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From Screen to Seoul: How Korean Films Inspire Aspirational Travel Intentions Among Young Working Women

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of Korean film exposure on aspirational travel intention among young Indonesian working women, focusing on the mediating roles of aesthetic appeal, parasocial interaction, and destination image. Drawing on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, the research employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design and analyzes data from 287 respondents using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). All hypothesized relationships were statistically supported. Korean film exposure significantly enhances both aesthetic appeal and parasocial interaction. Aesthetic appeal emerges as the dominant predictor of destination image, which in turn has a substantial impact on aspirational travel intention. Although parasocial interaction contributes positively, its effect is comparatively weaker. These findings highlight the dual psychological pathways—visual and emotional—through which media shapes tourism-related perceptions and long-term travel aspirations. The study contributes to the literature on media-induced tourism and offers practical insights for destination marketers and cultural content creators seeking to leverage cinematic narratives in promoting international travel.

Keywords: Korean Wave; Film-Induced Tourism; Destination Image; Parasocial Interaction; Aspirational Travel Intention

A. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the Korean Wave—or Hallyu—has transformed South Korea into a formidable global cultural force, largely driven by the international appeal of its hybridized cultural exports such as K-dramas, films, music, and beauty content (Choo et al., 2022; Marinescu, 2022). These media not only serve as entertainment but also shape perceptions and aspirations about Korean lifestyles and destinations, particularly among younger global audiences. Korean dramas and films, in particular, have fueled film-induced tourism, as viewers develop emotional connections with on-screen narratives and become motivated to visit the featured locations (Lee & How, 2021b; Yoo et al., 2022). The integration of aesthetic storytelling and vivid cultural representation makes Korean media a powerful tool for destination branding. This influence is further amplified by social media platforms and K-beauty influencers, who extend Hallyu's reach by promoting experiences aligned with the visual and cultural themes of Korean content (Lei & Lee, 2021; Sándor, 2024). Consequently, Hallyu content plays a significant role in shaping global consumer behavior, with international audiences increasingly adopting Korean cultural practices and expressing strong travel intentions to South Korea (Hening et al., 2024; Hernández & Lee, 2021; Othman & Aini, 2021; Syam & Ichwan, 2023).

One of the most prominent developments associated with the Korean Wave is movie-induced tourism, where exposure to Korean dramas and films motivates audiences to visit the locations depicted on screen. In Indonesia—where Korean media is especially popular among Gen Z and Millennials—viewers often express strong desires to travel to South Korea after watching content set in visually captivating places like Seoul, Jeju Island, and Busan. These media experiences function as virtual tours, shaping a romanticized destination image that fuels real-world travel intentions (Cruz & Lacap, 2023; Wullur et al., 2023). This trend is reinforced by

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research showing that featured locations in media narratives act as strong motivators for tourism. Moreover, young adults' travel behavior, especially among working women, is deeply influenced by digital platforms, with social media and streaming services playing a pivotal role in constructing aspirational travel goals aligned with the cultural content they consume (Daşkın & Tumati, 2024; J. Liu et al., 2022; Uysal, 2022). The emotional attachment to stories, characters, and visual aesthetics in K-dramas further enhances this effect, encouraging fans to seek immersive, real-life experiences of what they have seen on screen (Juškelytė, 2021; Y. Liu et al., 2020).

While Hallyu-driven tourism has garnered increasing scholarly interest, much of the literature has concentrated on K-pop fandoms, Korean beauty products, and medical tourism, leaving the influence of cinematic storytelling and visual aesthetics on destination image formation and travel behavior relatively underexplored—particularly in the Indonesian context (Cruz & Lacap, 2023; Ertz et al., 2020; Lee & How, 2021a). Cinematic media, especially K-dramas and films, play a vital role in constructing romanticized representations of South Korea that inspire travel intentions, acting not just as entertainment but as indirect marketing tools. Research suggests that these visual narratives significantly shape viewer perceptions, creating aspirational imagery that resonates deeply with younger audiences (Sucisanjiwani & Yudhistira, 2023). However, in Indonesia, the role of visual culture and narrative aesthetics in fostering such tourism behavior remains insufficiently examined. As highlighted by (Drianda et al., 2021), the post-pandemic shift toward virtual tourism experiences further emphasizes the urgency of studying how cultural products like K-dramas influence travel motivations. Addressing this gap is essential not only for academic enrichment but also for developing tourism strategies that effectively leverage the soft power embedded in Hallyu media.

