

INFLUENCE OF THAI DRAMA THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA ON POPULARITY OF THAI CULTURE: CASE STUDIES OF STUDENTS OF BUSAN UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN STUDIES

Youngseon KO¹

¹ Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand; zz0408zz@naver.com

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 24 February 2023

Revised: 15 March 2023

Published: 27 March 2023

ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of social media in Korea, the influx of dramas from Southeast Asia, especially Thailand, is increasing. As a result, it can be seen that the awareness and popularity of Thai culture is increasing. This research aims to determine whether Thai drama through social media influence the level of interest in Thai culture among Koreans. It analyzes how Thai dramas introduced to Korea through the development of social media contribute to the rise in popularity of Thai culture. In addition, the research attempts to analyze which Thai culture Koreans are interested in and how they experience those cultures in South Korea. Many Thai workers and immigrants live in Busan, and there is a university with a Thai language department in Busan, so it was selected as Busan. Therefore, The paper aims to examine whether watching Thai dramas through social media stimulate people's interest in Thai culture and influence the popularity of Thai culture by doing in-depth interview and questionnaires with a sample group. The sample group consisted of students of Busan University of Foreign Studies. And in conclusion, it was concluded that the influx of Thai dramas definitely influenced Koreans in terms of food, language, history, idols, and travel. In addition, an additional conclusion was drawn that not only this cultural element, but also that Thailand has a positive view on the overall image, and that it is a country that will continue to be watched with continued curiosity.

Keywords: Social Media, Thai Drama, Thai Culture, South Korea, Korean Students

CITATION INFORMATION: Ko, Y. (2023). Influence of Thai Drama Through Social Media on Popularity of Thai Culture: Case Studies of Students of Busan University of Foreign Studies. *Procedia of Multidisciplinary Research*, 1(3), 11.

INTRODUCTION

Diplomatic relations between Korea-Thailand began in earnest with the Korean War. Due to the relationship established during the Korean War, Thai people have clear memories of Korea and its people. According to the Thai government, after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Thailand, as a member of the United Nations forces, was the first Asian country to dispatch 4,000 ground troops to Korea, as well as to send 40,000 tons of rice as aid. This was viewed positively by Koreans, and as time passed, overseas travel became free, and as Thailand established itself as a tourist destination country, the number of tourists to Thailand began to increase. According to Korea Tourism Organization, since the late 1980s, when overseas travel became free, Korean tourism to Thailand has increased. The number of tourists from Korea was less than 8,000 in 1986, and it gradually increased and exceeded 300,000 in 1995, a nearly 40-fold increase. In 1995, the number of Korean tourists accounted for about half of the tourists from the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Since then, the number of tourists has increased significantly, from 700,000 in 2002 to over 1 million in 2005, ranking third among foreign tourists visiting Thailand after Japan and Malaysia. From 2010 to the present, on average, the number of Koreans visiting Thailand is about 63,337 visitors, which has increased by 24.75% compared to the previous year every year, accounting for nearly 6.98% of all visitors. As the number of Koreans visiting Thailand increased, at the same time, the number of Thai tourists visiting Korea and the number of Thai workers coming to Korea to work has also increased.

In addition, during the past 20 years, South Korea has been the top destination of Thai workers. Factories in Busan employ foreign workers, and Thai workers began to flow into Korea in large numbers after the Memorandum of Understanding for the Employment Permit System was signed between Korea and Thailand in 2004. Based on data from the Ministry of Justice, Korea Immigration Service, the number of Thai workers coming into Korea from 2017 to the present increased by 5,000 to 7,000 a year. The proportion of Thai workers is higher than foreign workers from other countries, and a small community of Thai workers was formed. They have become the channel of cultural exchange between Thai and local Korean. Services for the Thai community, such as Thai restaurants, were established to provide services and goods for not only for Thai customers, but also for the local people.

Friendly relationship between Korean and Thai paved the way for the establishment of the Thai Department in the Busan University of Foreign Studies. This phenomenon is also a factor that makes Koreans aware of Thailand and Thai culture.

