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Original Research Article

The Behavior of Receiving Marketing Communications through Soft Power from the Popularity of Korean Dramas Among Employees of Private Companies in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative research investigates the exposure behavior of private company employees in receiving marketing information embedded as Soft Power within Korean dramas. The study had three primary objectives: (1) to examine how demographic factors influence employee behavior in receiving marketing messages through Korean dramas, (2) to explore viewing behavior and exposure to Soft Power elements, and (3) to assess opinions on the effectiveness of marketing communication via Korean drama content. Soft Power, defined as the ability to shape preferences through appeal and attraction rather than coercion, serves as the conceptual framework. Data were collected using structured questionnaires distributed to 400 employees from private companies. The sample primarily comprised females aged 30–40, bachelor's degree holders, single, operational-level employees residing in the Bangkok metropolitan area. Descriptive statistics, including percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used for analysis.

The findings show that respondents commonly consumed Korean dramas 1–2 times weekly, especially on weekends and before bedtime, for 1–2 hours per session. Romantic and romantic-comedy genres were most preferred, typically viewed alone via Netflix, with online media as the main influence. Key Soft Power elements observed included Korean cuisine, values like loyalty in relationships, and government-backed cultural promotion. Frequently embedded marketing content included products like soju and technology brands such as Samsung, contributing to high brand recognition and repeat purchases. The overall perceived effectiveness of Soft Power marketing communication was high (mean = 4.14), with “Appeal” rated the highest (mean = 4.24). These findings suggest that Korean dramas function effectively as vehicles of Soft Power, subtly influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors through culturally embedded marketing communication.



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Introduction

In the evolving landscape of international relations, the concept of Soft Power, introduced by Professor Joseph S. Nye of Harvard University, has emerged as a critical tool for influencing global perceptions and behavior. Unlike Hard Power—which relies on coercion through military force or economic leverage—Soft Power is the capacity to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. It operates through the transmission of culture, political values, and foreign policies that are perceived as legitimate or morally authoritative. This form of influence is particularly relevant in a globalized world where information, media, and culture transcend national boundaries with increasing ease. A prominent example of Soft Power in practice is South Korea, whose global cultural influence—commonly referred to as the Korean Wave or Hallyu—has expanded rapidly over the past two decades. Korean popular culture, especially television dramas, has become a powerful vehicle for promoting national identity, values, and consumer products. In Thailand, the popularity of Korean dramas has significantly shaped cultural preferences and daily life, influencing trends in fashion, food, cosmetics, and even social values. These dramas, as cultural exports, do more than entertain; they serve as strategic instruments of Soft Power that generate substantial national revenue and promote Korean brands and lifestyles abroad. The success of South Korea's Soft Power strategy can be attributed to a combination of proactive government policies, robust private-sector innovation, and global digital distribution channels. In contrast, Thailand's Soft Power potential remains underutilized, hindered by a lack of cohesive vision, insufficient strategic planning, and minimal institutional support. This contrast presents a notable research gap: while the global impact of Korean Soft Power is widely recognized, there is limited empirical research on how such influence manifests at the individual consumer level, particularly within specific demographic groups such as Thai private-sector employees.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how Korean dramas influence the consumer behavior of Thai private company employees, a group characterized by high digital content consumption, cultural openness, and affinity for international brands. Understanding this group's responsiveness to Soft Power content can provide actionable insights for Thai industries aiming to develop and export their own cultural products—particularly in sectors such as tourism, lifestyle, and consumer goods. The study employs purposive sampling, targeting individuals with prior exposure to Korean dramas to ensure the authenticity of insights related to Soft Power influence. The theoretical framework guiding this research is the 5A Marketing Model by Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan (2017), which examines five stages of consumer behavior: Awareness, Appeal, Ask, Act, and Advocacy. These dimensions offer a comprehensive lens for analyzing how embedded marketing messages in Korean dramas influence not only consumption patterns but also broader cultural attitudes. By focusing on a specific and relevant audience, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how Soft Power operates at the micro level and offers strategic implications for enhancing Thailand's own cultural influence on the global stage.



Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This reviews the existing body of literature and theories relevant to the study of how private company employees consume marketing information embedded in Korean dramas. The study focuses on Soft Power as a key driver of influence and explores behavioral patterns in media consumption and marketing receptivity. The literature is organized to highlight relevant frameworks, including the Korean Wave (Hallyu), Soft Power theory, marketing communication models, media use behavior, and digital marketing strategies.

Soft Power and Korean Cultural Influence

The concept of Soft Power, as articulated by Joseph Nye (1990), denotes a state's capacity to shape the preferences and behaviors of other actors through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or monetary inducement. Soft Power is primarily exercised through the projection of cultural values, political ideals, and foreign policies that are perceived as legitimate or desirable by international audiences. A salient contemporary example of Soft Power in practice is the Republic of Korea's global cultural proliferation, commonly referred to as Hallyu or the "Korean Wave." This phenomenon encompasses the international dissemination and popularity of South Korean cultural products, including K-pop music, Korean cuisine, fashion, and, most notably, Korean television dramas (K-dramas).

Empirical studies have demonstrated the significant global impact of K-dramas, revealing their influence on viewers' lifestyle choices, consumption patterns, and perceptions of Korea as a tourist destination (Kim, 2013; Jung, 2011). These dramas often embed strategic forms of cultural branding and product placement, thereby functioning not only as entertainment but also as instruments of Soft Power and transnational marketing (Lee & Nornes, 2015). In this capacity, K-dramas serve to enhance Korea's national image, stimulate cultural affinity, and advance economic interests by promoting Korean goods and services abroad.

Marketing Communication through Entertainment Media

Entertainment media has emerged as a powerful platform for marketing communication, leveraging narrative formats to subtly influence consumer attitudes and behaviors. In particular, Korean dramas have become a prominent medium for the integration of branded content, product placement (PPL), and narrative-driven marketing strategies. These techniques allow marketers to embed promotional messages within the storyline, often enhancing audience engagement without overt advertising (Russell, 2002). Empirical research indicates that the effectiveness of such embedded marketing is significantly influenced by the emotional engagement of viewers with the characters and plot. When audiences develop affective bonds with fictional figures or narratives, their receptivity to associated brands and products increases (Balasubramanian, 1994; Van Reijmersdal, 2009). Consequently, entertainment media not only serves as a source of leisure but also functions as a strategic communication channel for brand positioning and consumer persuasion.

Audience Behavior and Demographics

A comprehensive understanding of audience behavior in response to media content necessitates the consideration of key demographic variables, including age, gender, educational background, and occupational status. Empirical evidence suggests that younger demographic segments exhibit greater openness toward global media content and demonstrate heightened susceptibility to media representations of products and lifestyles (Lin & Kim, 2011).

Furthermore, there exists a notable research gap concerning the media consumption patterns and behavioral responses of specific professional groups, particularly employees within private sector organizations. This underexplored area constitutes a critical focus of the present study, which aims to elucidate the ways in which such professionals engage with and are influenced by media content.

Soft Power

Soft Power Theory, as articulated by Joseph Nye (2004), offers a conceptual framework for understanding the capacity of a nation to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or monetary inducement. This theory emphasizes the role of cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policies in shaping the preferences and behaviors of international audiences.

Within this framework, Korean dramas exemplify an effective instrument of soft power by leveraging culturally resonant narratives and aesthetically appealing content to captivate foreign viewers. These dramas often depict idealized representations of Korean society, including its cultural norms, social values, and consumer lifestyles. Through such portrayals, Korean dramas not only entertain but also subtly shape foreign perceptions and attitudes towards Korea. This attraction can foster a favorable image of Korea, thereby encouraging international audiences to emulate aspects of Korean culture and consumption patterns, such as fashion, beauty products, and lifestyle choices.

Thus, Korean dramas serve as a strategic cultural asset, enabling Korea to project influence abroad by cultivating admiration and affinity, aligning closely with the core principle of Soft Power Theory—that influence is most effectively attained through attraction rather than coercion.

AIDA Model

The AIDA model represents a foundational framework in consumer decision-making theory, delineating four sequential stages: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. This model explicates the psychological processes through which consumers progress prior to making a purchase decision. Initially, the model emphasizes the necessity of capturing the consumer's attention, followed by the cultivation of interest in the product or service. Subsequently, a desire is generated, motivating the consumer toward a favorable attitude, which ultimately culminates in the action of purchasing (Belch & Belch, 2003). The AIDA framework remains instrumental in guiding marketing communication strategies aimed at effectively influencing consumer behavior.



