

From Screen to Travel: The Impact of K-dramas and C-dramas on Malaysian Audiences

Iza Sharina Sallehuddin^{1*}, Foo Mei Lee², Kor Eng Choon³

Faculty of Creative Industries, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Sungai Long Campus, Kajang, Malaysia

[*izas@utar.edu.my](mailto:izas@utar.edu.my)

fooml@utar.edu.my

korec@utar.edu.my

Abstract: The increasing global popularity of international television dramas (particularly K-dramas and C-dramas) has had a significant impact on audience behavior, mainly in terms of media consumption and travel goals. This conceptual paper analyses the influence of Korean and Chinese dramas on Malaysian audiences, with a focus on how these narratives contribute to screen tourism. The paper investigates how televised cultural representations influence audiences' cultural perceptions, emotional connections, and travel motivations, using a framework that includes media influence and cultural perception, emotional engagement and destination image formation, and tourism and travel motivation. This paper synthesizes key theoretical perspectives from existing literature on media influence, cultural globalization, and tourism behavior to examine how fictional media content fosters real-world engagement and behavioral change. The discussion focuses on how these dramas' emotional and aesthetic appeal fosters affective connections with the portrayed locations and cultures, inspiring audiences' desire to visit filming locations and engage with cultural elements depicted on screen. This paper contributes to a broader comprehension of media-driven tourism in Malaysia by emphasizing cross-cultural appreciation and aspirational travel behaviors. The findings aim to inform destination marketers, tourism boards, media producers, and cultural policymakers on how to strategically employ popular media content to boost cultural tourism and promote international cultural exchange. Ultimately, the paper specifies K-dramas and C-dramas as influential cultural products that go beyond entertainment, acting as catalysts for tourism development and cultural engagement among Malaysian audiences.

Keywords: *international television dramas; media influence; cultural perception; emotional engagement; travel motivation*

Introduction

The Malaysian viewership has consistently demonstrated a dynamic and diverse engagement with international media content, reflecting the country's sociocultural diversity and adaptive media consumption practices. With the rise of streaming platforms and Malaysia's advanced digital infrastructure, access to foreign television productions has become seamless, positioning East Asian dramas particularly Korean (K-dramas) and Chinese dramas (C-dramas) as central elements of popular culture (Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2021). The global appeal of these dramas transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, fostering cross-cultural exchanges and influencing audience behaviors, including media consumption and travel aspirations (Jin et al., 2023; Li & Wang, 2022).

In recent years, K-dramas and C-dramas have garnered unprecedented international attention, driven by their emotionally compelling narratives, high production quality, and cultural specificity (Kim & Lee, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Chua (2012) argue that these dramas are not merely sources of entertainment but also serve as cultural ambassadors, shaping perceptions of Korean and Chinese societies among Malaysian audiences. The proliferation of these dramas has been further amplified by the strategic use of digital platforms and social media, enabling real-time engagement and fan communities to flourish globally (Kamilia et al., 2022).

K-dramas, renowned for their emotionally charged plots, strong character development, and cinematic aesthetics, often explore themes such as romance, science fiction, historical epics, and social commentary (Kim & Lee, 2022). Kamilia et al. (2022) assert that the contemporary surge of Korean popular culture has more effectively propelled the expansion of Hallyu than previous cultural export waves by enhancing Korea's cultural prominence globally and amplifying international interest in its language, fashion, and tourism. Recent studies highlight how K-dramas leverage storytelling techniques to create affective bonds with audiences, inspiring travel to filming locations and fostering cultural curiosity (Park & Kim, 2022). For instance, the popularity of dramas like *Squid Game* (2021) and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* (2022) has spurred interest in Korean destinations, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between media content and tourism (Jin et al., 2023).

Jin et al. (2023) assert that C-dramas intentionally diversify their content across various genres, including historical epics like *The Long Ballad* (2022) and contemporary romances and fantasy narratives such as *Love Between Fairy and Devil* (2022), a strategy that enhances audience appeal and strengthens their competitive stance in the Asian drama market. These dramas often embed traditional Chinese values, philosophies, and myths, serving as vehicles for China's soft power strategy (Li & Wang, 2022). The rapid expansion of Chinese streaming platforms like iQiyi and Tencent Video has facilitated global access to C-dramas, further enhancing their cultural reach (Zhang et al., 2022). Research indicates that C-dramas not only entertain but also reshape viewers' perceptions of Chinese heritage and modernity, motivating travel to featured destinations (Chen & Lim, 2022).

For Malaysian audiences, K-dramas and C-dramas function as dynamic mediums for engaging with East Asian sociocultural norms, aesthetics, and lifestyles. From culinary trends to fashion and travel, these dramas have significantly influenced local consumer behavior and aspirational travel goals (Park & Kim, 2022). For example, the depiction of scenic locales in K-dramas like *Goblin* (2016) and *Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha* (2021) has spurred Malaysian tourists to visit filming sites in Korea, while C-dramas like *Eternal Love* (2017) have heightened interest in Chinese historical sites (Chen et al., 2022).

This study draws on theoretical frameworks from media influence, cultural globalization, and tourism behavior to examine how televised narratives stimulate travel motivations. By integrating concepts from media studies and tourism research, the paper explores the mechanisms through which audiences form emotional connections with on-screen destinations and translate these perceptions into real-world travel intentions (Kim & Lee, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Key constructs include:

Media Influence and Cultural Perception: How dramatized portrayals shape viewers' understanding of foreign cultures.

Emotional Engagement and Destination Image Formation: The role of affective narratives in fostering aspirational travel.

Tourism and Travel Motivation: The psychological and behavioral outcomes of media-induced wanderlust (Park & Kim, 2022).

