

K-Pop Idol Controversies: Malaysian Tweets and the Emotive Language of Cultural Appropriation

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Received: October 9, 2024 Accepted: October 25, 2024 Published: October 27, 2024

doi:10.5296/jsel.v12i1.22343 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/jsel.v12i1.22343>

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the use of emotive language in Malaysian tweets reacting to the cultural appropriation by K-Pop idols. As K-Pop grows globally, cultural sensitivity within the industry becomes crucial. Twitter serves as a key platform for idols to engage with fans, and Malaysia's cultural values shape how users express emotions, particularly in response to cultural appropriation by idols from more homogeneous societies. A qualitative content analysis was employed, examining 20 tweets from Malaysian users to explore emotive language and its connection to cultural values. The analysis followed the framework by Martin and White (2005), revealing that all tweets expressed negative emotions in response to appropriation. Additionally, Hofstede's cultural dimensions were applied to understand how Malaysian cultural values influence the use of emotive language. The findings suggest that strong cultural pride and sensitivity play significant roles in shaping these reactions. This study aims to reduce incidents of cultural appropriation by enhancing cultural awareness among K-Pop idols and the industry. Furthermore, it contributes to the broader discourse on the intersection of cultural values and emotive language in addressing issues of appropriation within global entertainment cultures like K-Pop.

Keywords: emotive language, cultural appropriation, online discourse, k-pop idol, twitter

1. Introduction

The global phenomenon of K-Pop, originating from South Korea, has spread worldwide, including Malaysia, significantly influencing global pop culture, particularly through social media during the Hallyu 2.0 era (Jin & Yoon, 2016; Jung & Shim, 2013; Oh & Park, 2012). As K-Pop idols seek to expand their influence, embracing cultural sensitivity is crucial for personal growth and South Korea's cultural diplomacy (Jang & Paik, 2012).

In Malaysia, K-Pop's accessibility is evident through platforms and events, such as ASTRO's KBS World Channel and vibrant Malaysian K-Pop Facebook communities (Dzul, 2016). Events like dance competitions organized by Hitz FM and the Korean Tourist Organization (Jenol & Pazil, 2020) highlight K-Pop's popularity, showcasing cultural exchange and adoption. Cultural adoption, as defined by Wu (2020), involves borrowing cultural elements to create new products, including language, fashion, and music. This process can represent genuine evolution or cultural appropriation, influenced by power dynamics and reciprocity (Kunst et al., 2023; Rogers, 2006).

In today's digital age, persuasive language shapes public discourse surrounding cultural exchanges. Lakoff (1982) noted that persuasive discourse aims to convince and influence opinions. On social media, users employ various linguistic devices to persuade others (Frigillano, 2021), underscoring how cultural values shape persuasive language. Malaysian values, reflecting a blend of multiple ethnicities, emphasize collective culture, respect for hierarchy, and a balanced approach to success (Othman et al., 2022). These values may affect reactions to cultural appropriation by K-Pop idols, particularly on platforms like Twitter.

As K-Pop globalizes, awareness of cultural appropriation becomes vital for idols and companies. On "K-Pop Stan Twitter," fans often address instances of appropriation using emotive language to express their feelings (Nikitin et al., 2022). Unlike the clearer power imbalances in the West, cultural appropriation in South Korea is complex due to its international context (Hong et al., 2022). The South Korean entertainment industry has faced scrutiny over cultural appropriation, yet it continues to provoke debate among fans.

This study aims to investigate how Malaysian Twitter users employ emotive language in response to cultural appropriation by K-Pop idols and how Malaysian cultural values influence these reactions. The objectives are to identify the emotive language used by selected users and to analyze the impact of Malaysian cultural values on their responses.

1.1 Problem Statement

As K-Pop becomes more globalized, it is essential for K-Pop idols and companies to be aware of other cultures and cultural appropriation. One major platform where fans engage with idols is "K-Pop Stan Twitter," which fosters close communication and community building (Malik & Haidar, 2020). Fans also use this platform to call out idols on issues, particularly cultural appropriation. Emotive language is often employed to express emotional reactions during these conflicts (Nikitin et al., 2022).

In South Korea, cultural appropriation is more complex to define compared to the West due to its unique global position (Hong et al., 2022). The South Korean entertainment industry has a history of cultural appropriation, including stereotypical depictions of other races, such as Blackface and Afro wigs (Hong et al., 2022). Despite K-Pop's growing global influence and the presence of non-Korean idols, cultural appropriation remains a hotly debated issue, with fans frequently holding idols and companies accountable.

K-Pop's rise in the late 1990s coincided with South Korea's societal shifts, leading to its transnational influence (Kim, 2018). Seo Taiji and Boys, debuting in 1992, introduced new genres like hip hop and reggae, which paved the way for K-Pop's international reach (Oh & Lee, 2014). Research has examined emotive language on Twitter (Nikitin et al., 2022; Alkhamash, 2021), but primarily in the context of sentiment analysis, with less focus on K-Pop and cultural appropriation.

