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The Influence of Hallyu on Africans' Perceptions of Korea: The Moderating Role of Service Quality

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between Hallyu, destination image, and behavioral intentions in light of the moderating effect of service quality. To that purpose, we established two objectives: to investigate relationships between Hallyu, destination image, and behavioral intentions and to examine how service quality at a destination affects the relationship between Hallyu and destination image. We collected data from 250 African students studying in Korea, 223 of whom returned usable surveys that we subjected to structural analysis. The results revealed that there is a positive relationship between Hallyu and destination image and that destination image significantly influenced behavioral intention. Moreover, we found differences in the moderating role of service quality. Such findings contribute to tourism marketing for African tourists.

Keywords: Hallyu; Africans; destination image; service quality; culture

1. Introduction

In recent years, as Hallyu has expanded beyond Asia, the content of the phenomenon has increasingly contributed to popular culture, art culture, and food culture [1] and its impact has attracted significant attention around the world [2,3]. Research from a Korean creative content agency, for example, has revealed a rise in exports from the Korean broadcasting industry. Korean pop culture is centered on Asia, and Hallyu has become a source of national competitiveness [3–5]. As Hallyu cultural content has gained in popularity, the popularity of Korean products related to Korean pop culture has risen as well [6]. In parallel, the same cultural content has provoked curiosity about Korea and fueled outsiders' desire to visit the country [3,7].

Africa was primarily regarded as a source of raw materials before 2010, but Africa's finance then led to the rise in the purchasing power of its middle class [8]. More recently, when the African Continental Free Trade Zone (AfCFTA), which aims to build a single market with a population of 127 million and a GDP of US$3.4 trillion, was re-evaluated as a consumer market in May 2019, not only developed but also developing economies such as China, Brazil, and India sought to enter the African market. Despite mounting interest in Africa, however, studies on Africans' perceptions, especially cultural ones, have remained rare [9]. In particular, though Hallyu has grown in popularity among Africans, research on the impact of Hallyu culture has been scarce.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between Hallyu, destination image, and behavioral intentions in light of the moderating effect of service quality. To that purpose, we established two objectives: to investigate relationships between Hallyu, destination image, and behavioral intentions and to examine how service quality at a destination affects the relationship between Hallyu and destination image. Our study was justified for two reasons. First, Africa, especially its non-resource-intensive countries, is highly attractive to the tourism industry, and it can especially

offer insights into the commercialization, effects, and future direction of the tourism industry. Moreover, by analyzing the tourism-related preferences and consumption patterns of Africans, it may be possible to specifically target groups in the African market. In sum, we expected our study to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the Korean image in African countries and prospects for economic cooperation.

This study proceeds as follows: The next part discusses the theoretical foundation and introduces our hypotheses. We then describe the methods and provide the results. Lastly, we discuss the implications, limitations, and future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hallyu

In the late 1980s, the "Hallyu" became a full-fledged phenomenon, and it began to be visible in the late 1990s [10]. With the increase in overseas distribution and consumption of Korean popular cultural products such as movies, TV dramas (i.e., K-dramas), popular music (i.e., K-pop), and games, especially in China, the Chinese media began calling the influx of Korean pop culture into China the China Wave [11]. Since then, the so-called "Korean Wave" and its inundation of pop-cultural products have not only intensified in China but have also begun spreading throughout Southeast Asia [12,13].

The phenomenon of Hallyu can be called "the Korean Wave" in a broad sense. Generally definable as a craze in local markets for Korean culture, Hallyu indicates that Korean culture has grown in popularity as a cultural code, one primarily propagated by Korean dramas, movies, and songs, among other products [14]. At the same time, because the Korean Wave has landed on the shores of many countries whose populations enjoy and consume Korean pop cultural products, the influence of the Korean Wave has increased the number of foreign tourists who visit or are interested in visiting Korea. The Korean Wave has even resulted in a preference for Korean content in various overseas domains, including pop culture [15]. Moreover, as tourism products used to experience Korean culture continue to experience increased demand, cultural tourism factors of the Korean Wave can be experienced in various ways depending on the type of Korean Wave. As such, the scope of the Korean Wave is becoming increasingly comprehensive, and its cultural contents broadcasts, animated arts, games, and novels, not to mention K-pop, movies, and dramas, are increasingly becoming sought-after products of the Korean Wave [3,16,17].

