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## **The Korean Wave in the Netherlands: Soft Power Across Different Age Groups**

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# **The Korean Wave in the Netherlands: Soft Power Across Different Age Groups**

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## *ABSTRACT*

This study investigates how the Korean Wave functions as a soft power tool in shaping perceptions and engagement with South Korea among Dutch audiences across different age groups. Building on a prior bachelor's thesis, this research employs a qualitative methodology grounded in soft power theory and utilizes thematic analysis of survey data (n=25) and semi-structured interviews (n=15) to explore generational differences in how the Korean Wave influences cultural understanding and attitudes toward South Korea. The findings reveal that the Korean Wave shapes perceptions in nuanced ways that vary across generations. Rather than merely fostering positive views, it serves as a mechanism for both surface-level engagement and deeper cultural inquiry. Younger participants (ages 18–24) primarily engage through entertainment media like K-Pop and K-Dramas on TikTok, YouTube, and Netflix, characterized by emotional investment and social connectivity driven by a desire for community. In contrast, older participants (ages 55 and above) approach Korean culture through historical and political lenses, reflecting a desire for depth and authenticity influenced by historical narratives. The groups in the middle blend both perspectives, often starting with pop culture and later developing deeper cultural curiosity, which highlights how initial entertainment encounters can lead to richer cultural understanding. This study identifies key themes such as the evolution of interests, accessibility of content, and community formation, illustrating the multifaceted impact of the Korean Wave. These themes demonstrate that it functions as a generationally adaptive form of soft power, facilitating diverse pathways for cultural engagement. The insights contribute to broader discussions on cultural diplomacy, transnational media influence, and audience reception in non-Asian contexts, emphasizing how different age groups navigate and interpret Korean culture.

**Key words:** South Korea, soft power, the Netherlands, Korean Wave, age groups

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, digital platforms like YouTube serve as effective tools for projecting soft power. K-pop's global popularity exemplifies this, particularly with artists like PSY, whose "Gangnam Style" success paved the way for other hits exceeding 100 million views.<sup>1</sup> The Korean Wave, or *Hallyu* (한류), has surged into the global spotlight, transforming South Korean culture into a powerful force that not only captivates millions but also reshapes perceptions and engagement across different age groups, particularly in the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> For my bachelor's thesis I wrote about South Korea's soft power in the Netherlands through the medium of K-pop. This master's thesis will explore the broader Korean Wave and its impact on generational differences among Dutch audiences. During my bachelor's thesis I conducted survey-based research with 23 participants in their 20s, and now I expanded the scope of my study by including 15 interviews and 25 surveys from individuals of all ages above 18. For participants under 18, parental consent is required. Therefore, those below the age of 18 are excluded. I will provide more detailed explanations regarding my research methods and findings in the following chapters. The research question of this thesis is: "In what ways does the Korean Wave function as a soft power tool in shaping the perceptions and engagement of Dutch audiences toward South Korea, and how does this vary across different age groups?" This question aims to investigate the impact of the Korean Wave, encompassing cultural exports like K-pop, K-dramas, and Korean cuisine, on how Dutch audiences perceive and engage with South Korea. It seeks to explore how the Korean Wave serves as a form of cultural diplomacy that shapes perceptions of South Korea, while also examining variations in how different age groups engage with and interpret Korean culture, reflecting their unique experiences and

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<sup>1</sup> Jun Su Kang, "sop'üt'üp'awöro pon hallyurosöüi pangt'ansonyöndan koch'al," [소프트파워로 본 한류로서의 방탄소년단 고찰] *Event Convention Research* 15, 3 (2019): 105-111. DOI:10.31927/asec.15.3.6.

<sup>2</sup> Youna Kim, "PART I: Popular Culture as Soft Power," In *South Korean Popular Culture and North Korea*, (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019): 1.

exposure. It investigates the broader implications of cultural exchange and soft power, assessing both positive and critical perspectives across different demographic segments. Soft power is the ability of a country to shape the preferences of others through non-coercive means, such as culture, values, and policies, in contrast to hard power, which relies on military or economic force.<sup>3</sup> While hard power has been the focus of extensive scholarly research, soft power has received comparatively less attention, particularly in the context of South Korea's influence in the Netherlands. Despite the growing global popularity of Korean cultural content like K-pop and K-drama's, there remains a significant gap in understanding its effects.<sup>4</sup> By exploring how the Korean Wave operates as a tool of soft power, this study seeks to deepen the understanding of its impact in the Netherlands.

This thesis will be structured into 8 chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive exploration of the Korean Wave and its impact as a soft power tool on Dutch audiences. Following Chapter 1: Introduction, Chapter 2: The Korean Wave, will examine the origins and evolution of the Korean Wave. Chapter 3: Literature Review will synthesize existing research on the Korean Wave and soft power, identifying gaps in the current understanding and justifying the need for this study. Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework will discuss the concepts and theory of soft power. Chapter 5: Methodology will detail the research design, including open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviews, justifying these methods for gaining deeper insights into audience engagement. Following this, Chapter 6: Findings will present and summarize key insights from both the surveys and interviews, providing a foundational basis for further analysis. In Chapter 7: Thematic Analysis, the findings will be examined thematically, linking them to the research questions and theoretical framework to interpret how the Korean Wave influences Dutch audiences across different age groups. Finally, Chapter 8:

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008): 94.

<sup>4</sup> Aigerim Raimzhanova, *Power In IR: Hard, Soft, and Smart*, PhD diss., (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy and the University of Bucharest, 2015), 6.

Conclusion will summarize the key findings and their implications, revisit the limitations of the study, and propose agendas for future research in this area. The Bibliography will list all sources referenced throughout the thesis, while the Appendix will include supplementary materials, such as survey and interview transcripts, ensuring transparency and supporting the research findings.

## ***CHAPTER 2: THE KOREAN WAVE***

The Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*, refers to the global proliferation and popularity of South Korean culture, particularly in entertainment, music, television dramas, films, fashion, cuisine, and technology.<sup>5</sup> The term ‘*Hallyu*’ first appeared in a Taiwanese newspaper, the China Times, on December 17, 1997, describing how this cultural wave was ‘invading’ Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> At that time, it did not carry the same connotation as it does today. In Chinese characters, it literally means ‘the coldest wind.’ By 1999, Chinese newspapers began using ‘*Hallyu*’ to refer to the rising popularity of Korean artists in China, marking a significant linguistic evolution that reflects the transformative nature of this cultural phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> The Korean Wave gained significant momentum in the 2010s, emerging as a major cultural force with a broad international impact. Its development can be categorized into three distinct phases. The ‘*Hallyu 1.0*’ phase, from the early 1990s to 2007, was marked by the introduction of Korean TV dramas and films that gained traction in East Asia.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by the ‘*Hallyu 2.0*’ phase, spanning 2008 to 2017, which saw the rise of K-pop, online games, and animation, alongside the growing influence of social media and digital platforms across Asia, Europe, and North America.<sup>9</sup> The ‘*Hallyu 3.0*’

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<sup>5</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “Introduction,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “Introduction,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 2.

<sup>7</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “Introduction,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 2.

<sup>8</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 16.

<sup>9</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 16.

phase, which began in 2017 and has further expanded the Korean Wave into areas such as webtoons and mobile games, as well as increasing its presence on global digital platforms like Netflix.<sup>10</sup> The primary consumer base has also evolved, now encompassing a broader age range from teens and young adults to those in their 30s to 60s. This evolution has been driven by hands-off policies and public diplomacy as key cultural strategies.<sup>11</sup> There seems to be new discourse surrounding the newest Korean wave called ‘Hallyu 4.0’. One source claims it started in 2020, making the ‘Hallyu 3.0’ only 3 years. They mention it emerged to diversify K-content and enhance support for various cultural industries.<sup>12</sup> This initiative, led by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, established a new ‘Hallyu Content Cooperation Division’ within the Contents Policy Bureau, focusing on fostering both K-wave content and its market.<sup>13</sup> Another article mentions it started in 2022. They mention the range of ‘Hallyu 4.0’ content and areas of consumption are becoming increasingly diverse, extending beyond any single country or consumer group to encompass a broader cultural landscape.<sup>14</sup> One more source explains ‘Hallyu 4.0’ as something that has the potential to evolve into a “K-style” that closely ties to the right of publicity.<sup>15</sup> The success of the Korean Wave is largely due to the affection of fans worldwide, who are drawn to the images and identities of Hallyu stars. These stars embody a distinct identity that fans admire and often imitate, leading to an interest in their lifestyles, including their food, fashion, and living environments.<sup>16</sup> For ‘Hallyu 4.0’ to thrive, it is essential to effectively manage and protect the publicity rights of these stars. However, in South Korea,

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<sup>10</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 16.

<sup>11</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 16.

<sup>12</sup> Yunhee Kim, “The K-Wave: South Korea’s Soft Power Bliss” ISPI, March 7, 2022, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/k-wave-south-koreas-soft-power-bliss-33969>.

<sup>13</sup> Yunhee Kim, “The K-Wave: South Korea’s Soft Power Bliss” ISPI, March 7, 2022, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/k-wave-south-koreas-soft-power-bliss-33969>.