This paper aims to address gaps in the literature by examining how Malaysian Twitter users use emotive language when reacting to cultural appropriation by K-Pop idols. Malaysia's cultural diversity may influence the types of emotive language employed in these reactions, particularly toward idols from more homogeneous societies. Although K-Pop's global popularity and cultural appropriation are well-documented, little is known about how specific cultural values, such as Malaysia's, shape the responses of fans to such issues. This research will explore the impact of Malaysian cultural values on their Twitter reactions to cultural appropriation by K-Pop idols, contributing to the broader understanding of how cultural contexts influence online discourse.

1.2 Emotive Language and Cultural Appropriation in Digital Spaces: The Role of Cultural Values in Cross-Cultural Communication

Emotive language is an essential tool in online communication, especially on social media, where individuals express thoughts, opinions, and emotions. Emotive language refers to words or phrases that evoke emotional responses, influencing the audience's perceptions. Beardsley (1981) describes it as carrying emotional weight, while Macagno and Walton (2010) argue that emotive language prompts listeners to assign value to subjects, making it a vital tool for effective communication (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018).

In social media spaces, emotive language fosters emotional connections and participation in discussions (Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2021). It also serves as a visual tool through emojis to enhance emotional expression (Pollach, 2006). However, the intense emotional responses it generates can lead to irrational discourse and division (Crabtree et al., 2020). Researchers explore emotive language through different theoretical frameworks. Appraisal Theory by Martin and White (2005) classifies language into affect (emotions), judgement (evaluation), and appreciation (attitudes), frequently used in qualitative studies (Fadhil, 2021; Engelbrecht, 2020). Plutchik's wheel of emotions (1980) also offers a visual model of emotions and their intensity (Łyda, 2020; Mohammad, 2012), while sentiment analysis quantitatively classifies emotions as positive or negative (Driscoll, 2015). These approaches highlight how emotive language shapes social media discourse.

Cultural values heavily influence how individuals express emotions. Emotions are cultural phenomena, shaped by socio-cultural norms (Absattar et al., 2022). As users engage globally, their cultural backgrounds affect how they interpret and respond to emotional language (Kadri et al., 2020). Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions (1980) offers insight into how cultural values shape emotional expression, particularly in individualistic versus collectivistic societies. In individualistic cultures, personal expectations are prioritized, while collectivistic cultures emphasize societal expectations, such as family or community (Dewaele, 2015).

Studies illustrate how cultural values impact emotional responses. For instance, Lebanese, Indian, and Chinese participants reacted differently to emotional stimuli based on their cultural backgrounds (DeCoursey et al., 2015). Similarly, Maitner et al. (2017) found that individuals from high-honor cultures, like Arabs, respond more emotionally to insults than the British. Such studies underscore the significant role culture plays in shaping emotional reactions, especially in digital spaces where emotive language is prevalent.

Malaysia's multiculturalism exemplifies how collective values influence emotional expression. Comprising various ethnic groups (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021), Malaysia scores high on power distance, indicating respect for authority and hierarchy (Alsafi, 2020). This is rooted in traditional and religious values that emphasize elder respect and social harmony (Aziz, 2021). As a collectivistic society, Malaysians prioritize group loyalty and mutual care (Pérez-Huertas & Barquín-Rotchford, 2020). Communication in Malaysia also balances masculinity and femininity, focusing on indirect, polite speech to avoid confrontation (Ramli, 2013), which aligns with the Malaysian value of 'budi bahasa,' promoting respect and cultural sensitivity.

Malaysia's low uncertainty avoidance suggests a comfort with ambiguity, navigating uncertain social situations through politeness strategies (Othman et al., 2022). The cultural practice of 'jaga hati' (minding others' feelings) reflects Malaysians' focus on preserving social harmony and avoiding direct confrontation (Jaafar et al., 2004). This blend of cultural norms influences emotional expression and contributes to how Malaysians engage in digital discourse.

Cultural appropriation, a global issue, often highlights tensions in cross-cultural communication. It refers to the adoption of cultural elements without respect for their original context (Ziff & Rao, 1997). Scafidi (2005) argues that appropriation is harmful when it involves marginalized communities, as it exploits their cultural property. In Western contexts, cultural appropriation often involves the misuse of Indigenous symbols, music, and religious elements (Borrows & McNeil, 2022; Howard, 2020). Globalization has led to the borrowing of Western cultural elements in Eastern societies, such as Blackface in Asian media (Hong et al., 2022) and the adoption of hip-hop and reggae in non-Western contexts (Callier, 2016).

