularly in terms of its global news representation. Based on the preceding discussion, this study proposes the following research questions.

RQ1: What are the key agendas in news coverage of K-pop in BBC and CNN?

RQ2: How do dominant patterns manifest in the representation of K-pop across BBC and CNN news?

RQ3: What significant discrepancies emerge between US and UK news discourses in their reporting on K-pop?

METHOD

This study adopts a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis (CACDA) approach to conduct a comparative examination of news narratives within data related to K-pop. By employing the CACDA method, this research aims to analyze how the news media frames and contextualizes K-pop, with a particular emphasis on the specific terms and phrases encoded in news discourses. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers an interdisciplinary lens for examining texts within their social contexts, aiming to unravel the intricate interplay between language, power, and ideology. As proposed by Fairclough and Wodak (1997), discourse is not only influenced by the social milieu but also actively shapes it. Consequently, CDA examines language as a form of social practice, emphasizing the societal structures and power dynamics that both affect and are affected by discourse.

Van Dijk and Kintsch (2013) highlight the non-neutrality of texts, emphasizing their inherent ideological loadings and the power dynamics they reflect. Their work underscores the interpretive role of linguistic structures in discourse comprehension, suggesting that texts don't merely depict reality but actively construct it. Thus, by dissecting symbolic lexical choices and nuances in phrasing, analysts can discern the ideologies that permeate the discourse and identify how language may reinforce or challenge prevailing power narratives. Building on this, Wodak and Meyer (2009) advocate for a multi-dimensional

approach to discourse, acknowledging the multifaceted layers—ranging from specific linguistic elements to overarching socio-political frameworks. This perspective underscores the necessity to understand both the details and broader contexts in which language operates. Through such a comprehensive approach, CDA highlights the interdependent relationship between language and society, offering insights into the complex dynamics that underpin textual and conversational constructs (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

In the method of assessing the salience of issues in media, this study utilized the WordSmith Tool, substantially mitigating subjectivity. By discerning the highest-ranked keyword, we infer the most dominant issue corresponds to the term most recurrently used by the news entity. Notably, computer-assisted textual analysis, facilitated by such data-mining tools, proves instrumental in studying news frames due to its capacity to pinpoint salient themes (Entman, 1993; Tian & Stewart, 2005). For our systematic textual exploration, we incorporated WordSmith Tool 7.0, adept at automating word extraction. This methodology curtails the inherent subjectivity of manual coding, offering insights into overarching media discourse structures derived from explicit microstructures (Seale, 1998, 2008; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 2013). In the evolving landscape of discourse analysis, the need for methodologies that can adeptly handle voluminous corpora is becoming increasingly evident. Moschonas and Spitzmüller (2010) underscore this growing necessity, particularly in the context of comparative, corpus-based discourse analysis. For instance, in their comprehensive examination of media portrayals of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press, Baker et al. (2008) examined the discursive constructions related to refugees and asylum seekers in UK tabloids and broadsheet newspapers from 1996 to 2005 using WordSmith Tools. Wang et al. (2020) examined the ways

in which Chinese, US, and Filipino newspapers reported on South China Sea issues using a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis. Kim (2014) examined how CNN, *Newsweek*, and *The New York Times* portrayed North Korea using the WordSmith software. Seale (2008) also conducted a computer-assisted content analysis of British and American journals in sociology and medical sociology using WordSmith Tools in his pioneering work in medical sociology (Seale, 2008).

This study used WordSmith software's keyword function to identify dominant media issues (RQ1) and to analyze key K-pop news terms across different sources. It excluded generic articles such as “the,” “a” and conjunctions while focusing on significant pronouns such as “Trump,” “BTS,” and “BLACKPINK” to represent media focal points. In line with R2, the research aims to uncover patterns in K-pop media narratives by decoding keywords with WordSmith Tools. To ascertain significant lexical associations, collocates within a 10:10 span underwent rigorous analysis, assisted by WordList, KeyWords, and Concord features. For statistical robustness, the ‘Log Likelihood’ (L.L.) measure was chosen after evaluating alternatives like MI and Dice Coefficient (DC) (Kim, 2014, p. 225). In response to R3, this exposition explores the contrasting representations of K-pop in BBC and CNN news discourses.