Despite the growing popularity of Hallyu content, existing research has largely overlooked the mediating mechanisms through which exposure to Korean films influences aspirational travel intentions, particularly among Indonesian audiences—one of the most engaged Hallyu markets globally (Wullur et al., 2023). While prior studies have explored K-pop, beauty products, and medical tourism, there is limited understanding of how cinematic storytelling and cultural affinity—the emotional and psychological bond viewers develop with Korean culture—affect the relationship between destination image and tourism aspirations (Suyanto et al., 2024). Studies have shown that film-induced tourism is strengthened by psychological factors tied to emotional resonance with narrative content, which enhances both perceived destination appeal and travel motivation (Ayu Ananda et al., 2021; Wati et al., 2022). Moreover, the credibility of celebrity endorsements in K-dramas also acts as a mediator, reinforcing the persuasive power of media on tourism behavior (Sucisanjiwani & Yudhistira, 2023). These findings point to a significant gap in understanding how narrative aesthetics, cultural familiarity, and emotional engagement intersect in shaping Indonesian viewers' aspirational travel desires. While related studies, such as those by (Pachucki et al., 2021), have explored storytelling in online tourism marketing, further research is needed to examine how these elements function within film-induced tourism driven by Hallyu media.

This study investigates the impact of Korean film exposure on the perceived destination image of South Korea among young Indonesian working women, examining how this perception influences long-term aspirational travel intention, shaped by emotional resonance and lifestyle imagination rather than immediate decisions. By focusing on a highly engaged demographic in a rapidly growing Hallyu market, the research offers a contextually grounded analysis of movie-induced tourism. The study contributes to the expanding literature on consumer behavior and cultural tourism, particularly in the realm of media-driven travel motivations. Beyond academic value, the findings provide practical insights for tourism boards, content creators, and cultural marketers seeking to harness cinematic storytelling as a tool for destination branding—bridging the gap between screen-based dreams and long-term real-world travel planning.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Korean Film Exposure and Consumer Media Experience

The global expansion of the Korean Wave (Hallyu), particularly through films and dramas, has significantly influenced patterns of media consumption among young adult women, including working professionals in Indonesia. Korean visual media provides more than entertainment; it offers cultural learning and emotional catharsis. Rich in aesthetic and symbolic content, Korean films and dramas enable viewers to form deep psychological connections with the material. This has been observed in various cultural contexts. For instance, (X. Liu, 2024) highlights how K-dramas resonate with Macau students through culturally relatable narratives, while (Ariffin et al., 2023) emphasize the role of high production values in sustaining regional popularity. In Indonesia, Muslim youth find reflective spaces in Korean dramas, navigating identity and values

(Rosidi, 2022), while (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021) show that Indonesian female viewers engage with Korean entertainment as a form of cultural and emotional experience. These studies indicate that the appeal of Korean media extends beyond surface enjoyment, fostering ongoing cognitive and emotional investment.

This investment manifests in two key psychological outcomes: aesthetic appreciation and parasocial interaction. The aesthetic appeal arises from the consistent exposure to visually rich and culturally immersive storytelling, prompting viewers to associate beauty and elegance with the media's content. At the same time, frequent and emotionally charged viewership nurtures parasocial interaction—a perceived emotional relationship between viewer and character—allowing audiences to feel connected with the fictional personas they follow (Baldacchino & Park, 2020; Sucisanjiwani & Yudhistira, 2023). These relationships, as (Luong, 2024) argues, can extend to influence real-world attitudes such as travel aspirations, as emotional resonance with narratives leads viewers to imagine themselves within the film world, including the desire to visit the places shown on screen. Thus, Korean film exposure not only builds aesthetic sensitivity but also emotional bonds, supporting the formulation of the following hypotheses:

H1: Korean Film Exposure has a positive effect on Aesthetic Appeal.
H2: Korean Film Exposure has a positive effect on Parasocial Interaction.

