

TOURISM AS A DRIVER OF SOFT POWER: THE CASE OF SOUTH KOREA

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Abstract

In recent years, Korea has become more well-known due to the expansion of its culture and entertainment industries. According to the four regions proposed by Ooi (2016) (i) Tourism has increased knowledge about Korea, fostering empathetic understanding and familiarity with the destination. (ii) The principal goal of the tourism authority is to enhance Korea's reputation as a tourist destination. (iii) Korea has organized and invested in several events, exhibitions, and games that serve as a major tourist draw, thereby enhancing its geopolitical position. (iv) Through their behavior in the destination country, foreign tourists reflect the image of their home country, so altering preconceived notions of the other countries. This paper examines how tourism has become a driver of the country's soft power, taking into account the shift in the rebranding of the country towards the cultural and entertainment industry "Hallyu" and the country's ability to design public policies that promote attractive and accessible tourism for international visitors. In addition to their ability to organize large-scale events, the peninsula has demonstrated its political, social, and economic development to the world. Additionally, the manner in which tourism has been approached during and after COVID has made it possible to maintain the confidence of tourists and capitalize on the popularity of Hallyu stars as a clear strategy to attract tourists and position the country as a tourist destination, thereby boosting tourism and, consequently, enhancing soft power.

Keywords

Soft Power , Korea, Tourism , Hallyu

Introduction

Many countries choose diplomacy to act on the international stage, avoiding armed conflicts and economic pressures. Since the end of the Cold War, international relations have played a crucial role in world stability. These international relations are sometimes unstable and changing and there is a risk of deployment of traditional military forms of power or also called "Hard Power". To avoid the latter, soft or intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions have been resorted to.

Thus, arises what Professor Nye (1990) establishes as "Soft Power" and which he defines as the ability of some countries to persuade others, through their cultural manifestations, values, social model or international institutions, thus avoiding the use of force or coercion. It is a form of power that enhances the attractiveness of a country, an attraction that will be crucial to attract other states to institutional alliances, coalitions, international cooperation, development aid.

Nowadays, we find a very changing context as far as geopolitical relations are concerned, and it is in this scenario where the use of hard power is giving way to a softer approach or soft power to attract investment, economic development, and wealth to their countries (ElMassah, 2015; Nye, 1990). This transformative nature is now reflected in the dynamism, ease, and solidity of international relations (Rawnsley, 2016). Chitty (2017) defined soft power as "a cultural artefact that represents a body of thought that is associated with resources invested in attraction-power as well as with strategies for using such resources to further actors' interests". It is unwise to underestimate soft power, since it is intimately related to tourism as the widespread idea that tourism plays an crucial role in international diplomacy (Xu et al., 2020)

However, and despite the fact that some countries still use hard power to achieve their objectives, its use is decreasing and this is giving way to a much more active role of diplomacy, involving universities, sports organizations, NGOs ...

These strategies, also called "soft power packages" are used by states to calm their internal audiences and strengthen external positions (Grix, 2021).

For a long period of time, South Korea has been considered a manufacturing powerhouse, and the name "Made in Korea" conveyed an image of quality and value of its products. However, and due to the growth and boom of other countries in terms of production and manufacturing such as China and other emerging countries, Korea has lost weight on the international stage. For this reason, the Korean government has seen the need to change its approach and therefore its country image, and has based this on a cultural image or brand, that is, it has based its strategy on Korean popular culture or Hallyu (Holt, 2004).

The term Hallyu or Korean Wave is used to refer to Korean entertainment products and their popularity abroad. These entertainment products (movies, TV dramas (K-drama), pop music (K-pop), and online gaming) have undergone exponential growth since the mid-2000s (Oh, 2018).

This new approach or cultural image of Korea based on the entertainment industry has generated impacts in other areas such as the export of products from the music industry (Chae, 2014) and the formation of perceived image abroad (Lee, 2011; Lee & Workman, 2015). Since it has spread across all industries, it is causing the effect of the Korean wave.

