The Impact of the Korean Wave on Korean Food Consumption of Thai Consumers

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Abstract

As a result of globalization and rapid growth in technological progress over the past decades, Korean cultures have received much attention and expanded globally. "Hallyu" or "Korean Wave" has generated a soft power in Korea mainly through entertainment media, arts, fashion, language, and food. Among these, Korean food usually displayed and provoked by Korean dramas are among the most prominent ones that directly affected Thai consumers. This paper examines how the Korean Wave impacts Korean food consumption in Thailand. Our objectives are to study how the Korean Wave has influenced the Korean food consumption of Thai consumers and to provide useful empirical evidence for businesses so that the right consumer groups can be targeted. We collected primary survey data of Thai consumers in Chiang Mai and employed an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) method to estimate the impact of the Korean Wave.

Keywords: Korean Wave, Korean Food, Hallyu, Consumption Behavior, Theory of Planned Behavior

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the rise of globalization has made the world become more connected and interdependent in various economic, social, and cultural aspects. People, trade, investments, goods, ideas, cultures, and even diseases have become mobile across borders of different countries and continents and have done so in greater numbers and with increasing speed mainly due to the advancement in technology (Chareonwongsak, 2002).With technology continuously driving globalization and economic growth, one crucial thing that clearly has benefited from this is "culture". During the 21st century, Korean culture has received much attention and expanded worldwide. The term "Hallyu", which means "Korean Wave" has arisen. In the aftermath of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the Korean government began to develop and support the Korean entertainment industry strategically labeling it as a way to promote the growth and soft power of the country. Hallyu has then become increasingly prominent (Chandee, 2020). In just over a decade, Korean culture has subsequently become a global trend (LA Film School, 2021).

The Korean Wave has traveled to Thailand since 2001, starting with the first waves of Korean dramas such as "Autumn in my Heart," a K-Pop star "Rain," and an online game "Ragnarok" (Thandee, 2008). After that, localized versions of popular dramas were developed and broadcast in Thailand, notably "Dae Jang Geum" in 2005.

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Among these Korean Waves, Korean food usually displayed and provoked by Korean dramas are among the most prominent ones that directly affected Thai consumers. When " Dae Joung Gum" was the first broadcast in Thailand, a majority of Thai fans became interested in trying Korean food as appeared in the drama. Korean roasted pork, BBQ, kimchi, bibimbap, dumplings, instant noodles (ramyun), and dessert-like bingsu are among the most popular. As a result, Korean food businesses in Thailand started to grow and expanded rapidly during the beginning of the Korean Wave (Saleepoch, 2009). The sales volume of Korean food in Thailand increased by 20-30% during 2004-2005, and in 2009, there were about 80 Korean food stores in Bangkok. Fifty percent of the food stores in 2009 were established after the Korean Wave, most of which are in the Korean Town of Sukhumvit Roads (Saleepoch, 2009).

The Korean Wave still possesses an important effect on Thai consumers nowadays. Researchers are interested in studying the factors related to the Korean Wave across different generations of Thais. This allows us to analyze whether and how different age groups have different consumption patterns and cultural adoptions. Because Korean foods are usually promoted through series, music videos, and movies and have become widespread among Thai consumers, they are likely to affect their decisions and choices. In this paper, we, therefore, aim to examine how Hallyu impact Thai people's consumption of Korean food. Our research question is therefore whether and how Hallyu (Korean Wave) has impacted each generation of Thai consumers (generations X, Y, Z) in terms of their Korean food consumption. Our assumption is that Hallyu (Korean Wave) has influenced Korean food consumption differently across different generations of Thai people.

We collected primary survey data of Thai consumers in Chiang Mai and employed an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) method to estimate the impact of the Korean Wave. The result of this research can serve as empirical evidence of the impact of Hallyu on Korean food businesses. Businesses can also use the information to target the right consumer groups. Ultimately, restaurants or companies can use this result to build their business strategies. Thailand's food industry also benefits as we learn the behaviors and choices related to Korean food across different generations of consumers.

