# The Influence of the Korean Wave on the Consumption of the Iconic Korean Spirit, 'Soju', by Thai Consumers

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## Abstract

In recent decades, Korean culture has gained global attention due to globalization and rapid technological advancements. This cultural phenomenon, known as the "Hallyu" or "Korean Wave", has conferred substantial soft power on Korea through its impact on entertainment media, the arts, fashion, language, and cuisine. The main objective of this research is to examine how Economic Value (ECV), Quality Value (QV), Emotional Value (ETV), Epistemic Value (EPV), Familiarity (FM), Subjective Norm (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) influence Thai consumers, purchase intentions for Soju, a popular Korean alcoholic beverage, by applying the extension of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Methodologically, this study employed a quantitative approach, conducting a cross-sectional survey of 464 Thai consumers in Chiang Mai. The collected data were analyzed using the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression method. The study reveals that perceived quality, emotional value, familiarity, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control have a significant impact on Thai consumers' purchase intentions for Soju. In contrast, economic and epistemic values do not show significant influence. Based on these findings, businesses should focus on quality assurance, cultural integration strategies, enhancing product familiarity, leveraging social influence, and improving product accessibility to expand the Soju market in Thailand effectively. Implementing these targeted marketing approaches can strengthen Thai consumers' connection to Korean culture and enhance Soju's market presence nationwide.

**Keywords:** Korean Wave, Soju, Theory of Planned Behavior

## Introduction

The Korean Wave (Hallyu) has demonstrated a remarkable influence on consumer behavior in Thailand, particularly evident in the rising consumption of Soju, the iconic Korean spirit. Figure 1 illustrates Soju sales in Thailand have shown consistent and substantial growth, increasing from 0.75 million liters in 2018 to 1.05 million liters by 2023. This upward trajectory represents a change in beverage preferences and signals a more profound cultural shift in Thai consumer behavior.

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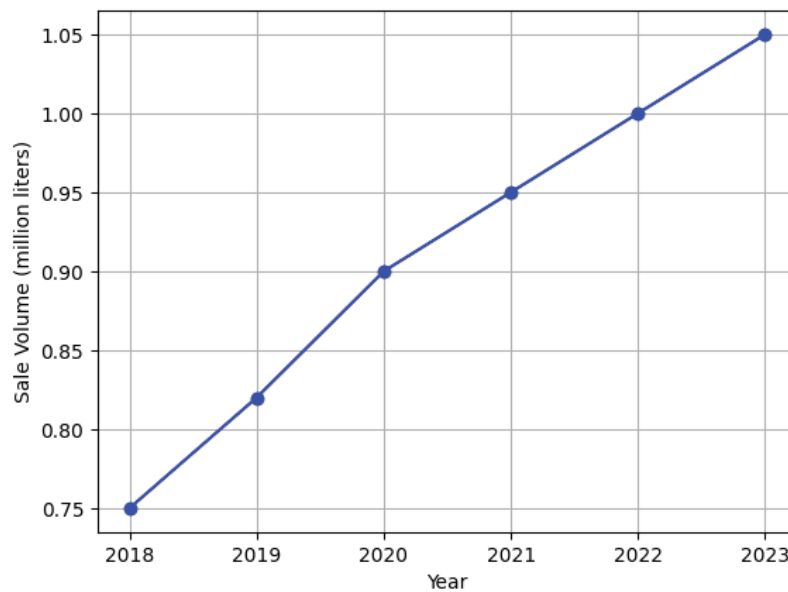*E-mail: pithoon.th@cmu.ac.th

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**Figure 1** The Total Sales Volume of Soju in Thailand from 2018 to 2023
**Source:** Statista

The growth pattern of Soju consumption in Thailand is intricately linked to the broader success of Korean cultural exports, which have dramatically influenced consumer behavior in recent years. In 2022, South Korea's cultural exports reached an impressive $1.7 billion, representing a substantial 47.9% increase from 2021 (Bank of Korea). This surge in cultural exports has been particularly amplified through various forms of entertainment media. Notable phenomena such as the film Parasite, which garnered the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2020, and the global sensation Squid Game, which shattered Netflix viewing records, have played a significant role in fostering an appreciation for Korean culture (Ahn, 2022). A striking feature of these media productions is the prominent depiction of Soju in social settings, which cultivates cultural associations that can significantly inform consumer preferences.