This paper does not employ empirical data collection but synthesizes current academic literature and documented case studies to develop a conceptual framework. The findings of this study aim to provide actionable insights for tourism boards, media producers, and policymakers. By understanding how cultural elements in K-dramas and C-dramas resonate with Malaysian audiences, stakeholders can intentionally leverage screen-based content to strengthen destination appeal and support more sustainable tourism development. Moreover, these dramas can serve as tools for fostering cross-cultural understanding and strengthening global cultural ties in an increasingly media-driven world (Kamilia et al., 2022).

In summary, this paper underscores the transformative role of K-dramas and C-dramas as cultural products that extend beyond entertainment, acting as catalysts for tourism development and cultural engagement among Malaysian audiences. By synthesizing recent research and theoretical perspectives, the study contributes to a deeper comprehension of media-driven tourism and its implications for cultural globalization.

Theoretical Framework

Building upon the introductory insights, the following section elaborates on the theoretical foundations that explain how media influence, emotional engagement, destination image, and travel motivation converge among Malaysian audiences.

The theoretical framework integrates concepts from media influence, emotional engagement, destination image formation, and travel motivation to explain how K-dramas and C-dramas influence Malaysian audiences' travel behaviors. This model emphasizes the mediating role of emotional and cognitive processes that transform media exposure into real-world tourism actions.

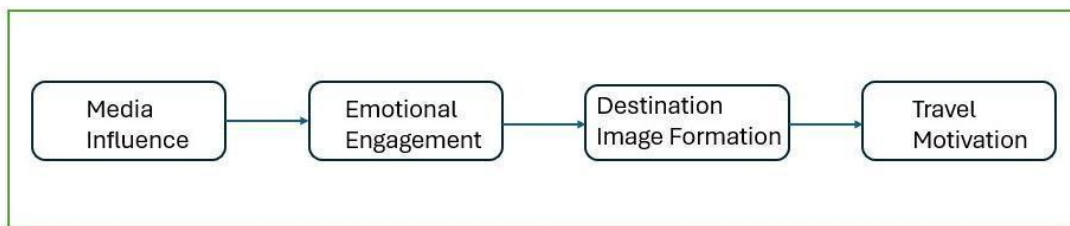
Media Influence Theory provides the foundation for understanding how screen narratives affect attitudes and perceptions. Cultivation theory, proposed by Gerbner and Gross in 1976, indicates that extended exposure to media slowly influences audience perceptions of social reality. This framework helps clarify why the idealized representations of Korean and Chinese cultures in K-dramas and C-dramas can affect how Malaysian viewers envision and understand these foreign societies. The uses and gratifications theory suggests that audiences actively choose media content to fulfil emotional, social, and cognitive needs. In this context, Malaysians frequently engage with K-dramas and C-dramas not solely for amusement but also to examine aspirational lifestyles, cultural values, and envisioned travel experiences. These on-screen portrayals often shape viewers' travel preferences, rendering dramas a significant catalyst for film-induced tourism as audiences are inspired to visit the locations depicted in the narratives.

Emotional engagement serves as a psychological link between media influence and behavioral outcomes. Narrative Transportation Theory by Green and Brock's (2000) explains how viewers are drawn into fictional worlds, experiencing empathy and emotional resonance that can alter their real-world perceptions. When applied to media tourism, this same immersive process assists audiences in developing emotional connections with on-screen locations, encouraging identification and generating genuine interest in visiting them. Passive viewing becomes an active desire to explore the cultures and destinations depicted on screen because of this "affective transportation" process.

Destination image formation operates as the cognitive outcome of emotional engagement. According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), destination image consists of cognitive, affective, and cognitive components that influence travel intention. When viewers find locations aesthetically pleasing or culturally enriching, their emotional responses improve the cognitive assessment of those destinations. Travel motivation signifies the behavioral expression of these interrelated constructs. Kim et al. (2025) conceptualized screen tourism

as a cyclical process comprising three stages: media consumption, travel motivation, and destination experience. This framework aligns with push-pull motivation theory, where internal desires (push factors) interact with external stimuli (pull factors). Sarkar and Yang (2025) argue that emotional resonance with K-dramas and C-dramas serves as a push factor, while the scenic and cultural representations of Korea and China act as pull factors affecting travel choices.

The proposed conceptual model positions media exposure as the stimulus that triggers emotional engagement, which influences destination image perception and ultimately results in travel motivation. This relationship can be illustrated as follows:



This conceptual framework illustrates the dynamic relationship between media influence, emotional engagement, destination image formation, and travel motivation. Media exposure to K-dramas and C-dramas serves as the initial stimulus, generating emotional engagement among Malaysian audiences. These affective responses shape destination image perceptions, ultimately influencing audiences' travel motivation and behavior. The model underscores the psychological and cultural pathways linking mediated narratives to real-world tourism intentions.

1. Media Influence and Cultural Perception in K-Dramas and C-Dramas

The global dominance of Korean and Chinese television dramas (K-dramas and C-dramas) continues to reshape cultural perceptions and travel motivations among Malaysian audiences. Recent studies highlight how these dramas serve as powerful tools for cultural diplomacy and tourism promotion, leveraging emotional engagement and aesthetic appeal to inspire real-world behaviors (Kim & Lee, 2022; Wang & Zhang, 2022).

1.1 Media as Cultural Vehicles

Media, especially television programs, have evolved from mere entertainment to become significant cultural agents that influence viewers' perceptions, values, and travel intentions. The emergence of digital streaming platforms providing worldwide access enables audiences to engage with the cultures depicted in those narratives (Nayak & Saxena, 2022). This trend is particularly evident among Malaysian audiences, for whom East Asian dramas cultivate emotional engagement, cultural appreciation, and an increasing interest in tourism.