It seems that tourism has not been left out of this effect. Tourism is cause and effect of Soft Power. As a cause it is considered as an activity through which countries show their culture and values (Hollinshead and Hou, 2012). As economic effect it could be reflected in exports, export effect in other industries and the economic ripple effect (Lee, 2011) This fact is the starting point of this research, since it mainly tries to analyze, using the four main areas framed by Ooi's (2016), the soft power of South Korea and its relationship with tourism, that is, if the four interrelated areas are suitable to evaluate and understand the relationship between both variables in a country whose notoriety is growing day by day. The reason of choosing South Korea is the progress and status it has achieved in recent years in terms of soft power.

Ko (2012) focuses on the Korean Wave as the cause of the increase in foreign tourists. One of the motivations that tourists have when visiting Korea is its cultural industry, that is, foreigners visit Korea and visit hallyu tourist attractions due to the influence of this Korean Wave (Lee, 2011)

Because of this, and based on previous research that relates tourism with the entertainment industry and the Korean Wave, this study is justified, which raises the need to analyze whether South Korea is conveniently using its creative and entertainment industry to attract tourists and thus strengthen its soft power. In addition, another fact that justifies this research is that most of the existing literature has focused on China and Japan (Otmazgin, 2008; Shambaugh, 2015), and South Korea has not been examined in the framework of the soft power of tourism.

2. Methodology

The methodology is based on the development of a case study from secondary sources. Likewise, and starting from the four main areas proposed by Ooi's (2016), the research will try to analyze the actions in the field of tourism that South Korea is carrying out and that will have an impact on its Soft Power.

Ooi (2016) has proposed four elements that links soft power and tourism:

- (i) Tourism has generated a greater knowledge of Korea, generating empathy and greater familiarity with the destination.
- (ii) The primary objective of the tourism authorities is to improve the image of Korea as a tourist destination.
- (iii) Korea has organized and invested in numerous events, exhibitions, games which constitute an important attraction for tourists and which in turn improves their geopolitical position.
- (iv) Foreign tourists show the image of their own country through their behaviors in the destination country and thus change the stereotypes established against those other countries (Ooi, 2016).

Based on these four elements or frames of reference, this study will carry out an exhaustive review of the existing literature to analyze whether Korea is enhancing its tourist resources in an ideal way to improve the Soft Power.

Findings.

(i) Tourists' Understanding and Empathy.

To achieve nationally significant global trade, investment, and tourism goals, more governments are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of building, enhancing and promoting their nation brands in order to create a crucial competitive advantage in the global market (Dinnie, 2008; Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009). The majority of studies analyzing the image of Korea as a tourist destination emphasize "Hallyu" or the Korean-Wave that is creating a surge in its popularity. According to these surveys, tourist satisfaction has increased as a result of this (Chen, 2005; Kim, 2007; Suh & Suh, 2004).

Tourism related to popular culture, in which individuals visit a location associated with movies or TV programs (Iwashita, 2008), has garnered a growing amount of interest over a relatively brief time span (Connell, 2012). The impact of pop-culture/film-induced tourism have been studied considering the tourists' experiences, destination image, intention to visit, future attitudes, destination brand development, as well as residents' responses (Busby & Klug, 2001; Busby, Brunt, & Lund, 2003; Busby & O'Neill, 2006; O'Connor & Bolan, 2008; Roesch, 2009; Ward & O'Regan, 2009).

Thus, the market of cultural goods has been dominated by Japan and Hong Kong. However, it is spreading to new markets as the Korean, where Korean cultural goods are increasing its popularity in Asia. (Seabrook, 2012).

According to Lee (2015), the "Korean Wave 4.0" has introduced a brand-new trans - border portrayal of Korea in the global market. It is a blend of social media and musical skills facilitated by Korea's digital technology investment. Korea has utilized its K-pop artists, dramas, and movie business to grab the attention of people around the world.

As illustration, if we think about what could inspire individuals all over the globe to look information related to Korea, Psy's music video Gangnam Style made it, with its 3.4 billion views in YouTube as of September 2019 is one of the music videos most seen for international community attracted by Korea Nye and Kim, 2013).

The dramas and cinema industries, also contribute to spread Korea interest and gained a global crowd. The melodrama "Descendants of the Sun" has attracted approximately one billion watchers in 32 countries, and the movie Parasite, directed by Bong Joon-Ho, was the first language other than English movie in Oscar's history to win for Best Picture. (Trisni, 2019)

The signifying the success and arrival of a South Korean boy group into the US market was with BTS. Its consolidation of success was when they reached the top ten US Billboard chart in early summer 2018 (Bjenaru ,2022). BTS contending with Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande was seen as a hit of Korean K-pop industry added to its invitation to the United Nations Organization to make a speech during a session of the General Assembly in 2018 and again in 2021.