As Korea is an internet powerhouse, these days, social media is also developing overtime. With the development of social media, it has become easier to access media from various countries, and media from Southeast Asia have also recently become popular. In Korea, Thailand is the most well-known among Southeast Asian countries, and it is a country that has maintained a somewhat diverse cultural exchange compared to other Southeast Asian countries. Among the popular culture of Thailand, the most widely known in Korea is the movie. As social media continues to develop, the influx of mass media such as Thai films and dramas has become much more active than before, which is enough to make Koreans interested in Thai culture. As Thai films continued to flow into Korea, interest in and awareness of Thailand and Thai culture began to rise. This phenomenon can be expected to affect the interest in Thai culture among Koreans. As mentioned above, Busan is a city where there are many Thai workers and immigrants, and in proportion to this, the number of schools with Thai departments and Thai restaurants is increasing.

According to “Korea-Thailand Relationship” by Jeong Hwanseung (2015), it analyzes and describes how the relationship between Korea and Thailand began and progressed, and what civilizations and cultural exchanges and interactions took place in the process. Based on this, future cultural exchanges between the two countries are predicted and desirable development

directions are presented.

In addition, “The Joy of Thai culture” by Kim Hongkoo (2016), shows that not only the Korean Wave phenomenon in Thailand, but also the recent influx of Thai culture into Korea through Thai dramas, language exchanges, and food, explains the Thai wave in Korea, and shows the rising popularity of Thailand and Thai culture in Korea.

To explore about this research, the questionnaire and in-depth interview were conducted on a total of 200 respondents from bachelor's, master's and doctoral students in South Korea, with classification and categorization of opinions into groups, and summarize the results. Most of the questionnaire questions were aimed at finding out how the influx of Thai dramas affects the perception of Thai culture in Korea. In addition, it aimed to systematically find out how much and how Koreans are exposed to the culture through detailed questions on the five elements of Thai culture selected in advance. The questionnaire had a total of 15 questions and 1 subjective opinion question.

Therefore, this study aims to search how Thai drama through social media influence the level of interest in Thai culture among South Koreans.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are (1) to explore the general background of Thai dramas and series available on social media in the Korean market and (2) to study the impact of Thai series available on social media on the interest in Thai culture among Busan University of Foreign Studies students.

Thai Wave in South Korea

Korea and Thailand have active social and cultural exchanges. Thailand is a stronghold of the Korean wave in Southeast Asia and is very interested in Korean TV dramas, movies, records, and games. Similarly, in Korean society, Thai culture has been rapidly introduced recently, focusing on Thai massage, Thai food, and movies. Overall, Thai studies in Korea have developed, centered on the language, literature, and education fields, and the proportion of the same fields is still the largest in all fields ranging from dissertations, academic journals, and books (Kim Hongkoo, Lee Miji, “Thai Studies in Korea: Trends and Issues”, 2017). The Korean mass media recently introduced Thai people, Thai food and massage, Thai movies and dramas, and various other programs introducing Thai culture. As the central axis shifted from the drama-centered Korean wave to the K-pop-centered Korean wave, the amount of K-pop exports has been on the rise for the past five years. In addition to direct income from music sales due to K-pop, there has been an increase in foreign visitors due to K-pop performances, etc. (Kim Ju-Yeon and Ahn Kyung-Mo, “Impact of K-pop on Positive Feeling Towards Korea, Consumption Behavior and Intention to Visit from other Asian Countries”, 2012). It can be said that an increase in tourism income is expected. Unlike the previous method of disseminating Korean wave, K-pop spreads through online channels such as YouTube, and its ripple effect is greater. Among Asian countries, especially Southeast Asian countries, the country where the Korean Wave has become the most popular is Thailand.

Social media trend in South Korea

The modern society has entered a knowledge-based society, and as mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet PCs have been newly developed and quickly become common, it is possible to access the Internet anytime and anywhere through Wi-Fi and 5G data access methods (Jeong Heeseon, “The Evolution of Korean Social Network Service focusing on the Case of Kakao Talk”, 2012). The development of such mobile technology has laid the foundation for the rapid growth of the social media field, where individuals can interact widely with unspecified people around the world in real time. And the new generation, who are familiar with online media, has come to the extent that two-way communication has become a culture, and their desire for self-expression and friendliness has become stronger. If the existing community services such as Cyworld (Korean social media) or messenger were limited to

exchanges with people, social media that has recently emerged is a platform that can communicate with an unspecified and infinite number of people. It provides features and functions. Therefore, it means that a system that can interact with various people who do not know anything at all has been popularized by actively producing, sharing, and disseminating knowledge and information, away from maintaining the networks that we have known for fun and interest. (Ju Hyojin, Jeong Jaewoo, Cho Jooyeon, and Kim Taehee, “Effects of Motives for Social Media Use on Corporate Image: Twitter Account of Korail”, 2011) Social media or SNS (Social Network Service) has evolved through combination with other services rather than itself.

