

## Consumers' Profiles in Purchasing Korean Products: Malaysia Context

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### Abstract

*The study analyzes customer profiling in purchasing Korean products in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The focus of this study is to identify the type of Korean products interested by Malaysian consumers. Apart from this research studies the Korean wave factors that influence customer purchase intention toward Korean products. Consequently, this research also studies the type of Korean products that might influence customer purchases. The research objective is to identify the consumers' profiling in terms of age, gender, occupation, and race that influence the purchasing of Korean products. Another objective of this study is to identify the type of Korean products purchased by Malaysians. Questionnaires were distributed online via a social media platform. The respondents focus on random consumers that love to buy Korean products. Descriptive analysis was used to evaluate the data collected.*

**Keywords:** Korean products, consumer profiling

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## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Korean Waves in Malaysia generates some interest among Malaysian people toward Korean products thanks to K-pop music, Korean drama, and Korean variety shows. Malaysia's acceptance of Korean Waves has been indicated by Ha (2010), which around 3.15% of people who live in Kuala Lumpur find Korean culture to be impressive whereas another 3.15% express interest in experiencing more of the culture itself.

According to Iqbal, 2016, these two countries Malaysia and South Korea have established relations on 23 February 1960 which are the two-sided international relationship between the two nations. Malaysia has an ambassador in Seoul and South Korea has an Embassy of the Republic of Korea located in Kuala Lumpur. Starting in the year 2004 until the year 2008, there is a 6.7% increase in Malaysia's trade with South Korea from US\$9.7 billion in the year 2004 up to US\$15.4 billion. An investment of RM7.7 billion was used for another 287 projects in 2012.

In 2015, Malaysia became South Korea's 12th largest business cooperation when it reached US\$10.8 billion in trade value (Iqbal, 2016). According to Rasid, 2018, in New Straits Times, Malaysia and SK

Group from South Korean has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2018 for the purpose to invest in the latter by team up in information and communications technology (ICT) and 5G network technology, environmental technology and urban planning and oil and gas. Due to this phenomenon, various Korean products are flowing into the Malaysian market. People are getting more related and influenced by the Korean wave and therefore started to use Korean products in their daily life.

The study analyses customer profiling in purchasing Korean products in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The focus of this study is to identify the type of Korean products interested by Malaysian consumers. Apart from this research studies the Korean wave factors that influence customer purchase intention toward Korean products. Consequently, this research also studies the type of Korean products that might influence customer purchases. The research objective is to identify the consumers' profiling in terms of age, gender, occupation, and race that influence the purchasing of Korean products. Another objective of this study is to identify the type of Korean products purchased by Malaysians.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of countries such as South Korea on consumers' purchasing intention is rather notable (Chang and Lee, 2017), now that the Korean Wave phenomenon makes the world like the same place. When a consumer has the intention to purchase a product the first thing, they consider is information and data about the country.

According to Sulu, Saerang, and Massie (2016), if certain or specific product information is hard to obtain, the consumer does not decide on the product but rather judges where the product comes from because the country's image will give the information about the country. Thus, in their words, that consumer purchase intention is the likelihood that happens when they are in a state where they need to pick a certain product selection that drives their intention to purchase the product.

Influence of intention to purchase can come from any side, one of it from a marketer's brilliant marketing strategy idea to attract consumers. Foreign consumers or fans that are familiar with Korean culture are likely to encounter tremendous intentions toward Korean products. For example, luxury or cosmetic products that were shown in the drama were sold off like hotcakes when they appeared in the drama. This way often captures the fans' or consumers' attention not only Korean consumers but international fans (Chang and Lee, 2017).

According to Chang and Lee, 2017, Korean dramas are often being sponsored by big Korean brands such as Samsung smartphones, cosmetic products, skin care products, or other products to advertise and promote their product by naturally appearing in the drama. This is an easy way to make consumers familiar with the brand and often captures the audience's or consumers' attention not only Korean consumers but international fans. All advertisements or endorsements by K-pop or those appearing in K-dramas often translate into a direct influence on consumer purchases intention because they are already familiar with the brand or product. These show that brand familiarity has a strong contribution to the purchase intention of consumers.