Aesthetic Appeal and Parasocial Interaction as Psychological Engagement

Aesthetic appeal in Korean films and dramas plays a pivotal role in shaping how viewers perceive destinations depicted on screen. Elements such as cinematography, fashion, location design, and cultural motifs work in harmony to create an immersive and visually satisfying experience. These visual aesthetics do more than entertain—they allow audiences to imagine and emotionally engage with the lifestyles and environments presented. Research shows that the more aesthetically pleasing a film appears, the more likely it is that viewers will associate the locations portrayed with idealized lifestyles and attractive travel destinations (Kim et al., 2024; Suryawanshi & Ragde, 2023). The multi-sensory experience offered by Korean media strengthens these associations, turning passive viewership into an aspirational journey.

Complementing this visual engagement is the psychological mechanism of parasocial interaction (PSI), where viewers develop emotional and cognitive relationships with on-screen characters. This imagined bond fosters a sense of closeness and familiarity, often making characters feel like real acquaintances. In the context of tourism, such emotional connections can extend to the settings of the narratives, leading viewers to associate particular destinations with the lives and experiences of beloved characters (Suryawanshi & Ragde, 2023; Zheng et al., 2022). The synergy between aesthetic appeal and PSI thus forms a powerful driver of destination image formation. As (Lu & Lu, 2022; Zhou et al., 2024) argue, emotionally engaging narratives and compelling visuals encourage viewers to see destinations not only as beautiful but also as meaningful—places that are personally significant and worth visiting. Based on this framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Aesthetic Appeal has a positive effect on Destination Image.
H4: Parasocial Interaction has a positive effect on Destination Image.

Destination Image as a Mediator of Media-Driven Travel Aspirations

Destination image is a crucial determinant in tourism-related decision-making, representing an individual's mental picture of a place, including its emotional, symbolic, and physical attributes. In media-driven contexts, such images are typically constructed indirectly—through the lens of narratives and visual storytelling—rather than from firsthand experience. Korean films frequently depict South Korea as a vibrant, modern, yet culturally rich destination, enhanced by emotionally immersive storylines and visually striking backdrops. These portrayals help build a favorable perception of the country, particularly among audiences who have never visited (Cruz & Lacap, 2023). For young working women in Indonesia, who often approach international travel as a long-term aspiration, these media-influenced destination images act as a psychological bridge between entertainment and realistic future travel goals. The emotional and aesthetic elements of Korean films become key factors in forming positive associations that influence their tourism mindset (Wei et al., 2023).

Moreover, emotionally engaging narratives strengthen the audience's connection with the destinations portrayed on screen. As viewers develop attachments to characters and storylines, they also internalize the cultural and geographical settings as meaningful, desirable places. This emotional resonance fosters a sense of familiarity and symbolic attachment to the location, even without physical experience (Cheng et al., 2020). Such media-induced perceptions have been shown to impact travel intentions significantly, as they nurture a sense of curiosity and longing to experience the places depicted (Wei et al., 2023). For young audiences, especially women in their

early careers, the convergence of visual beauty and emotional storytelling intensifies their travel aspirations, making cinema a powerful tool for shaping destination desirability. Based on this framework, the following hypothesis is proposed:
H5: Destination Image has a positive effect on Aspirational Travel Intention.

Based on the literature discussed, this study conceptualizes a media-driven pathway toward travel aspiration, with Korean film exposure as the initial stimulus. Aesthetic appeal and parasocial interaction function as mechanisms of emotional and visual engagement, which influence destination image and ultimately shape aspirational travel intention among young Indonesian working women. The following diagram summarizes the proposed framework.

