

Received: 22 June 2020 Accepted: 26 April 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33182/tmj.v9i2.1054>

## Cultural Exportation, Digital Distribution, and Penetration of K-Dramas in Turkey

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### Abstract

*South Korea has pursued a multidimensional public diplomacy strategy in which Korean television exports and capitalization have emerged as a public and commercial cultural diplomacy tool over the last two decades. This article examines the widespread influence of Korean television content, including digital serial delivery, cultural exportation, cultural interactions, and capitalization—that is, content sales, indirect advertising, and media-induced tourism. Empirical data was obtained from Turkey’s audience members using the online survey tool. As a result of the social and cultural impact, the respondents’ opinions on Korean serials are both animated and rational. The creation of audience members’ social, psychological, and cultural experiences with K-Dramas clarifies their intimacy and activeness. Unlike local or other international content, a significant number of respondents claim that Korean TV serials are not only a source of entertainment but also have profound edifying aspects. According to the results, “Cultural Proximity” and “Content Availability” are two of the most important factors in choosing Korean TV serials over foreign content. The “content availability” is based on the emergence and expansion of Streaming TV; however, in cultural proximity, similarities in family norms and values in both nations are notable.*

**Keywords:** Digital distribution; K-dramas; cultural exportation; cultural proximity; streaming TV

### Introduction

In order to obtain soft power, political, and economic gains, Korea has adopted a strategy of multidimensional public diplomacy by various cultural initiatives. This paper, however, focuses on the emerging transnationalization and digital distribution of Korean TV serials. In general, it refers the widespread expansion of the Korean TV content to the region and the world. Particularly, however, it focused on the penetration of Korean serials in Turkey through streaming television, which is the digital distribution of TV content. A case study of Turkish audience is presented in this study. These TV contents are not only playing role in the commodification of culture, it also is a source of gaining soft power. As for Cevik (2014), the major producer of soft power is popular culture, which contains music, cinema, television, and other forms of art. Nye (2008) states, before the Cold War, American corporate leaders, advertising executives, and heads of Hollywood studios were selling not only their products but also America’s culture and values, the secrets of its success, to the rest of the world. The earlier research suggests, a successful film or TV show can be helpful in developing a positive image of a location and its socio-cultural and economic situations, a phenomenon that can also lead to media-induced tourism. For instance, films such as *Braveheart* (1995), *The Sea*

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Inside (2004), and Troy (2004) have strongly impacted the flow of tourists to Scotland, Spain, and Turkey, respectively (Anaz & Ozcan, 2016; Nunes, Agúndez, Fonseca, & Chemli, 2020).

A growing body of literature have focused on the penetration of “Korean Wave” into different regions of the world such as Europe (Hong, 2013), South America (Ko et al., 2014), and the Middle East (Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Israel and Palestine) (Elaskary, 2010, 2018; Kim, 2008; Otmazgin & Lyan, 2014; Lee, 2017). Previous work has only focused on the Muslim majority regions and Middle Eastern countries in a monolithic way; however, all different Muslim majority countries have different, history, cultural identity, socioeconomic status and political systems (Oligarchy, Democracy, Kingdom, Confederation, etc.) which requires conducting individual studies of each cultural area. We have focused in our research the Turkish fans and their motives for consumption of K-Dramas.

In this context, this paper addresses the exportation of Korean serials, precisely their penetration in Turkey. An empirical analysis of the Turkish audiences of Korean serials have made that how do Turkish followers consume Korean content as a cultural practice? Moreover, this paper calls into question the socio-cultural and socio-psychological impacts of these serials on Turkish audience groups.

### Transnationalization of K-Dramas

After dominating the world scene for decades, American popular culture (including movies, television dramas, and pop music) has lost its dominance, and other countries (Korea, India, Japan and Turkey, for example) have taken a considerable share in the Asian market and beyond (Kuwahara, 2014; Molen, 2014). A vast amount of literature says that media imperialism, Hollywood media hegemony, the one-way flow of technology and information from the USA to the rest of the world are not effective anymore (Bornman, 2017; Tunstall, 1977, 2007). What we know, however, is that the exportation of television productions from different other countries are notable. For instance, the popularity of Danish TV drama series among the viewers in the United Kingdom (Esser, 2017) and the worldwide acceptance of Turkish serials, which ranks second largest in global TV serials exports after the U.S. (Ağırseven & Öрки, 2017; Özalpman, 2017; Yesil, 2015; Khan & Rohn, 2020a), has been debated in detail lately. Moreover, the widespread international acceptance of the Korean TV serials and K-pop precisely in East Asia, Middle East, and Latin America has seen a sharp rise in recent years (Min, Jin, & Han, 2018; Won, 2017).