2.2. The Relationship between Hallyu, Destination Image, and Behavioral Intention

If a national image captures a country's competitiveness and the level of its political influence in the international community, then a destination image captures the general perception of the quality of goods manufactured in a country [18]. Kim, et al. [19] have thus defined the destination image as a holistic picture of consumers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of a country's production and the marketing of its products. By contrast, a public image refers to the complex elements of a country's history, politics, economy, society, culture, and art. In the formation of a national image, cultural factors are known to bear considerable influence.

Most previous studies on the national image have shown that national image is influenced by various factors, including the country's level of economic and cultural development, its political atmosphere, its wealth, and the population's level of education [20]. More specifically, studies on the Korean Wave have examined its effects on Korean Wave cultural contents such as movies and TV dramas, as well as on the potential tourists' preferences regarding images and tourist attractions.

For example, when Kim et al. [21] investigated the relationship between celebrities and national image, they found that TV drama celebrities can influence the national image and behavioral intentions. In another study, Lee et al. examined the involvement of Hallyu celebrities in Japan and found that they exerted a cognitive and emotional influence on Korea's tourist image as well as swayed intention to visit Korea. Kim and Nam [2] also suggested that Hallyu has a significant impact on the national image and behavioral intention. Among other findings, Lee, Lee and Jeon [3] observed that Korean

celebrities, dramas, and music could play key roles in creating a positive national image for South Korea and shaping such behavioral intentions.

In terms of the effect of service quality at a tourist destination, given its key role in marketing, a market's service quality plays a critical part in affecting the destination image [22]. Recognizing that dynamic, several studies have involved investigating the role of service quality in increasing consumers' perceptions [23–25]. We thus considered that service quality could contribute to developing a marketing strategy that can secure a competitive advantage able to attract more customers, both existing and prospective. However, in our literature review, we also found very little research on the relationship of Hallyu and destination image. Based on those understandings and concepts, we formulated a series of hypotheses:

H1a. *Hallyu involving a K-drama has a significantly positive effect on destination image.*

H1b. *Hallyu involving K-pop has a significantly positive effect on destination image.*

H1c. *Hallyu involving K-sports has a significantly positive effect on destination image.*

H2. *The destination image has a significantly positive effect on behavioral intention.*

2.3. The Moderating Role of Service Quality

Service quality plays a critical role in affecting tourists' perceptions. The service quality of a destination refers to the satisfying of tourists' expectations, encouraging of tourists' values, and the implementation requirements. Typically, service quality can enhance the overall image. For example, He and Li found that service quality plays a moderating role between service factors and brand image. Thus, this study indicated the importance of the moderating role of service quality. Chin et al. investigated the relationship between market orientation and performance with the moderating role of service quality. They suggested that service quality has significant effects on them.

In terms of tourism contexts, Kim, Holland, and Han examined the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. They found that service quality has positive impacts on tourists' satisfaction and destination loyalty. Moreover, Owusu-Frimpong et al. explored the impact of service quality on destination attractiveness. They found that service quality has effects on destination attractiveness. Moreover, Tosun et al. suggested that the service quality of a destination can influence destination image. Furthermore, Akroush Mamoun et al. indicated that service quality has a positive impact on the destination image. In other words, there are some studies on investigating the relationship between service quality, image, and behavior intentions.

Although Hallyu factors are increasing in the tourism industry, there is still little research in terms of the impact of the moderating role of service quality between Hallyu and destination image.

This suggested that we could consider service quality as a moderating role for destination image. In other words, the service quality of a destination can inform differences between Hallyu and destination image. Based on the previous studies, the following hypotheses were formulated (Figure 1):

H3a. *The service quality of a destination significantly moderates the relationship between destination image and Hallyu involving a K-drama.*

H3b. *A customer's gender significantly moderates the relationship between destination image and Hallyu involving K-pop.*