And, in smartphones with internet in hand, SNS is positioning itself as its core service (Jung Haeseon, “The Evolution of Korean Social Network Service focusing on the Case of Kakao Talk”, 2012). Previously, it was a space for communication through social media, but in modern society, culture is shared through various media such as images and photos, as well as individual opinions and communication with unspecified people. YouTube can be an example. Recently, in Korea, Naver Blog and YouTube's awareness were significantly lower than that of Kakao Talk, Korea's representative social media. However, as the times changed and the video medium developed, YouTube began to become active. As the popularity of YouTube soared, existing video media such as TV and cable entered YouTube, and traditional news media such as AP also provided videos, evolving from an amateur-oriented media to a professional-dominated channel. The genres of videos that viewers can use on YouTube are also very diverse, from entertainment to information such as music, movies, dramas, sports, politics, general news, science, and life information. The most common and popular genres are movies and movie review channels. The frequency of watching videos uploaded to drama and movie channels has increased, or it has become common for an unspecified number of people to communicate through comments while uploading videos where individuals explain their opinions or contents. In addition, in the case of typical social media, the functions are very diverse and the usage behavior varies according to the personality, but for YouTube, the audience tends to have more motivation (fun and information-seeking) like general videos than social media (Oh Dayyoung, “Effects of Demographic Features, Use Motives and Personality of Audience on Usage of YouTube”, 2017). Therefore, in this paper, through the development and popularization of these social media, it is necessary to study how Thai media has flowed into and influenced Korea through social media, and which social media is most exposed to Thai media.

Development of social media in Korea and influx of Thai culture

As Korea is an internet powerhouse, social media is also developing over time. It is true that all life has become much easier with the development of social media or SNS (Social Network Service), but people in the older generation still tend to prefer analog methods. On the other hand, the new generation is highly satisfied with this change, and those born in the 90s who experienced the transition from analog to digital age feel the difference in speed and efficiency and prefer it. With the development of social media in Korea, news, shopping, and communication are all conducted through social media in Korea. With the development of social media, it has become easier to access media from various countries, and media from Southeast Asia have also recently started to flow a lot. In Korea, Thailand is the most well-known among Southeast Asian countries, and it is a country that has maintained a somewhat diverse cultural exchange compared to other Southeast Asian countries. In particular, starting with the entry into the film industry in Thailand, recently, the number of consumers who consume and watch Thai dramas is also increasing.

Increase in awareness of Thailand in South Korea

Referring to the questionnaire, most of the questions were aimed at raising awareness of Thailand and Thai culture through watching Thai dramas on social media. Ultimately, the

channels to watch Thai dramas are YouTube and Netflix, where you can watch full videos, but not only this, but whenever a new series of Thai dramas comes out, promotional materials are also posted through other social media platforms such as Instagram and blog sites. It is only natural that in this way, exposure to the Korean public is increased and awareness of Thailand naturally increases. In particular, Thailand is one of the most preferred tourist destinations by Koreans from a long time ago, and thanks to Thai dramas through social media, positive perceptions of Thailand are bound to increase.

Rising interest in Thai culture in South Korea

Thai people's perception of Korea is quite good. According to the results of the BBC Country Favorability Survey, Thais' perception of Korea was found to be positive at 60-70%, which is because Thais see Korea as a country that has a positive influence on Thailand. Of course, Korea also considers Thailand as a friendly country through summit meetings and steady cultural exchanges, starting with it being a preferred travel destination, and the perception of Thailand is also positive. As time goes by, Korea not only has a favorable impression of Thailand due to the introduction of dramas and movies of various genres in Thailand due to the recent development of social media, but also increases curiosity and good awareness of various cultures.

Data Analysis

Researcher had access to 200 of respondents. Analyzed data from this 200 survey was verified through in-depth interview of 30 samplings. Among the 30 samplings, researcher classified them by gender, age, level of studies, income level, and whether they are a fan or non-fan of online Thai dramas.

The questionnaire started with questions about the experience of watching Thai dramas through social media, and included questions about the awareness, interest, and frequency of experiencing aspects of Thai culture mentioned above. And at the end of the survey, the paper will analyze the popularity of Thai culture in South Korea and whether Koreans are more willing to experience Thai culture after watching a Thai drama.