Crash Landing on You (2019), exemplifies how media content transcends entertainment to become a catalyst for tourism. The drama's portrayal of South Korea's picturesque landscapes, such as the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and Seoul's urban vibrancy, has spurred Malaysian fans to visit these real-world settings. A study by Saad et al. in 2022 revealed that 68% of surveyed Malaysian viewers exhibited increased interest in traveling to South Korea after viewing the drama, attributing this to emotional connections with its romantic storyline and picturesque settings. Similarly, Cha & Lee (2025) assert that the drama's incorporation of Korean culinary culture, such as fried chicken and soju, heightened viewers' eagerness to engage with these elements directly, thereby strengthening the connection between media consumption and cultural tourism.

Similarly, *Story of Yanxi Palace* (2018), a historical C-drama, leverages China's rich heritage to attract audiences. The drama's depiction of the Forbidden City and traditional Qing dynasty costumes has resonated with Malaysian viewers, particularly those of Chinese descent. According to Chen & Lim (2022), the drama's emphasis on Confucian values and historical grandeur fosters a sense of cultural pride and curiosity, motivating travel to China. Streaming platforms like iQIYI have capitalized on this trend by offering virtual tours of filming locations, blending digital engagement with real-world tourism (Chen & Lim, 2022).

The impact of these dramas extends beyond tourism promotion; they serve as strong instruments that project national identity and cultural values globally. South Korea's "Hallyu" wave and China's promotion of traditional heritage through historical dramas have both contributed to cultural diplomacy, fostering international curiosity and admiration. K-dramas and C-dramas like *Crash Landing on You* and *Story of Yanxi Palace* have significantly influenced Malaysian viewers' interest in cultural tourism by showcasing scenic locations and traditional elements. Emotional engagement with narratives and exposure to cultural practices through media have driven fans to explore South Korea and China, both virtually and physically. Watching these dramas not only as an act of entertainment but a cultural exchange that broadens horizons and bridging screen and reality through curiosity, connection and travel.

1.2 Cultural Perception and Emotional Engagement

This shift from cultural representation to emotional interpretation reflects how Malaysian viewers internalize these narratives through shared Asian values and aspirational modernity.

K-dramas and C-dramas function not merely as sources of entertainment but as cultural texts that influence audiences' understandings of national identity, social values, and interpersonal dynamics. Through strong visual storytelling and rich narratives, these dramas construct cultural imaginaries that audiences interpret and relate to within their own sociocultural contexts. For Malaysian audiences who share a multicultural identity, with its distinctive multicultural landscape, such representations resonate deeply, bridging the gap between cultural familiarity and differences.

K-dramas such as *Crash Landing on You* frequently depict South Korea as a fusion of modernity and tradition, resonating with Malaysia's multicultural audience. This drama received global recognition for its romantic storyline and highly nuanced portrayal of North Korea, shaping modern representations of the country. The drama's significant impact highlights how South Korean media reflects broader social and political contexts, influencing the perspectives of both local and international audiences (Epstein & Green, 2020).

According to Kamilia et al. (2022), emotional engagement remains critical in converting media consumption into travel motivation. Fan communities in Malaysia actively recreate scenes from *Crash Landing on You* and share travel plans on social media, thereby amplifying the screen tourism effect. Likewise, *Story of Yanxi Palace* has inspired themed tours to Beijing's historical sites, demonstrating how emotional narratives drive destination image formation (Chen & Lim, 2022). K-dramas and C-dramas shape Malaysian audiences' cultural perceptions by blending emotional narratives with representations of tradition and modernity that resonate with their identities. This emotional connection motivates screen tourism, as seen in fan-led activities and themed travel inspired by *Crash Landing on You* and *Story of Yanxi Palace*.

K-dramas and C-dramas reveal how emotional storytelling and cultural imagery converge to shape audience perception and behavior. For Malaysian viewers, these dramas transcend entertainment, fostering self-reflection, cultural belonging, and transnational connection. By weaving emotional depth with depictions of tradition and modernity, *Crash Landing on You* and *Story of Yanxi Palace* illustrate how media transforms affective engagement into meaningful cultural and touristic interaction.

2. Emotional Engagement and Destination Image Formation

Extending beyond cultural representation, this section explores how emotional resonance evolves into spatial imagination, where narrative affection transforms into destination interest.

The emotional narratives and aesthetic visuals in K-dramas and C-dramas forge powerful affective bonds between viewers and the depicted settings. These connections play a pivotal role in shaping favorable destination images, as audiences associate the emotions evoked by the dramas with real-world locations. This phenomenon, known as "media-induced tourism," turns passive viewing into active travel aspiration (Dela Cruz & Lacap, 2023). For example, the romanticized depiction of urban and rural landscapes in these dramas often blurs the line between fiction and reality, leading viewers to perceive these locations as idealized havens. Recent studies highlight emotional engagement as a critical driver in tourism motivation, emphasizing its role in conative image formation the stage where emotional resonance translates into behavioral intentions (Wang et al., 2023). This is particularly evident when

viewers, inspired by dramatic narratives, prioritize visiting filming locations to recreate emotional moments, thereby driving tourism demand.

The process is accelerated by the global reach of streaming platforms such as Netflix and Viki, which expose international audiences to culturally diverse settings. According to Dela Cruz and Lacap (2023), the accessibility of these dramas increases their influence on destination branding, as viewers form aspirational attachments to unfamiliar locales. For example, despite their geographic distance, Malaysian audiences may feel culturally aligned with the East Asian values depicted in these dramas, fostering a sense of familiarity and emotional connection. This alignment underscores the interplay between media consumption and tourism motivation, where emotional engagement transcends cultural barriers.

Emotional storytelling and vivid visuals in K-dramas and C-dramas create strong viewer attachments to filming locations, shaping idealized destination images and driving tourism interest. Streaming platforms amplify this effect by making culturally rich content widely accessible, allowing international audiences like Malaysians to form emotional and aspirational connections with distant locales.