According to the available data, the first exported Korean television drama was “*What is Love all about*” purchased by China in 1997 (Yoon, Jin, & et al., 2017). By the mid-1990, K-Dramas began to be aired in Taiwan, and a remarkable serial was “*The Autumn Story*” aired in 2001. *Winter Sonata* was another hit which had made its way to Japan. Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia also imported Korean dramas during the late 1990s and early 2000s. In mid-2000, a hit serial “*Dae Jang Geum*”, opened its way to Asia, Europe, Middle East, and South America, which was sold out to more than 120 countries. As for Min (2017), the Korean television serials had made their entry to the market of Latin America in 2003 and *All About Eve* (2000) was aired in Mexico, followed by *Star in My Heart* (1997), and *Winter Sonata* (2002). Since 2008 the digital media and social media network had further intensified the popularity of Korean popular culture in many regions, including North America, South America and Europe. In 2015, South Korea was the world’s seventh-largest media content creator, edging out Canada, which shared the seventh spot with South Korea a year earlier (Yonhap News



Agency, 2017). Moreover, the global content streaming service Netflix has stepped up the Korean TV dramas and films to new audiences worldwide since its official launch in Korea in 2016 (Sohn, 2018). It could be claimed that the developing democracy in Korea has opened the ways of Korean popular culture to the rest of the world. According to Won (2017), the emergence and elevation of the Korean Wave is not a natural advent, however, it is purposely promoted by all stakeholders, including government institutions, which has played the principal role in the nation branding and cultural industry promotion to achieve economic benefits after the financial and economic crisis in 1997-98 in Korea. The researchers give it the term of “*cultural nationalism*” which means that how culture and nationhood are deployed in a popular generic form, and how this might be used to delineate broader discourses associated with media representation of small nations and different ethnicities (Allen, 1995).

Ryoo (2009) argues that the success of the Korean wave is associated with the ability of Korean culture and media which easily interpret or adapt Western or American culture to fit Asian taste. A growing body of the literature addressed that unlike shows from some other countries (e.g., United States), Korean TV dramas have been classified as “safe” to watch by the generally conservative Muslim viewers. For instance, Hong (2014), refers to the fact that Korean producers keep in mind Muslim customs and religious backgrounds in terms of family matters, cultural and religious sensitivities when airing K-drama in the Muslim world. According to the previous research, the reason for the widespread acceptance of Korean popular cultural products by the Middle Eastern Fans are cultural similarities, socio-cultural environment, lack of media content in the Middle Eastern countries, development of information communication technology (ICT), and support of Korean government to transform the pop culture contents into creative economy (Kim, 2017).

The audience of the Middle Eastern countries has been historically a consumer of Hollywood, Japan, and Indian popular culture products. For instance, the Japanese TV drama *Oshin* (1983), which was aired in more than 60 countries, had received a massive reception in the Middle East. However, the situation changed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when Korean and Turkish dramas took centre stage in the Middle Eastern countries (Elaskary, 2018).

According to Kim (2017), the first exported Korean serial to the Middle East was *The Youth*, purchased by Jordan in 2002, followed by *The 1st Coffee Prince* and *Winter Sonata* in 2007. The other TV dramas that have become popular in the Middle Eastern countries were *Boys Over Flowers*, *Jewel in the Palace*, *Sorry I Love You*, and *Woman of the Sun*. Later, *Goblin* (2017) and *Descendants of the Sun* (2016) have also been welcomed by millions of viewers (Elaskary, 2010). Kim (2017) adds, around 500 hours from 16 different series produced were sold at a media marketing show in Dubai in 2007. As for Noh (2011), the Korean drama *Autumn in My Heart* (2000), premiered on Egyptian state television in August, 2004, followed by other Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan, Tunisia, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran (Oztarsu, 2017; Ying, 2008). Television dramas such as *Winter Sonata* has been introduced to the Middle East by Ghassan, a distributor in Saudi Arabia. In Iran, *Dae Jang Geum* (2003), received a rating of around 90%, which was exceptional in Iran’s domestic market. After the airing of the Korean television serials, the number of fans of Korean pop culture has grown across the Middle East, such as in Iran, KSA, Egypt, UAE, and Turkey (Kim, 2017).

In 2008 the Korean satellite station, Korea TV, translated Korean serials into many local languages in the Middle Eastern countries. In Tunisia, the first Korean TV serial *Sad Love Story*

(2005), was aired on the state-owned network “Elwataniya 1” in late 2007. As for Lee (2017), Tunisians are found to identify with Korean culture, seeking out the features that are shared with Islamic culture, such as family-friendly values. In our research, however, we found identical emotions in Turkish fans towards Korean popular cultural products. Choi (2014), also adding that historical facts and empirical analysis, reveals that there is a strong link and similarities between Islamic culture and Confucianism.