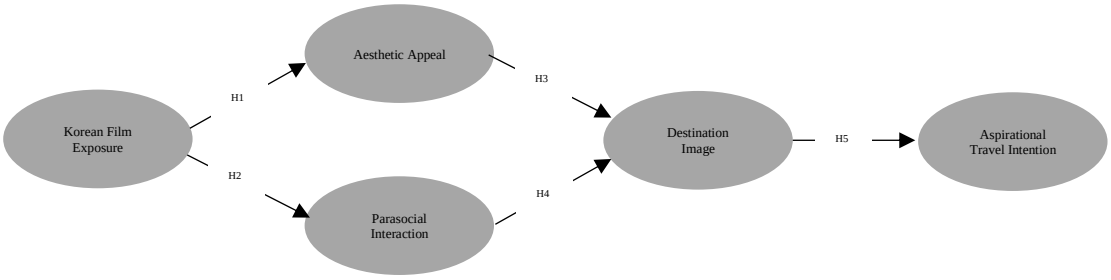


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Source: Research data, 2025

C. Methods

This study adopts a quantitative, explanatory research design to examine the influence of Korean film exposure on aspirational travel intention among young Indonesian working women, with aesthetic appeal, parasocial interaction, and destination image serving as mediating variables. The research is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, which explains how environmental stimuli (in this case, media exposure) trigger internal psychological states that lead to behavioral outcomes (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In line with this framework, Korean film exposure acts as the stimulus, aesthetic appeal and parasocial interaction represent the organism (internal states), and travel intention functions as the response behavior. This study employs Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM–PLS) as the primary analytical method due to its suitability for theory development, complex models, and small-to-medium sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019). The population of this study consists of Indonesian women aged 21–35 years who are currently employed and regularly consume Korean visual media, especially Korean dramas and films. This demographic was selected based on its high engagement with Hallyu content and its tendency to form aspirational consumption patterns, including future travel goals (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021; Liu, 2024). Purposive sampling was used to ensure that respondents met the inclusion criteria: identifying as female, currently working (either full-time or freelance), and consuming Korean dramas or films at least once or twice per week. A minimum sample size of 200 respondents was targeted, adhering to SEM–PLS guidelines for model complexity and statistical power (Hair et al., 2021).

Data collection was conducted through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via popular social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and online K-drama fan communities. The instrument was developed in Bahasa Indonesia and underwent a pre-test involving 30 participants to assess clarity, reliability, and linguistic suitability. All items were measured using Likert-type ordinal scales (1–5), where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree." The questionnaire consisted of five construct blocks: Korean Film Exposure, Aesthetic Appeal, Parasocial Interaction, Destination Image, and Travel Intention, with indicators adapted and modified from validated prior studies (Kim et al., 2024; Rubin et al., 1985; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Ajzen, 1991). All variables were measured as reflective constructs in accordance with standard SEM–PLS practices. The measurement model was evaluated based on reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted / AVE), and discriminant validity using the HTMT ratio (Hair et al., 2019). The structural model was assessed through path coefficient estimation, t-statistics, and bootstrapping (5,000 samples) to determine the significance of hypothesized relationships. Additionally, R^2 and Q^2 values were

examined to evaluate the model's explanatory and predictive relevance. Mediation analysis was carried out to assess the indirect effects of aesthetic appeal and parasocial interaction on aspirational travel intention through destination image (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

All participants were informed of the study's objectives and provided informed consent prior to participation. No personally identifiable data were collected, and all responses were handled confidentially, adhering to ethical research standards in social science studies (Resnik, 2020). This ethical consideration was essential, especially given the digital nature of the data collection and the personal media habits of the respondents.