Literature Review

This chapter presents relevant variables and theories employed to examine the influence of Hallyu (Korean Wave) on Korean food consumption. As we primarily aim to explore consumer behavior, we first outline the theory of planned behavior (TPB), which consists of attitude, subject norm, perceived behavioral control, and intention. Then, we describe the relevant variables central to our study.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a psychological theory designed to predict and explain human behavior over which individuals have the ability to exert self-control (Ajzen, 1991). The theory posits that an individual's behavioral achievement depends jointly on intention and behavioral control. The model consists of five variables: attitude towards the behavior, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, intention, and behavior. The first three 'motivational' variables together shape an individual's behavioral intentions, which are then performed to influence behavior. As an individual has behavioral control, the intention is usually expected to impact the behavior or performance, which in turn should increase with behavioral control. Behavioral achievement is a basis for many theories, for example, animal learning (Hull, 1943), level of aspiration (Lewin et al., 1944), performance on psychomotor and cognitive tasks (Fleishman, 1958; Locke, 1965; Vroom, 1964), and person perception and attribution (Heider, 1944; Anderson, 1974).

This study applies the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to understand factors that affect Thai consumers to consume Korean food because this theory explains that the social behavior of an individual is related to intention and behavior (Ha, 2019).

Relevant Variables

1. Economic Value

Economic value is the measurement of benefits from any goods or services to people in society. It can also refer to the maximum price the consumer is willing to pay for a good or service and therefore can be higher than the market value (Banton, 2020).

2. Quality Value

Quality value refers to the social performance of a product or service. The quality value of the cognitive paradigm is developed by examining its deficiency to present alternative solutions (Allaire, 2018).

3. Emotional Value

Emotional value can impact human reasoning in one way or another. It can shape judgment and behavior, and thus can influence customer reasoning, customer judgments, and customer behaviors (Martin et al., 2008).

4 Epistemic Value

Epistemic value relates to cognitive successes: true beliefs, justified beliefs, knowledge, and understanding. True beliefs with justified beliefs will help make any action positive and consistent with the social context, but false beliefs may lead to mass destruction. The knowledge and understanding will help things to be more consistent and will help foster the true and justified beliefs that were there in the first place (Bondy, 2015).

5. Familiarity

Familiarity, in terms of the economic aspect, is the thing that can affect consumer behaviors, such as preference, trust, perceived risk, confidence in a decision, and behavioral intention (Flavián, Guinalíu, & Gurrea, 2006).

6. Subjective Norm

Subjective norm is imposed by comprehending social pressure from external factors, such as people in society, for an individual to behave in a certain way and their motivation to comply with people's views (Ham, Jeger, & Frajman Ivković, 2015).

7. Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived behavioral control can be defined in two significant aspects, which are on a conceptual basis and a practical basis. A conceptual basis is similar to self-efficacy, but a practical basis is often assessed by the ease or difficulty of the behavior (Wallston, 2001).

8. Intention to Consume Korean Food

Intention to consume Korean food refers to the individual's intent to purchase or consume foods in the Korean style. Behavioral intention is considered to narrate values and identity more clearly than actual past behavior (Qasim et al., 2019).
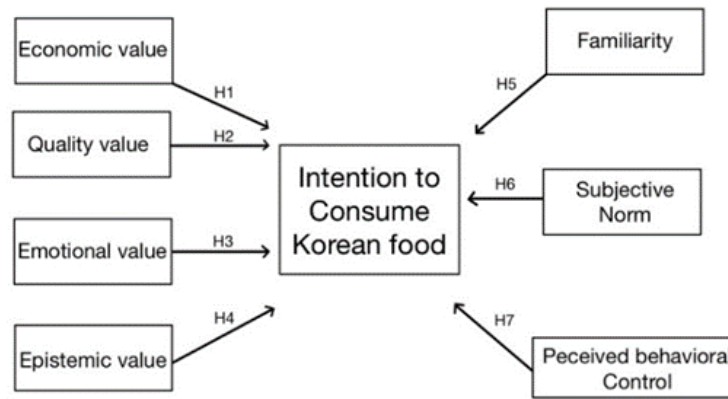
Figure 1 Conceptual Reserve Model

Research Methodology

This paper studies the impact of the Korean Wave on the Korean food consumption of Thai consumers by using primary survey data of consumers in Chiang Mai and multiple regression analysis.