<sup>14</sup> Miyoung Kim, and Sunju Park, “Analysis of Hallyu research trends based on topic modeling,” *Journal of Korean Society for Internet Information* 25, no. 6 (2024): 49–59.

<sup>15</sup> Bok-rae Kim, “Past, Present and Future of Hallyu (Korean Wave),” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 5, No. 5 (October 2015): 154-160.

<sup>16</sup> Bok-rae Kim, “Past, Present and Future of Hallyu (Korean Wave),” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 5, No. 5 (October 2015): 154-160

these rights are not well safeguarded due to the absence of relevant laws and regulations.<sup>17</sup> To ensure the sustainable growth of ‘Hallyu 4.0’, it is crucial to both protect the publicity rights of Hallyu stars and implement laws that allow for their legal and appropriate use.<sup>18</sup> Because ‘Hallyu 4.0’ has not been defined as the preceding *hallyu*’s, it will not be included in the table below.

	<i>Hallyu</i> 1.0	<i>Hallyu</i> 2.0	<i>Hallyu</i> 3.0
Years	Early 1990s-2007	2008-2017	2017-present
Primary genres introduced	TV drama’s, films	K-pop, online games, animation	Webtoons, K-pop, mobile games
Technologies/Digital cultures	Online games	Social media (SNS, smartphones), digital games	Digital platforms (Netflix, social media), transmedia storytelling
Major regions	East Asia	Asia, Europe, and North America	Global
Primary consumers	Ages 30s-40s	Ages 10s-20s now included	Ages 10s-20s included, plus 30s-60s
Major cultural policies	Hands-off policies	Hands-on policies/soft power	Hands-off policies/public diplomacy

Table 1: *Hallyu* differences.<sup>19</sup>

The Korean Wave began in the late 1990s, stemming from South Korea’s rapid economic and technological advancements after the war.<sup>20</sup> Recognizing the potential for cultural influence, the government actively promoted its cultural industries. The turning point came in 1997 with the success of the drama “What is Love?” in China, marking the start of significant Korean

<sup>17</sup> Bok-rae Kim, “Past, Present and Future of Hallyu (Korean Wave),” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 5, No. 5 (October 2015): 154-160

<sup>18</sup> Bok-rae Kim, “Past, Present and Future of Hallyu (Korean Wave),” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 5, No. 5 (October 2015): 154-160.

<sup>19</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 16.

<sup>20</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

cultural exports.<sup>21</sup> Following this, shows like “Winter Sonata” captured audiences across Asia, igniting widespread enthusiasm for Korean dramas.<sup>22</sup> The 2000s saw the rise of K-pop, with groups such as H.O.T., SES, and g.o.d. cultivating dedicated international fan bases, ultimately paving the way for global sensations like BTS and Blackpink in the 2010s.<sup>23</sup> This explosive growth can be attributed to several factors, including South Korea’s strategic investments in cultural production and its technological capabilities, which enabled the creation of high-quality content.<sup>24</sup> The polished images of K-pop idols, paired with infectious, danceable tracks, struck a chord with young viewers worldwide. Additionally, platforms like YouTube facilitated the global distribution of Korean entertainment.<sup>25</sup> The Korean Wave has also expanded beyond music and television. Films like “Parasite” have achieved both critical acclaim and commercial success, while Korean video games, fashion, and cuisine have gained international recognition.<sup>26</sup> This cultural phenomenon has brought substantial economic benefits to South Korea, enhancing tourism, exports, and soft power, while fostering the growth of related sectors like K-beauty and Korean language education.<sup>27</sup> However, the Korean Wave faces challenges, including increased competition from other Asian entertainment sectors and rising political tensions that raise concerns about dependency on cultural exports.<sup>28</sup> Critics have also pointed out issues regarding the treatment of artists and the tendency for Korean pop culture to be

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<sup>21</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

<sup>22</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

<sup>23</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

<sup>24</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

<sup>25</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

<sup>26</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

<sup>27</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

<sup>28</sup> Dal Yong Jin, “The History of the Korean Wave,” In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

homogenized for global markets.<sup>29</sup> Despite these obstacles, the Korean Wave stands as a remarkable achievement, illustrating South Korea's journey from a war-ravaged nation to a cultural leader. As it continues to evolve, it will be intriguing to observe how this phenomenon shapes the global cultural landscape moving forward.

### ***CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW***

As the material on soft power are increasing and the sources on the Korean Wave are abundant, I cannot incorporate everything in this literature review. However, it is important to identify the research gap. South Korea's soft power has been the subject of extensive research, both internationally and within Korea. The objective of such studies is to visualize a country's soft power and demonstrate how it is analyzed. Brand Finance, a prominent global brand valuation consultancy, has created the Global Soft Power Index as the leading tool for evaluating nations' international soft power.<sup>30</sup> The index is based on extensive surveys involving 173,602 participants from 102 countries worldwide. By incorporating a wide range of perspectives, the Global Soft Power Index employs a comprehensive set of metrics to provide a thorough assessment of nations' soft power presence, reputation, and impact.<sup>31</sup> The core concept of the index is to examine soft power through various lenses, including familiarity, reputation, influence, and specific domain-based perceptions, to offer a balanced and holistic evaluation of a country's soft power capabilities. This multidimensional approach enables the index to deliver a detailed and insightful analysis of a nation's soft power standing.<sup>32</sup> In the Global Soft Power Index Report released in 2024, South Korea achieved 15<sup>th</sup> place among 193 evaluated

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<sup>29</sup> Dal Yong Jin, "The History of the Korean Wave," In *Understanding the Korean Wave : Transnational Korean Pop Culture and Digital Technologies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024): 11-28.

<sup>30</sup> Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index Report, BrandFinance.com, 2025.  
<https://brandirectory.com/softpower/report>

<sup>31</sup> Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index Report, BrandFinance.com, 2025.  
<https://brandirectory.com/softpower/report>

<sup>32</sup> Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index Report, BrandFinance.com, 2025.  
<https://brandirectory.com/softpower/report>

countries.<sup>33</sup> However, in the most recent Global Soft Power Index Report of 2025 (although the year is not over yet), South Korea currently ranks 12<sup>th</sup> place.<sup>34</sup> This increase in ranking highlights South Korea's increasing soft power presence globally, as the nation continues to utilize its cultural exports, technological advancements, and diplomatic efforts to boost its international influence and appeal. The Global Soft Power Index offers important insights and analysis for policymakers and researchers aiming to grasp the changing dynamics of international relations and national soft power. However, it does not incorporate the differences in age groups or the soft power of a country in another country. It is purely about the global soft power standings of a country. One source highlights that South Korea's global soft power ranking improved from 12<sup>th</sup> place in 2009 to 11<sup>th</sup> place in 2013, reflecting a period of growing international influence, largely attributed to the rise of the Korean Wave and strategic cultural diplomacy efforts.<sup>35</sup> However, this source dates back to 2014, making it relatively outdated, especially considering how much can change over the course of a decade in terms of global perception, media influence, and international relations. Interestingly, if we trace the more recent soft power rankings, South Korea appears to have returned to 12<sup>th</sup> place, suggesting a potential plateau or shift in its soft power trajectory. This cyclical trend raises questions about the long-term sustainability and evolving nature of South Korea's cultural influence on the global stage. Joseph Nye is widely recognized for his foundational work on the concept of soft power. Over the years, he has published extensively on the subject, including studies that explore the dynamics of soft power in East Asia, with specific attention to South Korea. In these analyses, Nye identifies the Korean Wave as a prominent example of cultural soft power,

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<sup>33</sup> Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index Report, BrandFinance.com, 2024  
<https://brandirectory.com/softpower/report>

<sup>34</sup> Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index Report, BrandFinance.com, 2025.  
<https://brandirectory.com/softpower/report>

<sup>35</sup> Ch'anghyŏn Ch'oe, Chŏngpae Pak, and Chongkŭn Kim, "Kungnyŏkyoso chung, sop'ŭt'ŭp'awŏrosŏi munhwagyŏngjaengnyŏng pigyobunsŏng yŏn'gu," [국력요소 중, 소프트파워로서의 문화경쟁력 비교분석 연구], *Journal of Digital Convergence* 12 Iss 6 (2014): 55-68. DOI:  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14400/JDC.2014.12.6.55>

illustrating how South Korea leverages its popular culture enhance its global influence and shape international perceptions.<sup>36</sup> Although Joseph Nye's work has been highly influential and illuminating in shaping the discourse on soft power, it largely remains at the level of conceptualization rather than a fully developed theory. This distinction will be further explored in Chapter 4. In response to this limitation, numerous scholars have sought to construct more comprehensive theoretical frameworks to better articulate the mechanisms and applications of soft power. One such framework has been selected for use in this thesis due to its relevance and analytical depth (see Chapter 4). Other authors have proposed alternative soft power theories, often focused on categorizing different forms of soft power, clarifying how their perspectives diverge from Nye's original formulation, and theorizing how soft power emerges from underlying soft resources.<sup>37</sup> These models are frequently designed to evaluate and guide national soft power strategies, such as those of South Korea. However, such frameworks are less applicable to the aims of this thesis. Instead, a more suitable and contextually appropriate framework has been adopted and will be elaborated upon in Chapter 4.

