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An Empirical Analysis of the Role of Social Media in Korean Media and Product Consumption

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Abstract

In the era of the Korean Wave 4.0, it is essential to investigate how social media usage influences Korean media consumption and then affects the future intention to consume K-Culture products. This study showed that the path of social media usage- Korea-related knowledge- Korean media consumption- the future intention to consume K-Culture products did not exist, and that the path of social media usage- Korea-related knowledge- the future intention to consume K-Culture products occurred. The implications and limitations were discussed.

Keywords: Korean Media Consumption, Korean Wave, K-Culture Products, Social Media

1. Introduction

The Korean Wave is a compelling cultural phenomenon which refers to the worldwide spread of Korean movies, dramas, music and other cultural products. Nowadays, the Korean Wave faces four main changes: first, the content includes not only mass culture but also language, food and traditional culture which are called K-Culture products. Second, the Korean Wave has become prominent in both the Eastern and Western hemisphere. Third, the Korean Wave diffuses through not only mass media but also the Internet. Finally, Korean lifestyles such as beauty, fashion and tourism are widely accepted all over the world. All these changes have led the Korean government to invest more into Korean cultural products which in return facilitated the diffusion of the Korean Wave [1]. This kind of trend of seeing the Korean Wave as a complete section of mass culture, language, fashion, beauty and other parts is referred as the Korean Wave 4.0. [2].

As the Korean Wave 4.0 experiences a channel shift from mass media to the Internet, the influence of the Internet, especially the usage of social media has become essential. Social media are

the most important factor contributing to the development of the Korean Wave as many global fans including Asian and Western fans enjoy Korean popular culture through social media [3]. Such usage of social media plays a significant role in the purchasing of K-Culture products. Social and digital media have become the new outlets for K-Culture products, and the convergence of the traditional media and new media have changed the transmission of Korean Wave [4]. The K-Culture fans have been heavily dependent on social media such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube to enjoy all kinds of K-Culture products [4]. Such phenomenon indicates that individuals interested in purchasing K-Culture products obtain and access information through social media which may affect the likelihood of purchasing. Thus, it is crucial to search the role of social media on the purchasing of K-Culture products. Also, K-Culture fans who play a significant role in the diffusion of the Korean Wave operate diverse online community to communicate with other K-Culture fans [4] and create many original performances and collective actions such as flash mobs and cover dances on social media platform [5]. Regarding the television industry, 'last-minute live' practice is strengthened through enhanced audience-producer interactivity via social media. Given the vital role of social media in the diffusion of Korean Wave, it is logical that individuals who utilize social media to obtain Korea-related knowledge are exposed to K-Culture products.

Past research demonstrated a general relationship between social media and consumer purchasing behavior. For instance, it was empirically demonstrated a significant increase in consumer purchasing when the consumer engaged in social media brand community [6]. However, there is insufficient research on social media and the consumption of K-Culture products, specifically. K-pop was able to spread globally and localize enough to maintain its loyal audience in South Korea and immediate geographic neighbors [3]. Furthermore, the Korean government shifted its cultural policy from indirect to direct support to the global trade of cultural product [4]. With governmental support, K-Culture relishes the means and resources necessary to stretch out to other nations. The Korean Wave is distinctive from a historical, geographical, and political standpoint, making K-Culture products distinctive as well. Given the unique status of Korea and its cultural influence on the international stage, investigating the impact of social media on the consumption of K-Culture products in terms of Korean-related knowledge and Korean media consumption will provide insight into how Korea as a national brand affects consumer choices.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media and New Trend of Korean Wave

According to the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism's study [7], the Korean Wave is facing a transmission channel shift from traditional mass media to the Internet. Nowadays, the Korean Wave is in a new era where the diffusion of the Korean Wave is embedded into fan-blogs, user-generated content (UGC) websites, peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing websites and social networking services (SNS). For example, K-pop artists and contents are often in the top rank on Twitter trending topic [8]. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the role of new media, especially social media in the diffusion of the Korean Wave.

Literature regarding the influence of social media on the Korean Wave can be categorized into two streams. One category is about institutional strategy using social media to bolster the diffusion of the Korean Wave. Korean entertainment agencies utilize social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube by increasing social media channels, involving users' participation and providing exclusive content [9]. Also, social media-based Korean Wave diffusion began to obtain its

royalty incomes, breaking the traditional commercial patterns of Korean Wave [10].