The sales data illustrated in Figure 1 demonstrates several key trends in Soju consumption. First and foremost, the growth in Soju sales has shown remarkable consistency year over year, indicating that this shift in consumer preferences is enduring rather than a fleeting trend. Another critical observation is that the steepest increase in sales occurred between 2020 and 2023, coinciding with a marked rise in global consumption of Korean media during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people spent more time at home watching streaming content. Moreover, the total volume growth of 40% over five years signifies substantial market penetration and an escalating acceptance among Thai consumers, suggesting a notable shift in drinking habits.

However, despite these indicators of market success, a significant gap remains in our understanding of the factors that drive this consumption pattern. While existing studies have broadly explored cultural product adoption, the specific variables influencing preferences for alcoholic beverages within the context of cultural diffusion, especially in Southeast Asian markets, have not been thoroughly investigated. This research gap limits our ability to understand the underlying dynamics driving the growth trend in Soju consumption among Thai consumers.

## Research Objective

This research aims to fill an important knowledge gap by examining the factors that influence Thai consumers' intentions to purchase Soju, a traditional Korean liquor. Utilizing the extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the study will analyze seven key variables: Economic Value (ECV), Quality Value (QV), Emotional Value (ETV), Epistemic Value (EPV), Familiarity (FM), Subjective Norm (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC). By examining these variables, the research aims to offer insights into the underlying motivations that drive the growth trend depicted in Figure 1.

The study will specifically focus on Chiang Mai, a culturally vibrant city in Thailand known for its diverse and dynamic population of 1,629,434 as of 2020. The research aims to examine how cultural diffusion affects market dynamics within this region, providing a framework to translate cultural influences into tangible market outcomes, as evidenced by sales data.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the academic discourse on cultural diffusion and consumer behavior, offering practical insights for businesses seeking to navigate the complexities of the culturally infused beverage market in Thailand and beyond. By understanding these intricate dynamics, companies can effectively tailor their strategies to meet consumers' evolving preferences in a rapidly changing landscape.

## Literature Review

### Theory of Planned Behavior in Cultural Product Consumption

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a comprehensive framework for understanding and forecasting consumer behavior across diverse cultural landscapes. Initially developed by Ajzen (1991), this model primarily centered on general behavioral intentions. However, contemporary adaptations have shed light on its significance in deciphering cross-cultural consumption patterns, providing valuable insights into how cultural contexts influence consumer decisions.

For instance, a compelling study by Ghorban Nejad et al. (2024) examined the intricate role of cultural familiarity in shaping consumer attitudes. This research delved deep into the psychology of consumers' intentions to curb their consumption habits, highlighting the crucial impact of individual differences, such as the need for evaluation and the process of self-referencing. Their findings suggest that the more familiar consumers are with a particular culture, the more nuanced their attitudes toward consumption reduction become.

Similarly, research conducted by Leong et al. (2023) expanded the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) within the vibrant realm of social commerce. By integrating the concept of social support, they employed a meta-analytic Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach to derive a richer understanding of the dynamics at play within social commerce environments. Their findings revealed the profound influence of social media on shaping subjective norms, illustrating how online interactions can significantly impact consumer behavior and decision-making processes in today's digital age.

Ayar and Gürbüz (2021) further enriched the discussion on sustainable consumption through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Their detailed analysis underscored the interplay among attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and altruistic values in fostering sustainable consumer practices. Drawing on extensive data gathered from consumers in Kastamonu, Turkey, their research employed Structural Equation Modeling to

unveil how these elements significantly impact intentions and behaviors related to sustainable consumption. Notably, they found that while perceived behavioral control does not directly influence behavior, other factors play a critical role. These insights are instrumental for policymakers, environmental organizations, and businesses aiming to encourage more sustainable consumer practices.