#### ***CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK***

This thesis employs the soft power theory to examine how the Korean Wave influences the perceptions of South Korea among Dutch age groups. It investigates whether the Korean Wave fosters positive perceptions of South Korea within the Netherlands. By analysing its impact on Dutch perceptions and attitudes, this research aims to understand soft power's role in shaping intercultural understanding and promoting a favourable image of South Korea in the Netherlands.

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph Nye & Youna Kim, "Soft power and the Korean Wave," In *South Korean popular culture and North Korea*, (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019): 41-53.

<sup>37</sup> Geun Lee, "A Theory of Soft Power and Korea's Soft Power Strategy," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* No. 2 (2009): 205-218. DOI:10.1080/10163270902913962

#### ***4.1: SOFT POWER: A CONCEPT ACCORDING TO JOSEPH NYE***

Soft power constitutes a critical analytical lens for examining the influence and impact of cultural phenomena like the Korean Wave within foreign contexts such as the Netherlands. Soft power, in essence, refers to a nation's capacity to shape the preferences, attitudes, and behaviors of external actors through non-coercive means.<sup>38</sup> This involves strategically leveraging cultural assets and appealing to shared interests and values to cultivate influence and generate positive perceptions.<sup>39</sup> Joseph Nye's conceptualization of soft power has undergone notable evolution since its initial creation in 1990. In his early iterations, he emphasized agenda-setting as a pivotal dimension of soft power.<sup>40</sup> However, in later iterations, he has prioritized attraction as the core characteristic. Specifically, in "Bound to Lead" (1990), Nye distinguished between "indirect" or "co-optive power", also known as soft power and "directive" or "command power" also known as hard power.<sup>41</sup> Soft power, in this context, entailed inducing others to desire what one desires through the allure of ideas, culture, and institutions, rather than through coercion.<sup>42</sup> In "The Paradox of American Power" (2002), Nye continued to define soft power as the ability to elicit desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion, underscoring its emphasis on preference shaping rather than mere persuasion.<sup>43</sup> In "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" (2004), Nye had further accentuated attraction as the necessity of soft power, arguing that the ability to attract others ultimately leads to acquiescence.<sup>44</sup> Nye has also introduced the concept of "smart power", which integrates the attractiveness of soft power with

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008): 94.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008): 94.

<sup>40</sup> Mikael Weissmann, "Capturing Power Shift in East Asia: Toward an Analytical Framework for Understanding "Soft Power"," *Asian Perspective* 44, no.3 (2020): 361-363.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (Basic Books (AZ), 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Mikael Weissmann, "Capturing Power Shift in East Asia: Toward an Analytical Framework for Understanding "Soft Power"," *Asian Perspective* 44, no.3 (2020): 361-363.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (Oxford: University Press, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (United Kingdom: Public Affairs, 2004).

the coercive capabilities of hard power.<sup>45</sup> However, Nye envisioned smart power as a broader instrument of foreign policy, rather than a discrete analytical framework for understanding soft power per se.<sup>46</sup>

#### ***4.2: SOFT POWER: A UTILIZED THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK***

While Joseph Nye's conceptualization of soft power offers valuable foundational insights, it lacks the comprehensive and structured approach required for a theoretical application. To bridge this gap, this research draws upon and adapts existing models that have sought to theorize soft power dynamics, acknowledging their contributions to laying the necessary groundwork. One such model provides a detailed explanation of how soft power functions as a theoretical construct, presenting a comprehensive framework for its analysis. For the specific purposes of this thesis, this pre-existing model has been carefully adapted and tailored to the unique context of the influence of the Korean Wave within the Netherlands. This adaptation is crucial to ensure that the theoretical framework accurately reflects the nuances of this particular cultural exchange and its potential impact on Dutch perceptions of South Korea. First, the target country, in this case, the Netherlands, must willingly develop an appreciation for the cultural products of the sender country (South Korea), including K-pop, K-dramas, K-food, and K-skincare, as well as its political and ethical values, institutions, and foreign policies.<sup>47</sup> This voluntary appreciation spreads throughout the target country's society through social interactions and a process known as "socialization in soft power operation".<sup>48</sup> These elements of voluntary appreciation and socialization are crucial prerequisites for soft power to exert its influence. Once established, the sender country can utilize its soft power resources to impact the target

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<sup>45</sup> Mikael Weissmann, "Capturing Power Shift in East Asia: Toward an Analytical Framework for Understanding "Soft Power"," *Asian Perspective* 44, no.3 (2020): 361-363.

<sup>46</sup> Mikael Weissmann, "Capturing Power Shift in East Asia: Toward an Analytical Framework for Understanding "Soft Power"," *Asian Perspective* 44, no.3 (2020): 361-363.

<sup>47</sup> Deuk Hahm Sung and Song, Sooho, "The Impact of the Korean Wave on South Korea–Taiwan Relations," *Asian Survey* 2 (2021): 217-240. DOI:10.1525/as.2021.61.2.217

<sup>48</sup> Deuk Hahm Sung and Song, Sooho, "The Impact of the Korean Wave on South Korea–Taiwan Relations," *Asian Survey* 2 (2021): 217-240. DOI:10.1525/as.2021.61.2.217

state, first focusing on the public and then on the government.<sup>49</sup> The influence of soft power can lead to concrete outcomes, such as increased travel, trade, and investment between the two nations, as well as shifts in government policies. In summary, the model outlines the essential steps for generating soft power as follows: Sources of soft power (Korean cultural products) > Diffusion of sources > Socialization of sources (the Korean Wave in the Netherlands) > Improvement of the sender nation’s image in the target state > Changes in international relations.<sup>50</sup>



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Model 1: *Soft power theory utilized in the context of this thesis.*

To clarify the process of soft power development, the following key steps can be identified:

Initially, South Korea proactively generates and promotes various cultural products, such as the hugely successful “Squid Game”, which act as instruments for expressing the country’s soft power. These cultural phenomena originate in South Korea and are deliberately spread to international audiences. As these South Korean cultural elements, including the Korean Wave, resonate with foreign populations, a process of socialization begins to take shape. For instance, in the Netherlands, many individuals become passionate fans of K-pop, deeply engaging with the music, dance, and the wider Korean cultural scene. This grassroots connection and

<sup>49</sup> Deuk Hahm Sung and Song, Sooho, “The Impact of the Korean Wave on South Korea–Taiwan Relations,” *Asian Survey* 2 (2021): 217-240. DOI:10.1525/as.2021.61.2.217

<sup>50</sup> Deuk Hahm Sung and Song, Sooho, “The Impact of the Korean Wave on South Korea–Taiwan Relations,” *Asian Survey* 2 (2021): 217-240. DOI:10.1525/as.2021.61.2.217

<sup>51</sup> Serafina Bucak, “K-Pop in the Netherlands: South Korea’s Soft Power,” (Bachelor’s thesis, Leiden University, 2024), 15-17, <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3769421>.

engagement with South Korean culture among Dutch fans gradually improve the perception and image of South Korea within the country. This transformation in public sentiment, driven by soft power resources from South Korea, can have real implications for international relations between the two nations. The enhanced goodwill, familiarity, and attractiveness of South Korea in the eyes of the Dutch can lead to more favorable diplomatic, economic, and cultural relationships. In summary, this complex process, starting with the creation of soft power resources in South Korea, their distribution and socialization in foreign contexts, the subsequent enhancement of the country's image abroad, and the strengthening of international relations, collectively boosts South Korea's soft power on the global stage. This comprehensive approach emphasizes the strategic and evolving nature of soft power development for countries like South Korea.

## ***CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY***

This study uses survey and interviews to explore consumers of the Korean wave by different age groups in the Netherlands. A survey with open-ended questionnaires is sent to 25 participants. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are conducted with 15 participants to gain deeper insights. The methodology involves administering an open-ended questionnaire through Google Forms, allowing participants to share detailed responses.<sup>52</sup> To reduce survey fatigue, which occurs when participants lose interest due to various factors, primarily the number of questions, the questionnaire is designed to consist of five questions. This approach aims to encourage participants to provide more detailed and thoughtful answers.<sup>53</sup> At the end all participants are asked to state their age through a multiple-choice question where the

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<sup>52</sup> Hamed Taherdoost, "Designing a Questionnaire for a Research Paper: A Comprehensive Guide to Design and Develop an Effective Questionnaire," *Asian Journal of Managerial Science* Vol.11, No.1 (2022): 8-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51983/ajms-2022.11.1.3087>

<sup>53</sup> Qualtrics, "Your Quick Guide to Open-ended Questions in Surveys - Qualtrics," Qualtrics, August 24, 2023, <https://www.qualtrics.com/au/experience-management/research/open-endedquestions/#:~:text=Solution%3A%20To%20reduce%20survey%20fatigue,open%2Dended%20questions%20or%20fewer.>

aforementioned age groups are listed. Examples of answers have been provided to give the respondents an indication of how they can answer the questions.

**1. Can you name five things you know about Korea?**

This question assesses the respondent's familiarity with Korea's culture and history, highlighting areas of interest and potential gaps in awareness.

**2. Put those five in chronological order and explain how you first learned about them.**

This question encourages respondents to reflect on their journey of discovery regarding Korea, revealing how their awareness has evolved over time.