The other category focuses on the user level trying to investigate the relationship between social media usage of individuals and popularity of the Korean Wave. For instance, past research found that the Korean Wave fans of Indonesia enhanced their fan identity through recreation and redistribution of Korean Wave contents [11]. Further, the use of social media by fans heightened not only an individual's identity but also the prominence of Korean product and the Korean Wave [3]. Bottom-up grassroots aspects rooted in social media diffusion are now competing with the traditional corporate-controlled top-down aspects in Indonesia [8].

Moreover, a qualitative interview was with the North American fans of the Korean Wave about how it is integrated into social media space [12]. The results showed that technological affordances of the social media, the sociality of the social media space, and the impure textuality are three main contributors of the Korean Wave's diffusion on social media. This means that social media enable foreign K-Culture fans to communicate with other fans nationally and internationally, to learn more Korea-related knowledge which could not have been accessed before through traditional media, to develop their participatory cultural practices and to obtain more integrated contents. Given past studies that emphasize the role of social media on a user-level in relation to Korean Wave, this study hypothesizes that:

H1: Social media usage is a predictor of Korean media consumption (1a), Korea-related knowledge (1b), and Korea-related network (1c).

2.2 Factors of K-Culture Products Consumption

There are many research that investigates the reason behind how K-Culture products gained popularity. Some of these research focus on the relationship between Korean social network and the consumption of Korean media. It was found that the more Korean friends or colleagues a person has, the greater the chance he or she uses Korean media [13] while another study [14] drew an opposite conclusion. Furthermore, it was pointed that there is no significant correlation between exposure to Korean people and the enjoyment of K-Culture products [15]. It was suggested that traveling a foreign country influences the affection one feels towards that country [16]. Traveling to a country would lead to gaining some level of knowledge of the country and exposure to its people. A study proposed the foreign TV program consumption model which indicates that TV program genre consumption, general knowledge about the country, the origin of the cultures in dramas and exposure to the citizens from the exporting country would increase an individual's exposure to the foreign shows [16]. Based on these past studies, general knowledge of Korean culture and general TV consumption are significant predictors of Korean drama consumptions and this study hypothesizes that:

H2: Korea-related knowledge is a predictor of Korean media consumption (2a) and future intention to consume K-culture products (2b).

H3: Korea-related network is a predictor of Korean media consumption (3a) and future intention to consume K-culture products (3b).

2.3 Korean Media Consumption

As the Korean Wave expanded, Korean media consumption increased. Fans in East Asian countries prefer Korean television programs over Japanese and American programs due to quality, pricing, cultural affinities, and emotional reasons [4]. As a result, the total profit of Korean television program exports increased by 27.4 times between 1995 and 2007, which translated into \$5.5 million in 1995 and \$151 million in 2007 [18]. Korean music (K-pop) also holds a strong, global audience as it shows a hybrid of Western universalism and Asian culture and, as a response, Billboard launched a K-pop Billboard section in 2011 [19]. Around the same time, Korean industries including tourism and beauty products benefited. From 2006 to 2011, the export of Korean cosmetics to Thailand increased by more than 1000%, which was \$52.2 million in 2011, and Thai tourists increased from 190,972 in 2009 to 309,143 in 2011 [20]. Numbers and figures underscore that there was an increase in Korean media consumption and K-Culture product consumption in the early 21st century. Currently, however, research that studies the direct relationship between Korean media consumption and K-Culture products consumption is lacking. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Korean media consumption is the predictor of future intention to consume K-culture products.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Two hundred and seven participants, who were (1) non-Korean, (2) attending a college, and (3) able to complete an online survey either in English or Korean, were invited to participate in the study. Their ages ranged from 17 to 35 ($M=21$, $SD= 3.20$). The participants consisted of 117 Americans (43.33%), 32 Chinese/Hong Kong Chinese/Taiwanese (11.85%), 18 Japanese (6.67 %), 8 Thai (2.96 %) 10 Filipinos (3.70 %) and other nationalities.