Uses and Gratifications

Uses and Gratifications Theory, originally developed by Blumler and Katz (1974), provides a framework for understanding the active role of audiences in selecting and utilizing media content to fulfill specific psychological and social needs. Unlike earlier models that emphasized passive consumption, this theory posits that individuals are purposeful and goal-oriented in their media use, seeking content that gratifies their particular desires or requirements.

In relation to Korean dramas, this theory elucidates why audiences across diverse cultural contexts engage with such media. Viewers are motivated by various factors—including the pursuit of entertainment, escapism from daily life, exploration of unfamiliar cultures, and opportunities for social interaction and identity formation. This active engagement underscores the importance of individual motivations in shaping media consumption patterns.

Importantly, this theoretical perspective is integral to understanding Objective 2, as it highlights the connection between personal gratifications derived from drama consumption and the manner in which Soft Power is perceived and assimilated. By addressing the specific needs of audiences, Korean dramas facilitate a deeper reception and internalization of the cultural values and narratives they convey, thereby enhancing

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), provides a theoretical framework for understanding the dual pathways through which individuals process persuasive communication. The model distinguishes between two routes to attitude change: the central route, which involves careful and thoughtful consideration of message content, and the peripheral route, which relies on superficial cues such as source attractiveness, emotional appeal, or associative heuristics.

In the context of marketing messages embedded within Korean dramas, the ELM offers critical insight into how viewers process such content. Given that entertainment media often engage audiences in a more affective and less cognitively intensive manner, viewers are likely to be influenced via the peripheral route. Factors such as visually appealing scenes, celebrity endorsements, or emotionally charged narratives can shape audience attitudes and preferences without necessitating deep, systematic processing of the underlying marketing messages.

This theoretical perspective is particularly pertinent to Objective 3, as it substantiates the notion that marketing communications integrated into Korean dramas can effectively influence audience opinions and consumer behavior, even in the absence of deliberate or conscious scrutiny. Consequently, the ELM elucidates the mechanisms by which entertainment-embedded marketing operates as a subtle yet potent form of persuasion.

Theoretical Framework

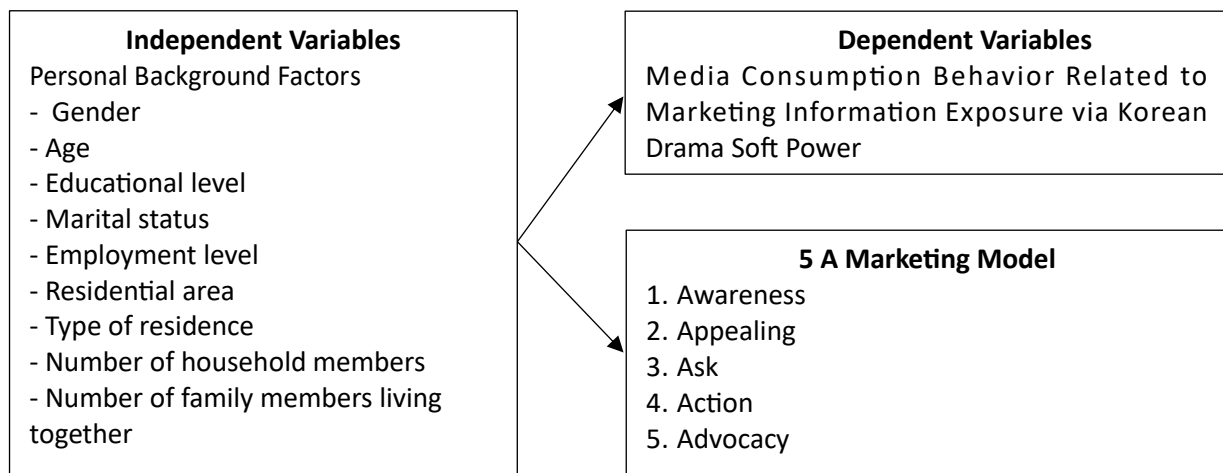


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the behavior of private company employees in receiving marketing information through Soft Power as embedded in Korean dramas, classified by personal demographic factors.
2. To investigate Soft Power exposure behavior through Korean drama consumption.
3. To explore opinions toward the effectiveness of marketing communication via Soft Power embedded in Korean dramas.