**3. What sparked your interest in Korean culture, and how has it developed?**

This question explores the motivations behind their interest and how their engagement with Korean culture has deepened or expanded.

**4. Have you learned anything new about Korea due to your growing interests?**

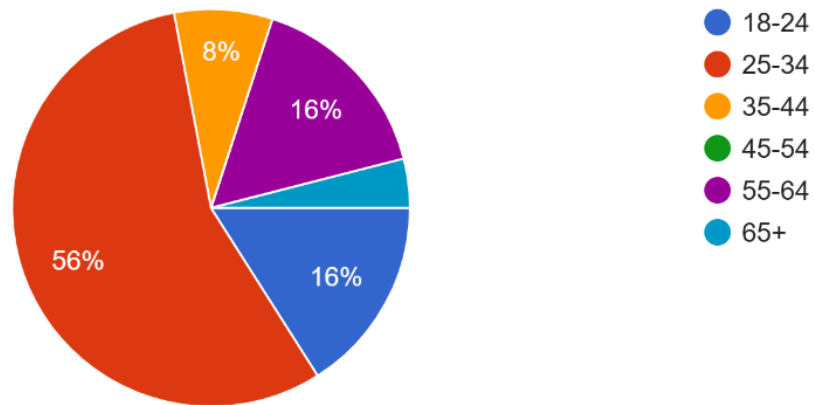
This question assesses how their increasing interest has broadened their knowledge of Korea.

**5. How do you typically consume Korean-related content?**

This question investigates the platforms and methods through which respondents engage with Korean culture, such as music, television, or social media.

The questionnaire will be distributed to a sample (n) of 25 participants, of various ages, with the aim of capturing a variety of perspectives. This approach will help understanding the diverse experiences related to the Korean wave in the Netherlands. It is worth noting that the majority (56%) of the respondents of the survey are in the 25-34 age group. The remainder of the respondents are in the 18-24 (16%), 35-44 (8%), 55-64 (16%), and 65+ (4%) age groups. Unfortunately, there were no respondents for the 45-54 age group recorded. See the pie chart below.

25 responses



*Chart 1: respondents of survey age details*

For the interviews, a semi-structured interview method is used. In the structured interview method, researchers gather data using a predetermined set of questions.<sup>54</sup> Each interview follows the same format, facilitating comparison but limiting interviewees' ability to explore topics of personal interest.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, unstructured interviews allow for questions based on the interviewee's responses, enabling deeper exploration, but may overlook significant topics.<sup>56</sup> To balance these approaches, researchers often use semi-structured interviews, which include a standard set of questions while allowing for additional questions based on the conversation.<sup>57</sup> This flexibility encourages in-depth discussions on specific topics.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Samsul Mannan and M. Afni, "Best practices of semi-structured interview method," *Chittagong Port Authority* (2020): 1-12.

<sup>55</sup> Samsul Mannan and M. Afni, "Best practices of semi-structured interview method," *Chittagong Port Authority* (2020): 1-12.

<sup>56</sup> Samsul Mannan and M. Afni, "Best practices of semi-structured interview method," *Chittagong Port Authority* (2020): 1-12.

<sup>57</sup> Samsul Mannan and M. Afni, "Best practices of semi-structured interview method," *Chittagong Port Authority* (2020): 1-12.

<sup>58</sup> Samsul Mannan and M. Afni, "Best practices of semi-structured interview method," *Chittagong Port Authority* (2020): 1-12.

The following questions were frequently asked during the interviews, with some overlap with the survey questions:

1. **What do you know about Korea?**

Assesses the interviewee's existing knowledge of Korean culture and history.

2. **How did you acquire this knowledge?**

Explores the sources contributing to their understanding of Korea.

3. **What, according to you, is typically Korean?**

Investigates perceptions of Korean culture and identity.

4. **What was your first encounter with Korean content?**

Identifies initial exposure to Korean media or culture.

5. **How has that expanded over time?**

Seeks to understand the evolution of their engagement with Korean content.

6. **What was the appeal of the Korean content for you?**

Explores specific aspects of Korean content that resonate with the interviewee.

7. **What is your personal perception of South Korea?**

Gathers subjective views on the country.

8. **Have you noticed a change in the accessibility of Korean content?**

Assesses observations regarding the availability of Korean media over time.

9. **How has your view of South Korea changed?**

Investigates shifts in understanding or attitude based on their experiences.

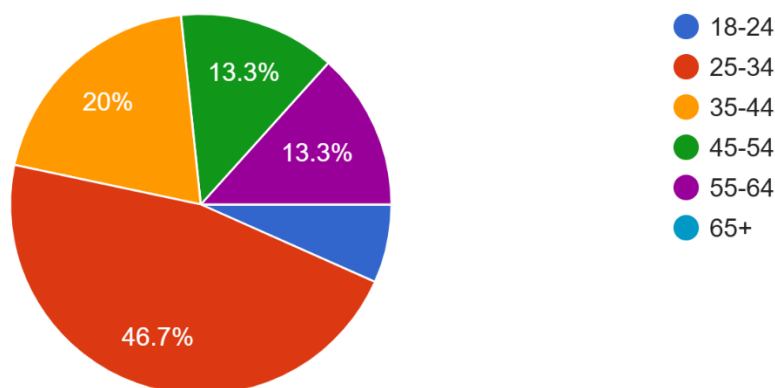
10. **What keeps you interested in anything Korean?**

Identifies factors sustaining their interest in Korean culture.

11. **Did you learn anything new because of your growing interest in Korean content?**

Explores whether their interest has led to new insights about Korea.

15 responses



*Chart 2: respondents of interviews age details*

Here it is also worth noting that the majority (46.7%) of the respondents of the interviews are in the 25-34 age group. The remainder of the respondents are in the 18-24 (16%), 35-44 (20%), 45-54 (13.3%), 55-64 (13.3%), and 65+ (6.7%) age groups.

The only requirement for the participants is that they consume content or products related to the Korean wave. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of Dutch Korean wave consumers and how soft power is employed.

Thematic analysis will be used to examine data collected from both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. This analysis will identify recurring themes and patterns, providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and cultural implications of Korean wave consumers in the Netherlands.<sup>59</sup> Thematic analysis offers flexibility in interpreting data, allowing for efficient categorization into broader themes. Unlike many qualitative methods, it can adapt to various theoretical frameworks relevant to this research.<sup>60</sup> The goal of thematic analysis is to identify and interpret significant features guided by the research question,

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<sup>59</sup> Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Thematic Analysis," *The journal of positive psychology* 12, no. 3 (2017): 297–298.

<sup>60</sup> Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Thematic Analysis," *The journal of positive psychology* 12, no. 3 (2017): 297–298.

accommodating evolving inquiries throughout the analysis process.<sup>61</sup> It can handle different research questions, sample sizes, and data collection methods, helping to uncover patterns in participants' experiences and views.<sup>62</sup> This method is suitable for both large and small datasets, as well as homogeneous and heterogeneous samples, making it versatile across research contexts.<sup>63</sup> The questionnaire was distributed to individuals nearby through social media, and recipients were encouraged to share it with their peers. The same approach was used for the interviews. Participants were recruited through nearby sources. For instance, I would ask a nearby friend for an interview and to fill out the survey. I would then ask that same friend if they know people who can fill out the survey and who I can interview. Thus, the sampling methods primarily involve convenience sampling and snowball sampling.<sup>64</sup> For selecting participants, purposive sampling is employed.<sup>65</sup> By incorporating this set of data and methods, this study aims to highlight the unique characteristics and experiences of Dutch consumers of the Korean wave across different age groups. This will contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural impact and significance of the Korean wave in the Netherlands, as well as insights into South Korea's soft power.

This research method has several important limitations. First, interpreting survey responses can be subjective, leading to variations in analysis and conclusions about South Korea's soft power in the Netherlands. The survey's short timeframe may limit the depth and reliability of the data collected. Additionally, smaller sample sizes compared to full-scale ethnographic studies can restrict the generalizability of findings and introduce sampling bias.

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<sup>61</sup> Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Thematic Analysis," *The journal of positive psychology* 12, no. 3 (2017): 297–298.

<sup>62</sup> Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Thematic Analysis," *The journal of positive psychology* 12, no. 3 (2017): 297–298.

<sup>63</sup> Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Thematic Analysis," *The journal of positive psychology* 12, no. 3 (2017): 297–298.

<sup>64</sup> Dana P Turner, "Sampling Methods in Research Design," *Headache* 60, no. 1 (2020): 8–12. DOI: 10.1111/head.13707

<sup>65</sup> Dana P Turner, "Sampling Methods in Research Design," *Headache* 60, no. 1 (2020): 8–12. DOI: 10.1111/head.13707

While participants were encouraged to provide detailed answers, some responses were brief, potentially lacking sufficient information for thorough analysis. The Netherlands' multicultural society includes individuals from various backgrounds, which may further limit the applicability of findings and contribute to sampling bias. Finally, while thematic analysis is flexible, this flexibility can complicate decisions about which data points are most significant.

## ***CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS***

In this chapter, the findings from the surveys and interviews will be presented. The thematic analysis will be reserved for chapter 7. Here, the focus is on highlighting the key findings derived from the participants' responses, ensuring that they align with the research question.