H3c. *A customer's gender significantly moderates the relationship between destination image and Hallyu involving K-sports.*
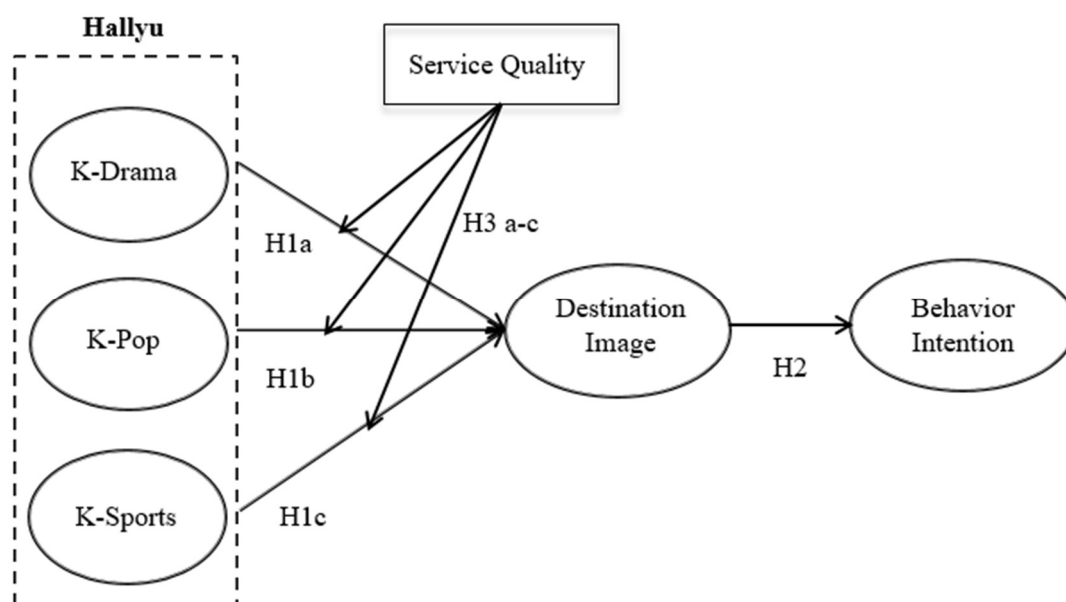
Figure 1. The proposed model.

3. Methods

3.1. Measurements

In our research model, we established four variables—Hallyu, destination image, behavioral intentions, and service quality—that we measured with a questionnaire containing items from past studies that we modified for our study's purposes. We used factors of Hallyu with 13 items suggested by Kim, Kim and Han [21] and Kim and Nam [2], which include the following: "I am very interested in K-dramas," "I often watch K-dramas," "I think the storylines of K-dramas are unique," "I get immersed in the acting of K-dramas," "I recommend K-dramas to other people," "I like K-pop lyrics and melodies," "I often watch K-pop music videos," "I have purchased K-pop music," "I want to attend K-pop concerts," "I often watch K-sports," "I am very interested in K-sports," and "I recommend K-sports to other people." In terms of destination image, we measured destination image with 6 items suggested by Kim, Kim and Han [21] and Choi, Meng and Kim [9], which include the following: "Korea is safe," "Korea has nice weather," "Korea's environment is clean," "Korea's sanitation level is high," "Korea's historic heritage is interesting," "Korea's cultural resources are interesting," "Korean people are friendly," and "Korea's nature is beautiful." For service quality, we have defined it as satisfying Africans' student expectations in Korea. In order to measure service quality, we used 5 items adopted from Akroush Mamoun, Jraisat Luai, Kurdieh Dina, N and Qatu Laila [22]. Examples of service quality measures include the following: "The service I received while I traveled is worth the price I paid," "The service personnel provide the necessary information," "The service personnel offer high-quality services," "The service personnel have professional knowledge," and "The service personnel offer fasts service." Lastly, we measured behavioral intention with 4 items, as suggested by Oliver [26], which include the following: "I will continue to visit Korea," "I will say positive things about Korea to the people around me," "I will recommend visiting Korea to others," and "I will prioritize visiting Korea when choosing a possible travel destination." Respondents evaluated all items on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire also included items addressing the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics.

3.2. Data Collection

To collect data for analysis, we surveyed African students studying in Korea via Amazon Mechanical Turk in October 2019 and November 2019. Although we distributed 250 questionnaires, only 223 were ultimately valid and subjected to statistical analysis. In terms of sample sizes, although

our sample sizes seem small compared to other studies, our sample sizes are statistically sufficient to test our hypotheses based on effect size. For data analysis, we performed structural equation modeling (SEM) to investigate the proposed model in a two-stage process. The first stage involved using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the construct validity of the measurements; the second involved SEM to evaluate the structural model [27]. We also performed a multi-group to examine the moderating role of service quality in the relationship between Hallyu and destination image [28].