With regard to the selection of media outlets, we prioritized globally influential platforms, specifically selecting the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the US-based Cable News Network (CNN) due to their pivotal roles as global agenda setters. Given their esteemed international reputation and their ability to vie with leading global news agencies, the narratives produced by BBC and CNN serve as salient benchmarks for global media discourse (McPhail, 2016; Tian & Stewart, 2005; Xie & Boyd-Barrett, 2015). This study utilized a corpus of news articles sourced from the LexisNexis Advance database.

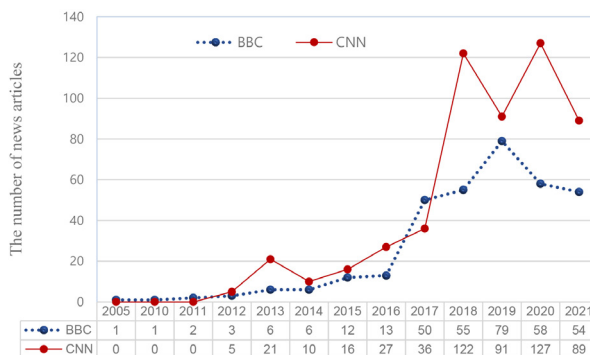
These articles have previously been employed in analyses of news discourse, as demonstrated in studies by Gabrielatos and Baker (2008, p. 9), Lai and Lane (2009), and Kearns et al. (2019). Adopting Gibson's (2018) methodology, the search term 'K-pop' was selected to minimize overlapping with unrelated terms. The dataset encompasses content from BBC World and BBC UK National, alongside CNN International and CNN Domestic. The temporal scope of the study extended from an unspecified opening date to 31 December 2021, a period chosen to include the full scope of relevant news coverage pertaining to K-pop. Given that the BBC World Service and CNN International offer content in 42 and 7 languages respectively, as stated on their websites, the selection of English-language content was facilitated by specifying the 'English' language filter within the database, thereby ensuring the extraction of news items exclusively in English.

RESULTS

BBC's initial coverage of K-pop emerged on December 31, 2005. This narrative, predominantly centered on the year's pervasive digital trends,

highlighted the meteoric rise of Psy's "Gangnam Style." As delineated by BBC's Rory Cellan-Jones, within a mere span of five months, this cultural artifact not only clinched the apex position on global music charts but also registered an unprecedented near-billion YouTube views. The global resonance of this musical phenomenon culminated in Psy's discourse at the esteemed Oxford Union and engendered myriad parodies, with a rendition by Eton pupils being particularly noteworthy. Cellan-Jones further posited a discernible shift in youth's media consumption patterns, veering towards platforms like YouTube, suggesting that the Gangnam wave— emblematic of foreign cultural transference— had captivated audiences prior to its mainstream media endorsement. On a parallel note, CNN's first reference to K-pop materialized on July 3, 2012. Within the international news segment, Suzanne Malveaux, accompanied by an aural backdrop of Busker Busker's track, intimated the band's ascension post their debut on South Korea's talent spectacle, Superstar K3, subsequently solidifying their chart dominance. Figure 1 chronicles the annual frequency of K-pop-centric news from 2005 through 2021 across both BBC and CNN.

Figure 1. *News Size and Volume: The Number of News Articles in BBC and CNN*



Note. Spanning from 2005 to 2021

In 2017, a year marked by a significant increase in news reporting, the BBC frequently used the keywords “Jong” (raw frequency: 45) and “Hyun” (36), relating to news about Kim Jong-hyun, the lead singer of SHINee. This was highlighted in a report dated December 19, 2017, which noted, ‘He was the lead singer of one of South Korea’s largest pop groups, SHINee. His death elicited an outpouring of grief from fans around the world.’ In 2018, the predominant keyword ‘Concert’ (34) in CNN’s coverage focused on a K-pop concert in Pyongyang, featuring groups such as Red Velvet. As the 2020s commenced, the BBC expanded its coverage to include megastars like BTS (41), and BLACKPINK (45) prominently figured in the 2021 analysis. Meanwhile, CNN’s 2017 reports concentrated on Kim Jong-hyun’s death and significant political events, including then-President Trump’s first visit to South Korea, as indicated by the keywords “SHINee” (19) and “Trump” (34). The keyword “music” (62) in 2019 was primarily used in discussions about K-pop and the Korean pop music industry, exemplified by the statement on October 14, 2019: “Concerns regarding how mental health is managed in the Korean pop music industry - often referred to as K-pop - have grown significantly over the past decade. Many of its stars, known as idols, undergo years of training to refine their singing, dancing, and acting skills...” Throughout the 2020s, CNN’s coverage evolved to include various socio-political campaigns, especially those involving BTS (266) in 2020, while continuing to cover issues related to “Trump” (122) in 2020 and “China (Beijing)” (138) in 2021.