RESEARCH RESULTS

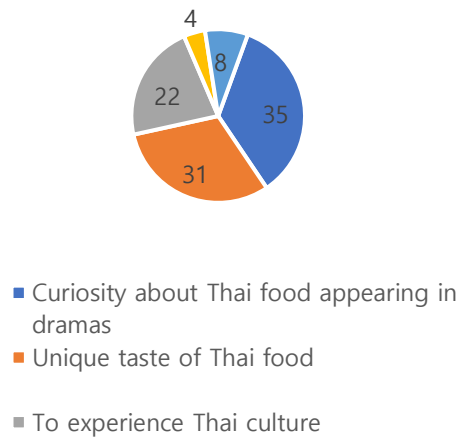
When summarizing the questionnaire, there were more female respondents than male respondents, and most of the respondents had a bachelor's degree. This is a part that should be taken into account that the app is used for college students.

In addition, the proportion of non-major respondents was much higher than that of Thai studies majors, which can be a sign that the survey results can be viewed more objectively since the response rate of those who have nothing to do with Thailand is high.

Moreover, the response rate of Thai dramas through social media exceeded 90%, indicating that this was enough to make people interested in Thailand's various cultures.

From the survey, a total of five elements were selected, such as food, travel, language, idol, and history in the survey of interest in Thai culture after watching Thai dramas.

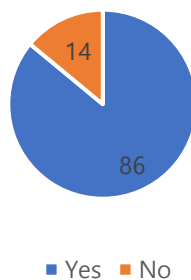
10-3. After watching Thai dramas, what makes you interested in Thai food?



First, let's look at Thai food. Korea has a large number of Thais among foreign workers from Southeast Asia. In fact, Thai restaurants were run by Thai migrant workers long before Thai dramas were introduced and activated. In Korea, Thailand had a good image as a tourist country, and there were often cases in which Thai food was sought out for its unique taste and exotic charm (Naver Encyclopedia, “Culture and tourism relations between Korea and Thailand”, 2022). After Thai dramas were actively introduced through social media, Korean viewers' curiosity about Thai culture increased, and food was the easiest and most local way to experience the culture.

According to the survey, after watching Thai dramas, they became aware of Thai food appearing on the screen, and most respondents said that they wanted to experience Thai culture and were attracted to the exotic taste of Thai food.

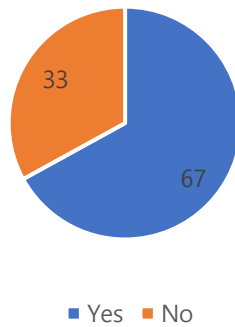
11-1. Has your interest in traveling to Thailand increased after watching Thai dramas?



Looking at the case of travel, in fact, Thailand has long been a famous overseas tourist country for Koreans, so the number of trips made before the standard year in the survey was not small.

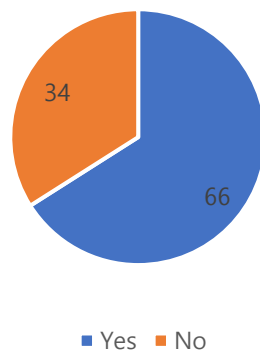
In addition, in fact, Thailand is a major overseas travel destination for Korea following China and Japan, and mutual visits between the citizens of the two countries are expected to continue to increase.

12-2. Did you become a fan of Thai idols
after watching Thai dramas?