K-pop idols, for instance, have faced criticism for appropriating African American culture, including music, fashion, and hairstyles. Due to Korea's cultural homogeneity, appropriation is often seen as a lack of awareness about racism (Williams, 2020). Rogers (2006) categorizes appropriation into cultural exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation. Cultural exploitation, the most harmful, involves taking from marginalized groups without reciprocity or permission.

In conclusion, the interplay between emotive language, cultural values, and cultural appropriation in digital spaces highlights the complexity of cross-cultural communication.

Emotive language on social media is a powerful tool for expression, shaped by cultural norms that influence how individuals interpret and react to emotional content. Cultural appropriation adds another layer of complexity, particularly when global trends borrow elements from marginalized communities. Together, these factors emphasize the importance of understanding the nuances of language, culture, and communication in an interconnected world.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach, as defined by Fraenkel et al. (2011), which investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials (p. 245). The data was sourced from Twitter, a prominent social media platform with millions of active users that facilitates rapid communication through concise posts known as "tweets" (Weyand & Zaidi, 2021). The focus was on the "K-Pop Stan" community, where fans engage with their idols and each other (Malik & Haidar, 2020). The selected tweets were reactions from Malaysian Twitter users regarding incidents of cultural appropriation by K-pop idols, providing insights into socio-cultural sentiments (Absattar et al., 2022). Malaysians were chosen for their multiracial society and cultural values, which influence the expression of emotions online.

A non-probability purposive sampling method was employed to select tweets authored by Malaysians in English, excluding any Malay-language content to focus specifically on emotive language. This approach allowed for rich qualitative data and was efficient in participant selection (Golzar et al., 2016; Stratton, 2021). A total of 20 tweets were selected from January 2020 to December 2023, accounting for the limited number of cultural appropriation incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had significant impacts on the Korean entertainment industry (Dhan, 2022).

2.1 Instruments

In this section, human coding, the coding schemes and coding guidelines are explained. Human coding or manual coding is the process of categorising text responses, typically based on a coding guide. The data is coded by two coders, and any discrepancies had to be addressed (e.g. by a specialist coder or by bringing in a third coder) to ensure the results were reliable (He & Schonlau, 2021). By using a human coder, it helped increase contextual understanding which machine learning models lack (Pamuksuz, 2021). In this study, the aim was to analyse the use of emotive language by Malaysian *Twitter* users in reacting to the cultural appropriation of K-pop idols, as well as how Malaysian cultural values affected the use of emotive language in their reactions.

The coding scheme used for this data was adopted from Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory. Ailan (2017) emphasised that one of the advantages of the Appraisal Theory is its exploration of how speakers used appraisal to express emotions, attitudes, influence listeners, form opinions, and build relationships. Wei et al. (2015) highlighted the broad applicability and usefulness of this theory in understanding interpersonal meanings.

Based on Martin and White's (2005) framework, only the 'affect' subcategory under the 'attitude' domain of the framework was used. Martin and White (2005) explained that 'affect'

was concerned with resources for constructing emotional reactions (positive and negative emotional reactions). 'Affect' is an evaluation of an emotional response to behaviour, text/process, or phenomena, where these emotional responses could be either a positive reaction or a negative reaction (Martin & White, 2005). Analysing 'affect' helped uncover the positive and negative emotions expressed by Malaysians in response to cultural appropriation by K-Pop idols. It also shed light on how cultural values influenced the emotional reactions and their intensity. In their book, "The Language of Evaluation", Martin and White (2005) explained that 'positive affect' was a pleasant feeling that was enjoyable to experience, while 'negative affect' was an unpleasant feeling that was best avoided.

3. Results

This section is divided into two. The first part discusses the first research objective, where the data on the use of emotive language by Malaysians are presented. The next part discusses the second research objective, where the influence of Malaysian cultural values plays a role in the use of emotive language in *tweets* by Malaysians reacting to cultural appropriation of K-Pop idols.

3.1 Emotive Language Used by Selected Malaysian Twitter Users on Cultural Appropriation of K-Pop Idols

This subsection presents the overall results of the coding work on emotive language used by Malaysian *Twitter* Users. Table 1 summarises the findings based on the framework by Martin and White (2005).

Table 1. Identified Emotive Language Used by Selected Malaysian Twitter Users

| No. | Emotive Language | Frequency |
|-----|------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Positive | 0 |
| 2 | Negative | 20 |

From the table above, it is found that out of the 20 *tweets* analysed for this study, all 20 Malaysian *tweets* used negative emotive language. There was no use of positive emotive language used in the selected *tweets*.