### **The arrival of K-Dramas in Turkey**

Turkey is one of the main consumers of Korean TV serials and K-pop, but previously no published work solely focused on Turkish spectators. According to the available data, in Turkey, *Emperor of the Sea* (2004) was the first Korean serial aired on national television channel TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) in 2006 (Kaptan & Tutucu, 2019). *Jewel in the Palace* (2003) was another hit aired by TRT in January 2008. In Turkey, the Korean drama serials were broadcasted on multiple networks such as Digiturk, D-smart, Turksat etc. Digiturk and D-smart are terrestrial and satellite networks, while Turksat is a cable network and internet service which offers over 500 channels by subscription (Akser, 2014; Kaptan & Tutucu, 2019). On satellite network, national and commercial channels such as TRT1, Ege TV, Fox TV, Meltem TV, Olay TV, Mesaj TV, and Kidirga TV, Korean TV dramas are aired either in original form with subtitles or the adapted versions (Kaptan & Tutucu, 2019). In addition, a vast number of Korean TV serials and films, are accessible through streaming television. For instance the websites *Koreanurk* and *Yeppuda* are actively involved in the translation, subtitling and streaming of Korean dramas and films (Orrego-Carmona & Lee, 2017). An internet-based survey conducted by the Korea Communications Commission in the Middle Eastern countries (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates) regarding 27 Korean dramas assessed the response of Turkish netizens, who were more active in giving feedback to videos and on SNS (social networking service) (Korea Bizwire, 2019).

The majority of Turkish television serials are adaptations and derivatives of international television shows. In the past, Turkish TV producers adapted TV serials from American productions; however, today’s most popular shows are based on Korean and Japanese shows (Birsin, 2019).

Several Turkish television serials are also official or loose adaptations of Korean dramas. One of the reasons that Turkish producers discovered it that Korean and Turkish societies share some similar sense of family values, morals, and societal norms. The previous study reveals that some Turkish shows loosely adapt the Korean storyline while others follow it very carefully for the first 10-15 episodes, and after that, the plot moves in its own direction because Turkish television serials are much longer than Korean dramas and therefore need extra plotline. The first adapted version of K-Damas was started in Turkey by Show TV in 2001, which is later followed by other channels (Kaptan & Tutucu, 2019; Daehandrama, 2016), and lately, more than 32 Turkish adaptations of Korean TV serials prevails on Turkish television screens.



**Table 1.** List of Turkish adaptations from K-dramas, Source: (Khan & Won, 2020b)

S.No.	Original Serials	Year	Adapted Serials	Year	Channel
1	The Temptation of An Angel	2009	Beni Affet	2011	Focus Film (Show TV)
2	I am Sorry, I Love You	2004	Bir Aşk Hikayesi	2013	MF Yapım (FOX TV)
3	Autumn in My Heart	2000	Paramparça	2013	Endemol Shine Production (Star TV)
4	King of Baking,	2010	Aşk, Ekmek, Hayaller	2013	Show TV
5	Boys over Flowers	2009	Güneşi Beklerken	2013	Kanal D
6	Rooftop Prince	2012	Osmanlı Tokadı	2013	Ulusal Televizyon TRT1
7	The Innocent Man	2012	Günahkâr	2014	FOX TV
8	A Gentleman's Dignity	2012	Kiraz Mevsimi	2014	FOX TV
9	My Husband got a Family	2012	Kocanın Ailesi	2014	FOX TV
10	Cruel Love	2007	Acı Aşk	2015	Show TV
11	Bride of the Century	2014	Beyaz Yalan	2015	Show TV
12	The Heirs	2013	Çilek Kokusu	2015	Star TV
13	Can Love Become Money	2012	Kıralık Aşk	2015	Ortak Yapım (Star TV)
14	Full House	2004	İlişki Durumu Karışık	2015	MF Yapım (Show TV)
15	Birth of a Beauty	2014	Eve Dönüş	2015	ATV
16	Panda and Hedgehog	2012	Maral	2015	TV 8
17	Love Again	2012	Aşk Yeniden	2015	Fox TV
18	Get Karl! Oh Soo Jung	2007	Tatlı İntikam	2016	Kanal D
19	May Queen	2012	Mayıs Kraliçesi	2015	Show TV
20	Summer Scent	2003	Rüzgârın Kalbi	2016	Fox TV
21	My Girl	2005	Aşk Yalanı Sever	2016	Fox TV
22	High Society	2015	Yüksek Sosyete	2016	Star TV
23	You Are My Destiny	2014	No: 309	2016	Fox TV
24	Smile, You	2015	Gülümse Yeter	2016	Show TV
25	She Was Pretty	2015	Seviyor Sevmiyor	2016	MF Yapım (A TV)
26	Flames of Desire	2010	Hayat Şarkısı	2016	Most Production (Kanal D)
27	What Happens to My Family	2014	Baba Candır	2016	TRT1
28	Resurrection	2005	Kış Güneşi	2016	Endemol Shine production (Show TV)
29	The Doctor	2016	Kalp Atışı	2017	Show TV
30	Descendants of the Sun	2016	Son	2017	Star TV
31	Secret Love	2013	Meryem	2017	Kanal D
32	Her Legend	2013	O Hayat Benim	2017	Fox TV

## Theoretical background

The selection of specific media among a variety of content denotes the audience's activeness in terms of seeking out particular media content to satisfy their needs. As for Uses and Gratification Theory which is based on the socio-psychological communication tradition, means that the audience actively chooses the media content to fulfil their social and psychological needs (Severin & Tankard Jr., 2000). What the audience read in a newspaper, of what they see on television or receiving by social media may or may not be true. Even if something were true, one could be certain the one did not get the whole picture. Some things are left out. The active and media literate audience are comparatively selective and view the media with a more critical eye. The audience members choose selective media content to fulfil their desires in terms of enhancing their knowledge, seeking companionship, relaxation, and diversion. More specifically, there are few different classifications of needs fulfilled by media, which are effective, personal integrative, social integrative, and escapism (Kane, 2015).