According to a survey by Statista (2021) on the global popularity of South Korean beauty products in 2019, around 59.6 per cent of respondents in Malaysia stated that K-beauty is very popular in their country. The same survey revealed that K-beauty was most popular in Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand. K-Beauty stores have landed in Malaysia a few years ago, k-Beauty is available at their flagship offline stores/department stores. Consumers can

also shop K-beauty products online/offline on Sephora, Watsons & Guardian. The accessibility made it easy for the consumer to get it and the awareness about the K-Beauty products is vast (Fishmeatdie website, 2020).

According to Uyuna et al (2020), The popularity of Korean cuisine has undoubtedly increased in Malaysia. People commonly access various types of Korean restaurants within walking distance in the center of Kuala Lumpur. They offer an extensive range to suit customers of their income status. Many seem to like the taste of spicy and sour dishes prepared with various kinds of ingredients. There is no need to travel a thousand miles to reach Seoul and Busan to get the authentic flavor of kimchi, bulgogi, bibimbap, and many more. Along with the impulse in the popularity of K-Pop culture, Korean cuisine also has been emerging as one of the top cuisines, especially in Asia. Numerous Korean Food franchises and independent restaurants have been launched since the development of the Korean Wave in Malaysia such as Seoul Garden, Mr. Dakgalbi, K-Fry, Nene Chicken, Dubuyo, and many more. However, only a few of all Korean Food Restaurants were Halal JAKIM certified. In 2018, Seoul Garden, Dubuyo and Sweetree just received their Halal by JAKIM. On the other hand, one of the fast-growing Korean Franchises of the famous Korean Fried Chicken restaurant, which recently launched its 16th restaurant in Kuala Lumpur is in the process of getting Malaysia halal certificates.

Apart from that, a study done in 2019 by Negin, Pressca & Kasuma et al. reveals that both advertisement and celebrity endorsement has a strong relationship with purchase intention. Ultimately, celebrity endorsement has a strong influence in convincing netizens to purchase intention towards Korean cosmetic products.

For the past few years, Korea has managed to capture the hearts of many not just with its music, K-dramas, and K-pop idols, but its mouth-watering cuisine as well. From the best Korean BBQ in town to a tteokbokki buffet and a hidden gem that serves naengmyun (cold noodles), the Klook website (2021) has listed Malaysian favorite Korean restaurants around Klang Valley to satisfy their food cravings!

- Donkas Lab
- Pocha
- Buldojang
- Han Kang Restaurant
- Sae Ma Eul BBQ
- Chi Mac Bistro
- Da On Fine Korean Cuisine
- Dookki Malaysia

- Palsaik Korean BBQ
- Daorae BBQ Restaurant

The Korean wave took advantage of social media platforms which changed the consumers' thinking. For instance, it started in 2013 when Egypt launched the Korean Cultural Center. In 2016 Egypt organized a KCON event (K-pop concert, K-beauty, Kfood) that attracted almost more than 8000 participants from UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It proved that Korean products become a gateway to a broader interest in Korean culture, it provided an avenue for the consumer to know Korean lifestyle, customs, values, and history as stated by Uyuna et al (2020).

Besides the Korean food phenomena, Korean electronics and appliances have become an increasing demand in Malaysia. For instance, Cuckoo, Coway water purifier, and other appliances. The cuckoo brand has considered transferring its plant to Malaysia (The Star, 2016). SOUTH Korea's top home appliance maker, Cuckoo Electronics, is considering setting up a plant in Malaysia following encouraging consumer response to its range of healthy lifestyle products (The Star, 2016). Other than that, another water purifier brand SK Magic home appliances debuts in Malaysia (News Strait Times, 2018). Therefore, it encourages Malaysian consumers to have choices in choosing their home appliances.

**3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The population is the consumers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The population is 1,795.2 Million. The sample size chosen from the total population is 384 consumers. The sample size was derived from Krecjie & Morgan (1970) table. The unit analysis of the respondents is consumers between 15 years old to 65 years old who are willing to buy Korean products. The sampling technique used is convenience sampling as the researcher distributes their questionnaires in a social media platform where the social media users were randomly selected.

**4.0 FINDINGS**

**4.1. Demographic Profile**

The analysis from the questionnaire, the demographic profile is covered by age, gender, occupation, race, and respondents' recent Korean purchase. The profile background for the sample size of 384 respondents is shown in the table and figure below.

**4.1.1 Age of Respondents**

Based on table 1 for respondent age, there are divided into five categories of age; 15 until 25 years old are 22% (83 respondents), 26 until 35 years old is 49% (190 respondents), 36 until 45 years old are 18% (69 respondents), 46 until 55 years old is 6% (23 respondents), and 56 until 65 years old and over are 5% (19 respondents).