Moreover, the TPB framework provides a powerful lens for exploring how cultural exposure influences consumer intentions, particularly in the context of cultural product consumption, such as Soju. As cultural appreciation grows, so does the understanding of how heritage products are consumed, driven by cultural significance and consumer intent. This multifaceted approach highlights the significance of cultural nuances in influencing market behaviors and strategies.

In the specific context of Thailand, studies on alcohol consumption patterns have primarily focused on traditional beverages, with limited research on the adoption of foreign alcoholic products. However, the insights from these studies provide valuable context for understanding how cultural influences might shape new beverage preferences among Thai consumers.

### Relevant Variables in This Study

Building on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) principles, this study explores seven distinct value dimensions that influence consumer habits in beverage consumption, with a primary focus on Soju, a traditional Korean spirit.

### Economic Value

The economic value of Soju transcends mere price comparisons; it encompasses a broader perception of worth that significantly steers the choices of Asian consumers regarding alcoholic beverages. Recent market analyses indicate that a strong sense of value for money has a significant impact on purchasing decisions (Li, 2022). In Thailand, for instance, Soju has carved out a niche as a premium yet accessible option, stimulating considerable growth in its market presence and appealing to diverse consumers eager for quality and affordability.

### Quality Value

Perceptions of quality in alcoholic beverages are increasingly intertwined with notions of cultural authenticity. Research indicates that consumers often correlate specific production methods and ingredient sourcing with their cultural origins, which enhances perceived quality (Jeong & Lee, 2021). For Soju, the meticulous traditional distillation process and its rich cultural heritage elevate its status and reinforce its image as a high-quality spirit deeply embedded in Korean customs and traditions.

### Emotional Value

The emotional aspect of consuming cultural products has gained significant attention in recent scholarly discourse. Studies reveal that exposure to media can forge emotional bonds and nostalgia associated with cultural items (Satrio et al., 2020). Soju's ubiquitous presence in Korean dramas and films often evokes positive sentiments for consumers, turning it into more than just a beverage; it becomes a vessel for cherished memories and cultural connections.

### Epistemic Value

The quest for knowledge and the desire for unique experiences play pivotal roles in adopting cultural products. Research shows that consumers are increasingly drawn toward authentic cultural experiences through the products they choose to consume (Addis, 2023). Soju exemplifies

this phenomenon, serving not merely as a drink but as an invitation to explore and immerse oneself in the intricate tapestry of Korean culture.

### Familiarity

Recent studies underscore the significance of familiarity in mitigating consumer hesitance toward foreign products. The concept of "cultural proximity"—fostered through media exposure—has surfaced as a vital determinant in accepting and adopting products from different cultures (Berg, 2020). This familiarity with Soju, bolstered by its representation in various cultural contexts, enhances consumers' comfort levels when considering it a beverage choice.

### Subjective Norm

Social narratives and influences play a decisive role in shaping beverage consumption behaviors. Research highlights how peer groups and the pervasive influence of social media significantly inform choices surrounding alcoholic beverages (Simpson-Rojas et al., 2024). The communal nature of Soju consumption depicted in Korean media reflects cultural practices and helps establish the social norms that govern these practices among diverse consumer groups.

### Perceived Behavioral Control

Factors relating to accessibility and the convenience of consumption markedly shape behavioral intentions. Studies indicate that product availability and traditional serving methods significantly sway consumption patterns (Kin et al., 2024). The ease with which Soju can be accessed and enjoyed contributes to its popularity, making it a favored choice in social gatherings and personal celebrations.