2.1 Emotional Resonance and Narrative Transportation

The psychological mechanism that underpins this process is emotional resonance, in which viewers internalize the emotions depicted on screen. For example, *Crash Landing on You* used Switzerland's tranquil landscapes as a backdrop for its cross-border romance, weaving the setting into themes of love and escape. The drama's cinematography and narrative depth enabled audiences to experience "emotional transportation," a state in which they mentally immerse themselves in fictional worlds (Green & Appel, 2024). This transportation is more than just escapism; it is a cognitive-emotional process that incorporates fictional experiences into viewers' personal goals. As a result, fans want to relive their emotions by visiting actual locations, effectively transforming narrative fantasy into travel motivation.

Furthermore, repeated exposure to drama content, such as rewatching scenes or engaging with related media, helps to maintain emotional resonance over time. According to Green and Appel (2024), emotional transportation is reinforced through "narrative consistency," which ensures sustained viewer engagement. In the case of *Crash Landing on You*, the recurring visual motifs of Swiss Alps and lakes became synonymous with the protagonist's emotional journey, deepening viewers' attachment. Similarly, *Story of Yanxi Palace* leveraged China's historical grandeur to evoke cultural nostalgia, with its meticulous set designs and costumes amplifying the allure of heritage sites (Choi et al., 2024).

Such productions transform historical locations into living museums, where drama-induced nostalgia motivates cultural tourism. Emotional resonance and narrative consistency in dramas like *Crash Landing on You* and *Story of Yanxi Palace* enable viewers to internalize

on-screen emotions, turning fictional experiences into personal aspirations. This emotional transportation drives tourism by inspiring fans to visit film locations, where they can relive the feelings and cultural nostalgia evoked by the dramas.

2.2 Technological Immersion and Community Engagement

While emotional resonance forms the psychological basis of screen tourism, technological affordances and fan participation heighten and sustain this engagement.

Advancements in immersive technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), further intensify emotional engagement. Bigné et al. (2023) found that VR tourism experiences heighten physiological arousal and presence, increasing the likelihood of visiting. For example, VR recreations of drama locations allow users to "step into" iconic scenes, bridging the gap between media consumption and physical travel. While K-dramas and C-dramas achieve similar effects through cinematic storytelling, social media extends this engagement post-viewing. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok enable fans to share their visits to filming locations, creating a feedback loop that perpetuates destination appeal (Aboalghanam et al., 2025).

The role of fan communities is particularly noteworthy in sustaining emotional momentum. After *Crash Landing on You* aired, social media platforms were flooded with user-generated content of fans visiting Swiss filming locations, often replicating poses or scenes from the drama. This collective participation not only validates the emotional connection but also enhances the perceived authenticity of the destination. Aboalghanam et al., (2025) emphasize that such content acts as "digital word-of-mouth," where peer recommendations carry more weight than traditional advertising.

For destination marketers, this underscores the need to collaborate with influencers and fan communities to amplify media-induced tourism effects. Immersive technologies like VR and social media platforms enhance emotional engagement with drama content, allowing fans to virtually or physically connect with filming locations. Fan communities play a vital role in sustaining this momentum by sharing user-generated content, turning emotional experiences into influential digital word-of-mouth that drives tourism interest.

2.3 Cultural Proximity and Identity Exploration

As digital engagement strengthens emotional affinity, cultural proximity provides the contextual anchor through which Malaysian audiences personalize their identification with on-screen cultures.

For Malaysian audiences, cultural proximity to East Asian values strengthens emotional connections to K-dramas and C-dramas. These dramas frequently depict lifestyles and landscapes that reflect common cultural ideals, making them aspirational. For example, the

Confucian values of family loyalty and communal harmony, which are frequently depicted in these dramas, are consistent with Malaysian cultural norms, creating a sense of relatability. As indicated by Green and Appel (2024), emotional transportation allows viewers to explore alternative identities, which increases motivation to travel. This is evident when audiences emulate the fashion, cuisine, or travel habits seen on screen, blurring the distinction between media influence and personal identity.

Additionally, the depiction of cultural heritage in dramas such as *Story of Yanxi Palace* serves as an educational tool, sparking interest in historical contexts. The drama's depiction of the Forbidden City not only rekindled interest in Chinese history but also positioned the filming locations as gateways to cultural escapism. Dramas' dual role as entertainment and cultural ambassadors highlights their ability to diversify tourism demographics by attracting both leisure and education-focused travelers.

Emotional engagement elicited by Korean and Chinese dramas has a significant impact on destination image formation and travel motivation. Through emotional resonance, technological immersion, and community engagement, these dramas convert viewers into potential tourists. Destination marketers can capitalize on these dynamics by creating campaigns that are consistent with the emotional narratives of popular media, bridging the gap between fiction and reality.

3. Screen Tourism and Travel Motivation

Screen tourism, often referred to as film-induced tourism, has become a significant force in the modern travel industry. This phenomenon is driven by the massive growth in global consumption of audiovisual media, where fictional narratives depicted in films, television series, and streaming content powerfully inspire real-world travel decisions. In the context of Malaysia, the rising popularity of international media, particularly Korean dramas (K-dramas) and Chinese dramas (C-dramas), demonstrates this trend clearly. These media formats have evolved beyond mere entertainment; they now act as compelling catalysts for destination selection, shaping travel aspirations and fostering a deep interest in the cultures they portray (Araújo-Vila et al., 2024).

3.1 Media, Narrative, and Travel Aspirations

Saad et al. (2022) illustrate that K-dramas significantly influence the motivation of Malaysian tourists by converting filming locations into emotionally significant “mediated destinations.” Their research indicates that Malaysian audiences cognitively connect with the cultural contexts, romantic visuals, language, and heritage depicted onscreen, prompting many to aspire to visit renowned sites such as Namsan Tower, the Han River Cruise, and locations featured in *Goblin* or *Winter Sonata*. Approximately fifty percent of respondents expressed a desire to revisit, attributing this to the influence of K-dramas; the authors emphasize that

cinematography, appealing cast members, and cultural values enhance the allure of the destination. Their findings assert that Korea's effective amalgamation of media, heritage, and cultural branding provides strategic insights for both Malaysian tourism and broadcasting industries.