Interpreting the Uses and Gratification Theory in the age of digital media, one can assume that the cognitive need, affective need, personal, and social integration became more reliable

in terms of ‘digital democracy’, ‘digital interactivity’ and ‘parasocial interaction.’ For example, when the media was entirely analogue on TV, there was no source to bridge the audience with each other, who used to watch the same program or content. Digital media, however, has changed this tendency, and audience members do not only create social integration with the media program but also get the association to the other consumers of the same media content. In term of cognitive need, the digital media does not only inform the audience members but also enables them to practice actively, freely and equally in the proposal, development, and creation of laws (Jafarkarimi et al., 2014). To satisfy the ‘effective need’ (the emotional connection of the audience with media content), the digital media enables the audience members for the personal connection with the brands, characters, and producers.

The Uses and Gratification Theory in the age of digital media could be applied to our study. In our study, we assume that unlike one-way flows of media, the multi-way flow of communication has provided an opportunity for the audience groups to cherry-pick content according to their desires. A growing body of literature and empirical research describes the active role of audience members in the age of digital media. Youjeong Oh (2015) calls it discursive consumption. The audience members discuss and share their viewing experience, recapping plots and gossiping about them, admiring characters and actors, capturing and modifying drama images, generating one’s own movies, suggesting future plotlines, promoting dramas to acquaintances, producing drama themed souvenirs and supporting the production (Lee & Nornes, 2015; Oh, 2015). These discursive consumption practices denote the ways in which television dramas become a source of collective discussion, cultivation of additional pleasures and the production of secondary texts, enables audience groups to produce their own meanings and pleasures and interactions among people via social media. Social media has raised practices of discursive consumption in which collective and collaborative discussions heighten the pleasures of drama watching (Oh, 2015). This trend is not only observed in the Korean audiences, but the Turkish audience of the Korean dramas also continuously engaged in creating short clips of K-dramas, making a meme on them, and sharing their experiences with other fans on social media networks. The internet forums are an open platform for the fans where they could share their opinion, experience, and tastes, which reflect their behaviour and attitude, as primary source of information for research (Kocak, 2015). Active Korean serials fandom in Turkey could be traced from the different blogs regarding K-dramas and K-pop created by fans. In these blogs, fans share their views and enthusiasm regarding Korean protagonists and their idols. In June 2015, in Turkey, there were 37 blogs (Orrego-Carmona & Lee, 2017), which are now in hundreds, dedicated to Korean television serials, movies, and K-pop.

## Methodology

An online survey is conducted in September 2019 to collect data from the Turkish audience of Korean television serials in order to examine the transnational position of television production and digital distribution of TV content in general and the unique case of Korean television serials in particular. People who have access to the Internet (netizens) and have watched Korean television serials were included in the study. The questionnaire included demographic questions as well as questions with 5-point Likert scale response choices (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The link to the survey is shared on different social media networks such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, KakaoTalk, and HelloTalk.





Cultural proximity and hybridity in the sense in which cultural, social, and psychological dynamics in Korean TV serials drew Turkish viewers and touched their sensibilities throughout the study were explored. The paper further examined what characteristics of Korean culture attract Turkish audiences, and how do Turkish followers consume Korean content as a cultural practice?

### **Data analysis**

According to the 2019 statistics the population of Turkey is approximately 83 million. The languages spoken by the majority are Turkish. The main religion, followed by 99% of the population, is Islam. The literacy rate is about 96% overall as of 2018 (World Population Review, 2019). Despite having 99% of the Muslim population, Turkey is a welfare secular, and democratic state retaining gender equality, monogamy, and free-market economic system. For these reasons, the public of less developed and undemocratic countries in the region and the Muslim world consider it a model state. Some scholars, however, call it a western projection by a Muslim source (Cevik, 2014; Gürzel, 2014). The socio-economic status of Turkey is growing for the last three decades, and the majority of the population are living a standard life having access to the basic needs. According to economists and political scientists, Turkey is a developed state having an emerging economy market and is one of the world's newly industrialized countries (IMF, 2016).