3.2 Procedure

An online survey was available in English and Korean. The English version was produced first, and the Korean version was made based on the English one using back-translation method to ensure equivalence in meaning. Translation and back-translation were done separately by two bilingual research assistants who are fluent in English and Korean and their discrepancy were inspected to finalize both versions of the survey. Participants chose their preferred language to complete the questionnaire.

3.3 Measures

The survey measured six variables. The descriptive statistics of the variables and correlations among variables are included in Table 1.

3.3.1 Social media usage. Participants reported SNS platforms they use such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others. More kinds of SNS used by respondents indicated more SNS usage.

3.3.2 Korea-related knowledge. Respondents estimated their general knowledge about Korean movies, TV shows, actors or actress, music, singers, food, language and products on a 5-point scale: (1) Poor to (5) excellent. This scale was taken and modified from Chuang and Lee's study (2013). A higher score indicated more general knowledge of Korean culture. Reliability for the scale was .94.

3.3.3 Korea-related network. Respondents answered the number of Korean or Korean-related friends, non-Korean friends who recommend Korean culture products and non-Korean friends who like Korean culture products. This scale was adapted from [13] study. A higher score indicated more exposure to Korea-related people. We used Korea-related network instead of actual numbers of Korean friends on social media based on the logic of Dunbar's number, which indicates a biological constraint on the number of humans' social interactions from 100 to 200 [21]. This means that even if an individual has 900 Facebook friends, he or she would have an average of 150 friends with a stable interpersonal relationship. Therefore, coming up with an approximate number of Korea-related network would be a more accurate representation of an individual's network size.

3.3.4 Korean media consumption. Respondents were asked to estimate how frequently they consumed K-Culture products encompassing Korean movies, Korean TV shows and operas, Korean pop and music video, Korean webtoon and other. Response items are (1) never or almost never to (6) everyday. A higher score indicated more K-Culture products consumption.

3.3.5 Future intention to consume K-culture products. Participants reported their level of motivation to eat Korean food, to visit Korea, to experience Korean culture, to learn the Korean language, to buy Korean products, to live in Korea, and to make Korean friends. Response items ranged from (1) very unlikely to (5) very likely. Higher score indicated higher intention to consume K-culture products. Since the measurement items of general Korean media consumption were similar to the items for future intention to consume K-culture products, there were two-page unrelated survey questions between these two to minimize any carry over effect.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables and correlations among variables

	Social media usages (SU)	K knowledge (KK)	K network (KN)	K-media consumption (KMC)	Future intention to consume K Product (FI)
SU					
KK	.14*				
KN	.18*	.40**			
KMC	.12*	.64**	.22*		
FI	.29*	.56**	.30*	.463**	
Mean	2.79	20.75	24.42	8.67	29.81
SD	1.30	9.03	35.93	4.45	9.38

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

4. Results

A structural equation modelling program was used to test the model fit and significance [22]. The original predicted model did not produce acceptable fit indexes. The model was revised using the Modifications Indices provided by Mplus 7.4. The fit of the model could be improved by adding a correlation between Korea-related knowledge and Korea-related network ($\beta = .38, p < .001$). After excluding the nonsignificant paths, χ^2 was 1.26 ($df=2, p=0.533$), the comparative fit index (CFI) was .00 and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was .01. These show a good model fit [23]. The AIC and BIC of the hypothesized model was 7940.39 and 7983.57 which are higher than modified model with 7898.47 and 7941.65, respectively. It was suggested that the modified model with low AIC and lower BIC value is more acceptable [24]. The modified model is shown in Figure

1, the coefficients are those of the modified model and represent standardized beta weights. The standardized regression weights, standard errors and correlation of Korea-related knowledge and network are shown in Table 2.