Data from Google Trends (2016) indicates that J-pop enjoyed global popularity in the late 1990s and 2000s. However, a shift occurred around 2009, with growing public interest in K-pop. This trend intensified from 2010 onwards, as evidenced by a dramatic increase in K-pop related searches, leading to an unprecedented widening in the popularity gap between J-pop and K-pop. Currently, K-pop’s popularity is approximately

14.3 times greater than that of J-pop. Furthermore, when compared to K-pop, the popularity of Cantopop (Cantonese pop music) and Mandopop (Chinese pop music) is markedly lower, almost negligible (Kong, 2016).

Table 1 presents the prominent keywords extracted using the Wordlist function of the WordSmith Tool. Word frequency illustrates the methods by which news media emphasize specific issues or topics, predominantly employing consistent terminology within news narratives (Entman, 1991).

A comparative analysis was conducted between the Wordlist and KeyWord lists. The consequential list of salient keywords extracted from each media outlet via the KeyWord function indicates congruent key agendas between BBC and CNN. The top 15 keywords, arranged hierarchically, for BBC were as follows: “K-pop,” “BTS,” “Korean,” “Fans,” “Asian,” “Blackpink,” “Crimes,” “Anti,” “Issues,” “Biden,” “Hate,” “Idols,” “Military,” “Limbo,” and “exports.” For CNN, the list comprised “K-pop,” “BTS,” “Biden,” “Trump,” “Korean,” “Fans,” “Tiktok,” “China,” “Blackpink,” “Twitter,” “Music,” “Netflix,” “Rally,” “Crimes,” and “Slave.” The words distinctly prevalent in each media source were “Hate,” “Military,” “Limbo,” and “exports” for BBC, and “Trump,” “Tiktok,” “China,” “Netflix,” and “Rally” for CNN. Within the list of 20 keywords, three pivotal terms – “K-pop,” “China,” and “fans” - emerged as the primary news agendas in both the BBC and CNN. Building on this selection, the subsequent section will offer a critical discourse analysis for each keyword, delving into the nuances of their respective news narratives.

Keyword 1: K-pop as an ‘Export’

Categorizing K-pop as both a cultural product and an export, both BBC and CNN primarily framed their coverage with an economic lens, forecasting its potential influence on the tourism and gastronomy sectors. These major news

Table 1. *Top BBC, CNN Wordlist*

	BBC	Freq.	CNN	Freq.
1	K-pop	1,067	K-pop	1,235
2	South (Korea)	871	South (Korea)	588
3	North (Korea)	430	North (Korea)	351
4	People	227	Trump	345
5	Government	212	BTS	344
6	China	210	Music	258
7	Yonhap (news agency)	191	President	254
8	World	187	World	254
9	Business	174	(K-pop) Group	233
10	Kim (Kim Jong-un, Kim Jong-hyun)	170	Band (BTS)	184
11	BTS	142	Fans	178
12	Military	137	Kim (Jong-un)	167
13	President	135	Stars	158
14	Fans	128	People	144
15	(K-pop) Group	124	(White) House	116
16	Music	123	Big (Hit Ent. Big Bang)	115
17	Stars	118	Military	95
18	Band	115	Show	94
19	Social (media, network)	109	Business	93
20	Concert	105	China	85

entities posited that K-pop could elevate Korea's financial returns as well as its international soft power. While specific details were absent regarding the exact actions taken by the Korean government to bolster the K-pop sector, it was highlighted that the global spread of South Korean pop culture was not merely coincidental but a result of deliberate governmental strategies (BBC: March 9, 2020). The research findings indicate the role of the controversial "slave contracts" in K-pop's rise, though the outlets provided neither detailed sources nor context for this assertion. Additionally, the rigorous training regimens for artists, the strategic intentions of the South Korean government to amplify cultural exports, coupled with Korea's forefront technological innovations and the widespread impact of social media, were cited as significant factors in K-pop's global success.