Taking a look at the general mediascape in Turkey, it is clear that the majority of the people are active in media consumption. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TurkStat) and Information and Communication Technology Usage Survey (2018), households' internet access in the country is 83.8%, and eight out of 10 households have access to the internet (Ergocun, 2018). According to a survey conducted by Gallup in 2017, almost 98% of households in Turkey have a working TV set, 73% have a computer, and 83.8% have access to the internet via computer or mobile phone (Gallup, 2017). The previous research reveals that there is widespread consumption of social media among Turkish users (Kurtulus et al., 2015).

The target audience of our conducted survey was those netizens who watch Korean serials. In our research survey, 750 audience members filled out the survey in which 95% were female, however 5% of respondents were male. Noh (2011) points out in her ethnographic research about women fandom in the Middle East that the traditional dichotomy between center and periphery is no longer valid to explain re-centered globalization. She adds that women respect the values featured in Korean dramas and movies.

From our study, we assume that Korean dramas portray symphonic relationships between males and females, depicting family-friendly values such as respecting elders, treating each other gently, hospitality to foreigners etc. which are the traits that satisfy the Turkish audience. These characteristics of the Korean dramas resemble the Islamic culture, as Kim (2014), and Lee (2017), found the same evidence in the Iranian and Tunisian audiences.

### **Audience age groups**

We deduced from our survey that majority of the Turkish fans of K-Dramas are teenage girls; the same case has been reported in previous research regarding spectators in Latin America and in the United States (Min, Jin, & Han, 2018). For instance, according to an online survey-

based report released in 2017, by the Korea Creative Content Agency's (KOCCA) U.S. office, Korean TV series, especially the romantic comedies are very famous among women in their teens to early 30s in the United States (Yonhap, 2017). Moreover, to analyze the age-group classification of the respondents, Hong (2013), classifies the international audience of Korean popular culture in three categories, such as cinephiles, young and middle-aged adults, and millennials who take advantage of digital media platforms. In our research, the majority of Turkish audiences belong to the second and third groups which are young and middle-aged and millennials, as 49% of the respondents belong to the age group of twenty or less and 42% are from 21 to 30 years old. Only 8% of the audiences belong to the age group of 31 to 40 and 1.5% of the audience members belong to the age group of 41 to 50.

### Education and profession profiles of the respondents

The data shows that the majority of the followers of Korean TV serials are university students and graduates (Table 2). Comparing the education level with age group demonstrates that the majority of the fans are school and university going adolescents. Also, we had put an optional question in our survey regarding the profession of the audience. Most of the respondents are students followed by housewives and office assistants. However, the list includes people from all walks of life.

**Table 2.** Educational background of the respondents

Education level of the Audience	Audience (%)
None	0
Primary	0.4
Middle	7
High/Higher Secondary	41
Undergraduate	45
Higher (Master/PhD etc.)	6.4

**Table 3.** Genre preference of Korean serial(s) by the Turkish audience

Genre preference of Korean serial(s)	Audience (%) *
Thriller/Mystery	53
Melodrama	76
Historical	43
Contemporary (Comedy)	31
Other	28

\* The percentages are reported on basis of multiple choices and thus do not add up to 100.

In the survey, 10% of the total respondents were those fans of Korean dramas, who have visited South Korea. Among them, 30% visited Korea for study, 10% for business or job, and 17% for tourism.

Regarding genre preference (Table 3), the majority of audiences have chosen more than one option, such as they prefer to watch romantic, thriller, and comedy at the same time. 75% of the respondents said that they preferred to watch melodrama or romantic Korean TV serials followed by thriller/mystery 53%, and historical genre 43%. 28% of the participants have chosen the "other" option stating genres such as, legal or law e.g. *Suspicious Partner* (2017), science fictions e.g. *Life on Mars* (2018), *Circle* (2017), *Memories of the Alhambra* (2019), *Are You Human* (2018), and medical genre e.g. *Doctor Stranger* (2014), *Faith* (2012), and *Kill Me Heal Me* (2015).

The audience members were asked about their three most favourite Korean serials, and an extensive list of Korean serials appeared in the answer box, indicating the wide-ranging availability of Korean content to the Turkish audience groups.





The following Korean serials are reported by Turkish audience members as their favourite fictions.