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

The population for this research comprised approximately 15.5 million employees working in private companies across Thailand including both the Bangkok Metropolitan Region and other provinces. Due to the extensive size of the population, the researcher adopted a sample size determination formula for unknown population sizes from the book "Research and Statistical Data Analysis with SPSS and AMOS" by Professor Dr. Thanin Sincharu (18th Edition). A sample proportion of 50% (0.50) was used, with a confidence level of 95% and an acceptable margin of error of 5% (0.05). Based on this calculation, the minimum required sample size was 385. However, to enhance the reliability of the study, the sample size was rounded up to 400 respondents.

Research Tools

The primary research tool was a structured questionnaire, which was divided into four main sections

1. Demographic information of the respondents
2. Viewing behavior of Korean dramas
3. Exposure to Soft Power elements and related marketing content
4. Perceptions and opinions on the effectiveness of Soft Power marketing communication

The questionnaire was reviewed by experts to ensure content validity, and a pilot test was conducted to improve clarity and reliability.

Instrument Development

The questionnaire items were developed based on conceptual frameworks and previous academic research. The three sections encompassed personal background, media consumption behavior related to soft power, and opinions on marketing effectiveness.

Instrument Validation

The research instrument underwent a validation process including

1. Content Validity: The Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) was evaluated by five experts, resulting in a value of 0.89.
2. Pilot Testing: The revised questionnaire was piloted on a sample of 30 respondents with characteristics similar to the target population. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.712.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed online to private company employees who had experience watching Korean dramas. Data collection was conducted between January and February 2024. The steps included

1. Purposeful selection of the sample group.
2. Distribution of online questionnaires via social media platforms.
3. Verification and cleaning of the data prior to analysis.

Satistical Analysis

1. Demographic data (Section 1) were analyzed using frequency and percentage.
2. Behavioral data (Section 2) were analyzed using frequency and percentage.
3. Opinion data (Section 3) were analyzed using mean and standard deviation

Results

1. To examine the behavior of receiving marketing information via soft power through the popularity of Korean dramas among private company employees, classified by demographic factors.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents (N = 400)

Variable	Highest Percentage	%
Gender	Female	61.00
Age	30–40 years	42.75
Education	Bachelor's degree or higher	77.00
Marital Status	Single	57.50
Job Position	Staff/Officer	70.00
Monthly Income	15,000–30,000 Baht	36.25
Place of Residence	Bangkok & Vicinity	53.25
Type of Residence	Private house	49.75
Household Size	Less than 3 people	41.50

The majority of respondents were female (61%), aged 30–40 (42.75%), held at least a bachelor's degree (77%), and were single (57.5%). Most worked as staff/officers (70%) with an average monthly income between 15,000–30,000 baht (36.25%), lived in Bangkok and surrounding areas (53.25%), in private residences (49.75%), and lived in households with fewer than three people (41.5%).

2. To explore the behavior of receiving soft power through Korean dramas.

Table 2: Behavior of Receiving Soft Power through Korean Dramas

Variable	Most Selected Answer	%
Viewing Days	Weekends/Holidays	52.25
Viewing Frequency	1–2 times/week	32.50
Viewing Time	Before bedtime	38.00
Average Viewing	Time (per day) 1–2 hours	50.75
Favorite Genre	Romantic/Romantic Comedy	57.50
Viewing Company	Alone	57.50
Viewing Platform	Netflix	50.75
Influential Media	Online Media	43.00
Viewing Motivation	Entertainment	36.25
Korean Drama Highlight	Engaging storyline	33.75
Embedded Content	Korean food & dining culture	33.00
Frequently Featured Products	Soju/Alcohol	77.25
Subtlety of Marketing Messages	Subtle but noticeable	29.00
Familiar Korean Brand	Samsung	86.75
Used Korean Brand	Samsung	73.00



Repurchase Intention	Yes	45.75
Life Lessons from Dramas	Loyalty in love	29.00
Korean Cultural Perception	Distinctive food culture	28.25
Success Factor of Soft Power	Government support	30.00