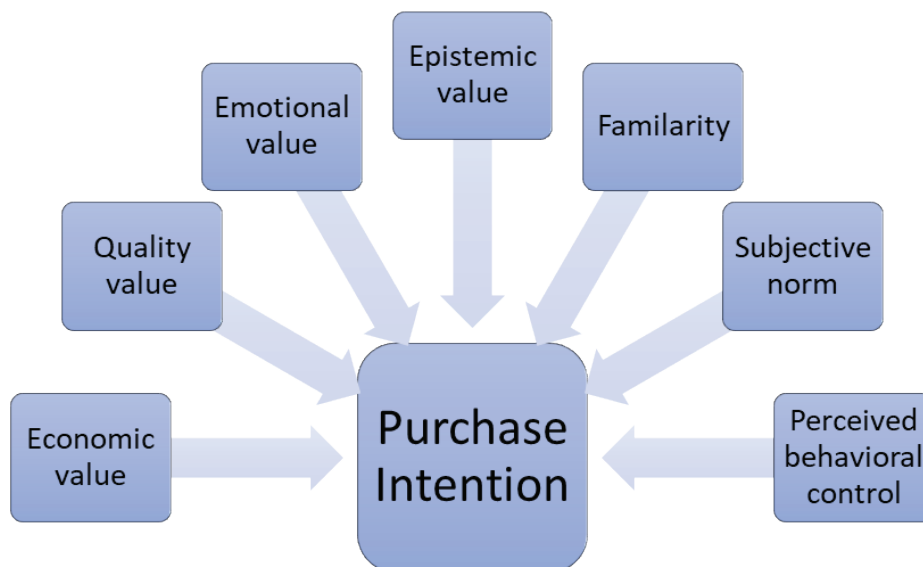### Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses



**Figure 2** Proposed Framework

Based on the literature review, this study proposes seven hypotheses:

H1: Economic value positively influences purchase intention.

H2: Quality value positively influences purchase intention.

H3: Emotional value positively influences purchase intention.

H4: Epistemic value positively influences purchase intention.

H5: Familiarity value positively influences purchase intention.

H6: Subjective norm positively influences purchase intention.

H7: Perceived behavioral control positively influences purchase intention.

## Methodology

### Research Design and Approach

This study employs a quantitative research approach with a cross-sectional survey design to investigate factors influencing Thai consumers' purchase intentions for Soju. The research design follows a deductive approach, testing hypotheses derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior within the context of cultural beverage consumption.

### Population and Sampling Strategy

The study focused on Thai consumers in Chiang Mai who have consumed Soju. Chiang Mai is a renowned tourist destination in Thailand for its distinctive culture and diverse attractions. The tourism sector is the primary source of revenue for Chiang Mai, contributing to income distribution, employment, and the growth of various industries. As a result, Chiang Mai is regarded as one of the most significant provinces in Thailand in terms of economic importance and cultural diversity.

Using Chiang Mai as a sample area is essential due to its vibrant culinary landscape. According to the Chiang Mai Provincial Public Health Office (n.d.), the population of Chiang Mai province in 2020 was 1,629,434 people. Based on Taro Yamane's sample size calculation (Yamane, 1973), the minimum sample size required for this study was 400 respondents.

While the sample provides valuable insights into consumer behavior in Chiang Mai, we acknowledge that the findings may not be fully generalizable to the entire Thai population due to regional cultural and economic differences across the country.

## Results

The development of the survey instrument followed a methodical approach to ensure validity and reliability. Initially, we extensively reviewed existing literature on consumer behavior, cultural product consumption, and the Theory of Planned Behavior to generate relevant measurement items. We conducted a pilot test with 30 residents from Muang District who had consumed Soju. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and provide feedback on its clarity, length, and comprehensiveness. This pilot phase revealed several ambiguities in wording and identified redundant items, which led to further refinement of the instrument. Reliability analysis of the pilot data yielded promising Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.68 to 0.83, indicating satisfactory internal consistency for most constructs. However, minor adjustments were made to strengthen scales with coefficients below 0.7.