Korea national public diplomacy strategy has been well developed with the image and support of Bangtan Boys (BTS). Its members: RM, Jin, Suga, J-hope, Jimin, V and Jungkook enthusiastically recognized their cultural and diplomatic impact. Their partnership with UNICEF with the successful campaign "Love yourself" which seeks to end violence and abandonment and promote self-esteem, has generated about five million tweets and over fifty million engagements, including likes, retweets, replies, and comments (UNICEF, 2021)

According to Mukarromah (2022), innovations and technical advancements make entertainment items such as movies, series, and dramas more accessible to the general public. As a result, several streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO Max, Star Plus, and Disney Plus have emerged. Since Netflix is the greatest streaming platform in the entire world, it has been a popular medium for reaching consumers of Hallyu items, as proven by the fact that its total members reached 203.7 million from its inception till 2020. (databooks.katadata.co.id,2021). Squid Game is watched by millions of people throughout the world, and while being a thriller drama, it shows part of the Korean traditional culture games.

All of the aforementioned demonstrates a vast array of cultural manifestations that are core component of the Korean cultural offer, i.e., they are constructed as motifs or features of the destination that draw the attention of visitors, creating and widening the level of understanding of the venue, as well as compassion and understanding and appreciation towards it.

Based in tourist perceptions and image about Korea from its rebranding strategy, according to the work carried out by (Choi et al., 2011) most Russian tourists have a favorable impression of Korea. They highlight the beauty of its landscapes and its historical and cultural attractions. They also highlight the variety of restaurants, quality of their accommodation, and transportation services

Pop culture has a wide spread and positive impact in the likeness of destination image and in the leading effect over indirect experiences of culture such as its food, language, and sense of fashion in their homelands of visitors from Chinese, Japanese, Malaysian, and Mexicans according to Lee's (2016) study. This has prompted them to wish to visit South Korea in the future and strengthen the positive impression through experiences of Kpop stars events and trips which have a strong influence on two aspects of future actions: intention to return and word of mouth.

(ii) Korean Tourism Policy

In 2019, the National Tourism Strategy was embodied in the so-called "Korea's Tourism Innovation Strategy". Although the growth of recent years has been impressive both in number of visits and in expenses, the sector faces several challenges. These challenges include visa facilitation strengthening the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises in response to future tourists tendencies, marketing less-visited regions, and improving the allure and quality of tourism-related products and services. (OECD, 2020).

From the initiative "Tourism Strategy 2020", Korea is seeking several policy responses to address these challenges.

South Korea has five objectives for its National Tourism Innovation Strategy include the creation of a smart tourist environment. The Smart Tourist Strategy of Korea began with the development of smart tourist facilities. This all-encompassing strategy includes a digital visitor information network to enhance the traveler experience, free Wi-Fi at main tourist attractions, and big data analytics for reference in the future and enhancement.

In contrast, the state will relax visa requirements to attract more tourists (multiple entry), four local localities will be established into tourist centers, and tour developers will start embracing more cultural content, such as K-pop with much more heavy advertising, to attract the foreign fans of Korean pop culture. In addition, the state would boost tourist subsidies to the same level as those granted to the industrial industry. (OECD, 2020).

In addition, life cycle leisure programs are developed for all age ranges, from youngsters to elderly. Independent travelers will benefit from a dedicated internet platform and enhanced digital advertising strategies. Developing suggested tour itineraries with the option to buy things. (OECD, 2020).

The developing of new tourism areas related to Hallyu it has required some efforts to develop tour programs with cultural content. For example, the Korea Herald (2021) as a result of the global success of the Netflix-streamed series "Squid Game," stated that local governments attempt to market their communities as cultural tourism destinations. Locations including Wolmido's theme park My Land, Kyodong Elementary School, Seongapdo, Dokdo, Deokjeokdo and Guleopdo islands have been promoted as tourism attractions out from Seoul, turning into new tourist sites.