In this section, we describe the population and sample, tools and data, data analysis, and research methods. The target population of this study is Thai consumers in Chiang Mai who have experienced or consumed Korean food. According to Sangkakorn and Suwannarat (2013), Chiang Mai is a major tourist destination in Thailand because of its unique culture and various tourist attractions. The tourism industry is the main Income that nourishes Chiang Mai—resulting in income distribution, employment, and the development of many industries. Therefore, Chiang Mai is considered one of the important provinces in terms of the economy and cultural diversity of Thailand. For this reason, Chiang Mai has a diverse food industry and thus justifies our use as a sample area. The Taro Yamane formula is used to calculate the sample size (Yamane, 1973).

Population and Sample

The target population of this study was Thai people in Chiang Mai province who have experienced Korean food. Chiang Mai Provincial Public Health Office reported that the population in Chiang Mai province in 2020 was 1,629,434. Using Taro Yamane's sample size calculation, our minimum sample size required is 400 respondents.

Tools and Data

We launched survey questionnaires to collect data from the sample. The method that we used to collect the data is convenient random sampling. Elements in the questionnaire were derived from the literature, and we modified some elements to be suitable for our research. We adopted the five-point Likert scale with the range of "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (5) for respondents to rate each factor that may affect them to consume Korean food. Sample questions from the survey are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample Questionnaires

Variable	Survey Questions	Source
Personal information	Q1 Age Q2 Gender Q3 Level of education Q4 Work situation Q5 Income per month Q6 Have you ever experienced Korean food?	Kraus and Cazlan, (2019) Fujita, Shiono, and Maki (2014)
Economic value	Q1 The price of Korean food, in general, is expensive. Q2 Korean food could be approximated with the market price of food from other nationalities. Q3 Costs incurred in dining at a Korean restaurant can be a proxy for luxury food. Q4 The price of Korean food varies from restaurant to restaurant, depending on the restaurant's service. Q5 The good atmosphere of Korean restaurants results in the willingness to pay higher prices for Korean food.	Kyophilavong (2011) Saka, Gujja, and Alkali (2019)
Quality Value	Q1 I can easily access Korean food according to the price based on ingredients and services. Q2 The atmosphere in Korean food restaurants is displayed harmoniously. Q3 Korean food provides a good experience in consuming good ingredients. Q4 Korean food restaurants provide impressive services. Q5 Korean food restaurants provide cleanliness and food safety. Q6 The ordering problem hardly occurred when I choose to consume in Korean restaurants, and even if the problem occurred, the Korean restaurants could instantly cope with it.	Kuo, Wu, and Deng (2009)
Emotional value	Q1 I am happy when consuming Korean food. Q2 When I am feeling optimistic, I tend to go to eat Korean food. Q3 Watching K-drama can make me crave Korean food. Q4 Consuming Korean food reminds me of the warm and romantic feeling of K-drama. Q5 Consuming Korean food makes me feel romantic/warmed towards my partner or family. Q6 Korean food makes me feel that I am a part of Korean culture.	King and Emmons (1990) Becerra et al. (2019)

Table 1 Sample Questionnaires (Con.)