Korea is excited by what this new musical export could do for its image – and its economy. But some of K-Pop's biggest success stories were built on the back of so-called slave contracts, which tied its trainee-stars into long exclusive deals, with little control or financial reward. (BBC: June 15, 2011).

In a specific report, BBC covered the incident involving Seungri, an erstwhile member of Big Bang and a restaurant franchise CEO, and Jung Joon-Young, a singer who rose to fame from a 2012 audition program. Both faced allegations and subsequent arrest over a "sex bribery" incident tied to a video scandal. In a focused report, the BBC detailed the controversy surrounding Seungri, formerly of Big Bang and a CEO of a restaurant franchise, and Jung Joon-Young, a singer who garnered attention from a 2012 audition program. The pair faced allegations, leading to their arrest, in connection to a "sex

bribery” incident linked to a video scandal. Within the context of Seungri’s situation, the BBC emphasized South Korea’s persistent struggle against secret recordings in public toilets and the unauthorized online dissemination of these materials (March 13, 2019).

Keyword 2: K-pop Stars in Relation to ‘China’

As illustrated in Table 1, the term ‘China’ was the frequently used by the BBC. News stories about K-pop associated with the keyword ‘China’ primarily focused on the conflict between South Korea and China. Specifically, China imposed a ban on Korean cultural products, including television dramas, films, and K-pop music, in response to the deployment of the US THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea. The BBC highlighted that the surplus from South Korean cultural products experienced a significant decline due to the THAAD-related tensions with China (BBC: May 7, 2017). Furthermore, BBC explored the emerging tensions between Weibo users and K-pop artists, centering on differing stances over politically charged topics. This was detailed by referencing discussions among Chinese users on Weibo, hinting at potential consequences at a national diplomatic level.

Social media users on China’s tightly censored Twitter-like Sina Weibo have been criticising South Korean actor and singer Choi Siwon ... Many Weibo users announced that they were abandoning him as fans while others told him to “get lost” or accused him of supporting “Hong Kong independence.” (BBC: November 26, 2019)

Further, CNN covered China’s intensified scrutiny of pop culture, citing instances like Chinese social media behemoth Weibo’s decision to temporarily suspend 21 Korean pop artists’ accounts for 30 days. Particularly noteworthy was the suspension of a BTS fan club account

dedicated to BTS member Jimin—with over 1.1 million followers—for 60 days on September 6, 2021.

Keyword 3: K-pop Fans as ‘Political Force’

A significant contributor to K-pop’s global popularity, the study suggests, is the collective efforts of K-pop fans, with a particular focus on the ardent support for bands, notably BTS. CNN highlighted the evolving role of K-pop fans as potent socio-political agents, noting their active involvement in significant events like Trump’s rallies and the Black Lives Matter movement, either through endorsement or boycott. For example:

One video, with more than a quarter of a million views, called on fans of South Korean pop music in particular to join the trolling campaign. Fans of the music, which is known as K-pop, are a force on social media – they posted over 6 billion tweets last year alone. And they have a history of taking action for social justice causes. Earlier this month, K-pop fans rallied around the Black Lives Matter movement, drowning out “White Lives Matter” and other anti-Black hashtags. (CNN: June 21, 2020).

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the portrayal of K-pop within Western news media, specifically on BBC and CNN, aiming to discern the varying discourses articulated by these outlets. The primary aim was to discern the dominant agendas and attributes characterizing their coverage of K-pop. Initially, the first research question (RQ1) explored the principal news agendas in the portrayal of K-pop on BBC and CNN. An inductive discourse analysis methodology, utilizing WordSmith for keyword analysis, was adopted. This analysis revealed that both BBC and CNN predominantly framed K-pop as an

export commodity, diverging from their typical coverage of Western pop artists like Adele or Taylor Swift, which tends to explore societal reflections, emotional depth, or musical expertise. K-pop artists, by contrast, are often depicted merely as products for export. Furthermore, both the BBC and CNN consistently portrayed K-pop as a deliberately crafted cultural product. Such portrayals could convey to global audiences Western stereotypical perceptions of the Korean music industry and South Korea as ‘undemocratic,’ positioning them as ‘the Other’ even among democratic nations (Wang, 2019).