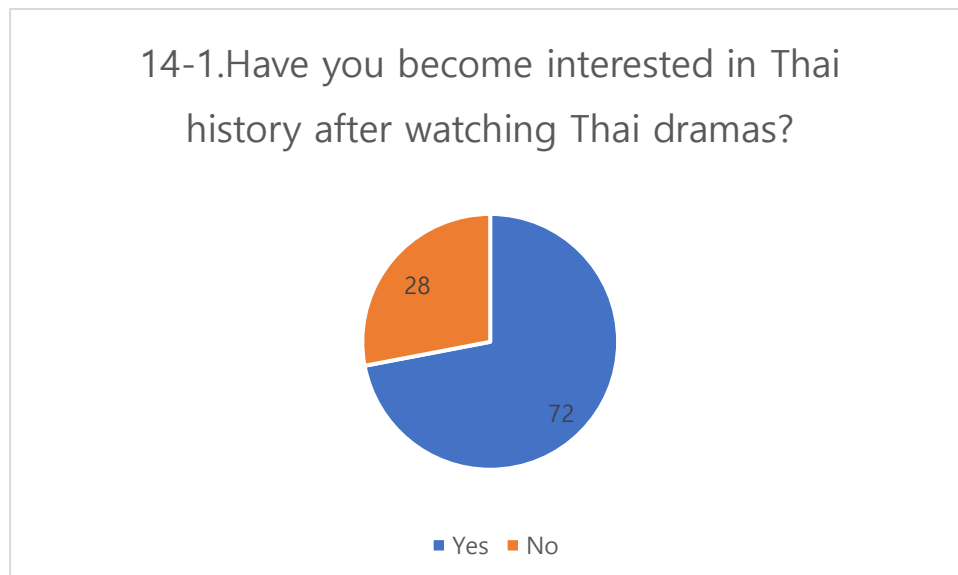
Regarding the level of interest in or being a fan of Thai idols, there were both cases in which Thai national idol fans became fans due to the influence of Thai dramas, and cases in which Thai idol fans became interested in Thai dramas because of the idols. Ultimately, this case can be seen as mutually positive. In particular, there were cases where Thai idols like Nichkhun made their debut in Korea even before Thai dramas became popular, so the introduction of Thailand was made little by little through the media. A few years later, as Thai dramas became more active and the number of debuts of Thai idols increased, Korean media also diversified programs that introduced Thai culture and language, focusing on Thai idols. For this reason, it can be seen that the awareness of Thai idols among Koreans has been much more active since the influx of Thai dramas.

13-1. Does Thai drama motivate you to
learn Thai language?



The number of people who are interested in learning the Thai language is also increasing. Even those who majored in Thai studies may start studying Thai language because they are attracted

to the pronunciation, tones, and atmosphere of the Thai language encountered in Thai dramas. Among Korean universities, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and Busan University of Foreign Studies are already teaching Thai language professionally. The survey shows that the percentage of respondents who said their interest in Thai language increased after watching Thai dramas and those who actually learn Thai language is not small.



History was a somewhat unfamiliar element compared to other Thai cultural elements. However, based on the questionnaire, when looking at the percentage of respondents about the degree of interest in Thai history, the number was not small. Through these results, it is not an exaggeration to say that Thai dramas have attracted the attention of Koreans in various cultural aspects.

However, in reality, it is not easy to visit Thai historical sites one by one even if you are interested in Thai history. Nevertheless, the percentage of cases in which Thai history was encountered through related books or through watching documentaries through social media was high. Of course, respondents who actually visited Thailand answered that they had visited Thai historical sites.

When considering in detail in each response from the survey, in the past, Korea's interest in Thai culture was limited to travel and food, but with the development of social media and the influx of Thai dramas, it can be seen that interest in Thai culture has widened.

In addition, the image of Thailand appears to be quite positive, and it is expected that Thailand's cultural popularity in Korea will rise in the future, as well as the continued positive relationship between Korea and Thailand in the future.

CONCLUSION

This research is a descriptive research which aims to understand the characteristics of how Thai drama has influenced on Thai culture in South Korea through social media.

In Korea, Thailand is the most well-known among Southeast Asian countries, and it is a country that has maintained a somewhat diverse cultural exchange compared to other Southeast Asian countries. In particular, starting with the entry into the film industry in Thailand, recently, the number of consumers who consume and watch Thai dramas is also increasing. There is a background behind the successful introduction of the Thai series in Korea through social media. Cultural exchanges between Korea and Thailand have been going on since before. Cultural exchange has continued to this day with the participation of the Thai army in the

Korean War as one of the earlier instances of this exchange. In the past, before the development of mass media, it was a person-to-person exchange, but now, as the time has developed, exchanges have become possible without direct way. Based on this, this research is going to study how Thai drama, the most popular Thai culture in Korea today, influences Korean society through social media, which has become a daily life method in Korea, and how Thai drama affects Koreans' interest in Thai culture.

The study "Influence of Thai drama through social media on popularity Thai culture in South Korea: A Case Study of Busan University of Foreign Language" used in-depth interview and questionnaire to investigate the key success of the influx of Thai dramas through social media in South Korea, as well as collecting data from library books, related researches, journals, etc. It also used a questionnaire to explore the impact of Thai drama on popularity of Thai culture in South Korea society.