One tourism strategy that was done by the Korea Government during the Corona Virus pandemic with the BTS phenomenon was the creation of tourism advertisement on YouTube featuring BTS named SEOUL X BTS SEE YOU IN SEOUL in an attempt to increase the number of global visitors who recognize BTS as K-pop stars (Oktaviani, 2022).

In 2018, the Hyundai Research Institute (HRI) estimated that BTS contributed approximately \$3.54 billion USD annually to the nation's economy. HRI also said that as many as 800,000 international visitors visit Korea annually due to BTS's promotion of the tourism sector (Suntikul, 2019)

The case of the Korean tourism commercial version of Seoul x BTS has demonstrated that the rebrand carried out by the government, and BTS as core resource in the strategy have done a financial rippling impact (Lee, 2011) reaching also the K-Beauty, K-Food, and K-Fashion industries.

(iii) Investing in Big Events

Globally, the use of sporting events or mega-events to achieve certain national and external policy objectives has become a widespread practice (Ikenberry, 2018). Mega-events, in general, refer to "cultural events, both commercial and sporting, on a large scale that have a dramatic character, a great popular appeal and international significance" (Roche, 1994).

China, Japan and South Korea are considered great powers in terms of mega sporting events (Lee, 2019). South Korea hosted the Olympic Games in 1988, the FIFA World Cup in 2002 and the PyeongChang Winter Games in 2018. Specifically, Korea has a clear sporting approach to improving its soft power, this being in a double sense: they invest in the athletes themselves and invest in the organization of sporting events (Grix, 2021)

The holding of the 1988 Olympic Games allowed Korea to show itself to the international community as a democracy based on traditional loyalty and patriotism as well as to promote Taekwondo and emit positive images abroad (Kang, 2021).

In relation to the FIFA World Cup in 2002, Kim (2007) argued that the main reason that prompted them to organize it was to improve relations with Japan, show their technological advances and promote Hallyu, a concept well known at that time in East Asia. Other authors corroborate this motivation and this achievement, such as Home (2004) who assured that the World Cup was a perfect scenario to show technological advances and make Hallyu something

beyond a regional phenomenon. The Hallyu was currently considered mainstream regionally and internationally, signaling its strengths as a new regional contender and raising the nation's global positioning (Jeong, 2021).

Finally, regarding the celebration of the PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games (2018), South Korea had the opportunity to show and promote peace on the Korean peninsula, boost and develop infrastructure in the province of Gangwon and also attract tourism to the area where the Asian Winter Games had been held in 1999 in Yongpyong (Merkel, 2008). The country considered that through this event, it could improve the perception of its technological products (Kang, 2019) and improve its status of pop culture at the global level (Choi, 2019).

Grix (2021) identifies mega events with soft power and this is the main reason that leads Korea to hold global events, as they allow it to develop its soft power strategy and shape its national identity and country image regionally and internationally. However, this policy of attraction seems to work especially when the resource of soft power is organic and refers to the cultural sector, which is increasingly influential (K-Pop, cinema, and television hits).

With festivals for everything from fireflies to pine mushrooms and swimming in icy water, Koreans get hold of numerous traditional celebrations. These regional festivals show how varied and rich Korean culture is.

In addition, a variety of cultural activities sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and others related to the Korean language and its culture are organized by Korea Foundation (Korea Foundation, 2013).

Another example that illustrates this is the collaboration between MOFA, the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism for the organization of the World K-Pop Festival, a music and dance competition in which groups from all over the world participate. MOFA also worked together with the World Taekwondo Federation and the World Taekwondo Peace Corps, to send teachers abroad and thus promote the knowledge and practice of martial arts, contributing to their globalization (Băjenaru, 2022).

(iv) Change of Stereotypes Against the Other Countries

The policies applied in relation to tourism in Korea show that there are no restrictions based on origin, ethnicity, or culture. This facilitates social and cultural exchange that avoids the creation of stereotypes.

Tourist arrivals to South Korea have grown across the board since 2000. However, as in the rest of the world and due to the Coronavirus pandemic, this trend was abruptly modified, reducing by more than 85%. Overall, with the exception of the pandemic years, each year almost 47% of all arrivals in South Korea are based on mainland China. It is followed by Japan, Taiwan and the United States. In 2019 South Korea received a total of 17,503,000 tourists in 2019 (World bank, 2020).