The questionnaire comprised three distinct sections. The first section contained screening questions to verify the eligibility criteria, including the minimum age of 18 years, residence in

Muang District, and prior experience with Soju consumption. The second section formed the core of the instrument, consisting of 29 items measuring the seven key constructs: Economic Value (4 items), Quality Value (4 items), emotional value (4 items), epistemic value (4 items), familiarity (4 items), subjective norm (3 items), perceived behavioral control (3 items), and purchase intention (3 items). All constructs were measured using multiple indicators to enhance construct validity and reliability. Respondents rated their agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

### Data Collection Procedure

Our data collection occurred from November 2023 to February 2024 in the Muang District of Chiang Mai. We selected our collection sites strategically to capture diverse demographic profiles, including shopping centers (Maya, Central Festival), university areas (Chiang Mai University, Rajabhat University), Korean restaurants, and public spaces around Tha Pae Gate and the Night Bazaar. Two trained research assistants administered the surveys in person and verified eligibility through screening questions before proceeding. Data collection was conducted at various times and on different days of the week to ensure the representation of different consumer segments.

Of the 652 individuals approached, 550 agreed to participate, resulting in a response rate of 84.36%. After screening for completeness, we obtained 464 valid questionnaires. Weekly review sessions were held to ensure consistency in data collection procedures across all locations and timeframes.

### Measurement Model Assessment

To establish the psychometric properties of our measurement model, we conducted comprehensive analyses of convergent and discriminant validity (Table 1).

**Table 1** Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analysis

| Construct | CR | AVE | EV | QV | EMO | EPM | FML | SN | PBC | INT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EV | 0.817 | 0.529 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| QV | 0.839 | 0.568 | .073 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| EMO | 0.866 | 0.620 | -.049 | .316** | 1 | - | - | - | - | - |
| EPM | 0.858 | 0.603 | -.083 | .372** | .723** | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| FML | 0.855 | 0.597 | -.006 | .345** | .569** | .474** | 1 | - | - | - |
| SN | 0.817 | 0.598 | -.055 | .220** | .461** | .427** | .421** | 1 | - | - |
| PBC | 0.890 | 0.729 | .095 | .265** | .363** | .259** | .558** | .463** | 1 | - |
| INT | 0.856 | 0.674 | .085 | .371** | .525** | .402** | .624** | .529** | .738** | 1 |

*Source:* **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; CR = Composite Reliability; Average Variance Extracted = AVE; EV = Economic Value; QV = Quality Value; EMO = Emotional Value; EPM = Epistemic Value; FML = Familiarity; SN = Subjective Norm; PBC = Perceived Behavioral Control; INT = Purchase Intention;

All constructs exhibited strong Composite Reliability (CR) values ranging from 0.817 to 0.890, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.7 for convergent validity. Furthermore, each construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was above the benchmark of 0.5, with values between 0.529 and 0.729. These findings and our previously reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients provide robust evidence for convergent validity.

To assess discriminant validity, we analyzed the inter-construct correlation matrix. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE for each construct should exceed its correlations with any other construct. As shown in Table 1, we confirmed that the square roots of the AVE values (0.727, 0.754, 0.787, 0.777, 0.773, 0.773, 0.854, and 0.821 for Economic Value, Quality Value, Emotional Value, Experiential Purchase Motivation, Familiarity, Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Purchase Intention, respectively) were all greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, thus confirming adequate discriminant validity.

The correlation patterns illustrated in Table 1 offer preliminary support for several of our hypothesized relationships. Notably, Purchase Intention (INT) demonstrated strong positive correlations with Perceived Behavioral Control ($r = 0.738$, $p < 0.01$), Familiarity ($r = 0.624$, $p < 0.01$), and Subjective Norm ($r = 0.529$, $p < 0.01$). Interestingly, Economic Value (EV) exhibited non-significant correlations with most constructs, suggesting its potential independence from other factors in our model.

To address concerns about multicollinearity, primarily due to the high correlation between Perceived Behavioral Control and Purchase Intention ($r = 0.738$), we calculated the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) for all predictor variables in our regression model. All VIF values were below 3.0, well under the recommended threshold of 5.0, indicating that multicollinearity did not significantly impact our regression results.