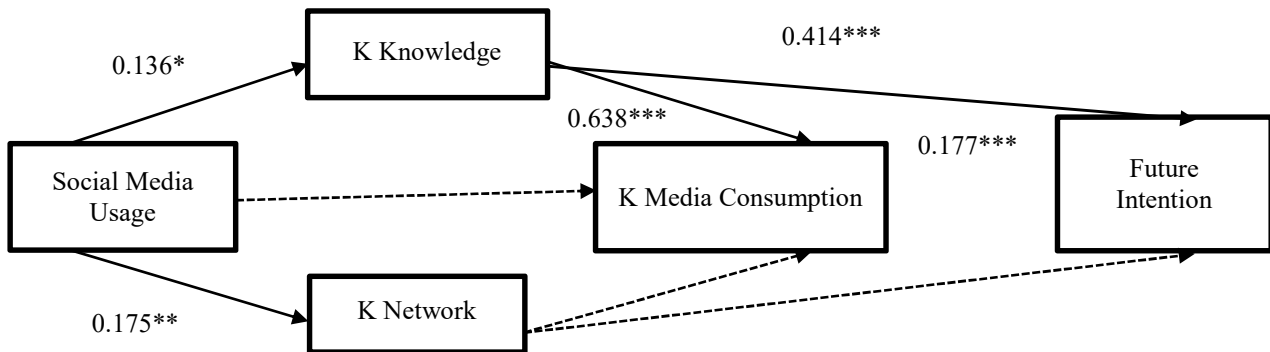


Figure 1. Structural equation model depicting significant regression paths (N = 270)

The results revealed that social media usage is a significant predictor of Korean-related knowledge ($\beta = .14, p < .05$) and Korean-related network ($\beta = .16, p < .01$), which supported H1b and H1c respectively. Respondents who use social media more would have more Korea-related knowledge and more Korea-related network. Also, Korea-related knowledge is a significant predictor of Korean media consumption ($\beta = .64, p < .001$) and the future intention to consume K-Culture products ($\beta = .41, p < .001$), which means H2a and H2b were supported. Respondents with more Korea-related knowledge would consume more Korean media and be more willing to consume K-Culture products. Korea-related network was an insignificant predictor of both Korean media consumption and the future intention to consume K-culture products, rejecting H3a and H3b. Besides, Korean media consumption was a significant predictor of the future intention to consume K-Culture products, which provided the evidence to support H4.

The indirect effects of social media usage and the future intention to consume K-Culture products were also assessed with bootstrapping method [25]. Many samples are extracted from the data set and the indirect effects in each bootstrap are estimated [25]. The confidence interval (CI) estimation is adopted for the indirect effects. The indirect effects are significant if the CI does not include zero. ML bootstrap with Monte Carlo procedure (10000 samples, 95% CI) was executed and results showed that the standardized indirect effect of social media usage on the future intention to consume K-Culture products was significant ($\beta = .07, SE = .031$) at $p < .05$. The indirect effect of social media usage on the future intention to consume K-Culture products via Korea-related knowledge was also significant ($\beta = .06, SE = .026$) at $p < .05$. However, the indirect effect of social media usage on the future intention to consume K-Culture products via Korean media consumption was not significant. Those results imply that there may exist another variable which can replace Korean media consumption in the path of social media usage-Korea-related knowledge-Korean media consumption-the future intention to consume K-Culture products.

Table 2. Standard errors, standardized regression weights, and correlations of variables

	Standardized Estimate	SE	Standardized Estimate/ SE
K knowledge	.136	.06	2.29*
← Social media usage			
K network	.175	.06	3.11**
← Social media usage			
K- media consumption	.638	.04	15.83***
← K knowledge			
Future intention to consume K-Culture products	.414	.06	6.49***
← K - media consumption			
The future intention to consume K-Culture products	.177	.06	2.94**
← K- media consumption			
K knowledge	.381	.05	8.49***
↔ K network			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Note: Coefficients are standardized scores. Single-headed arrow indicates standardized regression weights. Double-headed arrow indicates correlations.

4. Discussion

This study aims to discover how social media usage influences Korean media consumption and then contributes to the future intention to consume K-Culture products in the context that social media usage is playing an increasingly important role in the diffusion of the Korean Wave. Our findings offer some significant implications. First, our findings substantiate that social media usage is the predictor of both Korea-related knowledge and Korea-related network. These findings correspond with previous research which indicated that the potential customers of the Korean Wave who get Korea-related knowledge from social network is increasing [8]. However, social media usage was an insignificant predictor of Korean media consumption which partially contradicts some existing research arguing that social media usage may lead to Korean media consumption because it offers people interested in Korean media more opportunities to be exposed to Korean media [12].