South Korea makes great efforts and resources to boost its tourism sector both domestically and internationally. Proof of this is the importance of tourism in relation to other economic activities, representing 5.1% of the Gross Domestic Product and employing 1.5 million citizens, that is, 5.8% of total employment (Trends, 2018).

Given the importance that the tourism sector is acquiring in South Korea, there is no evidence to justify that tourism flows have contributed to the elimination of stereotypes. To be able to affirm this, that is, that tourists entering and leaving South Korea have changed the preconceived image of this country and its citizens, needs a deep, multidimensional and longitudinal analysis (Hussin, 2018). There are no previous studies that have specifically measured how tourism has contributed to eliminating previous stereotypes.

One might consider the idea that there are certain stereotypes related to the South Korea-North Korea duality. It is clear that there is a latent threat and this can provoke a certain sense of insecurity. Aware of this reality, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has as its mission to seek a Peace Treaty and participate in the six-party negotiations.

In recent years, certain events have occurred that have been able to modify or strengthen certain pre-existing stereotypes. The health crisis caused by COVID-19 has led all governments to make extreme decisions and protection measures that have influenced the image they project abroad.

It is also evident that the tourism sector has been very sensitive to this fact, since tourists show a greater aversion to risk in times of economic and health crises (Kim et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2016).

In this scenario, "contactless" tourism, or also called "Untact" has been widely used in Korea during the pandemic (Bae & Chang, 2021). Since it began to be used in 2017, it has represented a trend of avoiding human contact, along with the development of technology-based services that avoid physical contact (Lee and Lee, 2020). Bae and Chang (2021) showed that this phenomenon improved the perception of COVID-19 risk, positively influencing the attitude towards contactless tourism in Korea, which increased the intention and predisposition to do this type of tourism.

CONCLUSION

This research tried to analyze if Korea is enhancing its tourism resources in an ideal way to improve its Soft Power, based on the study of the four areas proposed by Ooi (2016).

In view of the analysis carried out, it can be said that the four areas are being conveniently used. Research suggests that South Korea has efficiently used its resources to rebrand the country through the creative industries and its traditions and as effect, promote tourism. It has been a strategy well used and made possible to be the latter being the main claim for potential tourists. In this way, and through the promotion of these four areas, South Korea is improving the country's notoriety in the international context, boosting tourism and therefore, enhancing the soft power.

After the analysis, it is noted that the government rebranding toward to make cultural industries more materialized in the so-called Hallyu, constitute the main element on which they base their tourism strategies. Also, tourism innovation must accompany and enhance a sector that is becoming more relevant every day. The K-Pop stars and its success in Asia, USA, Latin-American and all over the world are a key, in the government strategy for tourism, diplomacy and the soft power spread.

This confirms what other authors have claimed and is the emergence of a new market segment driven by pop culture, TV shows, k-dramas, movies, music, and celebrities (Miller, 2006). The choosing process of who will be in the marketing strategy and the combination with the diplomacy with BTS made possible to show a different image of Korea to a new market - far away for its manufacturing positioning after its economic miracle- moving forward to a country with a rich culture and what it seems, a very good recipe in music and entertainment groups production, to all over the world. The impact of the boy bands it is also a positive image for the country brand, tourism, and has an effect in other industries as the medical, fashion, food, etc. as (Lee, 2011) suggested.

In addition, recent research shows that a country's pop culture, such as television drama series, positively influences perceptions of the country (Kim et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2008) and a great influence on image formation of Korea to foreigners (Lee, 2011; Lee & Workman, 2015)

Korea have been working on the scenario to jump to the world and get a position of preference for tourism. Since the efforts done to make possible to host big sport events -and the cultural promotion with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Korea Foundation- show to the world Korea advances in democracy, technology, and its culture to the Hallyu these mega events helped place South Korea on the world tourism market.

Based on the four areas proposed by Ooi (2016), tourism is a driver of soft power in Korea. During the pandemic, the policies adopted and the use of technology at the foreign tourist view it was a trust. Its strategy at the domestic market with untact or "contactless" tourism, the smart tourism and its online strategies made possible to keep on mind the country for traveling.

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