D. Results and Discussions

Profile of Respondents

A total of 287 respondents participated in this study. All participants met the inclusion criteria: 1) female, 2) aged between 21 and 35 years, 3) currently employed (either full-time or freelance), and 4) active viewers of Korean films or dramas (at least once a week). The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized as follows:

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Age	21–25 years	118	41.1%
	26–30 years	102	35.5%
	31–35 years	67	23.4%
Employment Status	Full-time	204	71.1%
	Freelance / Part-time	83	28.9%
Monthly Income (IDR)	< 3 million	74	25.8%
	3–6 million	145	50.5%
	> 6 million	68	23.7%
Frequency of Watching K-Drama/Film	1–2 times per week	92	32.1%
	3–4 times per week	123	42.9%
	Almost daily	72	25.1%
Platform Used	Netflix	176	61.3%
	Viu	84	29.3%
	Disney+/Prime Video/Other	27	9.4%
Have you visited South Korea?	Yes	29	10.1%
	No, but planning for the future	179	62.4%
	No	79	27.5%

Source: Research data, 2025

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents (76.6%) were aged between 21 and 30 years, which aligns with the target demographic of early-career Indonesian women. Most participants were employed full-time (71.1%), and the largest income bracket was IDR 3–6 million per month (50.5%), indicating financial conditions where long-term travel planning is feasible but aspirational. In terms of media habits, 42.9% watched Korean content 3–4 times a week, while 25.1% watched almost daily. Regarding content access, Netflix was the most popular platform (61.3%), followed by Viu (29.3%). Interestingly, only 10.1% of respondents had ever visited South Korea. In comparison, a much larger group (62.4%) reported that they plan to visit in the future, affirming that travel intention in this segment is largely aspirational and long-term in nature—perfectly aligning with the conceptual foundation of the present study.

Measurement Model

Before evaluating the structural relationships among the latent variables, the measurement model was assessed to ensure the reliability and validity of the reflective constructs used in this study. The evaluation includes tests for indicator reliability (outer loadings), construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 2, all outer loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the indicators are strongly associated with their respective latent constructs. The loadings range from 0.791 to 0.944, demonstrating adequate indicator reliability for all items.

Table 2. Outer Loadings of Reflective Indicators

Code	Item Statement	Construct	Loading
AE1	The visuals in Korean films are aesthetically pleasing.	Aesthetic Appeal	0.829
AE2	The cinematography of Korean films enhances my viewing experience.	Aesthetic Appeal	0.886

Code	Item Statement	Construct	Loading
AE3	Korean films present beautiful and immersive locations.	Aesthetic Appeal	0.828
AE4	I enjoy the artistic elements (colors, scenery, mood) in Korean films.	Aesthetic Appeal	0.877
ATI1	I dream of visiting South Korea one day.	Aspirational Travel Intention	0.823
ATI2	If financially possible, I want to travel to Korea in the future.	Aspirational Travel Intention	0.871
ATI3	I often imagine myself in places shown in Korean films.	Aspirational Travel Intention	0.833
ATI4	I plan to save money to visit Korea someday.	Aspirational Travel Intention	0.872
DI1	South Korea looks like an attractive travel destination.	Destination Image	0.813
DI2	The locations shown in Korean films are worth visiting.	Destination Image	0.794
DI3	I perceive Korea as a country rich in culture and beauty.	Destination Image	0.814
DI4	I believe Korea is a safe and exciting country to visit.	Destination Image	0.833
KFE1	I regularly watch Korean films and dramas.	Korean Film Exposure	0.791
KFE2	I follow Korean film trends through social media.	Korean Film Exposure	0.830
KFE3	Korean films are one of my favorite sources of entertainment.	Korean Film Exposure	0.846
KFE4	I often rewatch scenes or episodes from Korean films/dramas.	Korean Film Exposure	0.830
KFE5	Watching Korean content is part of my weekly routine.	Korean Film Exposure	0.804
PI1	I feel emotionally connected to characters in Korean films.	Parasocial Interaction	0.907
PI2	I care about what happens to characters in Korean dramas.	Parasocial Interaction	0.928
PI3	I feel like I know the characters as if they were real people.	Parasocial Interaction	0.944