Table 1 presents a demographic profile of the respondents, who were overwhelmingly men (71.3%). By age, 53.8% of respondents were 30–39 years old, 35.4% were 21–29 years old, and 10.3% were 40–49 years old, while by the level of education, 65.4% had a graduate degree, 28.2% had a university degree, and 6.3% had a college degree. By the length of stay in Korea, 39.0% of the respondents had lived in Korea for 1 year, 22.0% for less than 1 year, and 16.6% for more than 4 years.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic profiles (*n* = 223).

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	159	71.3 %
Female	64	28.7 %
Age		
Under 21	1	0.4%
21 to 29	79	35.4 %
30 to 39	120	53.8 %
40 to 49	23	10.3 %
Education Level		
College degree	14	6.3 %
University degree	63	28.2 %
Graduate degree	146	65.4 %
How many years have you lived in Korea		
Under 1 year	49	22.0 %
1–2 years	87	39.0 %
2–3 years	21	9.4 %
3–4 years	29	13.0 %
Over 4 years	37	16.6 %

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Models

To evaluate the measurement model, we used a maximum likelihood estimation approach. Table 2 shows the results of our CFA on Hallyu, according to which our measurements of the proposed research model had an acceptable model fit for the data (χ^2 = 254.899, *df* = 71, χ^2/df = 4.522, CFI = 0.932; TLI = 0.911, RMSEA = 0.046).

To check the convergent validity of the variables, we calculated the average variance extracted, which appears in Table 2 along with the standardized factor loadings, construct reliabilities, and composite reliabilities. Based on the results, we also checked the supporting of convergent validity. Moreover, we confirmed discriminant validity in order to evaluate correlations among the constructs [28].

<div align="center">**Table 2.** Confirmatory factor analysis results of Hallyu (*n* = 223).</div>

Constructs and Items	Std. Factor Loadings [a]	Composite Reliability [b]	AVE [c]
K-Drama(KD)		0.952	0.791
I am very interested in K-dramas.	0.737		
I often watch K-dramas.	0.753		
I think the storylines of K-dramas are unique.	0.770		
I get immersed in the acting of K-dramas.	0.631		
I recommend K-dramas to other people.			
K-Pop (KP)		0.826	0.652
I like K-pop lyrics and melodies.	0.896		
I like the appearance of K-pop artists.	0.743		
I often watch K-pop music videos.	0.696		
I have purchased K-pop music.	0.496		
I want to attend K-pop concerts.			
K-Sports (KS)		0.792	0.615
I often watch K-sports.	0.782		
I am very interested in K-sports.	0.737		
I recommend K-sports to other people.	0.691		
Destination Image (DI)		0.921	0.781
Korea is safe.	0.925		
Korea has nice weather.	0.911		
Korea's environment is clean.	0.901		
Korea's sanitation level is high.	0.899		
Korea's historic heritage is interesting.	0.878		
Korea's cultural resources are interesting.	0.871		
Korean people are friendly.	0.855		
Korea's nature is beautiful.	0.822		
Service Quality (SQ)		0.931	0.799
The service I received while I traveled is worth the price I paid.	0.901		
The service personnel provide the necessary information.	0.897		
The service personnel offer high-quality service.	0.893		
The service personnel have professional knowledge.	0.891		
The service personnel offer fast service.	0.887		
Behavioral Intentions (BI)		0.911	0.732
I will continue to visit Korea.	0.934		
I will say positive things about Korea to the people around me.	0.931		
I will recommend visiting Korea to others.	0.922		
I will prioritize visiting Korea when choosing a possible travel destination.	0.911		

Notes: [a] Standardized factor loadings were all significant at $p < 0.001$. [b] Composite reliabilities; [c] Average variance extracted; model fit indices: $\chi^2 = 254.899$, *df* = 71, $\chi^2/df = 4.522$, CFI = 0.932; TLI = 0.911, RMSEA = 0.046; $*p < 0.05$; KD = K-Drama; KP = K-Pop; KS = K-Sports.