The results indicated that most respondents watched Korean dramas on weekends (52.25%), averaging 1–2 hours per day (50.75%), typically before bedtime (38%). Netflix was the most used platform (50.75%), with romantic/romantic comedy genres being the most favored (39.5%). Online media (43%) were the primary influence in choosing to watch, driven mainly by entertainment (36.25%). Notably embedded elements included Korean food culture (33%) and tourism sites (23.25%). The most commonly seen product was soju/alcohol (77.25%). Samsung was the most recognized and used brand, with a high likelihood of repurchase (45.75%).

3. To study perceptions of the effectiveness of marketing communication through Korean dramas.

Table 3: Perceptions of Marketing Communication Effectiveness

Marketing Aspect	Item with Highest	Mean	S.D.	Level	Rank
Awareness	Brand recall	4.20	0.74	High	4
Appealing	Generated interest	4.32	0.75	High	1
Ask	Curiosity about the product	4.28	0.72	High	2
Action	Intention to visit stores	4.28	0.78	High	3
Advocacy	Encourages repurchase	4.31	0.78	High	2

Overall Effectiveness Level: High (Mean = 4.14, S.D. = 0.43)

Respondents stated that Korean dramas were most effective in generating interest in products and enhancing brand credibility, image, and purchase intentions. The media also stimulated word-of-mouth sharing on social platforms.

Discussion

This study explored how Korean dramas function as Soft Power tools influencing the exposure behavior of private company employees to embedded marketing content. The research addressed three primary objectives, and the findings offer several important insights aligned with existing literature on Soft Power, media influence, and consumer behavior.

Influence of Demographic Factors on Exposure Behavior

The first objective examined how demographic characteristics affected the participants' exposure to marketing information within Korean dramas. The data revealed that the majority of respondents were female, aged 30–40, single, and held bachelor's degrees—demographics that are consistent with previous studies identifying young to middle-aged women as primary



consumers of Korean Wave (Hallyu) media content (Jin, 2016; Kim & Ryoo, 2007). The preference for romantic and romantic-comedy genres among this demographic may be attributed to the emotional engagement and relatable narratives offered in these genres, which enhance receptivity to embedded marketing messages (Lee, 2011).

The consumption patterns—1–2 times per week, mostly before bedtime—suggest a habitual yet relaxed engagement with content, providing a receptive environment for marketing communication. As Bandura’s (2001) Social Cognitive Theory suggests, repeated exposure to media models, such as characters using branded products, can lead to observational learning and behavioral imitation. Therefore, demographic factors not only influence genre preference but also the extent to which marketing content is internalized.

Viewing Behavior and Exposure to Soft Power Elements

The second objective focused on viewing behavior and exposure to Soft Power elements. Participants typically consumed Korean dramas via Netflix and were most influenced by online media, indicating a strong digital media ecosystem that supports the spread of Korean cultural content. The findings align with Nye’s (2004) definition of Soft Power as the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce. Korean dramas exemplify this by embedding culturally rich elements—such as traditional cuisine (e.g., Korean BBQ, soju), values like loyalty and familial respect, and high-tech products—into entertainment narratives.

Such elements subtly promote national image and lifestyle aspirations, consistent with research by Chua and Iwabuchi (2008), who argue that the Korean Wave fosters transnational cultural consumption. The inclusion of government-backed cultural initiatives further reinforces the strategic deployment of Soft Power by South Korea, a tactic that aligns with the nation’s broader cultural diplomacy efforts (Kim, 2011).

Perceived Effectiveness of Soft Power Marketing Communication

The third objective assessed how employees perceive the effectiveness of marketing messages embedded in Korean dramas. The high mean score (4.14) indicates a strong positive perception of Soft Power marketing. Among the evaluative dimensions, “Appeal” received the highest rating (mean = 4.24), suggesting that the attractiveness of cultural elements plays a central role in influencing viewers. This supports previous findings that aesthetic appeal and emotional resonance enhance advertising effectiveness within entertainment contexts (Russell, 2002; Balasubramanian, 1994).