Narrative Transportation Theory emphasizes that immersion in a narrative enhances emotional engagement, enabling viewers to temporarily embrace the perspectives, emotions, and beliefs depicted on screen. Malaysian viewers' engagement with East Asian dramas frequently results in profound cognitive and emotional immersion, which subsequently fosters a compelling aspiration to experience the fictional narrative through real-life travel.

Screen tourism is propelled by the media's ability to generate "mediated destinations," wherein emotionally impactful narratives motivate viewers to explore filming sites. This theory posits that extensive engagement with K-dramas and C-dramas cultivates romanticized views of real locations among Malaysian viewers, thereby inspiring travel influenced by these fictional narratives.

Together, these narrative and emotional mechanisms establish the foundation for the specific motivational dynamics that shape how viewers transition from fantasy-driven interest to actual travel behavior.

3.2 Motivational Dimensions and Media Attachment

Beyond narrative fantasy, internal motivations and external validation determine whether viewers transition from imagined to actual travel. Screen tourism motivations diverge from traditional leisure tourism in that they are both symbolic and performative (Reijnders, 2011). Research on film tourism experiences shows that the place attachment formed by viewers manifests through key dimensions such as the symbolic meaning of locations, social validation from fan communities, and affective resonance with the narrative (Kim & Assaker, 2014). These specialized attachments often influence decision-making more powerfully than conventional travel motivations.

Moreover, the rise of digital fan communities contributes significantly to shaping travel intentions by influencing how audiences engage with media-related destinations. Social media platforms and online fan spaces facilitate the sharing of travel information, emotional responses, and narrative-centered discussions that shape potential tourists' attitudes and destination preferences (Chiang & Yang, 2019; Lim, 2023). Within these communities, social interactions nurture a sense of belonging, as fans validate each other's shared emotional experiences and align their travel aspirations with collective narratives (Zhou et al., 2021). This dynamic supports aspirational identity construction, where travel functions as a form of mediated self-expression rooted in fandom and media consumption (Chiang & Yang, 2019).

Consequently, motivations for screen tourism often differ from traditional leisure travel by emphasizing symbolic, social, and emotional attachments to places rather than purely recreational or novelty-seeking aims.

3.3 The Screen Tourism Cycle

Screen tourism becomes cyclical when viewers reinterpret media through lived experience, forming a feedback loop between viewing and travelling. It can be conceptualized as a process beginning with media consumption, progressing to travel motivation, and culminating in the destination experience (Beeton, 2016). Initially, exposure to dramas introduces viewers to scenic or culturally rich locales. In the second phase, viewers become motivated travelers, influenced by narrative significance, emotional attachment, and social engagement. The final phase involves visiting the destination, where tourists may participate in reenactments, take site photographs, or dress in ways consistent with the show—behaviors categorized as performative media-related acts that demonstrate fans' engagement with the narrative.

Interestingly, the tourism cycle does not end at the point of travel. After visiting filming locations, many viewers re-engage with the original media text, now interpreting it through the lens of lived experience. This post-visit media engagement can intensify emotional bonds with the destination, consistent with theories of narrative transportation and destination attachment, where meaningful experiences strengthen affective ties and may encourage revisit intentions (Kim & Assaker, 2014).

Beeton (2016) notes that screen tourism is inherently cyclical, as media exposure continues to shape perception before, during, and after travel. In this sense, the cycle extends beyond the destination experience: tourists not only perform media-referencing acts such as reenactments or photography during their visits (Reijnders, 2011) but subsequently re-experience the narrative through the media itself, further reinforcing identity, memory, and place attachment. While empirical research specifically addressing this post-travel media re-engagement phase remains limited, conceptual evidence from film-tourism studies suggests such cyclical dynamics may exist. This recursive engagement can potentially inspire repeat visits or influence others' travel decisions, sustaining the dynamic connection between media and tourism.

These cyclical dynamics take on distinctive characteristics in Malaysia, where cultural proximity, digital engagement, and demographic patterns intensify the media–tourism relationship.

3.4 Malaysian Context and Cultural Dynamics

Placing these dynamics within Malaysia reveals unique patterns shaped by multicultural identities, digital interactivity, and regional cultural proximity. Malaysia provides a conducive environment for screen tourism, given its cultural closeness to East Asian traditions and high digital connectivity. Malaysians, as a multicultural society, often resonate with values embedded in K-dramas and C-dramas, such as filial piety, collectivism, and respect for tradition (Ariffin et al., 2018). This cultural affinity enhances perceived authenticity and relatability, heightening the allure of their real-world settings.

Streaming services like Netflix, iQIYI, and Viu have made East Asian content widely accessible to Malaysians across age and linguistic groups (Hill, 2024). Malaysians' active outbound travel culture, especially among digitally literate millennials, reinforces screen tourism behaviors (Azmi & Ahmad, 2022). The phenomenon has evolved beyond travel alone, becoming a form of cultural engagement and lifestyle aspiration shaped by symbolic meanings within screen narratives.

Furthermore, screen tourism in Malaysia is embedded within broader regional dynamics. The global influence of East Asian popular culture, particularly the Korean Wave (Hallyu), has shaped how Malaysians perceive destinations such as Seoul, Jeju, Beijing, or Hangzhou. These places are seen not merely as foreign destinations but as aspirational locales tied to lifestyle ideals, emotional narratives, and modern cultural prestige.

For many Malaysian viewers, travel inspired by screen content becomes a form of cultural engagement, identity expression, and symbolic participation. Whether reenacting scenes, visiting drama filming sites, or curating social media content, Malaysian screen tourists exemplify the convergence of media consumption, personal aspiration, and regional cultural connection. This demonstrates how screen tourism operates as both a behavioral outcome of media viewing and a reflection of shifting cultural affiliations and identity dynamics within Malaysia.