The study’s second question (RQ2) examined the dominant patterns manifest in the representation of K-pop in BBC and CNN news. The results show that h BBC and CNN’s news pertaining to K-pop were constructed with issues such as controversy or conflict. Additionally, the global media narrative around K-pop did not solely focus on its potential economic impact for South Korea, but also highlighted various challenges and controversies. This includes narratives on criticisms from Chinese social media users and specific incidents related to the THAAD deployment, and Choi Si-won’s endorsement of Hong Kong’s independence. There was also a propensity to elevate lesser-known figures, or “celetoids,” to K-pop stardom in Western coverage, sometimes shading the broader industry’s reputation (Rojek, 2004). Although the Korean Peninsula is technically at war, with 28,500 US personnel currently stationed in South Korea since the Korean War (1950–1953) ended in an armistice, Korean popular music has primarily been shaped by economic and geopolitical contexts. It particularly highlights the conflict not only between the two Koreas but also the ongoing tensions between South Korea and China, amidst China’s economic and military rivalry with the US, which significantly impacts the global landscape. Regarding the question about discrepancies between BBC and CNN in reporting on K-pop (RQ3), CNN depicted K-pop

fans as technologically adept, entwined in political narratives, especially during the Trump and Biden administrations. Furthermore, there’s a noticeable tendency within global media to portray K-pop fans as “extraordinary.” Such narratives, while differentiating K-pop fans from conventional pop music fans, simultaneously elevate them from mere supporters to potent political actors, sometimes overshadowing their philanthropic endeavors and commitment to sustainable initiatives.

As DeNora (2000) notes, the complexities of how music operates remain somewhat elusive. However, this study’s findings suggest that global news narratives pertaining to K-pop may not sufficiently explore in depth the aspects of audience-music interactions, potentially limiting our comprehensive understanding of music’s influence on listeners. Significantly, there was an apparent scarcity of articles that genuinely dealt with the conventional aspects of K-pop as a music genre, including the inspirations behind their musical compositions or dance choreography. In light of the substantial impact global media exerts on shaping societal perceptions, as noted by Curran et al. (2017), it becomes imperative to ensure a fair, nuanced, and comprehensive depiction of non-Western cultures in contexts. This study embarked on an exploration of K-pop’s portrayal in news media, striving to uncover the specific social contexts influencing its representation. The approach centered on contextual social factors, employing inductive analysis to reduce subjectivity. However, the investigation fell short of fully deciphering the elements influencing K-pop’s portrayal in international news outlets. Future research should adopt a cross-cultural comparative framework to critically examine the representation of Asian and Western pop stars in Western media narratives. Such scholarly pursuits are crucial, not for exacerbating East-West divides, but for transcending the stereotypical ideologies that shape the portrayal of Asian cultures in Western