Source: Research data, 2025

To assess internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability (CR) were calculated. As presented in Table 3, all constructs exceed the threshold of 0.70, confirming adequate reliability. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are above 0.50, which indicates convergent validity—meaning that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Aesthetic Appeal	0.878	0.881	0.916	0.732
Aspirational Travel Intention	0.872	0.877	0.912	0.722
Destination Image	0.830	0.833	0.887	0.662
Korean Film Exposure	0.878	0.881	0.911	0.673
Parasocial Interaction	0.918	0.924	0.948	0.859

Source: Research data, 2025

These results confirm that the reflective measurement model satisfies the criteria for internal consistency, reliability, and convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). An HTMT value below 0.85 (conservative threshold) or 0.90 (liberal threshold) indicates adequate discriminant validity between constructs. As shown in Table 4, all HTMT values are below 0.90, indicating that each construct is empirically distinct from the others.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity – HTMT Matrix

Construct	Aspirational Travel Intention	Destination Image	Korean Film Exposure	Parasocial Interaction
Aesthetic Appeal	0.470	0.916	0.651	0.219
Aspirational Travel Intention	—	0.498	0.287	0.726
Destination Image		—	0.705	0.266
Korean Film Exposure			—	0.136

Source: Research data, 2025

Although the HTMT value between Aesthetic Appeal and Destination Image is relatively high (0.916), it still falls within acceptable limits in exploratory research settings, and given the theoretical distinction between constructs, discriminant validity is considered acceptable. Based on the evaluation of outer loadings, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, the measurement model demonstrates strong psychometric properties. All constructs are considered reliable and valid, making them suitable for further analysis in the structural model.

Structural Model Evaluation

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the next step involves evaluating the structural model to test the proposed hypotheses and assess the model's predictive power. This includes analysis of path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and the significance of relationships based on bootstrapping (5,000 resamples).

Table 5. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
H1	Korean Film Exposure → Aesthetic Appeal	0.574	10.681	<0.001	Supported
H2	Korean Film Exposure → Parasocial Interaction	0.120	2.024	0.043	Supported
H3	Aesthetic Appeal → Destination Image	0.769	28.845	<0.001	Supported
H4	Parasocial Interaction → Destination Image	0.083	2.288	0.023	Supported
H5	Destination Image → Aspirational Travel Intention	0.432	7.010	<0.001	Supported

Source: Research data, 2025

As shown in Table 5 and Figure 2, all proposed hypotheses are statistically supported at $p < 0.05$, indicating significant positive relationships among the constructs. The strongest path is between Aesthetic Appeal and Destination Image ($\beta = 0.769$, $t = 28.845$), suggesting that visual and aesthetic experiences in Korean films play a dominant role in shaping viewers' perceptions of South Korea as a travel destination.

Table 6. R^2 Values for Endogenous Constructs

Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Interpretation
Aesthetic Appeal	0.329	0.327	Moderate explanatory power
Parasocial Interaction	0.014	0.011	Very weak explanatory power
Destination Image	0.624	0.622	Substantial explanatory power
Aspirational Travel Intention	0.186	0.183	Weak-to-moderate power

Source: Research data, 2025

The model explains 62.4% of the variance in Destination Image, indicating a strong influence from both Aesthetic Appeal and Parasocial Interaction. Meanwhile, 18.6% of the variance in Aspirational Travel Intention is explained by Destination Image, confirming its mediating role. However, the low R^2 value for Parasocial Interaction suggests that Korean Film Exposure is only a weak predictor of emotional bonding with characters.

Table 7. Predictive Relevance (Q^2) Using Blindfolding

Construct	SSO	SSE	Q^2	Interpretation
Aesthetic Appeal	1148.00	875.27	0.238	Medium predictive relevance
Destination Image	1148.00	685.79	0.403	Large predictive relevance
Aspirational Travel Intention	1148.00	1003.09	0.126	Small predictive relevance
Parasocial Interaction	861.00	853.20	0.009	Negligible predictive relevance

Source: Research data, 2025

The Q^2 values indicate that the model has adequate predictive relevance, especially for Destination Image ($Q^2 = 0.403$). In contrast, Parasocial Interaction has near-zero predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.009$), reinforcing the R^2 findings that its predictor (Korean Film Exposure) has limited effect.