Malaysia offers fertile ground for examining media-induced tourism, given its diverse cultural composition, high digital connectivity, and strong engagement with East Asian media. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2023), over 90% of the population has access to streaming platforms, with K-dramas ranking among the top five most-watched genres. This widespread accessibility allows audiences from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to consume K-dramas and C-dramas, fostering significant cross-cultural appreciation. Millennial and Gen Z viewers (aged 18–35) are key drivers, displaying high digital literacy and active participation in fandom communities (Yoke & Jamil, 2022). These groups often transition from passive viewing to dynamic involvement by creating fan pages, producing reaction videos, and organizing drama-themed gatherings.

The 2024 report from Malaysia reflects a surge in enquiries regarding travel to South Korea, a trend largely attributed to the widespread appeal of television dramas like *Crash Landing on You* (The Star Digital, 2024). Travel agencies have developed carefully designed filming-location packages in Seoul, Jeju Island, and Beijing. Social media platforms are further accelerating this phenomenon, as evidenced by the growing popularity of hashtags like #KdramaTrip and #YanxiPalaceTour on TikTok and Instagram. User-generated content on these platforms significantly influences perceptions of destinations and impacts travel decisions, as individuals share their experiences, recreate scenes, and offer travel recommendations. Malaysian individuals, through their digital narratives, serve as unofficial cultural representatives, correlating cinematic storytelling with practical tourism opportunities.

The emotional impact of K-dramas and C-dramas on Malaysian audiences can be understood through cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 2007). Themes such as filial piety, collectivism, and respect for hierarchy resonate strongly with Malaysian cultural norms, which enhances narrative relatability and deepens audience identification. This cultural alignment enables viewers to interpret the characters' motivations and social dynamics through familiar value systems, thereby intensifying engagement with the dramas (Ariffin et al., 2025). This alignment allows viewers to experience a combination of cultural immersion and aspirational fantasy, which frequently leads to visits to filming locations or attendance at media-related events.

The influence of Korean dramas on Malaysian viewers transcends mere travel motivation, embodying a multifaceted process of cross-cultural negotiation and the establishment of mediated authenticity. Malaysian viewers analyze these cultural products through various multicultural perspectives, including Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous, which influence the perception, adoption, or adaptation of Korean cultural elements. Studies demonstrate that these dramas evoke emotional responses through common values like familial loyalty, collectivism, and respect, thereby enhancing cultural proximity (Ariffin et al., 2018). Nathan (2023) highlights that these shared affinities, coupled with a regional focus on Asian compatibility, demonstrate how multicultural societies reinterpret foreign media.

Simultaneously, Saad et al. (2022) suggest that the modernity portrayed in K-dramas, characterized by polished urban lifestyles alongside persistent cultural traditions, generates a multifaceted engagement that intertwines aspiration with cultural familiarity. This duality renders South Korea both relatable and exemplary for Malaysian viewers, reinforcing its image as a successfully modernized society. This alignment enhances admiration and fortifies the psychological factors that drive film-induced tourism, as viewers are inspired to visit the locations depicted on screen. This interplay between familiarity and aspiration is a key driver of screen tourism, where emotional identification and imagined possibilities translate into concrete travel behaviors.

Furthermore, the authenticity that tourists seek at filming locations is inherently mediated. Fans seek out the "real" places seen onscreen, such as cafés, towers, and districts, although these locations are curated and narrated. The authenticity experienced is less about historical accuracy and more about fidelity to the media narrative and its personal significance (Saad et al., 2022). When a Malaysian fan visits a landmark like Namsan Tower due to its appearance in a drama, the experience becomes an emotional journey bridging daily life with cherished fictional worlds. In this way, screen tourism constitutes an embodied engagement with mediated cultural fantasy shaped by cross-cultural familiarity, aspiration, and imagined authenticity.

The confluence of high media exposure, cultural alignment, and emotional engagement positions Malaysia as a prime context for understanding screen tourism in Southeast Asia, highlighting how media consumption, identity, and travel behaviors intersect in dynamic and meaningful ways.

Practical Implications for Tourism and Media Industries

Ahmed et al. (2020) illustrate that popular screen narratives can be effectively utilised to stimulate cultural exchange and drive economic development, as evidenced by the strategies employed by Korean and Chinese tourism authorities in promoting dramas like *Crash Landing on You* and *Story of Yanxi Palace*. This conceptual analysis explains various practical implications for stakeholders in tourism and media, building upon the previously established perspective. By understanding the emotional engagement of audiences with narrative worlds, destination marketers and tourism boards can create more targeted campaigns that align storytelling elements with destination branding, thereby improving the effectiveness of film-induced tourism strategies.

Tang and Wei (2023) assert that Malaysia could attract international visitors by collaborating with streaming platforms such as Netflix or Viu to produce locally contextualized promotional content that highlights filming locations across the country. Collaborations may highlight Malaysia's scenic locations through co-productions or regionally themed series, thus promoting inbound tourism and strengthening the country's position in the global media landscape.

Destination marketers should also consider incorporating emotional storytelling into their promotional strategies, as affective engagement has been shown to have a significant impact on travel decisions (Su et al., 2021). From a policy standpoint, this suggests that Tourism Malaysia could form partnerships with influencers, production companies, or fan communities to co-create emotionally resonant campaigns that align national branding efforts with the appeal of K-drama and C-drama narratives. Furthermore, incorporating emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) into official tourism initiatives can provide immersive previews of drama-inspired experiences within

Malaysian cultural contexts, thereby supporting policies aimed at enhancing digital tourism innovation and strengthening Malaysia's competitiveness in the regional tourism market.