news media. Moreover, this approach will assist in reexamining the role of global news networks as agenda setters, responsible for cultivating a global public sphere within the ever-evolving and interconnected landscape of global media.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.
- Ang, I. (1985). *Watching dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*. Routledge.
- Bae, E. S., Chang, M., Park, E. S., & Kim, D. C. (2017). The effect of Hallyu on tourism in Korea. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 3(4), 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40852-017-0075-y>
- Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., KhosraviNik, M., Krzyżanowski, M., McEnery, T., & Wodak, R. (2008). A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press. *Discourse & Society*, 19(3), 273–306.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926508088962>
- Ban, Z., Sastry, S., & Dutta, M. J. (2013). Shoppers' republic of China: Orientalism in neoliberal US news discourse. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6(4), 280–297.
- Baudinette, T. (2021). Reflecting on Japan-Korea relations through the Korean wave: Fan desires, nationalist fears, and transcultural fandom. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 36.
<https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2021.2045>
- Boman, B. (2019). Achievement in the South Korean music industry. *International Journal of Music Business Research*, 8(2), 6–26.
- Boorstin, D. J. (1961). *The image: A guide to pseudo-events in America*. Vintage.
- Boudana, S. (2016). Impartiality is not fair: Toward an alternative approach to the evaluation of content bias in news stories. *Journalism*, 17(5), 600–618.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884915571295>
- Chouliaraki, L. (2006). *The spectatorship of suffering*. Sage.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2008). The symbolic power of transnational media. *Global Media and Communication*, 4(3), 329–351.
- Couldry, N., Hepp, A., & Krotz, F. (2010). *Media events in a global age*. Routledge.
- Curran, J., Esser, F., Hallin, D. C., Hayashi, K., & Lee, C. (2017). International news and global integration. *Journalism Studies*, 18(2), 118–134.
- DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge University Press.
- Entman, R. M. (1991). Framing U.S. coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran Air incidents. *Journal of Communication*, 41(4), 6–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1991.tb02328.x>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Routledge.
- Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as social interaction* (pp. 258–284). Sage.
- Gabrielatos, C., & Baker, P. (2008). Fleeing, sneaking, flooding. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 36(1), 5–38.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0075424207311247>
- Gibson, J. (2018). How K-pop broke the West: An analysis of Western media coverage from 2009 to 2019. *International Journal of Korean Studies*, 12(2), 22–47.
- Glynn, B., & Kim, J. (2013). 'Oppa'-tunity knocks: Psy, Gangnam style and the critical ception of

- K-pop in Britain. *Situations: Cultural Studies in the East Asian Context*, 7(1), 1–20.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.
- Hall, S. (1973). *Encoding and decoding in the television discourse*, Birmingham Centre for contemporary cultural studies. Amsterdam University Press.
- Han, H.-J., & Lee, J.-S. (2008). A study on the KBS TV drama Winter Sonata and its impact on Korea's Hallyu tourism development. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 24(2–3), 115–126.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10548400802092593>
- Hanaki, T., Singhal, A., Han, M. W., Kim, D. K., & Chitnis, K. (2007). Hanryu sweeps East Asia. *International Communication Gazette*, 69(3), 281–294.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048507076581>
- Hinton, P. (2015). The perverse stereotype of the Japanese man in the British media. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, 15(2).
<http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/ejcs/vol15/iss2/hinton.html>
- Iwabuchi, K. (2008). When the Korean Wave meets resident Koreans in Japan: Intersections of the transnational, the postcolonial and the multicultural. In B. H. Chua & K. Iwabuchi (Eds.), *East Asian pop culture: Analysing the Korean Wave* (pp. 243–264). Hong Kong University Press.
- Jang, S. H. (2012). The Korean Wave and its implications for the Korea-China relationship. *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 19(2), 97–113.
- Jin, D. Y. (2016). *New Korean Wave: Transnational cultural power in the age of social media* (Illustrated ed.). University of Illinois Press.
- Jin, D. Y. (2021). Ten myths about the Korean Wave in the global cultural sphere. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 4147–4164.
- Jin, D. Y., & Yi, H. (2020). Transnationality of popular culture in the Korean Wave. *Korea Journal*, 60(1), 5–16.
- Jin, D. Y., & Yoon, T.-J. (2017). The Korean Wave: Retrospect and prospect: Introduction. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 2241–2249.
- Kearns, E. M., Betus, A. E., & Lemieux, A. F. (2019). Why do some terrorist attacks receive more media attention than others? *Justice Quarterly*, 36(6), 985–1022.
- Kim, B.-R. (2015). Past, present and future of Hallyu (Korean Wave). *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 5(5), 154–160.
- Kim, K. H. (2014). Examining US news media discourses about North Korea: A corpus-based critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 25(2), 221–244.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513516043>
- Kim, H., & Lee, S. (2010). Understanding fandom induced tourism: Problems and strategies for the Korean Wave tourism. *GRI Review*, 12(2), 253–274.
- Kong, H. Y. (2016). *The globalization of K-pop: The interplay of external and internal forces* (Publication No. 249536) [Master's thesis, Furtwangen University].
<https://opus.hs-furtwangen.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/1294>
- Lai, W. Y. Y., & Lane, T. (2009). Characteristics of medical research news reported on front pages of newspapers. *PLoS ONE*, 4(7), e6103.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0006103>
- Lee, S., & Nornes, A. M. (Eds.). (2015). *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the age of social media*. University of Michigan Press.
- Liss, A. (2003). Images of China in the American print media: A survey from 2000 to 2002. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 12(35), 299318.
- Lovell, N. (2014). *The Curve: Turning followers into superfans: The Future of business*. Penguin UK.