**Table 4.** List of the Korean Serials preferred to watch by Turkish Audience

S.No.	Serial(s) Name	Year	S.No.	Serial(s) Name	Year
1	Signal	2018	29	Hello, My Twenties	2016
2	He Is Psychometric	2019	30	Orange Marmalade	2015
3	While You Were Sleeping	2017	31	49 Days	2011
4	Two Cops	2017	32	Playful Kiss	2010
5	W – Two Worlds	2016	33	My Love from the Star	2013
6	Strong Girl Bong-soon	2017	34	Black	2017
7	My Secret Hotel	2014	35	Dream High	2011
8	Suspicious Partner	2017	36	Angel's Last Mission: Love	2019
9	Tempted	2018	37	Jewel in the Palace	2003
10	Monster	2016	38	Moon Lovers: Scarlet Heart Ryeo	2016
11	City Hunter	2011	39	Hwarang: The Poet Warrior Youth	2016
12	The K2	2016	40	Faith	2012
13	The school	2012	41	Fight for My Way	2017
14	You're Beautiful	2009	42	Love in Sadness	2019
15	A Korean Odyssey	2017	43	My ID is Gangnam Beauty	2018
16	The Heirs	2013	44	Kill Me, Heal Me	2015
17	Legend of the Blue Sea	2016	45	The secret Life of My Secretary	2019
18	Descendants of the Sun	2016	46	Guardian: The Lonely and Great God	2017
19	Cheer Up	2015	47	Personal Taste	2010
20	My Lovely Girl	2014	48	Her Private Life	2019
21	Hill School: Love On	2014	49	Special labor inspection	2019
22	Doctor Stranger	2014	50	Welcome to Waikiki	2018
23	Boys Over Flowers	2009	51	Secret Garden	2010
24	Still 17	2018	52	Romance Is a Bonus Book	2019
25	Clean with Passion for Now	2019	53	Life on Mars	2018
26	My Strange Hero	2019	54	Circle	2017
27	Touch Your Heart	2019	55	Memories of the Alhambra	2019
28	Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok-joo	2017	56	Are You Human?	2018

Some of the respondents left a detailed note about their enthusiasm for K-Dramas and K-pop. Instead of writing the name of serials, one of the respondents stated that *“I am crazy for Korean serials and have watched almost sixty serials, I loved all of them and have no idea that which one should I mention here”*. One of them said, *“I love Korean serials because they bring a variety of topics, and the actors/protagonists seem very young, cute, and attractive to me.”* Another fan member left a note saying she is tremendously wholehearted about Korean people and wants to learn the Korean language after watching their serials.

The emotional, intimate, and enthusiastic behavioral development of the audience members towards the Korean public and culture signifies the existence of “emotional proximity” and the active role of TV production in the shaping of public opinion and gaining soft power of the producer country.

### Digital distribution and streaming TV

Multidimensional analysis of television audiences needs to be performed across multiple media consumption platforms (Napoli, 2012). Research says that media convergence and change in the media environment due to the development of communication technology is one of the reasons for the widespread expansion of the Korean Wave and of export of similar media from other countries. The emergence and expansion of social media have played a vital role in the global popularity of Korean TV dramas (Lee & Nornes, 2015). As mentioned by

Jin (2016), the media landscape has dramatically changed with the emergence of smartphones and social media which pushed the Korean Wave for achieving global fandom. After the emergence of social media such as YouTube and Facebook, Korean popular culture rapidly penetrated the global market (Jin, 2018). Huang (2017) also stated that Korean serials had started their promotion and circulation to social media which has provided a remarkable speed in the increasing of international fandom of not only the Korean television products but other popular culture elements as well.

**Table 5.** Network preference to watch Korean TV shows

Network preference	Audience (%)
Television (Cable/satellite)	10.0
YouTube	15.0
CD/DVD Purchased	0.3
Streaming TV (KoreanTurk, Netflix, etc.)	74.7

To identify and measure the importance of medium through which the audience members receive the content, we asked them in our conducted survey about their preference for watching Korean TV serials. The data shows that 90% of the respondents watch the serials via streaming TV such as *Koreaanturk*, *YonTube*, *Netflix*, etc. The website “*Koreaanturk*” is the top preference of the participants for getting access to the Korean television serials. A segment of the audience group, however, get access to Korea serials *via Netflix*, *Uzakdogu*, *Viki*, *Korezin*, *Yeppudaa*, *Asyanfantiklerim*, and *Onlinedizi*. Watching serials via digital media by the 90% of the respondents reveals that the communication technology and social media platforms are playing the central role in the widespread expansion of Korean serials. Data tells that 7% of the respondents watch Korean serials in the original language without subtitles or voice dubbing, which implies that a staggering number of Korean pop culture fans in Turkey are deeply associated with Korean culture. They do not only enjoy the media content but have also learned the Korean language, which enabled them to watch the serials in Korean language.

### Motives for watching Korean TV serials by the Turkish audience

According to our survey, 67.6% of the audience members watch K-Dramas not merely to entertain themselves, but moreover, they use it as a learning tool. The previous research such as (English, 2017) has also found the interest of foreigners in Korean language learning. The television serials in this regard are a useful tool of public diplomacy to persuade others about one’s culture and policy. Furthermore, it plays a vital role in attracting the audience towards their products and locations. Some of the respondents stated that they have begun watching K-Dramas after getting fed-up with local content. A segment of the audience believes that one of the reasons for selection of Korean serials is the absence of nudity in shows. Regarding the motive for choosing Korean content among local or other foreign series, we received diverse responses from the audience members; however, the striking reasons for selecting Korean serials are the quality of content and production, brief size of the serials and episodes, variety of themes, distinctiveness in themes and scenarios, intimacy (proximity), sincerity, young and attractive protagonists, and realistic approach of the narratives.