### ***6.1: SURVEY FINDINGS: DIFFERENCES IN ENGAGEMENT***

Based on the survey responses, several key findings emerge regarding the influence of the Korean Wave on Dutch audiences, emphasizing generational differences in perceptions and engagement with Korean culture. Participants mentioned a variety of topics related to Korea, indicating varying levels of familiarity and influence of the Korean Wave.

Cultural elements frequently mentioned by participants included various foods such as *kimchi*, *bibimbap*, Korean BBQ, *tteokbokki*, and Korean fried chicken, reflecting a strong connection to Korean cuisine. In terms of entertainment, K-Pop acts like BTS, 2NE1, and Shinee, along with K-Dramas such as "Squid Game" and "Boys Over Flowers", were popular references, showcasing the significant influence of these cultural exports. Participants also discussed the historical context surrounding South Korea, with the Korean War and North Korea's political landscape, particularly figures like Kim Jong Un, serving as important points of discussion. This historical awareness indicates a deeper understanding of Korea's geopolitical situation. Modern products and brands like Samsung and Hyundai were noted, highlighting the participants' recognition of South Korea's economic presence on the global stage. Additionally, social issues, including the topic of comfort women and recent protests,

emerged in conversations, demonstrating an interest in Korea's historical and social dynamics. Cultural practices were also acknowledged, with elements like traditional clothing (*hanbok*), the Korean language (*Hangul*), and unique customs, such as matching outfits, being significant to the participants' understanding of Korean culture. This multifaceted engagement illustrates the diverse ways in which Dutch audiences connect with South Korea.

There were notable generational differences in engagement with Korean culture, with younger age groups focusing more on pop culture and older age groups emphasizing historical context. The younger age group, particularly those aged 18 to 24, exhibits a strong focus on pop culture, especially K-Pop and K-Dramas. Many in this demographic discovered Korean culture through social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube, which play a significant role in shaping their interests. Their engagement with Korean food often stems from its portrayal in shows and music, illustrating how entertainment fuels their cultural curiosity. In contrast, participants aged 25 to 44, demonstrate a more balanced understanding of cultural, historical, and modern elements of Korea. Their interest in K-Pop and K-Dramas is frequently linked to family influences or personal exploration, often prompted by friends introducing them to Korean culture. This group tends to engage in discussions about social issues and politics, reflecting a deeper awareness of the complexities surrounding Korean society. Older age groups, particularly those aged 55 and above, are more inclined to reference historical events, such as the Korean War, with less emphasis on contemporary pop culture. Their engagement with Korean culture often arises from family connections or media exposure through news rather than social media channels. While they appreciate cultural practices, such as traditional foods, they typically show less interest in K-Pop or K-Dramas, focusing instead on the historical and social contexts that shape their perceptions of Korea.

Engagement with Korean culture among participants is evident through various forms of media consumption. Netflix emerged as the most popular platform for watching K-Dramas,

while YouTube and Spotify were favored for K-Pop. Many respondents also followed Korean culture through social media, highlighting the impact of digital platforms on their cultural engagement. Food exploration is another significant aspect, with a considerable number of respondents expressing a willingness to try Korean cuisine, often influenced by its portrayal in the media. This connection between media representation and food choices illustrates how entertainment can inspire culinary curiosity. Furthermore, cultural curiosity has grown among participants, with many showing increased interest in learning more about Korean history and societal issues. This heightened awareness is largely attributed to exposure through entertainment and social media, which serve as gateways to deeper understanding of Korean culture.

The findings indicate that the Korean Wave serves as a powerful soft power tool, significantly shaping perceptions and engagement across different age groups in the Netherlands. Younger audiences, particularly those aged 18 to 24, are primarily influenced by pop culture, with a strong affinity for K-Pop and K-Dramas. Their discovery of Korean culture is largely facilitated by social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube, which not only introduce them to entertainment content but also create a sense of community among fans. This demographic's engagement with Korean cuisine often stems from its portrayal in shows and music, highlighting how entertainment fuels cultural curiosity and culinary exploration. In contrast, participants aged 25 to 44, demonstrate a more balanced understanding of Korea, integrating cultural, historical, and modern elements into their engagement. Their interest in K-Pop and K-Dramas is frequently linked to family influences or personal exploration, suggesting that social networks play a crucial role in their cultural engagement. This group tends to engage in discussions about social issues and politics, reflecting a deeper awareness of the complexities surrounding Korean society. Their perspectives indicate that while they appreciate the entertainment aspects of the Korean Wave, they also seek to understand the broader socio-

political context. Older age groups, particularly those aged 55 and above, exhibit a different relationship with Korean culture. They are more inclined to reference historical events, such as the Korean War and social issues like Japan's colonial rule, showing a preference for traditional media over contemporary pop culture. Their engagement often arises from family connections or media exposure through news, rather than social media interactions. While they appreciate cultural practices, such as traditional foods and customs, they typically show less interest in K-Pop or K-Dramas. Instead, their understanding of Korea is shaped by historical and social contexts, leading to a more critical and nuanced perspective. This generational divide underscores the multifaceted impact of the Korean Wave on Dutch audiences. While younger audiences celebrate the entertainment aspects and foster connections through shared interests, older audiences navigate the historical intricacies that inform their perceptions. The Korean Wave not only promotes cultural curiosity among all age groups but also facilitates deeper intercultural understanding and dialogue. By bridging gaps between entertainment and historical awareness, the Korean Wave enriches perceptions of South Korea, demonstrating its effectiveness as a cultural diplomacy tool. Overall, the findings illustrate that the Korean Wave's influence is both broad and deep, with each age group engaging in unique ways that reflect their experiences and interests.

## ***6.2: INTERVIEW FINDINGS: DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVES***

Based on the interview transcripts, several key findings emerge regarding the influence of the Korean Wave as a soft power tool on Dutch audiences across different age groups. These findings indicate how perceptions of South Korea vary by age group and personal experiences. The findings from the interviews reveal several key insights regarding Dutch audiences' engagement with Korean culture, emphasizing cultural knowledge and exposure, perceptions of Korean society, the evolution of interests, accessibility of content, mixed perceptions of South Korea, and the influence of personal connections. Younger interviewees, particularly

those aged 22 to 29, often cited K-Pop, K-Dramas, and Korean cuisine as their primary sources of knowledge about Korea. In contrast, older interviewees, aged 46 to 60, emphasized historical contexts such as the Korean War and Japan's colonial rule, indicating a more nuanced understanding rooted in historical events rather than contemporary pop culture. Younger participants tend to focus on the vibrant aspects of Korean culture, viewing South Korea as a modern and appealing destination. For instance, a 25-year-old expressed admiration for the community aspect of K-Pop, while a 22-year-old appreciated the beauty of Korean landscapes depicted in K-Dramas. This highlights how younger audiences are drawn to the aesthetic and social dimensions of Korean culture. Conversely, older interviewees reflected on societal structures, such as hierarchy and family values. The 46-year-old mentioned respect for elders as a notable cultural trait, demonstrating how their perspectives are shaped by historical and social contexts. This generational difference underscores varying approaches to understanding Korean society.

Many respondents noted that their interests evolved over time. For example, a 36-year-old initially engaged with K-Pop but later developed a deeper understanding of Korean history and societal issues. This evolution often correlates with personal experiences, such as studying or living in Korea, as illustrated by the 27-year-old who lived there for six months and gained firsthand insights into Korean society. All interviewees acknowledged the increased accessibility of Korean content over the years, largely due to streaming services and social media. Younger participants highlighted how this accessibility fosters community and shared interests, making it easier to connect with others who share their enthusiasm for Korean culture. Older respondents noted that this increased access has broadened their exposure to diverse aspects of Korean culture beyond just entertainment. Mixed perceptions of South Korea were common among interviewees. Younger participants generally expressed positive views influenced by the vibrant and polished image portrayed in media. However, they also

recognized the complexities of Korean society, such as work culture and social pressures. Older participants, while appreciative of Korea's cultural richness, often maintained a more critical perspective, acknowledging historical tensions and contemporary social issues. Lastly, the influence of personal connections emerged as a significant factor in shaping interest in Korean culture. Several interviewees mentioned the role of friendships and social circles in their engagement. A 22-year-old noted how discovering K-Pop with friends created a bond, while a 27-year-old highlighted community involvement as a motivating factor to explore Korean content further. This showcases the importance of social networks in fostering cultural curiosity and engagement.