## Discussion

### Demographic Profiles

The survey conducted for this research involved 464 respondents out of an original pool of 550. Each participant was at least 18 years old, lived in the vibrant city of Chiang Mai, and had firsthand experience consuming Soju, a popular alcoholic beverage.

The age range of respondents varied widely, spanning from the youthful 18 to the more seasoned 55 years. A diverse representation of genders was noted, with 21 percent identifying as male, 66 percent as female, and 13 percent as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, highlighting the inclusive nature of the sample.

The respondents demonstrated a range of academic achievements in terms of educational background. Sixteen percent had completed a lower bachelor's degree, while an impressive 81 percent held a full one. Additionally, 3 percent of the participants had advanced their education to attain a graduate degree, showcasing a well-educated population segment.

Relationship in Relevant Variables and Research Hypothesis

First, all the questions underwent reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which required coefficients of 0.7 after data collection. All items passed this test, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** Cronbach's Alpha Scale Reliability Results

| Variable | Survey Questions | Cronbach's Alpha (n = 464) |
|---|---|---|
| Economic Value (ECV) | 1. The price of Soju, in general, is affordable.<br>2. The price of Soju is comparable to that of alcoholic drinks from other countries.<br>3. Soju is an excellent alternative to a luxury beverage.<br>4. The positive perception of consuming Soju results in a willingness to pay higher prices. | 0.701 |
| Quality Value (QV) | 1. I believe the ingredients used in my preferred soju brand are high quality.<br>2. The alcohol content of soju is well-balanced and suitable for my taste.<br>3. I find the flavor profile of soju to be enjoyable.<br>4. Soju is smooth and easy to drink compared to other spirits. | 0.738 |
| Emotional Value (EMV) | 1. I enjoy drinking Soju.<br>2. Watching K-drama makes me crave Soju.<br>3. Drinking soju reminds me of the warm, romantic feelings often portrayed in K-dramas.<br>4. Drinking soju makes me feel part of Korean culture. | 0.792 |
| Epistemic Value (EPV) | 1. Drinking soju satisfies my craving for new experiences.<br>2. Drinking soju makes me feel the atmosphere of Korean culture.<br>3. Drinking soju makes me reminisce about the K-dramas I have watched.<br>4. Drinking soju helps me grasp the cultural differences between South Korea and my home country. | 0.783 |
| Familiarity (FM) | 1. I am accustomed to the flavor of Soju.<br>2. I am familiar with the name "Soju".<br>3. Soju in K-dramas is something I am familiar with.<br>4. I often prefer drinking Soju over other types of alcoholic beverages from different countries. | 0.775 |
| Subjective Norm (SN) | 1. Drinking soju is widely accepted in my social circles.<br>2. My friends and family encourage me to drink soju during social gatherings.<br>3. I feel that drinking soju is important to participating in cultural traditions. | 0.703 |
| Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) | 1. I find it easy to obtain Soju whenever I want to drink it.<br>2. If I wanted to, I could buy Soju instead of other alcoholic beverages.<br>3. It's mostly my decision whether or not to buy soju. | 0.818 |

**Table 2** Cronbach's Alpha Scale Reliability Results (Con.)

| Variable | Survey Questions | Cronbach's Alpha (n = 464) |
|---|---|---|
| Intention to Drink Soju (INT) | 1. When deciding to drink an alcoholic beverage, I prefer soju. 2. When I choose to have an alcoholic beverage, I usually opt for Soju. 3. I will continue to drink Soju in the future if I have the opportunity. | 0.759 |

**Source:** Author's calculation

### Hypothesis Testing

Linear regression was employed to find the Coefficient, t-value, and p-value. For hypotheses to be accepted, it must be demonstrated that the factor has a significant effect on the purchase intention of Soju, and the p-value must be less than 0.05 for a 95% confidence level. The findings in Table 2 suggest that factors significantly affecting the purchase intention of Soju are quality value, emotional value, familiarity, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control.

To test our hypothesized relationships, we conducted multiple regression analysis with Purchase Intention as the dependent variable and the seven proposed factors as independent variables (Table 2). The overall model explained 67.2% of the variance in Purchase Intention ($R^2 = 0.672$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.665$, $F(7,356) = 104.319$, $p < 0.001$).