3.1.1 Positive Emotive Language

Social media has transformed into a vital platform for communication, information sharing, community engagement, and addressing social issues like cultural appropriation. Online activism, as exemplified, plays a crucial role in addressing public concerns effectively (Seelig et al., 2018). Individuals with similar perspectives in the realm of social media communication

can unite, fostering collective efforts to bring about societal or social change through social media activism (Chon & Park, 2020). Cultural appropriation, as defined by Rogers (2006), is the taking of components from a subordinated culture by a dominant culture without any real reciprocity, permission, or compensation. A study by Shresta (2019) where she interviewed Dr. Phyllis George and Dr. George McClellan each provided their own interpretation of cultural appropriation based on personal experiences, but there was unanimous agreement that the term "appropriation" carries a negative connotation. The sentiment of disapproval towards cultural appropriation is consistent with findings from Nilsson's study (2022) involving South Asians in Australia, where participants in the study felt negative emotions such as shame and anger towards Indo Chic cultural appropriation. Hence, the increasing awareness of cultural appropriation has prompted individuals to use social media platforms as avenues for voicing their concerns, critiquing instances of cultural appropriation, and demanding accountability from those responsible. The rise of social media facilitates both the dissemination of marginalised cultures and the widespread critique of cultural appropriation (Elmahdi & Hezam, 2022), which is a likely explanation for why there are no findings of positive emotive language in this dataset.

3.1.2 Negative Emotive Language

Table 2 illustrates the frequency of cultural appropriation incidents by K-Pop idols that Malaysian tweeters react to in this dataset.

Table 2. Identified Issues that Malaysian Tweeters React to of Cultural Appropriation by K-Pop idols

| No. | Incident | Frequency |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Cultural Appropriation of Religion (Islam and Hindu) | 20 |
| 2 | Cultural Appropriation of Islam | 19 |
| 3 | 'Kingdom's album resembling the Quran | 15 |
| 4 | 'NCT's use of the Imam Husayn Shrine is a performance | 2 |
| 5 | Cultural Appropriation in K-Pop | 2 |
| 6 | 'Oh My Girl' culturally appropriating Indians and Hindus | 1 |

All 20 *tweets* in this dataset react to cultural appropriation of religion (both Islam and Hindu), which is a common theme across all *tweets*. Out of the 20 *tweets* 19 of them are reacting to incidents of cultural appropriation of Islam. 15 are reacting to the incident involving 'Kingdom's album design resembling the Quran, a significant issue in K-Pop that has sparked

reactions from Malaysians. Meanwhile, two *tweets* in the dataset are reacting to ‘NCT’s incident on using the Imam Husayn shrine in one of their performances. Two *tweets* react to cultural appropriation of K-Pop idols overall (one *tweet* lists multiple examples of cultural appropriation of K-Pop idols, while the other *tweet* specifically focuses on Islamic cultural appropriation). Meanwhile, one *tweet* reacts to instances of cultural appropriation by ‘Oh My Girl’ where the girl group has appropriated Indians by dancing stereotypically like them to the song ‘Curry’ by ‘Norazo’ and worn *bindis*, appropriating Hindus. For example, *Tweet* ELN1 reacts to NCT’s incident of cultural appropriation.

Tweet ELN1:

I'm so tired of nct constantly doing CA especially in today's make a wish performance :// going to unstan honestly a literal masjid was right there

Standard English: I'm so tired of NCT constantly doing cultural appropriation, especially in today's "Make A Wish" performance :// I'm not going to like them anymore. Honestly, a literal mosque was right there

The *tweet* above is reacting to an instance of cultural appropriation by Korean boy group, ‘NCT’, in their performance for ‘Make A Wish (Birthday Song)’. ‘Make A Wish (Birthday Song)’ is a song by one of the subunits in ‘NCT’, named ‘NCT U’. The incident that the *tweeter* specifically referred to which has seemingly made them “tired” of ‘NCT’s constant incidents of cultural appropriation is a performance by ‘NCT U’, for their song ‘Make A Wish’ on *Inkigayo* (a music programme by South Korea Seoul Broadcasting System, or SBS, a South Korean television network) on the 25th of January 2020. In the performance, Chua (2020) described that fan on social media recognised visuals during the performance as the Imam Husayn Shrine (see Figure 4.1), a location that serves as both a mosque and the burial site of Husayn ibn Ali (Imam Husayn). Akbar and Isakhan (2023) explained Husayn ibn Ali is a key figure for Shia Muslims. He is the son of Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima and cousin, Ali. The Imam Husayn Shrine (see Figure 4.2) is located in Iraq and is a holy site for Shia Muslims where it is a place for pilgrimage, especially during the annual event known as *Arbaeen*, to commemorate the sacrifices of Husayn ibn Ali (Al-Kadhimi, 2019).



Figure 1. Imam Husayn Shrine from NCT's "Make A Wish (Birthday Song)" Performance



Figure 2. Imam Husayn Shrine

The *tweet* starts with the phrase “I’m so tired”, signifying the first use of negative emotive language. ‘Tired’ in this context is defined as the “feeling that you have had enough of somebody/something because you no longer find them/it interesting or because they make you angry or unhappy” (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.g).