Overall, these findings illustrate that the Korean Wave significantly shapes Dutch audiences' perceptions and engagement with South Korea, revealing notable differences across age groups. Younger audiences, particularly those aged 22 to 29, are primarily influenced by entertainment and social aspects, showcasing a strong affinity for K-Pop, K-Dramas, and Korean cuisine. Their engagement is often facilitated by social media, which creates a sense of community and shared interests. This demographic views South Korea as a vibrant and modern destination, drawn in by the aesthetic appeal and communal aspects of Korean culture. In contrast, older age groups, particularly those aged 46 to 60, draw from historical contexts, emphasizing events such as the Korean War and Japan's colonial rule. Their perspectives reflect a more nuanced understanding of Korean society, shaped by historical and social dynamics rather than contemporary pop culture. This critical viewpoint allows them to appreciate the richness of Korea's cultural heritage while also recognizing the complexities and challenges faced by the country today. The evolution of interests among participants could indicate that engagement with the Korean Wave is not static, rather, it develops over time and is influenced by personal experiences, such as living in Korea or studying its language. The increased accessibility of Korean content through streaming services and social media has further

facilitated this engagement, allowing both younger and older audiences to explore diverse aspects of Korean culture. Mixed perceptions of South Korea highlight the impact of media portrayals, where younger audiences may idealize the culture while acknowledging underlying social pressures, and older participants maintain a more critical lens informed by historical narratives. Additionally, the role of personal connections emphasizes how friendships and social networks can drive cultural curiosity and engagement, creating a rich tapestry of experiences that vary widely among different age groups. In summary, the Korean Wave serves as a dynamic tool of soft power, influencing Dutch audiences in multifaceted ways. It fosters cultural curiosity, emotional connections, and a deeper understanding of Korean society, while also illustrating how generational differences shape engagement with cultural phenomena. This complexity showcases the importance of recognizing the diverse pathways through which cultural influence operates in a globalized world.

#### ***CHAPTER 7: THEMATIC ANALYSIS: KEY THEMES IN AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS***

The Korean Wave functions as a powerful soft power tool, shaping the perceptions and engagement of Dutch audiences toward South Korea, with significant variations across different age groups. This analysis will explore key themes: cultural elements, media consumption patterns, perceptions of Korean society, cultural curiosity and evolution of interests, accessibility and community, and mixed perceptions. Each theme highlights the distinct ways in which different demographics engage with and understand Korean culture.

Younger audiences, particularly those aged 18 to 24, primarily engage with pop culture, especially K-Pop and K-Dramas. Their discovery of Korean culture is largely facilitated through social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube. This digital engagement not only allows for immediate access to entertainment but also fosters a sense of community among fans. The vibrancy of K-Pop and the emotional storytelling in K-Dramas resonate with younger

viewers, making South Korea an appealing and modern destination in their eyes. The influence of social media suggests that these platforms are shaping cultural preferences, highlighting how digital connectivity can enhance cultural curiosity. The implication here is that as younger audiences increasingly rely on social media, their engagement with Korean culture may become more immediate and communal, potentially influencing broader cultural trends in the Netherlands.

In contrast, older age groups, particularly those aged 55 and above, emphasize historical context in their engagement with Korean culture. They reference significant events like the Korean War and Japan's colonial rule, indicating a deeper understanding rooted in traditional media and familial influences. This perspective suggests that their engagement is shaped by historical narratives and personal experiences that prioritize the socio-political landscape of Korea. Their critical lens reflects a life experience that values depth over immediacy, allowing them to appreciate the complexities of Korean society. This implies that older audiences may be more inclined to engage with cultural phenomena that resonate with their historical knowledge, leading to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary issues.

Media consumption patterns also vary significantly between age groups. For younger individuals, Netflix emerges as the leading platform for K-Dramas, while YouTube and Spotify dominate for K-Pop. This reliance on streaming services enhances their ability to engage with Korean culture in real-time, fostering a communal experience around shared interests. The implications of this pattern suggest that younger audiences are not only consuming content but also participating in cultural dialogues that shape their identities. Older respondents, however, tend to rely more on news and documentaries, leading to a broader but less immediate engagement with contemporary Korean culture. This difference indicates that while younger

audiences prioritize entertainment and social interaction, older viewers seek informative content that deepens their understanding of Korea's historical and cultural complexities.

Cultural curiosity and the evolution of interests play a crucial role in how audiences perceive Korean culture. Many participants noted that their interests evolved over time, starting with K-Pop and K-Dramas, and later developing a deeper understanding of Korean history and societal issues. This evolution often correlates with personal experiences, such as studying or living in Korea, which enhances their appreciation for the culture. The implication is that exposure to culture can transform initial entertainment-driven interests into a comprehensive understanding of societal dynamics, highlighting the role of personal experiences in shaping cultural engagement.

Accessibility and community are also pivotal themes. The increased availability of Korean content through streaming services has made it easier for audiences to explore various aspects of Korean culture. Younger participants often cite this accessibility as a means to connect with others who share similar interests, emphasizing the role of digital platforms in fostering community. The implication here is that as accessibility increases, so does the potential for cross-cultural exchanges and friendships, enriching the cultural landscape in the Netherlands. Older audiences, while recognizing the benefits of accessible content, tend to focus more on the cultural richness and historical depth rather than entertainment alone. This distinction suggests that older audiences value a more comprehensive context, which may lead to different forms of engagement with Korean culture.

Lastly, mixed perceptions of South Korea emerge across age groups. Younger audiences generally express positive views influenced by polished media portrayals, acknowledging South Korea's modernity and cultural appeal. However, they also recognize underlying social pressures and complexities, indicating a more nuanced understanding than mere admiration.

Older participants maintain a critical perspective, valuing cultural richness while also acknowledging historical grievances. This complexity in perceptions highlights the multifaceted nature of cultural engagement and the varying lenses through which different age groups approach Korean culture. The implication is that these mixed perceptions can lead to deeper dialogues about cultural identity and societal challenges, enriching the overall understanding of South Korea among Dutch audiences.

Overall, these themes illustrate how the Korean Wave significantly influences Dutch audiences, revealing the intricate dynamics of cultural engagement shaped by age, media consumption, and personal experiences. Understanding these variations not only enriches our comprehension of the Korean Wave's impact but also emphasizes the role of soft power in fostering intercultural connections. The responses indicate that cultural engagement is not static; rather, it evolves with exposure, personal experiences, and societal contexts, reflecting the ongoing dialogue between cultures in a globalized world.

### ***7.1: DISCUSSION: THE KOREAN WAVE AS A SOFT POWER TOOL***

This chapter discusses the findings from the surveys and interviews to address the central research question: “In what ways does the Korean Wave function as a soft power tool in shaping the perceptions and engagement of Dutch audiences toward South Korea, and how does this vary across different age groups?” The findings reveal that the Korean Wave, as an instrument of soft power, significantly influences Dutch audiences' cultural perceptions, interest, and engagement with South Korea. However, this influence varies distinctly across generational lines, demonstrating the multifaceted and adaptive nature of Korean cultural diplomacy. The Korean Wave functions as a compelling vehicle for soft power by exporting cultural products, particularly pop music, television dramas, cuisine, and fashion, which shape positive perceptions of Korean society. Among Dutch audiences, these cultural exports foster emotional

connections and cultural appreciation, often leading to deeper socio-political engagement. The findings illustrate that the Korean Wave does more than entertain; it informs and influences how individuals perceive South Korea as a nation and culture.

Younger participants (ages 18–24) are primarily influenced by the entertainment dimensions of the Korean Wave, especially K-Pop and K-Dramas. Their engagement is amplified by digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Spotify, and Netflix, which transform Korean media into global commodities that reach youth audiences in a highly personalized manner. This accessibility fosters not only cultural affinity but also a sense of community among fans. The implications of this are significant: the digital landscape operationalizes soft power by creating emotional investments and shared experiences that encourage deeper cultural exploration.

In contrast, older respondents (ages 55 and above) engage with South Korea through traditional media formats, such as documentaries and news outlets. While their engagement may be less entertainment-driven, it remains informed and meaningful. Their understanding is shaped by historical contexts like the Korean War and Japanese colonial rule, adding depth to their perceptions. This generational divide underscores how soft power manifests differently across age groups; for older audiences, cultural narratives are intertwined with geopolitical relevance and historical grievances, indicating that soft power is not monolithic but rather reflects the audience's prior knowledge and experiences. Respondents ages 25–44 occupy an intermediate position, balancing entertainment-driven engagement with socio-cultural awareness. Many have begun their exposure through pop culture but subsequently developed a more nuanced understanding of Korean history and values. This trajectory highlights how initial encounters with entertainment can evolve into sustained interest, especially among those who have traveled to Korea or engaged in cultural exchanges.

The generational differences in how Dutch audiences engage with and perceive South Korea reveal the flexibility of the Korean Wave as a soft power tool. For younger individuals, Korean content serves as an entry point into broader cultural exploration. They often move from music and drama to deeper cultural, linguistic, and historical dimensions, a transition supported by interview data. Conversely, older audiences view South Korea through a geopolitical lens, shaped by long-standing narratives rather than contemporary entertainment. This perspective can result in critical views that reflect the complexities of Korean society, reinforcing the notion that soft power extends beyond mere admiration to include critical engagement.

Another noteworthy distinction lies in motivations and modes of engagement. Younger participants emphasize social connections and identity expression through Korean culture, often mediated by digital platforms. For them, South Korea represents not just a cultural touchstone but also a vibrant social community. Older participants, however, focus more on cultural authenticity and heritage, indicating that soft power is operationalized through a mix of emotional and historical sentiments. This duality suggests that the effectiveness of soft power depends on the materials and infrastructures that support these narratives, including media platforms, cultural products, and personal experiences.