4.2. Structural Model: H1 and H2

To assess H1 and H2, we used SEM with maximum likelihood estimation. The overall model fit indices indicated that our proposed model adequately provided the hypothesized construct ($\chi^2 = 576.664$, df = 202, $\chi^2/df = 2.855$, CFI = 0.904. TLI = 0.880, RMSEA = 0.051). Table 3 shows the findings of SEM with estimated path coefficients and test results. As those findings, Hallyu involving a K-drama had a significantly positive effect on destination image (H1a: $\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.05$), which supported H1a. Hallyu involving K-pop also had a significantly positive effect on destination image (H1b: $\beta = 0.211$, $p < 0.05$), which supported H1b, as did Hallyu involving K-sports (H1c: $\beta = 0.291$, $p < 0.05$), which supported H1c. Lastly, in terms of H2, our results indicated a significant relationship between destination image and behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.418$, $p < 0.05$), which supported H2.

Table 3. SEM with estimated path coefficients and test results (N = 223).

Paths	Standardized Estimate	t value	Results
H1a. KD → IM	0.276	2.544 *	Accepted
H1b. KP → IM	0.211	1.105 *	Accepted
H1c. KS → IM	0.291	2.943 *	Accepted
H2. IM → BI	0.418	5.890 *	Accepted

Notes: Model fit indices: χ^2 = 576.664, *df* = 202, χ^2/*df* = 2.855, CFI = 0.904. TLI = 0.880, RMSEA = 0.051; *p < 0.05; KD = K-Drama; KP = K-Pop; KS = K-Sports; IM = Image; BI = Behavioral Intention.

4.3. Structural Model: H3

To test the moderating role of service quality and to identify any differences among Hallyu and destination images, we conducted a multi-group analysis [26]. Figure 2 provides our final structural model. We used a chi-squared (χ^2) test to categorize the differences in individual paths. Based on the results, service quality was a significant moderator between Hallyu (i.e., K-drama) and destination image (H3a; $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 4.1, p < 0.05), which supported H3a. Service quality was also a significant moderator between Hallyu (i.e., K-sports) and destination image (H3c; $\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 4.6, p < 0.05), which supported H3c. However, the results related to H3b were not significant, meaning that, overall, H3 received only partial support.
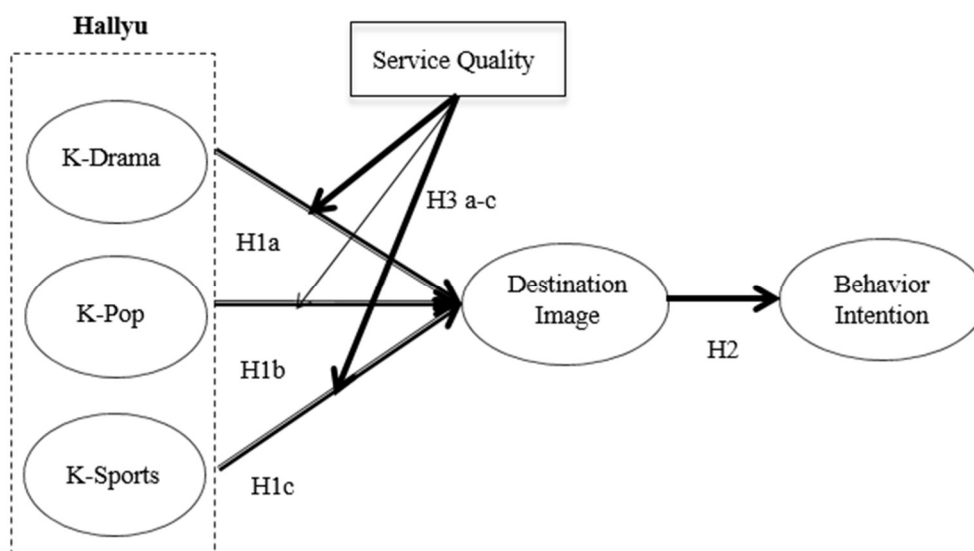
Figure 2. The final structural model.

5. Discussion and Implications

This study investigated the relationship between Hallyu, destination image, and behavioral intention in light of the moderating effect of service quality. However, there is little research on the relationship between Hallyu, destination image, and behavioral intentions, especially with the moderating role of service quality for African students in Korea. Therefore, we investigated the relationship between Hallyu, destination image, and behavioral intentions in that population in light of the moderating effect of service quality.