The word “so” further emphasises the use of the word “tired”, where it is used as an intensifier adverb. Bordet (2017) reports that the amplifying effect of “so,” typically indicates a greater degree compared to “very” or “really”. Hence, in Tweet ELN1, the use of “so” in this context emphasises the strong feelings of exhaustion or annoyance regarding NCT's perceived cultural appropriation, particularly in their ‘Make A Wish (Birthday Song)’ performance.

The *tweeter* also used the word “constantly”, which is defined as “all the time; repeatedly” by Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (n.d.a). This indicates that this is not the first time ‘NCT’ has

been pointed out in a cultural appropriation incident, signifying that this has been an ongoing issue that is bothering the *tweeter*. There is also the use of the emoticon “://” which can further enhance the use of the word ‘tired’ in the *tweet*. The emoticon “://” adds a visual element to possibly express a feeling of disappointment or dissatisfaction towards ‘NCT’ in their cultural appropriation incident in their ‘Make A Wish (Birthday Song)’ performance.

This emoticon is quite similar to the confused face emoji, which is often used to express slight sadness, disappointment, frustration, or convey confusion or hesitation (Emojipedia, 2012).

Lastly, the phrase “going to unstan” indicates a negative reaction as a fan (*tweeter*) after witnessing this incident of cultural appropriation. “Stan” used to be a negative term associated with obsessive fans but now means being a super fan, especially of celebrities in music (Trigo, 2020). Here, the term “unstan” is used where the prefix “un-” is added in front of the word “stan”. Jevric (2019) explains that the prefix “un-” has two meanings: it can indicate removal or reversal, as seen in words like “undress” or “undo,” and it can signify negation, as seen in words like “unhappy,” “unimportant,” or “unlucky.” In this context, the prefix “un-” means the later, where the *tweeter* expresses the want to negate themselves from being a super fan (stan) of ‘NCT’ after witnessing the use of visuals from the Imam Hussayn shrine in their ‘Make A Wish (Birthday Song)’ performance.

The *tweeter's* dissatisfaction, conveyed through negative language, may stem from their Malaysian identity, shaped by religious values. The *tweet* expresses frustration with NCT's repeated cultural appropriation, indicating strong disappointment and a potential decision to disassociate as a fan.

3.2 The Influence of Malaysian Cultural Values on Tweets Reacting to Cultural Appropriation of K-Pop Idols

This section discusses the influence of Malaysian cultural values on *tweets* reacting to cultural appropriation of K-Pop idols. The cultural values are discussed through Hofstede's cultural dimensions; power distance, collectivism/ individualism, masculinity/ femininity, uncertainty avoidance, time orientation and indulgence/ restraint.

3.2.1 Power Distance

In cultures characterised by high power distance, celebrities are highly admired and held in great esteem (Winterich, Gangwar, & Grewal, 2016). Malaysians prioritise respecting authority figures, as their values are strongly influenced by religion (Aziz, 2021). When K-Pop idols, considered influential figures, are perceived as culturally appropriating, negative emotive language is used to express disappointment in the breach of respect for cultural norms and hierarchical values. This can be illustrated from *Tweet* ELN13.

Tweet ELN13

THIS IS SO DISAPPOINTING! PLEASE RESPECT MY RELIGION 🙏 I LOVE KINGDOM BUT PLEASE DONT MAKE ME LOST MY INTEREST FOR THEM BCS OF THIS. WE NEED APOLOGIES IS THAT SO HARD FOR U TO DO SO?

Standard English: This is so disappointing! Please respect my religion, I love Kingdom but please don't make me lose my interest for them because of this. We need an apology, is that so hard for you to do so?

Throughout *Tweet* ELN13, the *tweeter* uses 'caps lock' to show that it "IS SO DISAPPOINTING" to see that Kingdom's album cover is similar to the Quran. The use of negative emotive language in the entire *tweet* conveys a disappointed and frustrated tone. The *tweeter* writes "PLEASE DONT MAKE ME LOST MY INTEREST FOR THEM" conveying this as an after effect of witnessing this incident. The *tweeter* demands for an apology for disrespecting their religion (Islam) at the end of the *tweet*.

The tweet here has sentiments of disappointment, frustration, and the expectation of respect from influential figures, which are indicative of the cultural dimension of power distance. Celebrities, being influential figures, should be positive role models, as explained by Spurgin (2012). de Brouwer (2020) notes that when celebrities, often seen as near-perfect figures, fail to meet expectations as role models, it can cause frustration and anger among their followers. In high power distance societies, there is an emphasis on respecting authority figures and influential individuals; in the Malaysian context this could be due to the influence of religion, as to why these *tweets* convey a sense of dissatisfaction when this expectation is perceived to be unmet.