**Table 3** Summary of Hypothesis Testing

| No. | Hypothesis Path | Beta (β) | t-Value | p-Value | VIF | Hypothesis Supported |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $H_1$ | ECV → INT | 0.043 | 1.360 | 0.175 | 1.037 | NO |
| $H_2$ | QV → INT | 0.102 | 2.955 | 0.003 | 1.236 | YES |
| $H_3$ | EMV → INT | 0.196 | 4.016 | 0.001 | 2.543 | YES |
| $H_4$ | EPV → INT | -0.006 | -0.119 | 0.905 | 2.247 | NO |
| $H_5$ | FM → INT | 0.178 | 4.102 | 0.001 | 1.935 | YES |
| $H_6$ | SN → INT | 0.095 | 2.837 | 0.001 | 1.619 | YES |
| $H_7$ | PBC → INT | 0.506 | 12.754 | 0.001 | 1.148 | YES |
| $R^2 = 0.666$, a significant level at 0.01 | | | | | | |

**Source**: Author's calculation

As shown in Table 3, five of our seven hypotheses were supported. The strongest predictor of Purchase Intention was Perceived Behavioral Control (β = 0.506, p < .001), followed by Emotional Value (β = 0.196, p < .001), Familiarity (β = 0.178, p < .001), Quality Value (β = 0.102, p = .003), and Subjective Norm (β = 0.095, p = .005). However, Economic Value

($\beta$ = 0.043, p = .175) and Epistemic Value ($\beta$ = -0.006, p = .905) did not significantly influence Purchase Intention; thus, $H_1$ and $H_4$ were not supported.

We assessed multicollinearity using Variance Inflation Factors (VIF). All VIF values ranged from 1.037 to 2.453, well below the threshold of 5.0, indicating that multicollinearity did not substantially affect our results.

The strong influence of Perceived Behavioral Control ($\beta$ = 0.506, p < .001) suggests that ease of purchase is a critical factor in decisions regarding Soju consumption. This finding indicates that distribution expansion and improved accessibility are key strategic considerations for businesses looking to increase Soju sales in Thailand. Consumers who perceive fewer barriers to purchasing Soju are significantly more likely to follow through with their purchase intentions, highlighting the importance of availability in retail outlets, restaurants, and online platforms.

The significant impact of Emotional Value ($\beta$ = 0.196, p < .001) on purchase intentions aligns with consumer socialization theory, which suggests that consumers develop emotional connections to products through repeated exposure and positive associations. For Soju, these emotional connections are often formed through Korean media depictions of the beverage in social, romantic, or celebratory contexts. The strong positive influence contrasts with the non-significant effect of Epistemic Value ($\beta$ = -0.006, p = .905), suggesting that Thai consumers are more motivated by emotional connections to Korean culture than by the novelty or learning experience of consuming Soju. This finding contradicts some previous cross-cultural consumption studies that emphasize epistemic value as a key driver and warrants further investigation.

The lack of significance for Economic Value ($\beta$ = 0.043, p = .175) is particularly noteworthy, given Soju's positioning as an affordable premium beverage. This suggests that Thai consumers may not be price-sensitive when it comes to cultural beverages like Soju, instead prioritizing quality, emotional associations, and social factors. This finding diverges from traditional alcohol consumption studies that often identify price as a key consideration and highlights the unique nature of culturally-influenced purchase decisions.

Familiarity's strong positive influence ($\beta$ = 0.178, p < .001) supports consumer socialization theory, which suggests that familiarity reduces perceived risk and increases comfort with foreign products. The significance of Subjective Norm ($\beta$ = 0.095, p < .001) further emphasizes the social nature of Soju consumption and its role in cultural connection and group identity.