Furthermore, the high brand recognition and repeat purchases of featured products such as Samsung smartphones and soju demonstrate successful product placement strategies. These findings are consistent with studies on narrative transportation and brand integration, which emphasize the persuasive power of seamless brand embedding within emotionally engaging stories (Green & Brock, 2000; van Reijmersdal et al., 2009).

Synthesis and Implications

Overall, the study confirms that Korean dramas serve as effective Soft Power tools by embedding marketing content that resonates with viewers’ emotions and cultural curiosity. The subtlety of message delivery enhances persuasion, aligning with the conceptual



framework of Soft Power as an indirect yet powerful form of influence. The implications extend beyond consumer behavior, suggesting that Korean media can shape cultural perceptions and brand preferences internationally.

These insights are valuable for marketers seeking to leverage entertainment media for cross-cultural communication, as well as for policymakers interested in cultural diplomacy. Future research could further examine longitudinal effects or expand to diverse demographic groups for broader generalizability.

Conclusion

This quantitative study investigated how Korean dramas, as instruments of Soft Power, influence the exposure behavior of private company employees to embedded marketing content. Grounded in the conceptual framework of Soft Power—which emphasizes persuasion through cultural appeal rather than coercion—the research addressed three main objectives: (1) to examine how demographic factors influence behavior in receiving marketing messages through Korean dramas, (2) to explore viewing behavior and exposure to Soft Power elements, and (3) to assess opinions on the effectiveness of marketing communication embedded in Korean drama content.

The findings reveal that demographic factors—particularly gender, age, education, and employment level—play a significant role in shaping media consumption habits and responsiveness to marketing content. The predominant audience of female, single, operational-level employees aged 30–40 showed consistent viewing patterns, favoring romantic genres consumed during personal leisure time, mainly via Netflix. This context creates an emotionally receptive environment for subtle marketing cues.

The study also identified key Soft Power elements such as Korean cuisine, values like loyalty, and technology products prominently featured in the dramas. These elements not only enhance the entertainment value but also serve as conduits for cultural and commercial influence, aligning with South Korea's broader strategy of cultural diplomacy. Viewers reported high recognition and positive attitudes toward brands such as Samsung and soju, indicating successful integration of marketing within the narrative.

Importantly, the perceived effectiveness of marketing communication embedded in Korean dramas was rated high, with "Appeal" scoring the highest among evaluative dimensions. This confirms that emotional resonance and cultural attractiveness are central to the persuasive power of Soft Power media. The findings validate the concept that entertainment can be a strategic vehicle for influencing consumer behavior and shaping perceptions across borders.

In conclusion, this research highlights the significant role of Korean dramas as vehicles of Soft Power and marketing communication. It offers valuable insights for media producers, marketers, and policymakers on how entertainment content can simultaneously promote cultural identity and commercial interests. Future research may consider longitudinal studies or comparative analyses across different cultural contexts to expand understanding of media-driven Soft Power.



Recommendations

Contributions to the Body of Knowledge

1. This study enhances the understanding of Soft Power, transnational media, and consumer behavior.
2. Providing insights into Thai working professionals' media consumption and how demographics affect receptivity.
3. Highlighting effective Soft Power elements (e.g., food, values, technology) in Korean dramas that shape brand perception.
4. Supporting theories of narrative persuasion, emotional appeal, and cultural branding through media.
5. It bridges cultural studies, marketing, and international relations, framing Korean dramas as tools of strategic communication.

Recommendations for the Public

1. For Viewers/Consumers Be media-literate: Recognize embedded marketing and Soft Power influences in entertainment and Use media for cultural learning: Gain awareness of other cultures and lifestyles through dramas.
2. For Marketers/Media Professionals Leverage cultural storytelling: Embed brands in relatable, emotionally engaging narratives and Target key demographics: Focus on young female professionals, who show higher engagement.
3. For Policymakers/Educators Acknowledge media's influence: Understand foreign media's role in shaping public perception and Promote media literacy: Equip citizens to critically assess media content and influence.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. Compare cross-cultural responses to Korean dramas.
2. Conduct longitudinal studies on long-term brand and cultural impact.
3. Use qualitative methods to explore viewer emotions and cognition.
4. Analyze different streaming platforms' roles in Soft Power delivery.
5. Perform content analysis on product placements and cultural symbols in dramas.

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