3.2.2 Collectivism vs Individualism

Malaysia is a collectivistic society, where the value of *Muhibah* can show this societal trait, as it fosters unity through open dialogue, family bonds, harmony, sincerity, trust, integrity and respect. As Malaysians who are deeply rooted in a collectivistic society shaped by *Muhibah* principles, they may react with negative emotive language, as shown in *Tweet* ELN16 below and *Tweet* ELN18;

Tweet ELN16

aren't we tired of advising the same damn community

Standard English: Aren't we tired of advising the same damn community?

This *tweet* is reacting to Kingdom's album cover design being similar to the Quran. The *tweeter* is implying that there have been many instances of K-Pop idols disrespecting Islam by cultural appropriation, and that the Muslim community is 'tired' on advising the K-Pop community (these may be targeted to K-Pop idols and K-Pop companies) who culturally appropriates Islam.

In *Tweet* ELN18, the *tweeter* listed multiple instances of K-Pop idols being involved in cultural appropriation such as the "bindi" and "dreadlock". The *tweeter* 'calls out' to K-Pop companies that they "need to educate themselves and learn to stop appropriating other people's culture and religion" This is so that there will be no instances of them using other cultures and religions for "aesthetic purposes", to which the *tweeter* says they are tired of seeing.

Negative emotive language is employed in both instances to convey shared disapproval, highlighting that the disappointment extends beyond individual sentiments. This collective expression is emphasised through the use of inclusive terms such as 'we,' 'community,' and 'Kpop companies,' signifying that the concern is not isolated but rather a shared sentiment within the collective. In alignment with the concept of *Muhibah*, where the principles aim to foster peaceful coexistence among diverse individuals, Malaysians may resort to negative emotive language to voice apprehensions about potential disruptions to cultural harmony. This expression underscores the importance of influential figures, like K-Pop idols, respecting and upholding shared cultural values for the collective well-being of the community.

3.2.3 Masculinity vs Femininity

With Malaysia having a balance for both, it represents a unique societal blend where the appreciation for assertive behaviour coexists with the value placed on modest conduct; where this trait can be highlighted through "*budi bahasa*" as a politeness strategy. *Tweet* ELN19 demonstrate this value.

Tweet ELN19

It's makes me so uncomfortable...Send me the email templates too..

Sm should be throne as king of CA,

Islam, black even indigenous 🙄

I hope one day kpop companies should hire cultural advisor..

Standard English: It makes me so uncomfortable. Send me the email templates too... SM should take the throne as kings of cultural appropriation. Islam, Black, even Indigenous cultures. I hope one day K-Pop companies will hire a cultural advisor.

The *tweeter* is reacting to the incident of NCT's 'Make A Wish (Birthday Song)' performance that had an image of the Imam Husayn Shrine. They express feeling 'uncomfortable', which is then followed by asking for an email template to be sent to NCT's company (SM Entertainment) to educate them on the issue. The *tweeter* further shows their 'uncomfortability' with this issue by stating that SM Entertainment should take the throne as 'king's of cultural appropriation', which is then justified with cultures that SM Entertainment has culturally appropriated in the past. The *tweet* then closes with a statement that they hope K-Pop companies will hire a cultural advisor to mitigate this issue.

From the tweet, it is evident that there is a balance of masculinity and femininity in reactions. A more masculine approach is indicated through directness, by showing disappointment and uncomfortability in instances of cultural appropriation by K-Pop idols. Demonstrating concern by offering advice to K-Pop companies, reflects a more feminine stance. This suggests that people are balancing between being direct and caring in their responses, showcasing a multifaceted approach to addressing cultural appropriation in K-pop. This aligns with the idea of *budi bahasa*, as it displays the use of a negative politeness strategy, where individuals balance expressing dissatisfaction straightforwardly with a more considerate and polite tone through advice.

3.2.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

As a fairly less avoidant society, Malaysians possibly demonstrates this trait through the value of '*cakap berlapik*' as a politeness strategy, as it emphasises using thoughtful communication to navigate uncertainty, fostering adaptability and understanding, which can be observed in the *tweets* below;

Tweet ELN6

i don't care if it's marketing, **this will bring negative points to Kingdom image** for sure. it's a **terrible marketing**.

Standard English: I don't care if it's marketing. This will bring negative points to Kingdom's image for sure. It's terrible marketing.

This *tweet* responds to Kingdom's album design, which resembles the Quran. The tweeter reacts negatively, assuming that the similarity between the album design and the Quran is a deliberate marketing tactic. They further go on to say that this is a bad strategy and 'will bring negative points to Kingdom's image', as it is terrible marketing.

Tweet ELN17

THIS is the real issue. Hello, who's the art designer? This is absolutely unnecessary and no justification needed for the stupidity.

Standard English: This is the real issue. Hello, who's the art designer? This is absolutely unnecessary and no justification is needed for this stupidity.