Second, our study suggests that Korea-related knowledge is the predictor of Korean media consumption and the future intention to consume K-Culture products while Korea-related network is not. This result supports existing research that general knowledge about the country where culture the dramas are from will increase the exposure to the country's dramas [17]. Yet it did not substantiate the research which indicated that there exists a relationship between Korea-related network and Korean media consumption [14]. Especially, it was identified the importance of the role of Korea-related network in the Korean Wave [13], but Korea-related network might be overlapped with Korea-related knowledge which was not included in the study of [13]. Also, our findings did not support that Korean media consumption was the predictor of the future intention to consume K-Culture.

Third, our research identified an indirect effect between social media usage and future intention to consume K-Culture. The path of social media usage- Korea-related knowledge-the future

intention to consume K-Culture products was substantiated while Korean media consumption was eliminated. This finding implies that there may be another variable which could replace Korean media consumption in the path of social media usage- Korea-related knowledge- Korean media consumption- the future intention to consume K-Culture products. For example, psychological cultural proximity may be a plausible factor instead of Korean media consumption. Cultural proximity refers to sharing of a similar identity and analogical values [26] and audiences tend to consume foreign TV dramas, the exporting country of which is culturally more similar to their own country [27]. It can be speculated that more Korea-related knowledge contribute to cultural proximity towards Korea by prompting them to understand and accept Korean values, which finally lead to more intention to consume K-culture products. Another implication of the mediation model in which social media use influences purchase of K-Culture products through Korea-related knowledge but not Korean media consumption is that Korea-related knowledge provides more than the information from Korean media consumption. If K-Culture products are of interest to international consumers, Korean media consumption is usually mentioned as a necessary step, but the current finding indicates that Korea as a brand would be powerful after excluding Korean media consumption.

This study not only examined whether social media usage exerts an effect on the future intention to consume K-Culture products but also found how social media usage achieved this effect, which provides empirical results to the future research. From an academic standpoint, our findings advance literature on social media and their effects on media and product consumption by isolating factors contributing to future intention of consumption and by identifying the path taken. This study adds to existing literature on modern South Korea as it pertains to a global trend, the Korean Wave, and focuses on the consumption of Korean media and Korean products. Also, the findings contribute to future research on corporate social responsibility of Korean firms by investigating the effect of advertising firms taking various activities such as socially responsible actions through social media on the consumption of products of that specific firm.

The results also present practical implications. Understanding the path through which social media usage influences the K-Culture consumption intention, this study offers some characteristics of potential K-Culture consumers—those who use more social media and have greater knowledge of Korea and its culture. Such findings provide insight to the Korean government which is eager to expand the influence of Korean culture and to the companies which plan to produce and popularize K-Culture products by suggesting how to find potential customers. This study additionally provides a possible route to reach these potential customers given that greater social media usage leads to greater Korea-related knowledge which in turn leads to greater future intention to consume K-Culture products. Companies could backtrack potential consumer pools through this route. The Korean government and companies can narrow down and locate the potential customer pool and create content that targets these population in order to attract greater number of potential consumers.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations which should be addressed. Our data were collected through cross-sectional survey and were analyzed by structural equation modeling, which may cause a causality problem. However, the structural equation model supports that the best fitted model has been selected [28] and that there is a particular ordering of variables based on the causal hypotheses [29]. In spite of these, we should be cautious to interpret the causality. One of the hypothesis proposed in this study is that social media increase Korean media consumption, Korea-related knowledge and Korea-related network; however, inversely, Korean media consumption, Korea-related knowledge, and Korea-related network could increase social media usage. Given that one of the easiest ways for

the younger generations to obtain information is via the Internet and social media, they may gain knowledge about Korea from abroad by accessing social media. Thus, the younger generation who already have Korean knowledge or network could use social media more often to obtain information about Korea. Finally, social media usage was measured using a single item that asked which social networking sites participants used. This measure does not provide rich details about the extent of their social media use. Future studies will benefit from including more detailed measures to allow such examinations.

Future research can concentrate on the following issues. As Korean media consumption was not a predictor of the future intention to consume K-Culture products, it is essential to identify another variable which can replace Korean media consumption in the path of social media usage- Korea-related knowledge- Korean media consumption- the future intention to consume K-Culture products. Further, it would be significant to study moderating variables such as gender and age which influence the relationship of social media usage and the future intention to consume K-Culture products and whether respondents have been to Korea or not.

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