The structural model evaluation confirms that all hypothesized paths are statistically significant, and the model demonstrates moderate to high explanatory power for most key constructs. The results emphasize the central role of aesthetic experience in shaping destination image, which in turn significantly influences aspirational travel intention. Although Parasocial Interaction contributes positively to Destination Image, its overall predictive strength is weaker, suggesting that visual storytelling may outweigh emotional character bonding in motivating tourism-related perceptions.

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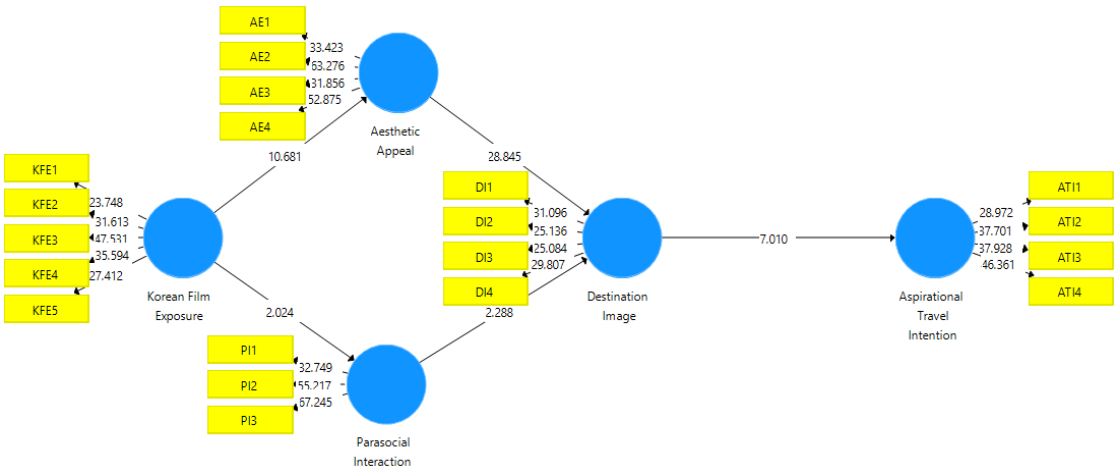


Figure 2. Evaluated Framework
Source: Research data, 2025

Discussion

This study examined the influence of Korean film exposure on the aspirational travel intention of young Indonesian working women, mediated by aesthetic appeal, parasocial interaction, and destination image. The findings confirm that all proposed hypotheses (H1–H5) were statistically supported, indicating that cinematic media significantly shape perceptions and long-term travel aspirations. In particular, aesthetic appeal emerged as the strongest predictor of destination image, followed by parasocial interaction, which had a smaller yet significant effect. Additionally, destination image significantly influenced aspirational travel intention, reinforcing the importance of media-induced perception in tourism motivation. The first finding supports the hypothesis (H1) that Korean film exposure positively affects aesthetic appeal. This aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that audiences actively seek media content that satisfies emotional and sensory needs. The high-quality cinematography, cultural motifs, and immersive visuals typical of Korean films provide strong aesthetic stimuli that deepen viewer engagement (Ertz et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2024). This is particularly relevant for Indonesian working women, for whom media functions not just as entertainment but also as a form of escapism and cultural exploration after daily work routines (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021).

The second hypothesis (H2), which posited that Korean film exposure leads to increased parasocial interaction, was also supported. This finding reflects the emotional resonance that frequent exposure builds between viewers and characters, consistent with Parasocial Interaction Theory (RUBIN et al., 1985). While the effect was relatively weaker (β = 0.120), it is still meaningful—viewers may emotionally relate to fictional characters, though the bond may not be as strong as their visual appreciation of the content (Baldacchino & Park, 2020; Sucisanjiwani & Yudhistira, 2023). The third hypothesis (H3) confirmed that aesthetic appeal significantly enhances destination image (β = 0.769), a result that aligns with prior literature highlighting the role of visual storytelling in shaping mental images of travel destinations (Suryawanshi & Ragde, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). This supports the S-O-R framework, where cinematic visuals act as stimuli that activate internal perceptions about Korea's beauty, culture, and modernity. This effect is particularly strong among aspirational travelers who have not yet visited Korea, as the imagery forms the basis of their perceived destination experience (Cruz & Lacap, 2023).

