

SOUTH KOREA CULTURE OVER TIME

This study explores the rise of Korean cultural prominence globally over the past decade. It uses four Google search terms: "Seoul", "Skincare", "K-pop", and "K-drama". All four terms refer to South Korea's soft power (the ability to shape interest in cultural and political matters across the world), through entertainment, beauty, and lifestyle trends. Each of the four keywords represents a less daunting form of cultural consumption, with "Seoul" as a geographic and cultural access point for viewers wanting to connect with Korean trends; "Skincare" as a historical symbol of Korea's impact on global lifestyles; "K-pop" as the epicenter of international recognition and acceptance; and "K-drama," not unlike K-pop represents a doorway to Korean television, snacks, and drama shows.

The terms demonstrate similar levels of interest over time so that they can be compared and correlated in a meaningful way. The increasing trend in interest in Korean cultural exports indicates the degree to which pop culture has developed a global presence from 2015 and the date of 2025.

Over the last ten years, Korean culture has progressed in the global sector, where they are no longer a niche or regional offering, but instead a global phenomenon. The association of K-pop idols, K-dramas, skincare and fashion trends has not only changed how younger generations around the world consume music, beauty and lifestyle, but it has also transformed their consumption of it.

Trend analysis indicates that overall interest in K-pop peaked to a relatively consistent level within the five years of 2015-2025, commensurate with release timelines of album announcements, album releases, world tour announcements and viral moments. Interest peaked between the years of 2018 and 2020, suggesting that this timeframe may be representative of historic firsts and types of interests globally, especially about BTS, and the broad success of BLACKPINK.

Furthermore, BTS and BLACKPINK changed the dynamic of incorporating Korean pop music into mainstream culture. As reported by BBC News, BTS has settled into the popular music stratum in the US and UK, thus achieving some significant milestones by topping the Billboard Hot 100 and UK Top 40 charts, speaking at the United Nations, collaborating with a wide range

of US artists for their releases, and gaining significant recognition on a global spectrum beyond the entertainment industry (BBC News, 2021). BLACKPINK achieved notoriety as a worldwide music group with their performances at Coachella, and the 2019 Netflix documentary that was released earlier in the piece signified the rise of "K-pop."

"Skincare" continues to see a steady rise, notably accelerating during the COVID-19 pandemic, where all over the world, people started to practice self-care at home. This rise happened in correspondence with sublime market numbers; Statista indicates that South Korea exported cosmetics valued at \$1.9 billion in 2013, whereas in 2023, the export of cosmetics reached \$8.5 billion (Statista, 2024). This indicates a growing global demand for K-beauty brands relying on strong product efficacy, influencers, tutorials and, as explained by K-pop idols' routines.

K-drama has also been on the rise in popularity, especially after the jet streams of international blockbusters such as *Crash Landing on You* (2019-2020) and *Squid Game* that reached global audiences via Netflix and television with much recognition. "Seoul" has remained the same, with slight increases appearing to be due to spikes for tourism international summits or announcements regarding K-pop concerts.

This analysis was conducted at a "world" level, recognising the global influence of Korean culture. Examining only Canada, the US, or other localised areas would underestimate the true scale and international expansion of South Korea's media, fashion, music, and skincare industries.

The graph was created using Google Trends data and examines global online search interest from October 2015 to June 2025, across all categories. See Figure 1 for an overview of the graph. Additional visualizations, including maps of geographic distributions and breakdowns of related search terms for each keyword, are available in the Appendix.

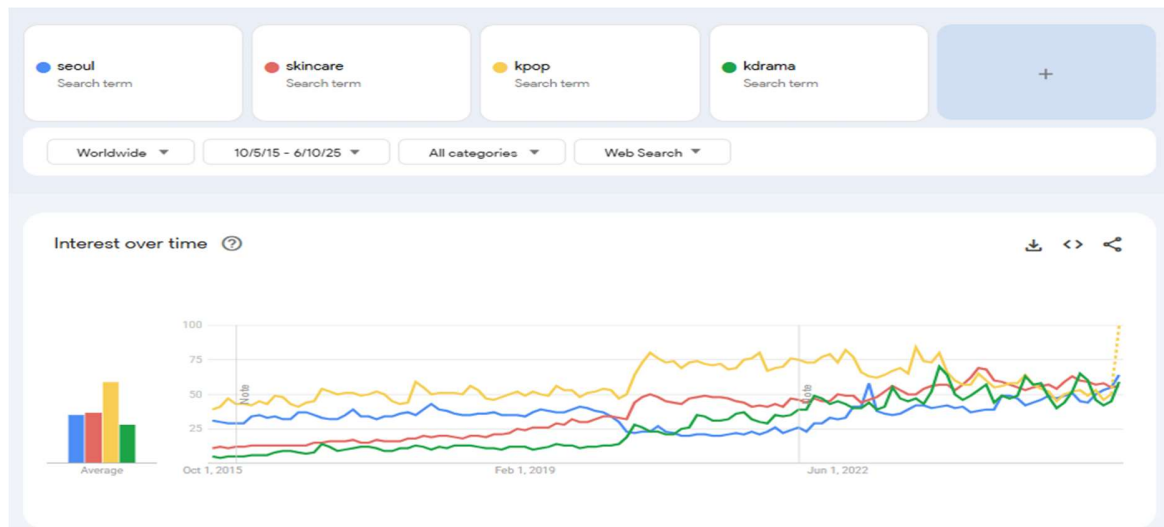


Figure 1: Google Trends graph comparing global interest in Seoul, Skincare, K-pop, and K-drama (Oct 2015 – Jun 2025).