In support of H1 and contribution to past findings indicating Hallyu's positive effect on destination image, our results indicated a positive relationship between Hallyu and destination image [21]. In particular, Hallyu involving a K-drama, K-pop, and K-sports was significant. Added to that, the results for H2 indicated that destination image also had a significant positive effect on behavioral intention, which corroborates previous findings that destination image has a significant positive impact on behavioral intention [2]. H3 indicated that service quality had different perceptions of Hallyu and

destination image. Such findings along those lines support the results of previous studies indicating that service quality critically affects destination image [22].

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Our findings have several implications. From a theoretical perspective, first, three dimensions of Hallyu matter in the tourism industry—K-drama, K-pop, and K-sports. Further, our study specifically focused on how Africans perceive Korea. Among our findings, Africans had a generally positive attitude toward Korean culture, tourism in Korea, and Hallyu content. Thus, the emotional codes of Africans and Koreans are somewhat consistent. Therefore, in disseminating Hallyu content to African countries in the future, it is necessary for policymakers and industry players to consider using K-dramas, K-pop, and K-sports as important promotional tools. For example, destination marketers could consider using activity-based tourism to provide a unique tourism experience that allows African to experience the emotions of Korea. Thus, there is little resistance to socialization, and there is no further relationship.

Second, by considering the service quality of destinations in the theoretical research, the study identified the relationship between Hallyu and destination image, especially African students in Korea. Some previous studies have indicated that the service quality of a destination is a crucial variable for understanding those destinations. In other words, considering the service quality of destinations could help researchers to understand the present theoretical foundation.

5.2. Practical Implications

From a practical perceptive, first, we found that the destination image plays a critical role in behavioral intention. In other words, all African students had positive perceptions of Korea as a destination, which suggests that Korea's tourism infrastructure is relatively well established, arguably due to the Korean government's active investment in and development of cultural tourism facilities. Therefore, to maintain the satisfaction of tourists visiting Korean destinations, it is necessary to continue developing and investing in tourism resources. For example, to maintain Korea's sustainable competitiveness as a tourist destination, it is necessary to consider narrative marketing using Korean history and cultural content.

Second, African students in Korea seem to be generally satisfied with the quality of service in tourist destinations. However, to survive the competitive destination market, destination marketers could consider continuously educating tourism employees to maintain and strengthen the competitiveness of tourism service quality. More specifically, to continue to maintain the quality of tourism services in Korea, we need to pursue a so-called "smart tourism city." In other words, there is a need to maintain tourism service quality through Korea's smart tourism, foster future tourism content and infrastructure based on technology, create conditions for the participation of innovative companies, and link regional cultural and tourism resources.

Lastly, this study focused on Africans' perceptions. Governments and policymakers could use Hallyu in order to build relationships. By creating a relationship, the formation of a human network capable of forming social capital could provide a suitable direction and approach. Currently, Africa is developing, and it is a space that can generate the most economic value. Therefore, the use of Hallyu plays as a marketing strategy a critical role in affecting Africans' perception and economic value.

6. Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations. First, in terms of data collection, we collected data from African students living in Korea. Thus, generalizations to all Africans and African cultures should be made with caution, and researchers in the future should consider using broader samples to study trends among Africans. Moreover, this study indirectly investigated African students' perceptions of Korea. Therefore, there might be some differences with respect to actual perceptions of Africans. A future study could consider a field study to take a closer look at Africans' perception of tourism and culture.

Second, this study focused on examining Africans' perceptions. Therefore, future researchers could consider adding moderating variables and control variables to their models.

7. Conclusions

To explore Hallyu with respect to the perceptions of African students living in Korea, we investigated the relationship between Hallyu, destination image, behavioral intentions, and the service quality of destinations. In order to test our research objectives, we collected 223 respondents. We found that Hallyu has a positive impact on the destination image. The destination image also has a significant impact on behavioral intentions. Moreover, we suggested that service quality plays a moderating role between Hallyu and destination image. Our findings imply that destination marketers and practitioners could highlight the characteristics of Hallyu in African countries for economic cooperation.

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