Across age groups, the Korean Wave fosters cultural curiosity and a desire to learn more about South Korea. Initial exposure through entertainment often leads to further exploration of Korean food, language, societal values, and history. This transition from passive consumption to active engagement exemplifies effective soft power. Interview participants noted how their interests expanded from K-Pop to complex topics like Korea's education system and economic transformation. Personal connections, whether friendships, romantic relationships, or travel experiences, further amplify the impact of Korean soft power. These interpersonal dynamics demonstrate how cultural diplomacy operates at the micro level through individual networks

and shared experiences. Increased accessibility to Korean content via streaming and social platforms facilitates this organic engagement, reaching audiences who might otherwise not connect with foreign cultures.

Despite overwhelmingly positive perceptions among younger audiences, there is an emerging awareness of the complexities within Korean society. Participants noted issues such as work culture pressures, beauty standards, and social hierarchies that challenge the idealized image presented in media. This critical awareness suggests that while soft power can generate admiration, it can also invite scrutiny when expectations created by cultural products do not align with lived realities. Older participants, approaching Korea from a more critical vantage point, were more attuned to these contradictions, discussing historical grievances and political tensions. Thus, while the Korean Wave promotes a favorable national image, it also opens space for dialogue about underlying issues, reinforcing the idea that soft power is as much about engagement as it is about persuasion.

In summary, the Korean Wave functions as an effective and adaptable soft power mechanism that shapes Dutch perceptions and engagement with South Korea in diverse ways. Younger audiences are drawn in by entertainment and social media, leading to cultural affinity and community formation. Older audiences engage through historical and sociopolitical narratives, fostering critical appreciation. The study highlights that while the manifestations of soft power vary across generations, the Korean Wave consistently stimulates curiosity, emotional investment, and deeper cultural understanding. These findings suggest that the future workings of soft power will rely on the infrastructure of digital platforms, the emotional resonance of cultural narratives, and the historical contexts that inform audience engagement. Understanding these dynamics will be crucial for future discussions on cultural influence in an increasingly interconnected world.

## ***CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION***

In answering the research question, “In what ways does the Korean Wave function as a soft power tool in shaping the perceptions and engagement of Dutch audiences toward South Korea, and how does this vary across different age groups?” it is evident that the Korean Wave plays a complex and dynamic role in influencing Dutch audiences’ perceptions and engagement with South Korean culture. Key findings illustrate that younger audiences, particularly those aged 18-24, are primarily captivated by pop culture elements such as K-Pop and K-Dramas, which they discover through social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube. This engagement not only fosters a sense of community but also shapes positive perceptions of South Korea as a vibrant and modern society. The emotional investment and social connectivity experienced by this demographic highlights how the Korean Wave serves as a powerful catalyst for cultural curiosity and collective identity among younger audiences. Conversely, older audiences (ages 55 and above) approach the Korean Wave with a focus on historical context and social issues, often referencing significant events such as the Korean War and Japan’s colonial rule. Their understanding, shaped by traditional media and familial influences, leads to a more critical perspective on South Korea’s societal dynamics. This generational divide reveals a nuanced relationship with the Korean Wave, where younger audiences celebrate entertainment while older audiences engage with historical intricacies, underscoring the complexities of cultural engagement through soft power. Overall, the Korean Wave not only enhances cultural curiosity among Dutch audiences but also serves as a conduit for deeper intercultural understanding and dialogue. By bridging the gap between entertainment and historical awareness, it effectively enriches perceptions of South Korea, demonstrating its significant role as a tool of cultural diplomacy.

### ***8.1: CONTRIBUTION AND LIMITATIONS***

This study provides valuable insights into how the Korean Wave functions as a soft power tool in shaping Dutch audiences' perceptions of South Korea. By employing an approach that includes surveys and interviews across diverse age groups, the research highlights generational differences in engagement with Korean culture. Younger audiences predominantly connect through pop culture, while older individuals tend to focus on historical and social contexts. This nuanced understanding enhances the existing literature on soft power by illustrating how cultural exports like K-Pop and K-Dramas foster emotional connections and cultural curiosity, thereby influencing perceptions and engagement.

Conceptually, this thesis expands on Joseph Nye's framework of soft power by adapting it to the context of the Korean Wave. It emphasizes the importance of cultural diplomacy and the dynamic interplay between entertainment and historical narratives. By proposing a model that links cultural products to shifts in public perception and international relations, this research illustrates the adaptability of soft power in contemporary contexts. The findings showcase that soft power is not merely about attraction but also involves critical engagement and dialogue, suggesting new avenues for future research on cultural influence. This thesis not only contributes empirically to the understanding of the Korean Wave's impact in the Netherlands but also enriches the theoretical discourse on soft power by framing it within the complexities of cultural exchange. As the Korean Wave continues to evolve, ongoing research will be crucial to explore its implications across different demographics and cultural contexts.

One significant limitation of this study lies in its exclusive focus on a single national context: the Netherlands. Although the Dutch case offers important and contextually rich insights into the reception and influence of the Korean Wave as a form of soft power, the findings may not be readily generalizable to other Western countries that differ in their cultural norms, political systems, media landscapes, and socioeconomic conditions. Each national

context possesses unique characteristics that shape how foreign cultural products are received and interpreted by local audiences. Therefore, without comparative analysis involving other European nations, or even countries outside of Europe, it remains difficult to determine whether the patterns observed in the Netherlands are indicative of broader, transnational trends or are instead uniquely shaped by Dutch-specific factors. In addition to the geographic limitation, the study relies solely on self-reported data obtained through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires administered to respondents. While self-reported data can provide valuable subjective insights into individual perceptions, preferences, and attitudes, it also has well-documented limitations. Respondents may consciously or unconsciously present themselves in a favorable light, may lack full awareness of their own motivations and behaviors, or may interpret questions differently based on personal frames of reference. Moreover, self-reports may not capture the more subtle, implicit, or subconscious dimensions of how exposure to Korean popular culture influences thought patterns, social interactions, and identity formation. As such, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Cultural trends and media consumption patterns are fluid and subject to change, particularly in a fast-moving digital age where new content, technologies, and global influences continuously reshape public tastes and behaviors. Longitudinal research, involving repeated observations or data collection over extended periods, would be instrumental in tracking how individuals' engagement with Korean pop culture, and their perceptions of Korea as a result, develop, intensify, or wane over time. This would be especially useful for examining how the soft power potential of South Korea unfolds across different phases of fan involvement or sociopolitical contexts. Additionally, while the sample size may be justifiable given the study's qualitative and exploratory nature and it is broader than the bachelor's thesis sample, it remains relatively small and lacks sufficient demographic diversity. Despite these acknowledged limitations, the study nevertheless contributes valuable preliminary insights into the workings

of the Korean Wave as a vehicle of South Korean soft power within the Dutch context. It serves as an important starting point for further academic inquiry, laying the groundwork for more expansive, comparative, and methodologically rigorous investigations into how Korean popular culture circulates and exerts influence in diverse sociocultural environments across Europe and beyond.

## ***8.2: AGENDAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH***

In light of the limitations outlined in this study, several avenues for future research are recommended to further advance understanding of the Korean Wave's role as a mechanism of South Korean soft power, particularly in Western contexts. These recommendations focus on addressing the current study's geographical, methodological, and temporal constraints, while also advocating for more inclusive, comparative, and interdisciplinary approaches. First, future studies should move beyond the national focus on the Netherlands and adopt a broader comparative framework that includes multiple countries across Europe and potentially beyond.

The influence of the Korean Wave is unlikely to manifest uniformly across different sociopolitical and cultural settings. Countries vary significantly in their historical relationships with East Asia, their openness to foreign media, their internal media infrastructures, and their public attitudes toward globalization and cultural hybridity. By conducting cross-national comparative analyses, researchers can explore how these contextual variables mediate the reception and interpretation of Korean popular culture. Such an approach would not only enhance the generalizability of findings but also illuminate both the commonalities and differences in how South Korea's cultural exports are received globally. Comparative studies might, for example, examine differences between Northern and Southern European countries, between Western and Eastern Europe, or between European and non-European nations with varying levels of engagement with Korean media.

Secondly, future research should aim to overcome the methodological constraints associated with relying solely on self-reported data from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. While these tools are valuable for capturing personal reflections and subjective experiences, they are inherently limited in their ability to access unconscious or socially mediated influences. Self-reports are also susceptible to bias, including social desirability bias and selective memory. To mitigate these limitations, future studies should incorporate a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, discourse analysis, experimental designs, and digital analytics. Methods such as participant observation within fan communities and analysis of online behavior and interactions could offer more nuanced and multidimensional insights into how the Korean Wave shapes identity, perception, and behavior at both individual and collective levels.

Furthermore, to better capture the fluid and evolving nature of media influence in the digital age, longitudinal research designs are strongly recommended. The Korean Wave is not a static cultural phenomenon. It is subject to the ebbs and flows of global media dynamics, shifting fan practices, and the broader sociopolitical climate. By following the same participants over time or revisiting case study contexts at regular intervals, researchers can trace how individuals' relationships with Korean culture develop, deepen, or decline. Longitudinal studies would be especially useful in assessing the long-term efficacy of South Korean soft power initiatives and whether these cultural engagements lead to lasting attitudinal shifts or behavioral changes.