The evidence shows a correlation between increasing global engagement with South Korean culture and its exports in entertainment and lifestyle. The Hallyu phenomenon has become a case study in transnational cultural power. Jin (2016) exemplifies that the combination of the South Korean government sponsorship and social media virality (for the cultural exports) has had a disproportionate global impact, whereas, by design, soft diplomacy can be facilitative. As reported by The New York Times (2023), K-dramas, skincare routines, and K-pop idols have been structured to sell the country's image (New York Times, 2023).

Google searches related to rising Korean culture include “Korean skincare routine”, “BTS concert 2024”, “Seoul travel tips”, and “best K-dramas on Netflix”. Related topics include K-beauty, Korean fashion, Korean food, Korean tourism, soft power, and Hallyu.

There are a few ways to expand this baseline trend analysis. Segmenting the trends regionally, for example, Latin America or Southeast Asia, could reveal localized adoptions. Maybe data from TikTok or YouTube can be aggregated as an additional social engagement layer on top of Google search trends. Perhaps demographic correlations could be investigated by age or gender using social listening tools, or trend data on global e-commerce around Korean products could provide more quantitative corroboration.

Korean culture has transcended international borders and become a part of some daily lifestyle patterns among multigenerational populations, particularly Gen Z and Millennials.

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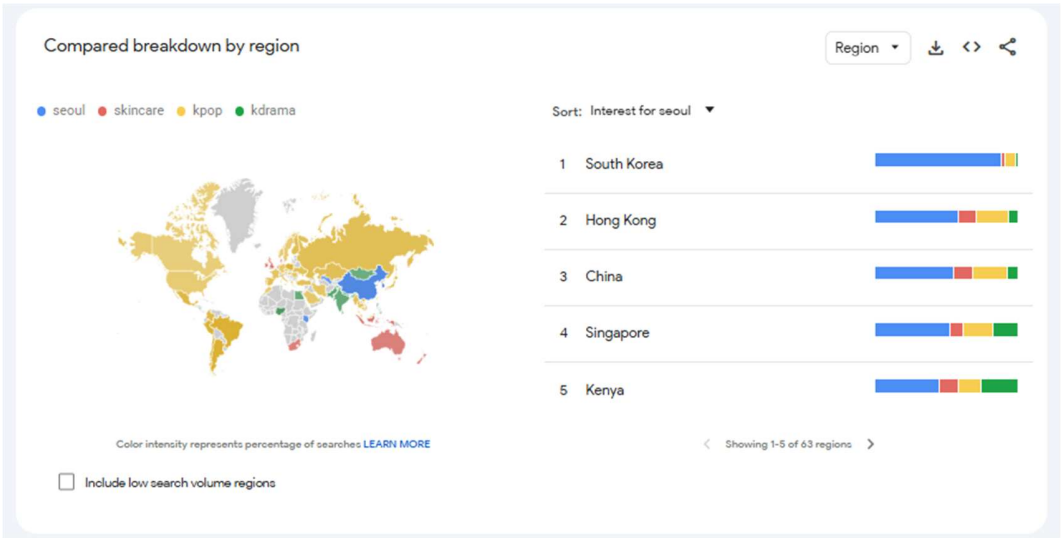
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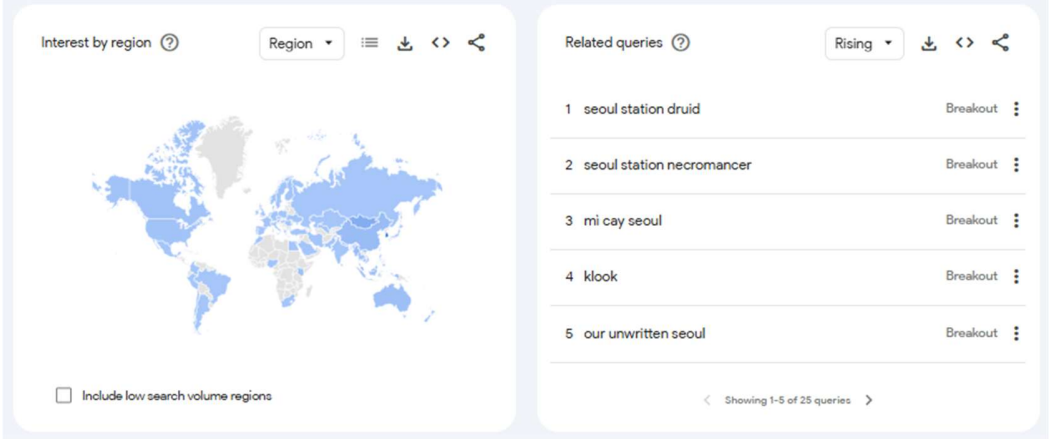
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APPENDIX



seoul



skincare