Variable	Survey Questions	Source
Epistemic value	Q1 Consuming Korean food satisfies my new experience. Q2 Consuming Korean food makes me feel the atmosphere of Korean culture. Q3 Consuming Korean food makes me reminisce about the K-dramas that I watched. Q4 Consuming Korean food makes me learn the cultural differences between South Korea and my home country.	Saka, Gujja, and Alkali (2019)
Familiarity	Q1 I am familiar with the taste of Korean food. Q2 I am familiar with the name of Korean food. Q3 Korean foods in K-dramas are familiar to me. Q4 I consume Korean food quite often compared to food from other cuisines.	Turetken, Ondracek, and IJsselsteijn (2019)
Subjective norm	Q1 My friends support my consumption of Korean food. Q2 My parents support me in consuming Korean food. Q3 My boyfriend/girlfriend supports me in consuming Korean food. Q4 My favorite Korean idols encourage me to consume Korean food. Q5 Our society (trend) supports my consumption of Korean food.	Ertmer (2016)
Perceived behavioral control	Q1 If I wanted to, I could buy Korean food instead of buying Thai food. Q2 I think it is easier for me to buy Korean food rather than other cuisines. Q3 I tend to buy Korean food even though other types of food look more worthy.	Wong, Hsu, and Chen (2018)
Intention to Consume Korean food	Q1 When deciding to consume food, I prefer to consume Korean food. Q 2 When deciding to consume food, I mostly intend to consume Korean food. Q 3 I will still consume Korean food in the future if given a chance. Q 4 I expect to consume Korean food in the future. Q 5 Assuming I have to go for dinner with my family/friends/ boyfriend/girlfriend, I intend to choose a Korean restaurant. Q 6 If I go to a restaurant with Korean food, I want to consume it as much as possible.	Islam, Karia, and Khaleel (2019) Khidzir, Ghani, and Guan (2017) Sarlan, Ahmad, Ahmad, and Dominic (2012)

Regression Analysis

The variables shown in the research equation consist of Intention to consume Korean food (ICK), Personal information (PI), Economic value (ECV), Quality value (ETV), Epistemic value (EPV), Familiarity (FM), Subjective norm (SN), Perceived behavioral control (PBC). We estimate the impact of these variables on the intention to consume Korean food using a multiple linear regression equation:

$$ICK = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PI + \beta_2 ECV + \beta_3 QV + \beta_4 ETV + \beta_5 EPV + \beta_6 FM + \beta_7 SN + \beta_8 PBC + u$$

where β_0 denotes the fixed effect on the different consumers. $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5, \beta_6, \beta_7$ and β_8 represent the coefficient of each variable, and **u** denotes the error terms. PI is added as a demographic control variable. All the other coefficients are expected to have a positive sign. Hence, we expect economic value, quality value, emotional value, epistemic value, familiarity, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control to positively affect the intention to consume Korean food.

Results

Demographic Profiles

The survey collected general information about the respondents, including age, gender, level of education, and career. Out of 550 respondents, there are 400 respondents of whom we can take the information into the analysis of the research as these are individuals who were both familiar with Korean food and the atmosphere of Korean food restaurants. These respondents can be classified into generation X (5 percent), generation Y (10 percent), and generation Z (86 percent). In terms of gender, 11 percent are men and 78 percent are women, and 11 percent are LGBTQ+. For the level of education, 14 percent are with a lower bachelor's degree, 82 percent with a bachelor's degree, and 4 percent have a qualification higher than a bachelor's degree. 81 percent of our sample are students.

Relationship in Relevant Variables and Research Hypothesis

We first conduct the reliability test of each variable using Cronbach's Alpha for the sample size of 400. The results are presented in Table 2. The value of Cronbach's Alpha greater than 0.7 suggests that the data is not unidimensional (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Based on this scale measure, almost all our variables possess sufficient variations with the value exceeding 0.7.

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha Scale Reliability Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha (n=400)	Item	Mean
Economic Value	0.723	EcoV1	4.165
		EcoV2	3.430
		EcoV3	4.125
		EcoV4	4.130
Quality Value	0.758	QuaV1	3.860
		QuaV2	4.1325
		QuaV3	3.8925
		QuaV4	3.825
		QuaV5	4.0275
		QuaV6	3.850
Emotional Value	0.774	EmoV1	4.335
		EmoV2	3.355
		EmoV3	4.4075
		EmoV4	3.6325
		EmoV5	3.900
Epistemic Value	0.768	EpisV1	4.2725
		EpisV2	4.025
		EpisV3	4.110
		EpisV4	4.2475
Familiarity	0.794	FamiV1	3.660
		FamiV2	3.675
		FamiV3	4.0875
		FamiV4	3.105
Subjective Norm	0.722	SubV1	3.0975
		SubV2	2.2275
		SubV3	2.480
		SubV4	3.815
		SubV5	3.7275
Perceived behavioral control	0.829	PerV1	2.6075
		PerV2	2.8550
		PerV3	2.6100
Intention to consume Korean food	0.860	IntenV1	2.825
		IntenV2	2.6575
		IntenV3	3.9525
		IntenV4	4.1275
		IntenV5	3.1425
		IntenV6	3.0475