Taking the case in theoretical assessment, according to Hong (2013), Korean drama fans in France are not the audience of peripheral culture; instead, they have been actively consuming Japanese manga, animation, Japanese drama, and Japanese pop, and eventually reached the



Korean content. The same is the case with the fans of Latin America; as for Min (2017), in general, many Latin American K-pop fans used to follow Japanese manga. This gradual reach of the French and Latin American fans to the Korean content denotes that the audiences are not passive. They, however, actively accede any accessible content in the world if they are “good.” So, Hong’s arguments support the hypothesis of quality production and quality cultural content of Korean TV productions (Hong, 2013). Availability of the content also matters, as in the case of Turkish fans, one of the apparent reasons is the costless availability of the serials with colloquial subtitles. Many websites such as *KoreanTurk*, *Korezin*, *Yepbudaa*, *Aryanfantiklerim*, and *Onlinedizi* translating, subtitling K-Dramas with colloquial language and provide the latest serials to the audience for free of cost.

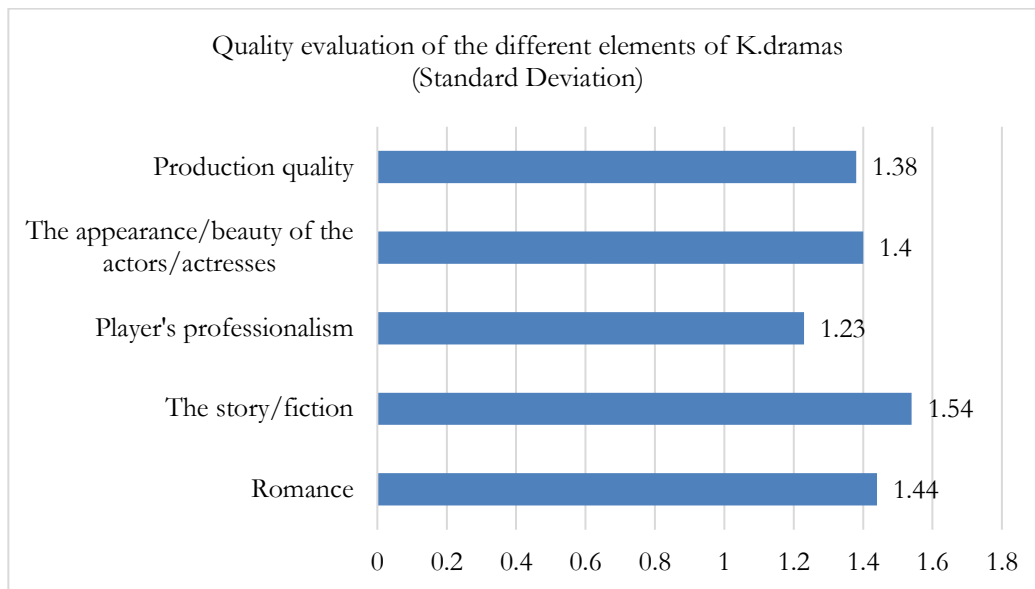
**Table 6.** Fundamental reasons for watching Korean TV serial(s)

Fundamental reasons for watching Korean TV serials	Number (%)
To learn Korean language and culture	4.6
Only fun/Entertainment	16.7
For Learning the Korean language, culture and Entertainment.	67.6
Other	11.0

To interpret the emotions and enthusiasm of Turkish fans towards Korean TV serials, we have put in words some of their detailed responses. Several audience members believe that the Korean TV serials are more impressive than the Turkish TV serials (local content) to them. A teenage high school student fan described that she prefers to watch Korean TV serials because, “*It motivates me, the people seem sympathetic in Korean serials, the topics are handled well and the serials do not come out of the subject, and they don’t add ridiculous events to prolong series unlike Turkish serials. In addition, I want to learn Korean language and know about culture.*” A fan has stated that K-pop led her to the K-Dramas, adding that she used to listen to K-pop; consequently, due to curiosity about Korean culture she started watching Korean TV serials. One member wrote that “*Curiosity about Korean people convinced me to watch K-dramas where I found fascinating stories, serenity, peaceful people and tranquil streets of Korea; also, I like it because it seems more decent and better fictions than western content, and it depicts that the Korean family structure is not spoiled.*” Another teenage fan has added that “*It makes me feel more intimate and closer than other countries series.*” The hypothesis of “cultural proximity” and “emotional proximity” seems effective in the case of the Turkish audience as the majority of the audience acknowledged that the Korean serials make them feel intimacy and familiarity. A fan stated, “*I feel happy to watch Korean serials; it gives me pleasure, I do not feel like I am watching a foreign show, I just love Korean shows and want to make a lot of Korean friends.*” Another participant mentioned that “*I like the speaking styles of the performers; they seem lovely couples. The overall quality is good and not too long, like (our local) Turkish serials. In contrast, Turkish serials are very protracted and sometimes losing the plot, which makes me bore instead of amused*” Some of the respondents have praised the acting style of the performers and scenarios of the series. According to them, the way of acting and fanatic nature of the stories keeps them active. A fan added that she loves Korean serials because “*I watch K-dramas since childhood and found that people in Korean serials are respectable and have a passion for art and defense, they don’t enter the homes with shoes which is same to our culture. Also, it shorter and conservative than local and Western TV serials*”. A housewife fan valued the Korean serials while saying “*I love them to watch because they are short, emotional, devoted, concise with the quality script which eliminates all my anxieties.*” A faction of audiences admitted that they prefer Korean content because the series are of better quality, contain a wide variety of scenarios, and are closer to their culture. Critically analyzing, one of the respondents wrote that “*although I do not find all the chic in K-dramas, however, the briefer serials and*