This *tweet* is reacting to the same issue of cultural appropriation as in Tweet ELN17. Here, the *tweeter* reacts negatively by questioning who's the art designer responsible for the design of the album cover. They further go on that the design of the album cover was unnecessary and it cannot be justified. The design on the album cover is seen as 'stupid' to the negligence of the 'art designer'.

In both *tweets* critiquing Kingdom's album design, negative emotive language like "negative points," "terrible," and "stupidity" are used to react to this issue. With a low uncertainty avoidance score, negative language is used to express discontent when cultural norms are disregarded, given that Malaysia has a 63.5% Muslim population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023), which suggests that the majority of Malaysians are familiar with the Quran. The *tweets* employ a direct communication style, lacking typical politeness strategies and leaning toward the "Bald on Record" (see 2.2.4 for this) approach. However, they exhibit elements of '*cakap berlapik*' by attributing responsibility not only to 'Kingdom' but also to its management, maintaining thoughtfulness and directness in critiquing the cultural appropriation issue.

3.2.5 Long-term vs Short-term Orientation

As a more short-term oriented society that tends to preserve societal norms, Malaysians possibly demonstrate this through the concept of face/ face saving as a politeness strategy in their speech, which can be observed in the *tweets* below;

Tweet ELN14

yet another reason to leave kpop

Standard English: Yet, another reason to leave K-pop.

The *tweet* is reacting to Kingdom's album cover being similar to the Quran. In this *tweet*, the *tweeter* expresses their 'disappointment' in the album cover design by stating that the disrespect towards Islam is 'another reason' to leave K-Pop. This conveys the message of the immediate impact that the incident has on the *tweeter*.

Tweet ELN15

FOUL. MESSED UP

Standard English: Foul, messed up.

Similar to Tweet ELN14, the *tweeter* expresses their disapproval towards Kingdom's album cover by saying that it is "FOUL." and "MESSED UP". The *tweet* shows an immediate response on the issue, although it is short.

For both *tweets*, the responses are short but straightforward and focuses on the present impact that the situation has on the *tweeters* as K-Pop fans. Here, it can be seen that negative emotive language is used to express disapproval when K-Pop idols are disrespecting a culture, which indicates that they are rooted in their tradition to uphold religious and cultural values. In both tweets, not delving into explicit details about the Quranic similarity is an effort to navigate a sensitive topic while expressing discontent. The individuals aim to save face by avoiding direct confrontations or explicit criticisms to prevent conflicts within the K-pop community. The use of negative emotive language and avoiding explicit details, showcase a commitment to uphold cultural values and navigate uncertainty, illustrating the influence to preserve traditions and norms.

3.2.6 Indulgence vs Restraint

With a moderately high score, Malaysia is a more indulgent society. However, in the tweets, Malaysians exhibit more restraint. This can be possibly attributed to the value of "*jaga hati*" (minding people's feelings) as it involves being mindful of others' feelings, showing consideration, and maintaining one's reputation in the eyes of others (Jaafar et al., 2004) to show politeness. "*Jaga hati*" emphasises the need for expressing disapproval with a degree of restraint, particularly in sensitive matters like cultural respect, as shown in *Tweet* ELN10 and *Tweet* ELN20.

Tweet ELN10

Can kpop leave Islam alone? 🙄 It's one thing to be **ignorant**, and it's another thing to **refuse improvement and ignore how the believers' of the religions feel**. Art is so wide yet you choose something **so controversial**, it's **becoming annoying** at this point.

Standard English: Can K-Pop leave Islam alone? It's one thing to be ignorant, it's another thing to refuse improvement and ignore how the believers' of the religion feel. Art is so wide yet, you choose to do something so controversial. It's becoming annoying at this point.

This *tweet* is reacting to Kingdom's album cover that has resemblance to the Quran. The *tweeter* is seen to be gradually frustrated with the issue of K-Pop idols disrespecting Islam by cultural appropriation. Here, the *tweeter* asks the K-Pop industry to 'leave Islam alone' as it's them being 'ignorant' and to 'refuse improvement and ignore how the believers of the religion feel'. The *tweeter* implies that art is diverse, yet you (could be directed to 'Kingdom'/ 'Kingdom's company, GF Entertainment), choose to do 'something so controversial' which the *tweeter* finds annoying.

Tweet ELN20 points out instances of K-pop idols appropriating Islamic culture. They state that there is a difference in approach on how K-Pop celebrities that appropriate other cultures besides Islam, they would apologise but will not when the culture appropriated is Islam. The *tweeter* observes that they "NEVER SAW A KPOP CELEBRITY APOLOGIZED FOR CA ISLAM ISTG".