For media producers, comprehending the tourism potential of scripted content presents opportunities for cross-industry collaboration. Incorporating identifiable landmarks or cultural symbols into local narratives can enhance domestic screen tourism, motivating Malaysians to re-explore national attractions through familiar storytelling methods. By highlighting Malaysia's varied destinations through emotionally resonant and culturally enriched narratives, local productions can cultivate national pride and international interest, in accordance with the nation's overarching objectives of cultural diplomacy and creative industry advancement.

Future Research Directions

Subsequent investigations ought to empirically evaluate the conceptual associations posited in this document. Quantitative research may utilize structural equation modelling (SEM) to investigate the mediating effects of emotional engagement on destination image and travel intention among Malaysian audiences. Qualitative methodologies, including focus groups and digital ethnography, could investigate how fans undergo emotional immersion and convert it into travel behaviors. Comparative analyses among various cultural groups (e.g., Malay, Chinese, Indian audiences) would elucidate how cultural proximity moderates the impact of K-dramas and C-dramas on tourism behaviors.

Furthermore, subsequent research should examine the sustainability of tourism driven by media influences. As post-pandemic travelers increasingly value authenticity and environmental consciousness, researchers may investigate the alignment of screen tourism with sustainable travel practices. The incorporation of emerging technologies, including AI-driven content personalization and virtual reality, may also be examined in influencing future travel motivations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, K-dramas and C-dramas significantly impact Malaysian audiences, illustrating how these media narratives shape cultural perceptions, emotional engagement, and travel motivations. By cultivating meaningful associations with portrayed locales, these dramas convert passive viewers into active tourists, propelling screen tourism and cross-cultural exploration. The interaction of emotional narratives, technological engagement, and fan communities enhances the appeal of filming locations, establishing a reciprocal relationship between media consumption and actual travel.

These insights provide stakeholders with strategic opportunities to utilize popular media content for the promotion of tourism and cultural diplomacy. K-dramas and C-dramas extend beyond mere entertainment, acting as significant catalysts for cultural exchange and aspirational travel behaviors in Malaysia. The enhanced conclusion emphasizes the broader theoretical and practical implications of this conceptual study. The emergence of K-dramas and C-dramas has transformed the role of media as a cultural commodity and a catalyst for tourism advancement.

Through emotional engagement and narrative transportation, these dramas connect imagination with experience, transforming audiences into cultural participants and travelers. The increasing significance of social media and streaming platforms highlights the convergence between media consumption and experiential travel. The distinction between fiction and reality is increasingly blurred, as screen narratives now serve as travel guides that shape global mobility trends.

K-dramas and C-dramas offer Malaysian audiences more than mere entertainment; they serve as portals to aspirational lifestyles, cultural appreciation, and the formation of personal identity. Their emotional impact cultivates curiosity and empathy for other cultures, enhancing cross-cultural understanding and regional solidarity. By leveraging this emotional influence, tourism stakeholders can develop sustainable and inclusive strategies that honor cultural diversity while promoting economic growth.

References

- Aboalghanam, K. M., AlFraihat, S. F., & Tarabieh, S. (2025). The Impact of User-Generated Content on Tourist Visit Intentions: The Mediating Role of Destination Imagery. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(4), 117. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15040117>
- Ahmed, Mohammed & Miracle, Agboola & Mark, Mabere. (2020). The impact of media on shaping global cultural narratives in the digital age AUTHOR. *Journal of Social Studies*. 6. 12-18.
- Aman, S. E., Azmi, N. F., & Sharkawi, S. (2024). COVID-19 and travel decision: A qualitative study on Malaysian millennials. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 133, 989–1000. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2024.05.81>
- Araújo-Vila, N., Cardoso, L., Almeida, G. G. F., & Almeida, P. (2024). *Film-induced tourism as a key factor for promoting tourism destination image: The James Bond saga case*. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(5), 94. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14050094>
- Ariffin, J. T., Abu Bakar, H., & Yusof, N. H. (2018). *Culture in Korean drama towards influencing Malaysian audiences*. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Engineering & Management*, 5(1), 10–14.
- Ariffin, J. T., Yasim, A. M., Khalil, M. I., & Yusof, K. W. M. (2025). *Korean cultural proximity towards Asian audiences*. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*. <https://ebpj.e-iph.co.uk/index.php/EBProceedings/article/view/6908>
- Azmi, Azila & Ahmad, Johanna. (2022). Developing Malaysia's Smart Community-Based Tourism Model. *Jurnal Intelek*. 17. 102-112. 10.24191/ji.v17i2.18172.
- Baloglu, S., & McCleary, K. W. (1999). A model of destination image formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(4), 868–897. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(99\)00030-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(99)00030-4)
- Beeton, S. (2016). *Film-induced tourism* (2nd ed.). Channel View Publications. <https://www.perlego.com/book/571519/filminduced-tourism-pdf>
- Bigné, E., Andreu, L., & Hernández, B. (2023). How immersive technologies impact behavioral responses in destination marketing: The role of physiological arousal, presence, and age. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Cha, S.-S., & Lee, M.-H. (2025). Representations of Korean Food in Hallyu Media and International Tourists' Food Experiences: A Systematic Review. *The Korean Journal of Food & Health Convergence*, 11(3), 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.13106/KJFHC.2025.VOL11.NO3.9>
- Chen, L., & Lim, S. (2022). Cultural diplomacy through historical dramas: The case of Story of Yanxi Palace in Southeast Asia. *Asian Media Journal*, 15(3), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.5678/amj.2022.003>
- Chen, Y., Li, X., & Wang, H. (2022). The impact of Chinese historical dramas on global tourism: A case study of The Long Ballad. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 15(3), 45–62.
- Chen, L., & Lim, S. (2022). Cultural diplomacy through historical dramas: The case of Story of Yanxi Palace in Southeast Asia. *Asian Media Journal*, 15(3), 45–60.