## Conclusion

This research examines the various factors influencing Thai consumers' enthusiasm for purchasing Soju, a revered Korean alcoholic beverage renowned for its distinctive taste and cultural significance. The findings highlight the significant roles of perceived quality and emotional value in shaping Thai consumers' intentions to enjoy Soju. This observation resonates with the analyses conducted by Choe and Kim (2018), suggesting that the overall perception of quality can evoke a strong desire to indulge in this refreshing drink.

Furthermore, familiarity with Soju is a pivotal driver in this purchasing journey. Soliman (2021) points out that as consumers become more acquainted with Soju—its unique aesthetics, intriguing name, and delightful flavor profiles—their perception and purchase intent increase markedly. This underscores the necessity of educating consumers about Korean products, not just in terms of their taste but also their visual appeal and texture, ultimately enhancing consumers' willingness to incorporate Soju into their social experiences.

Moreover, this study reveals the significant influence of subjective norms, encompassing societal expectations and opinions surrounding beverage choices. This finding aligns with Bindin et al., who highlight how public perceptions and group expectations can profoundly shape consumer behavior. The social settings in which Soju is consumed often elevate its desirability, encouraging Thai individuals to partake in this cultural phenomenon.

Lastly, the research identifies perceived behavioral control as crucial in the purchasing decision process. The study reveals that consumers perceive Soju as more accessible to buy than other alcoholic beverages, facilitating a smoother transaction experience. This insight is supported by the work of Islam and Khaleel (2019), who underscore the importance of perceived ease of purchase in determining consumption intentions. Overall, this research paints a comprehensive picture of the multifaceted motivations driving Thai consumers' interest in Soju, shedding light on the interplay between familiarities,

The non-significant impact of economic and epistemic values was unexpected and challenges some conventional wisdom about the adoption of cultural products. These findings suggest that the typical value proposition, focused on affordability or novelty, may be less effective for culturally embedded products like Soju. Instead, marketers should focus on fostering emotional connections, enhancing quality perceptions, and implementing social integration strategies.

This study is not without limitations. The sample was limited to Chiang Mai residents, which may not fully represent the diversity of Thai consumers. Future research could be expanded to other regions in Thailand and compared with rural versus urban consumption patterns. Additionally, longitudinal studies could track how these influencing factors evolve as consumers move from initial trial to regular consumption of Soju.

## Recommendation

**Enhancing Market Penetration and Consumer Engagement for Soju in Thailand** This study highlights several key factors influencing Thai consumers' purchasing intentions for Soju, including quality, emotional, epistemic, and familiarity aspects, as well as subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. To capitalize on these insights, marketers and policymakers can implement strategies to enhance market penetration and consumer engagement as follows:

**Quality Assurance and Promotion:** In marketing campaigns, emphasize the high-quality ingredients and balanced alcohol content of Soju. Highlighting the smooth and enjoyable flavor profile will attract quality-conscious consumers.

**Cultural Integration and Emotional Appeal**: Leverage the popularity of K-dramas and Korean culture to create emotional connections with consumers. Marketing efforts could involve collaborations with popular K-drama series or Korean cultural events to evoke warm and romantic feelings associated with Soju consumption.

**Experiential Marketing**: Promote Soju as a gateway to new experiences and cultural exploration. Organize tasting events, cultural festivals, and interactive campaigns that allow consumers to immerse themselves in Korean culture and experience the unique taste of Soju.

**Familiarity Building**: Increase consumer familiarity with Soju through consistent branding and media presence. Ensure Soju is prominently featured in advertisements, on social media, and through product placements in popular shows and movies.

**Social Influence and Norms:** Encourage social acceptance of Soju by leveraging influencers and social media campaigns. Highlight testimonials and endorsements from respected figures in Thai society to normalize the consumption of Soju in social settings.

**Accessibility and Convenience:** Improve the availability of Soju in retail outlets and online platforms. Ensure that Soju is easily accessible and competitively priced to enhance perceived behavioral control and encourage regular consumption.

By implementing these strategies, marketers and policymakers can effectively boost Soju consumption among Thai consumers, fostering a deeper connection with Korean culture and enhancing the overall market presence of Soju in Thailand.

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