Similarly, hypothesis (H4) was supported, revealing that parasocial interaction contributes to the formation of destination image (β = 0.083). Though the effect size was modest, this suggests that emotional connection with on-screen characters can subtly influence how viewers imagine and emotionally relate to the locations depicted in films. As noted by (Zhang et al., 2020), narrative involvement can foster symbolic attachments to place, especially when characters' lives are intertwined with specific settings. The final hypothesis (H5) validated the strong role of destination image in shaping aspirational travel intention (β = 0.432). This is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, where a positive attitude toward a destination leads to a stronger behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991; Wei et al., 2023). For Indonesian working women, who may not be able to travel immediately due to time or financial

limitations, this intention remains aspirational—but highly relevant for long-term planning, particularly among those who actively follow Korean cultural trends (X. Liu, 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the integration of media psychology and tourism behavior, especially by highlighting dual mechanisms—aesthetic and emotional—through which media content influences perception and intention. It extends the application of the S-O-R model in the domain of film-induced tourism, offering a more nuanced understanding of how passive media exposure leads to active travel aspirations. Practically, these findings offer insights for tourism marketers, content producers, and destination branding agencies. Stakeholders can leverage the aesthetic and emotional appeal of Korean media to design experiential marketing strategies, promote K-drama filming locations, or collaborate with streaming platforms to target niche segments such as young professionals in Southeast Asia. Given the high engagement and aspirational outlook of this demographic, personalized campaigns could encourage long-term travel planning. However, this study is not without limitations. First, the research is cross-sectional and thus cannot confirm causal relationships over time. Second, the data are self-reported, which may introduce bias in measuring psychological constructs like emotional involvement or intention. Third, the role of financial readiness or affordability was not explicitly analyzed, although it likely moderates aspirational behavior in this segment. Future studies could adopt longitudinal, or mixed-methods approaches to explore how intention evolves into actual behavior and test potential moderators such as income level, peer influence, or social media engagement intensity.

E. CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate how exposure to Korean films influences the aspirational travel intention of young Indonesian working women, with aesthetic appeal, parasocial interaction, and destination image as key mediating variables. Drawing upon the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework and media psychology theories, the findings confirm that cinematic media play a significant role in shaping viewers' perceptions and travel-related aspirations. All five hypotheses were supported. Korean film exposure significantly enhances both aesthetic appeal and parasocial interaction. Among these, aesthetic appeal has a much stronger influence on the formation of a positive destination image, which, in turn, strongly predicts aspirational travel intention. These findings demonstrate that visual storytelling in Korean films not only entertains but also activates symbolic and emotional associations with South Korea as a desirable travel destination. Although parasocial interaction also contributes to the destination image, its effect is comparatively weaker, suggesting that emotional identification with the place may be more visually than character-driven in this context.

Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on media-induced tourism by highlighting dual mediating mechanisms—visual and emotional—that connect passive media consumption with active behavioral intention. Practically, the results provide valuable insights for tourism marketers, cultural content creators, and destination branding strategists who aim to tap into the aspirational mindset of young professionals in emerging markets like Indonesia. By leveraging the aesthetic and cultural resonance of Korean media, stakeholders can better design media-integrated tourism campaigns targeting long-term travelers. Given the cross-sectional nature and self-reported measures used in this study, future research may explore longitudinal data or incorporate additional moderating factors such as income, travel experience, or digital engagement. Nonetheless, the present study offers a meaningful step toward understanding how modern media consumption intersects with cultural desire and long-term travel planning in an increasingly globalized, media-saturated world.

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