Chiang, L.-L., & Yang, Y.-J. (2019). *The role of self-expansion theory in tourist's fandom and behavioral intentions*. In Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy, 48th Conference (Paper A2019-8042).

Choi, Y., Kim, H., & Lee, S. (2024). Exploring social media affordances in tourist destination image formation: A study on China's rural tourism destination. *Tourism Management*, *101*, 104843.

Chua, Beng. (2012). *Structure, Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture*. Hong Kong University Press. 10.5790/hongkong/9789888139033.001.0001

Dela Cruz, J. A., & Lacap, J. P. (2023). Film-induced effects and intention to visit: The intervening role of country image of South Korea. *Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 11(1), 1–27.

<https://doi.org/10.30519/ahtr.1032405>

Epstein, S., & Green, C. K. (2020). Crash Landing on You and North Korea: Representation and Reception in the Age of K-Drama. *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 18(12), e5. doi:10.1017/S1557466020029848

Green, M. C., & Appel, M. (2024). Narrative transportation: How stories shape how we see ourselves and the world. In B. Gawronski (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 70, pp. 1–82). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.aesp.2024.03.002>

Hill, A. (2024). Streaming platform imaginaries: audiences and Southeast Asian streaming. *Continuum*, 38(5), 662–675. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2024.2411969>

Jin, D. Y., Yoon, K., & Han, B. (2023). Platformization of the Korean Wave: A critical perspective. *Communication Research and Practice*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2023.2249776>

Kamilia, Aida & Hanafiah, Mohd & Mohd Zahari, Mohd Salehuddin. (2022). Drama tourism: the influence of Korean K-pop dramas characteristics on Malaysian travel motivation and behavioural intention. *Anatolia*. 34. 1-5. 10.1080/13032917.2022.2096654.

Kim, S., & Assaker, G. (2014). An empirical examination of the film tourism experience: The case of Korean TV drama. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, *31*(2), 166–186.

Kim, S., Klarin, A., Reijnders, S., Xiao, Q., & van Es, N. (2025). Chronicles of film tourism: An integrative review and future research directions. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10963480211011641>

Kim, S., & Lee, J. (2022). Emotional storytelling in K-dramas and its influence on travel motivation. *Asian Communication Research*, 19(1), 88–105.

Kim, J., & Lee, H. (2022). Screen tourism and emotional engagement: The impact of K-dramas on international travel. *Journal of Cultural Tourism*, 18(2), 112–128.

Li, W., & Wang, T. (2022). Soft power and cultural diplomacy: The global rise of C-dramas. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 31(134), 789–805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2022.1234567>

Lim, S. (2023). *Consumption of pop culture and tourism demand: A two-step flow communication model*. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 47, 101058.

- Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. (2021). Internet users survey 2021. <https://www.mcmc.gov.my/skmmgovmy/media/General/pdf/IUS2021.pdf>
- Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. (2023). Internet Users Survey 2022. MCMC. <https://www.mcmc.gov.my/skmmgovmy/media/General/IUS-2022.pdf>
- Nathan, R. J., Soekmawati, S., Jeong, S. W., & Jin, B. E. (2023). *K-Wave fans and non-fans: Culture-specific and collective responses to Korean country and product image*. *International Journal of Business and Society*, 24(2), 846–866.
- Nayak, A. K., & Saxena, A. K. (2022). *Advanced dictionary of internet* (Revised ed.). Dominant Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd.
- Park, Y., Lee, S., & Han, J. (2022). From screens to destinations: How Crash Landing on You influenced Malaysian travel motivations. *Tourism and Media Studies*, 7(1), 34–50.
- Park, H., & Kim, M. (2022). From screen to destination: The role of K-dramas in promoting Korean tourism. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 42, 100–115.
- Reijnders, S. (2011). Places of the imagination: Media, tourism, fan culture. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(4), 1504–1525.
- Saad, Mazni and Husin, Nor Azilah and Ramlee, Nur Zafirah (2022) South Korea film-induced tourism: the K-drama determinant for Malaysian tourist. In: *Multidisciplinary perspectives on cross border trade and business*. IGI Global, Hershey PA, USA 17033, pp. 27-45. ISBN 2327-3429
- Sarkar, A., & Yang, X. (2025). Streaming K-dramas and C-dramas: The different paths of Korean and Chinese online television distribution overseas. *Television & New Media*, 26(4), 453-476.
- Straubhaar, J. D. (2007). *World television: From global to local*. Sage Publications.
- Su, L., Tang, B., & Nawijn, J. (2021). How tourism activity shapes travel experience sharing: Tourist well-being and social context. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 91, 103316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103316>
- Tang, Wenjia & Wei, Mingou. (2023). Streaming media business strategies and audience-centered practices: a comparative study of Netflix and Tencent Video. *Online Media and Global Communication*. 2. 10.1515/omgc-2022-0061.
- The Star Digital. (2024, November 28). South Korea cashes in on Hallyu tourism boom. The Star. <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/travel/2024/11/28/south-korea-cashes-in-on-hallyu-tourism-boom>
- Wang, R., & Zhang, T. (2022). Soft power and historical narratives: C-dramas as tools for cultural tourism. *Global Media Review*, 12(4), 78–94.
- Wang, X., Wang, X., & Lai, I. K. W. (2023). The effects of online tourism information quality on conative destination image: The mediating role of resonance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1140519. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1140519>

Yoke, Soo & Jamil, Nur. (2022). The Influence of K-Drama among Youths: A Malaysian Case Study. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* (2147-4478). 12. 1709-1720. 10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i1/12111.

Zhang, L., Chen, M., & Wu, Y. (2022). The globalization of C-dramas: Strategies and audience reception. *Media, Culture & Society*, 44(5), 112–130.

Zhou, J., Yhee, Y., Kim, E., Kim, J.-Y., & Koo, C. (2021). Sustainable tourism cities: Linking idol attachment to sense of place. *Sustainability*, 13(5), 2763. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052763>