Table 1 Age of Respondents

		AGE			
		Freq	%	Valid%	Cum%
Valid	15 - 25 years old	83	21.6	21.6	21.6
	26 - 35 years old	190	49.5	49.5	71.1
	36 - 45 years old	69	18.0	18.0	89.1
	46 - 55 years old	23	6.0	6.0	95.1
	56 - 65 years old and over	19	4.9	4.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>		384	100.0	100.0	

**4.1.2 Gender of Respondents**

According to table 2, the gender of respondents consists of male and female. The total of male respondents is 36% (137 respondents) and female respondents are 64% (247 respondents) in total.

Table 2: Gender of Respondents

		GENDER			
		Freq	%	Valid%	Cum%
Valid	Male	137	35.7	35.7	35.7
	Female	247	64.3	64.3	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	384	100.0	100.0	

**4.1.3 Occupation of Respondents**

Based on table 3, there are four categories of respondents' occupations which are school student, college or university, working, and unemployment. Respondents for school student are 12% (46 respondents), for college or university are 26% (101 respondents), for working is 57% (217 respondents) and for unemployment is 5% (20 respondents).

Table 3: Occupation of Respondents

		OCCUPATION			
		Freq	%	Valid%	Cum%
Valid	School students	46	12.0	12.0	12.0
	College/U niv.	101	26.3	26.3	38.3
	Working	217	56.5	56.5	94.8
	Unemployd	20	5.2	5.2	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**4.1.4 Race of Respondents**

Referring to table 4, there are 4 categories of respondents’ race; for Malay, there are 74% (286 respondents), for Chinese are 16% (61 respondents), for Indian are 9% (34 respondents) and others are 1% (3 respondents).

Table 4: Race of Respondents

		RACE			
		Freq	%	Valid%	Cum%
Valid	Malay	286	74.5	74.5	74.5
	Chinese	61	15.9	15.9	90.4
	Indian	34	8.9	8.9	99.2
	Others	3	0.8	0.8	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**4.2 Type Korean Product Purchase**

According to table 5, there are 5 categories of the recent Korean product purchase which are food is 46% (177 respondents), for smartphone / electronic appliances is 20.0% (78 respondents), for cosmetics is 22% (83 respondents), for others is 3% (11 respondents) and lastly is none are 9% (35 respondents).

Table 5: Type of Korean Product Purchase

		TYPE OF KOREAN PRODUCT PURCHASE			
		Freq	%	Valid%	Cim %
Valid	Foods	177	46.1	46.1	46.1
	Smartphone / Electronic Appliances	78	20.3	20.3	66.4
	Cosmetics	83	21.6	21.6	88.0
	Others	11	2.9	2.9	90.9
	None	35	9.1	9.1	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**5.0 DISCUSSION**

The findings indicated that a total of 247 respondents (64.3%) were female and 137 respondents (35.7%) were male who is customers that have an intention towards buying Korean products. For occupation, 46 respondents (12%) are school students, others 101 respondents (26.3%) are college/university, while 217 people (56.5%) are working, in addition 20

respondents (5.2%) are unemployed. The results also showed 286 respondents (74.5%) who are Malay, next 61 respondents (15.9%) who are Chinese and 34 respondents (8.9%) who are Indian, and 3 respondents (0.8%) from other races. The finding shows 83 respondents (21.6%) the age of 15 years old to 25 years old. There are 190 respondents (49.5%) aged 26 years old to 35 years old. From age of 36 years old to 45 years old the total number of respondents is 69 respondents (18.0%). In addition, there are 23 respondents (6%) for the age of 46 years old to 55 years old and around 19 respondents (4.9%) for the age of 56 years old to 65 years old and over. Overall, this is based on the number of 384 respondents which is divided by gender, occupation, race, and age as the result that we find.

**6.0 CONCLUSION**

The Korean wave has impacted Malaysia's life in several ways. Based on the findings, Korean products have become crucial in Malaysia's daily life. Korean food shows the highest score showing that Malaysians rather purchase, followed by electronic appliances that are made in Korea. Other than food and electronic appliances, cosmetics are one of the listed items that are made in Korea that is also part of the interest in buying by Malaysians. There are also other items that Malaysians are willing to buy Korean products. For future research, other researchers may look into this matter by surveying what are other Korean products that might interest Malaysian consumers.

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