In the *tweets*, restraint can be seen through the use of negative emotive language when K-Pop idols engage in actions perceived as culturally insensitive. "*Jaga hati*" can be observed by how the *tweeters* still try to maintain a degree of politeness in their *tweets* by not using disrespectful language although there is frustration detected in the *tweets*. Despite being a slightly indulgent society, Malaysians exhibit temporary restraint in their choice of negative language, influenced by the severity of cultural appropriation issues. This underscores their cultural sensitivity, advocating for a more considerate and respectful approach in such discussions.

Interestingly, the Malaysians (represented in this dataset) are all K-Pop fans themselves, exhibit intolerance towards cultural appropriation of K-Pop idols. The present study uses cultural dimensions as a guideline, revealing that Malaysians respond to K-Pop idols' cultural appropriation in line with these values, except for the indulgence-restraint dimension, where Malaysians are more restrained. These findings mirror studies by Shresta's (2019) and Nilsson's (2022) findings, where there is a 'disapproval' of cultural appropriation. Cultural influences can shape the communication of emotions and sentiments through language (Absattar et al., 2022). Hence, it is clear that the use of emotive language by Malaysian *tweeters* reacting to cultural appropriation of K-Pop idols is influenced by Malaysian cultural values, as the findings in the present study suggest.

4. Discussion

This discussion analyzes the use of emotive language in Malaysian reactions to the cultural appropriation of K-Pop idols through the lens of Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory,

particularly focusing on the ‘affect’ subcategory under the ‘attitude’ domain. The findings indicate that Malaysian tweeters predominantly employ negative emotive language, aligning with previous studies. For example, Engelbrecht (2020) notes similar negative affect in reports on rhino poaching, highlighting how such language evokes empathy and concern. In both scenarios, negative emotive language is used to express dissatisfaction and demand change, suggesting strong audience disapproval.

The present study reveals that Malaysian tweeters utilize negative emotive language to criticize K-Pop idols and the industry, echoing Kadri et al. (2020), who found that emotive language in Malaysian online news is strategically deployed to engage readers. Tweets reflect a sense of dissatisfaction and call for accountability, with many users demanding apologies and threatening to disengage from the K-Pop fandom. Williams (2020) argues that fans experiencing cultural appropriation seek recognition and apology, a sentiment mirrored in the persistent calls for accountability by Malaysian tweeters. The use of emojis, capital letters, and intensifiers amplifies their frustration, emphasizing the seriousness of the issue.

Interestingly, Malaysian K-Pop fans who react negatively to cultural appropriation are part of a multicultural society, suggesting that their intolerance is shaped by cultural values. The study employs Hofstede’s cultural dimensions to explore these influences. For instance, power distance reflects an expectation for respect from influential figures, resonating with Malaysian religious and cultural norms. The collectivistic nature of Malaysian society is apparent in the shared disapproval expressed through *Muhibah* principles, emphasizing respect for cultural values.

Malaysian tweeters exhibit a balance between masculine directness and feminine concern, consistent with ‘*budi bahasa*’ (politeness). While expressing criticism of cultural appropriation, tweets often lack explicit details, reflecting an effort to maintain face and avoid conflict within the K-Pop community. Despite low uncertainty avoidance, tweeters adopt a direct approach while navigating the topic sensitively, blending ‘*cakap berlapik*’ (diplomacy) to hold K-Pop idols accountable. This restrained language, aimed at ‘*jaga hati*’ (protecting feelings), underscores the cultural sensitivity inherent in their discourse.

Overall, this study highlights how cultural values shape emotive language in reactions to cultural appropriation. These values—rooted in politeness, respect, and communal well-being—guide Malaysians in expressing disapproval. The findings align with Frese’s (2015) definition of cultural values as shared ideals of moral good and bad and support research by Shresta (2019) and Nilsson (2022), which shows cultural appropriation is viewed negatively across societies. Thus, negative emotional reactions from Malaysians reflect a cultural framework where emotive language serves both as a critique and a means of upholding cultural integrity.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the pivotal role of emotive language in Malaysian responses to cultural appropriation in the K-Pop industry. By applying Martin and White’s (2005)

Appraisal Theory, it reveals a predominant use of negative emotive expressions, reflecting strong dissatisfaction and a demand for accountability. These reactions underscore cultural values centered on respect, communal well-being, and the importance of politeness.

Malaysian tweeters exhibit a nuanced balance between direct criticism and cultural sensitivity, navigating their expressions to maintain harmony within the K-Pop community. Despite evident frustration, their language remains restrained, demonstrating an effort to protect feelings while voicing concerns.

Overall, the findings emphasize how cultural frameworks shape emotive responses, revealing that language serves as both a means of critique and a vehicle for preserving cultural integrity. This underscores the collective commitment of Malaysians to uphold their cultural values in the face of perceived injustices.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge that this research was self-funded and not sponsored by any organization.

Funding

Not Applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Macrothink Institute.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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