Thailand, one of the traditional allies and strategic partners that dispatched troops to Korea during the Korean War, has maintained friendly and cooperative relations with Korea since the establishment of diplomatic ties in October 1958, and is still developing friendly relations in various fields including politics, culture and economy. According to the article, trade between South Korea and Thailand reached a record high of \$14.1 billion in 2018. Currently, there are about 400 Korean companies operating in Thailand. Among them, there are 210 manufacturing companies, and more than half of them are focusing on investments in electrical/electronic and automobile parts (Kim Cheongyeon, "Allied countries participating in the June 25 war... A place where the Korean Wave blooms and bears fruit", 2019). Above all, Thailand is a very important partner country in the New Southern Policy currently pursued by the Korean government. The New Southern Policy, which was officially announced through the keynote speech at the Korea-Indonesia Business Forum on November 9, 2017, is to diversify diplomacy that is biased toward the four major powers around the Korean Peninsula (USA, China, Japan, and Russia), and to find a new economic path. It is a policy to cooperate with ASEAN countries with great potential for development. In addition, Korea and Thailand are very active in various cultural exchanges including popular culture. In 2019, Lee Wook-heon, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Thailand, introduced Thailand as "a place where Hallyu blooms and bears fruit," suggesting that Hallyu culture is widespread in general products, including dramas and K-pop.

However, as time passed, the Thai wave in Korea became more and more popular as well as the Korean wave in Thailand.

As Korea is an internet powerhouse, the pace of development of social media is very fast. As much as it was fast, a lot of external cultural elements were introduced, and Thai culture, which had already been established little by little for a long time, was rapidly introduced through social media, and those are dramas and movies. In particular, as dramas and series quickly spread on Korean social media, Koreans became interested in Thai dramas and were naturally curious about and experienced Thai culture.

Considering the overwhelming proportion of Thai dramas among Southeast Asian dramas imported by Korea and the characteristics of drama series that can lead the spread of Thai pop culture in the future, their influence cannot be underestimated. In addition, the popularity of Thai food can be found in their own competitiveness, the Thai government's active marketing offensive, and Korean tourists' Thai travel experience, that is, a kind of reflux effect of the Korean Wave.

The increase in the number of tourists to Thailand can be attributed to the positive perception of Korea by Thai people who have experienced the Korean Wave and their admiration for Korea's economic development.

These phenomena will continue to increase in proportion to the spread of the Korean wave. In addition, the activation of Thai language education in Korea will be able to find the cause at

the policy level according to economic interests, and college students from both countries will be the subject of attention in that they can lead the spread of the Thai wave. In the future, the inflow of Thai dramas through social media is expected to increase. Furthermore, there is a high possibility that not only dramas but also various other cultural elements will flow into Korea and spread widely through this, and the awareness and popularity of Thai culture in Korea is expected to increase gradually. In addition, the influx of popular culture in Thailand will become important in relation to interactive cultural exchange with Korean wave. Finally, considering that there is a trend in Thailand that is wary of the unilateral spread of the Korean Wave as Korea's intention to expand its cultural economy, two-way cultural exchange can have the effect of allaying some of these doubts.

REFERENCES

- Jeong Hwanseung (2015), "Korea-Thailand Relationship"
- Kim Hongkoo (2016), "The Joy of Thai culture"
- Kim Hongkoo, Lee Miji (2017), "Thai Studies in Korea: Trends and Issues"
- Kim Ju-Yeon and Ahn Kyung-Mo (2012), "Impact of K-pop on Positive Feeling Towards Korea, Consumption Behavior and Intention to Visit from other Asian Countries"
- Jeong Heeseon (2012), "The Evolution of Korean Social Network Service focusing on the Case of Kakao Talk"
- Ju Hyojin, Jeong Jaewoo, Cho Jooyeon, and Kim Taehee (2011), "Effects of Motives for Social Media Use on Corporate Image: Twitter Account of Korail"
- Jung Haeseon (2012), "The Evolution of Korean Social Network Service focusing on the Case of Kakao Talk"
- Oh Dayyoung (2017), "Effects of Demographic Features, Use Motives and Personality of Audience on Usage of YouTube"
- Kim Cheongyeon (2019), "Allied countries participating in the June 25 war... A place where the Korean Wave blooms and bears fruit"

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. This is a fully open-access article distributed under the terms of the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).