- McPhail, T. (2016). *Global communication: Theories, stakeholders, and trends*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Miyazaki, J. (2014, December 13). *Japan's showbiz fans look to S. Korea*. BBC.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4092289.stm>
- Moon, M. (2019). *International news coverage and the Korean conflict: The challenges of reporting practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moon, M., & Park, J. (2017). Do “smart pills” make you smarter? News media coverage of ADHD. *Asian Communication Research*, 14(2), 42–68.
- Moschonas, S., & Spitzmüller, J. (2010). Prescriptivism in and about the media: A comparative analysis of corrective practices in Greece and Germany. In S. Johnson & T. Milani (Eds.), *Language ideologies and media discourse: Texts, practices, politics* (pp. 17–40). A&C Black.
- Nisbet, M. C., Brossard, D., & Kroepsch, A. (2003). Framing science: The stem cell controversy in an age of press/politics. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 8(2), 36–70.
- Nye, J., & Kim, Y. (2013). Soft power and the Korean Wave. In Y. Kim (Ed.), *The Korean Wave: Korean media go global* (pp. 31–42). Routledge.
- Reese, S. D. (2001). Understanding the global journalist: A hierarchy-of-influences approach. *Journalism Studies*, 2(2), 173–187.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700118394>
- Rojek, C. (2004). *Celebrity*. Polity.
- Rojek, C. (2013). *Event power: How global events manage and manipulate*. Sage.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Routledge.
- Seale, C. (1998). *Researching society and culture*. Sage.
- Seale, C. (2008). Mapping the field of medical sociology: A comparative analysis of journals. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 30(5), 677–695.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2008.01090.x>
- Shim, D. (2020). Transnational Koreans in Asian pop culture in the pre-Korean wave era. *Asian Communication Research*, 17(3), 55–83.
- Soroka, S. N. (2012). The gatekeeping function: Distributions of information in media and the real world. *The Journal of Politics*, 74(2), 514–528.
- Thussu, D. K. (2000). *International communication: Continuity & change* (2nd Ed.). Arnold.
- Thussu, D. K. (2006). Contra-flow in global media. *Media Asia*, 33(3–4), 123–129.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2006.11726823>
- Tian, Y., & Stewart, C. M. (2005). Framing the SARS crisis: A computer-assisted text analysis of CNN and BBC online news reports of SARS. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 15(3), 289–301.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01292980500261605>
- Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. Free Press.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1983). Discourse analysis: Its development and application to the structure of news. *Journal of Communication*, 33(2), 20–43.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1983.tb02386.x>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). *Discourse as social interaction*. Sage.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. Sage.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and context: A sociocognitive approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Van Dijk, T. A., & Kintsch, W. (2013). *Strategies of discourse comprehension*. Academic Press.
- Wang, J. (2019). Stereotyping in representing the “Chinese Dream” in news reports by CNN and BBC. *Semiotica*, 2019(226), 29–48.
- Wang, J., Fu, Y., & Lee, Y.-C. (2020). A corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis of South China Sea issues in Chinese, American, and

- Philippine newspapers. *The Journal of English Language and Literature Research*, 62(4), 291–317.
- Wasserman, H. (2014). The ramifications of media globalization in the Global South for the study of media industries. *Media Industries Journal*, 1(2), 54–58.
<https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0001.211>
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods for critical discourse analysis* (pp. 1–33). Sage.
- Wood, L. A., & Kroger, R. O. (2000). *Doing discourse analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and text*. Sage.
- Xie, S., & Boyd-Barrett, O. (2015). External-national TV news networks' way to America: Is the United States losing the global "information war"? *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 66–83.
- Yook, E., Yum, Y.-O., & Kim, S. J. (2014). The effects of Hallyu (Korean Wave) on Korean transnationals in the U.S. *Asian Communication Research*, 11(1–2), 5–21.