In addition, future studies should place a stronger emphasis on sampling diversity. While the sample in the current study is broader than in earlier iterations, it remains relatively small and insufficiently representative of the wider Dutch population, let alone the wider European public. Theoretically, future research would benefit from engaging with interdisciplinary perspectives that go beyond the boundaries of Korean Studies or cultural studies alone. Drawing on theories from international relations, postcolonial studies, media

anthropology, and digital sociology, for instance, can provide more robust frameworks for analyzing how cultural flows operate within systems of power and inequality. There is also scope to critically examine the potential ambivalences or contradictions of soft power, such as instances where cultural appeal coexists with geopolitical skepticism or where fandom becomes a site of resistance rather than compliance.

In sum, by expanding the geographical reach, diversifying methodological approaches, embracing temporal depth, and promoting demographic inclusivity and theoretical innovation, future research can build on the foundational insights of this study. These recommendations aim to support a deeper and more comprehensive exploration of how the Korean Wave functions as a dynamic and multifaceted form of soft power in an increasingly interconnected world.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview transcripts

As the file would become too big for the archive, I will only showcase one interview transcript and one survey transcript. For all transcripts, see the shared doc:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/13GjvBP8YrXoHvWiuKOB Rz2Hq38sslRodYsWRZ9MML k/edit?usp=sharing>

<p><b><u>Interview 7 – 25 years old.</u></b> <i>Recorded 09-04-2025.</i></p>
<p><b>Interviewer:</b> What do you know about Korea?</p>
<p><b>Interviewee:</b> I know a lot about Korean history from the premodern to the modern era. I know a lot about the cultural aspects. I know a fair amount of the language. I know a lot about the food and food culture. I even know things about Korean mythology.</p>
<p><b>Interviewer:</b> Okay, how did you acquire this knowledge?</p>
<p><b>Interviewee:</b> The more formal things I got to know through school or university. Other things I looked up myself or experienced through social media or the internet.</p>
<p><b>Interviewer:</b> Okay, and why did you decide to study this specific subject?</p>
<p><b>Interviewee:</b> It first started when I learned about South Korea and got into K-Pop and everything that came with it. I knew I wanted to go there eventually, preferably to work. At first, I didn't know this study even existed. I studied to become an English teacher to eventually go to Korea, and then a friend told me about this study, and I was immediately hooked. Before this, I did tourism management, which was also to eventually go to Korea. It was difficult for me because I didn't like the subjects that were taught there, but as soon as I started Korea studies, I liked everything about it, even though it was difficult and a lot of work. I managed to pull through.</p>
<p><b>Interviewer:</b> Thank you. According to you, what is typically Korean?</p>
<p><b>Interviewee:</b> I would say the language, <i>Hangul</i>, is typically Korean. But also the hierarchy, especially here in the West, you don't really see that, you know, the respect for elders. The different titles for people, like <i>sunbae</i>, <i>hoobae</i>, or even just <i>oppa</i> and <i>unni</i>, are also important. Typical foods like <i>kimchi</i> or <i>bibimbap</i> come to mind as well.</p>
<p><b>Interviewer:</b> Nice, and what was your first encounter with Korean content?</p>

**Interviewee:** My first encounter with Korean content would have to be “Gangnam Style” from PSY because that went viral. At the time, I really hated it because I didn’t know what he was saying, and I didn’t like that everyone in my class kept doing the dance. Eventually, I started doing the dance too. That was in 2012. My actual introduction to K-Pop and Korean dramas came two years later when a friend showed me her favorite boy band. From that moment on, I became a fan of that group, and the rest is history.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for your answer. How has that expanded over time?

**Interviewee:** It has expanded quite a bit. For instance, when I was younger, I would only look at the bands or groups I liked, but I also had a very orientalist view. It was a new world to me; I saw them as exotic, and anything Korean would immediately grab my attention, but not in a good way. I appreciated the culture and found it interesting, but I saw them as something other than myself. This was a very orientalist mindset, and I blame it on being young and not understanding. I would even make remarks like, “Oh, I wish I was Korean,” without realizing why that was a negative thing to say. As I got older, I looked at the history and deeper aspects of the culture, including negative aspects. It wasn’t all just beauty and perfection. I accepted who I was and realized that they are their own people. Now I have a more realistic view.

**Interviewer:** And what is your personal perception right now of South Korea?

**Interviewee:** I’d say it’s still a beautiful country. It has a lot of beauty, and the traditional aspects of the culture are interesting and different from what I usually see. Most of the time, the people are respectful, which is ingrained in their culture. However, after doing my own research and seeing things online, I noticed a lot of negativity as well. For instance, in the workplaces and even with the idols we all love. My perception is one of awareness. I’m more educated now and see things more realistically.

**Interviewer:** What was the appeal of Korean content for you in the beginning?

**Interviewee:** The appeal was definitely the new aspect of it. It was so different from what I was used to in the West. Now, more groups are westernized, and some songs have more American influences. Back then, it was truly unique. That was what the appeal was, along with the fact that I could share it with my best friends. No one else really understood it, and I felt unique as well.

**Interviewer:** Have you noticed a change in accessibility of Korean content?

**Interviewee:** Yes, definitely. Eleven years ago, there wasn’t really anywhere you could buy Korean stuff. You had to buy online in specific places like eBay, and you’d have to pay a lot

for shipping. It would take weeks to arrive, which made it feel special. There were very few Korean restaurants, and I was young and broke. Now it's practically everywhere. You can find Korean products in supermarkets, and Netflix features trendy Korean dramas or movies that are screened in Dutch cinemas. You can buy whatever you want online and it arrives in a couple of days. It has become much more accessible and acceptable. People don't look at you weirdly if you say you're a K-Pop fan. Nowadays, I think every family has a cousin who is a K-Pop fan.

**Interviewer:** Good, and what has kept you interested in anything Korean-related?

**Interviewee:** My interest in K-Pop has definitely grown less, but that's more because I'm busy with other things. I've matured, you know? The idols are younger now. However, I'm still very interested in the cultural aspects, history, and heritage. I'm still learning Korean at an advanced level and incorporating it into my thesis. The history is rich, and there's always something new to learn, which has kept me interested.

**Interviewer:** Did you learn anything new because of your growing interests in Korean content that you otherwise wouldn't have known?

**Interviewee:** Yes. I'd say the issue surrounding comfort women that has been suppressed or ignored by the governments involved. During my studies, I had to write a term paper on it for a history class, and we discussed it in detail. If I hadn't had this interest, I simply would not have known because it never came up in my high school history classes.

**Interviewer:** Would you say the recent political unrest has influenced your perception of South Korea?

**Interviewee:** Because I am much more aware of things now, it has only added to the realistic aspect of my view. If I had seen this when I was younger, it might have affected me more. But now it doesn't influence my perception as much.

### **Survey transcript**

**Can you name 5 things you know about Korea?**

**Example:**

Bibimbap, parasite (movie), BTS, Korean war, recent protests

*Submitted 28-04-2025, 20:35 PM*

Seoul, Jeju, Kimchi, K-Pop, K-dramas

**Put the above five in order, by the time you first got to know them (old to new). And please explain how you first got to know them.**

**Example:**

Korean War - I heard about it from history class in school

Bibimbap - I had a chance to eat Korean food and found Bibimbap is the most famous one

BTS - I wasn't interested too much in K-pop, but BTS got me.

Parasite - I was gradually more exposed to Korean culture and saw some movies, beginning with Parasite

Recent protest - I saw them in newspapers and social media

*Submitted 28-04-2025, 20:35 PM*

K-Pop (introduced to me through a family friend when I was young)

K-Drama (Interest in dramas started after Korean singers started mentioning them)

Seoul (Seoul was the background of everything so I got to know the name and that it was the capital.)

Jeju (It was the background of a popular k-drama that I watched)

Kimchi (A food that I didn't know before it was mentioned repeatedly by Korean celebrities.)

**What made you aware and interested about Korean culture? How have your interests developed over time?**

**Example:**

To me it was the Netflix dramas. I first clicked and watched some to kill time and actually found them quite fascinating. In the drama, some culture (like the intense work culture, family, and food) looked particular and interesting. Later I noticed there are Korean restaurants not so far from my area and gave it a try. I pay more attention when a new drama or movie is released these days.

*Submitted 28-04-2025, 20:35 PM*

I think that listening to K-Pop got me interested in the language, and that grew into wanting to know more about the background of things.

**Is there anything you newly learned about Korea due to your grown interests (and that you would otherwise not know)?**

**Example:**

Korean military - among fans of the band I like, the members' having to go to military was such a big deal and it made me look into the military system.

Cram school culture - I never had a chance to think about it but as it was covered in some dramas I got to know more.

*Submitted 28-04-2025, 20:35 PM*

Something I recently discovered about Korea is the culture of deep sea fishing in Jeju done by the 해녀 community. I discovered this through the k-drama When life gives you Tangerines. I knew that they existed but I didn't know about their lifestyle and the risks that came with the job.

**How do you typically consume Korean related content?**

**Example:**

I usually stream k-drama's on Netflix/I eat Korean food in local restaurants/I listen to Korean pop music on Spotify/I stay up to date with Korean related news through online news channels or the local newspaper

*Submitted 28-04-2025, 20:35 PM*

I listen to K-Pop on YouTube Music, and watch Korean content on Twitter/X.

**Finally, what is your age?**

*Submitted 28-04-2025, 20:35 PM*

25-34