Table 3 Summary of Hypotheses Testing

No.	Hypothesis Path	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis supported
H_1	Economic Value → *Intention to consume Korean food*	0.049	1.611	0.108	NO
H_2	Quality Value → *Intention to consume Korean food*	0.101	3.125	0.002	YES
H_3	Emotional Value → *Intention to consume Korean food*	0.319	6.939	0.000	YES
H_4	Epistemic Value → *Intention to consume Korean food*	-0.074	-1.847	0.066	NO
H_5	Familiarity → *Intention to consume Korean food*	0.186	4.753	0.000	YES
H_6	Subjective Norm → *Intention to consume Korean food*	0.025	0.732	0.464	NO
H_7	Perceived behavioral control → *Intention to consume Korean food*	0.453	12.420	0.000	YES

Source: $R^2=0.691$, a significant level at 0.05, p-value < 0.05

In Table 3, we perform the multiple regression analysis to test seven hypotheses on different potential factors that may affect the intention to consume Korean food. A p-value lower than 0.05 suggests that there is sufficient evidence from data to support that the factor in consideration has a significant effect on the intention to consume Korean food (Filho, Paranhos, & da Rocha, 2013). Based on the estimates in Table 3, quality value (β = 0.101 and p = 0.002), emotional value (β = 0.319 and p = 0.000), familiarity (β = 0.186 and p = 0.000), and perceived behavioral control (β = 0.453 and p = 0.000) are the independent variables that have a significant impact on the intention to consume Korean food. Although we do not find economic value, epistemic value, and subjective norm to have a statistically significant impact on the intention to consume Korean food, the estimates of economic value and subjective norm are of the expected positive sign.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

The study's main objectives are to study how Hallyu or Korean Wave has influenced Thai people's consumption of Korean food and to recommend businesses to target the right consumer groups, especially for businesses related to Korean food and culture. Our results reveal that quality value had an essential impact on Thai consumers' intention to consume Korean food. Consistent with this, Choe and Kim (2018) also found that quality value positively affects attitudes toward food consumption. In order to attract the intention of consumers, businesses should try to create harmony in the Korean atmosphere. The business owners of Korean food restaurants may decorate their stores to represent Korean cultures or popular trends.

Emotional value also has an impact on the intention to consume Korean food. Most Thai consumers agreed that watching K-dramas made them want to consume Korean food, and when they consume Korean food then, they tend to be happy. In the previously published research, Choe and Kim (2018) also found that emotional value positively affects attitudes toward the selection to consume some food. Therefore, to attract the attention of consumers of Korean products, businesses could present or relate their food or products to K-dramas or K-series that are viral among consumers.

In addition, familiarity is another significant factor that impacts the intention to consume Korean food. Soliman (2021) also found that familiarity significantly and positively affects the image and intention to consume. Therefore, creating familiarity with Korean-related products in terms of their appearance, names, and tastes or textures is also very

important to generate the intention to consume. For instance, a business owner may select a pastel color used by many K-dramas settings for their products or for the decoration of their store. Naming the product or their store related to Korean trends such as Gong Yoo fried chicken (Gong Yoo is a South Korean actor who is best known in the K-dramas films), or I-purple-you store (Purple is the color that stands for love and is used among the ARMY or fan club of the most popular K-pop idol (2022) named BTS) could also raise revenues.

Lastly, perceived behavioral control is also a factor that impacts the intention to consume Korean food. Some Thai consumers agreed that it is easier to buy Korean food than other cuisines, and they tended to buy Korean food even though other types of food looked more worthy. Islam and Khaleel (2019) also found that perceived behavioral control is the a vital factor in the intention to consume. Thus, creating beliefs in Korean terms that will affect the behavior of Thai people is also essential. One strategy is to create compelling advertisements. Large businesses may hire a presenter that is trending at that time, while small businesses may create a package that has connections with the concurrent Korean trend.

Hence, it is essential to target the right consumer groups so businesses can effectively make profits. Besides, increasing the intention to consume in many ways suggested by the research is also crucial.

Acknowledgment

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