*episodes are attracting me, also unlike other serials, I found some tutorials (learning) aspects in Korean serials.”* A segment of the audience believes that the Korean serials have less suggestive content and better orientation than local and Western TV serials. Other believe that they prefer to watch quality ones, and Korean serials are usually immersive.

**Figure 1.** Quality evaluation of the Korean TV serial(s) by Turkish fans



A question was set about different characteristics of the Korean TV serials, such as to evaluate the quality of romance, the fiction, the player's professionalism, the appearance of the performers and production (see figure 1). The Likert scale with a five ordinal gradation was used for the measurement of audience behavior. The graph (standard deviation) denotes that the quality of the story (fiction) tops all other elements; however, the professionalism of performers has been placed on the bottom by the audience members. Melodramatic nature of the serials, the attraction of the protagonists, and the production quality of K-Dramas also admired by the audience about which they expressed their emotions in detailed notes.

### Assessment of cultural proximity

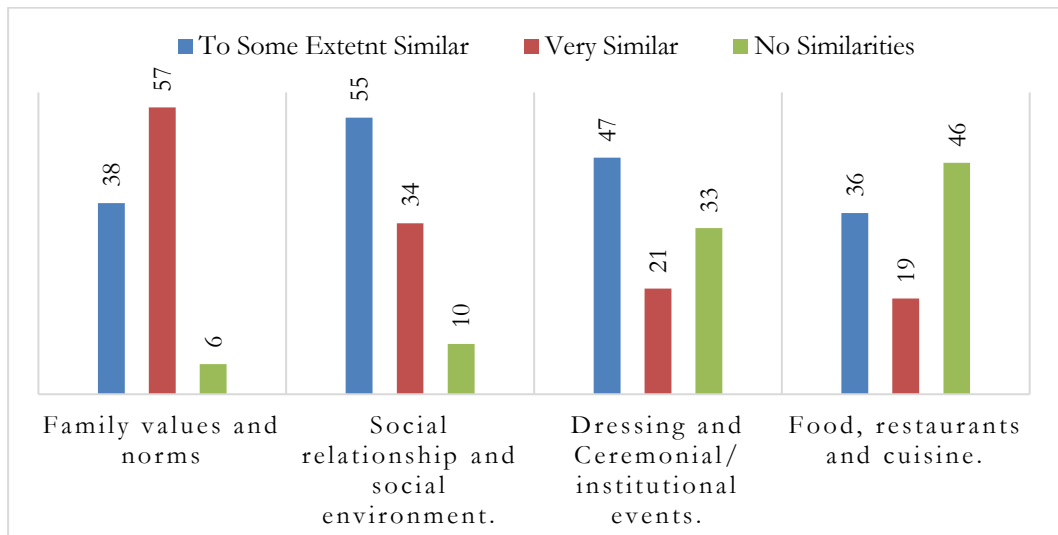
Choice of a film or serial is a matter of complex motivations behind. It might be the content as well as the context to be shared with the others. The youngsters having a tendency of choosing K-Drama usually have a dense communication with each other and they not only consume the serials but also, they build up their conversation on what they watched as a shared experience. Some of them intend to model them or show deeper identification behaviours as to have similar outlooks for their Instagram profiles in similar clothing or hairstyle. The cold and deep look in the face and unisex fashion seem to be effective for early adolescents.

A specific element in a K-Drama, whether a gesture, an object, a traffic rule, a way of communicating, or a special drink or food, will be connoted as being "Korean." Or a theme that a K-Drama revolves around, like school, kinship, or marriage, can be discussed in terms of culture (Schulze, 2013). To evaluate the measurement of the cultural proximity between



Korean and Turkish societies, we asked the Turkish fans about the similarities in family values and norms, social relationships, dressing and ceremonies, and the food and cuisine they have observed in K-Dramas. The statistics indicates that audience members have strongly conceded about the strong resemblances between Turkish (local) and Korean societies (Figure 2). The majority of the audience members believe that family values and norms have close similarities, however social gatherings, ceremonial activities, and cuisines are less similar. One of the reasons could be the differences between halal and haram food, as due to religious beliefs, Muslims do not consume pork.

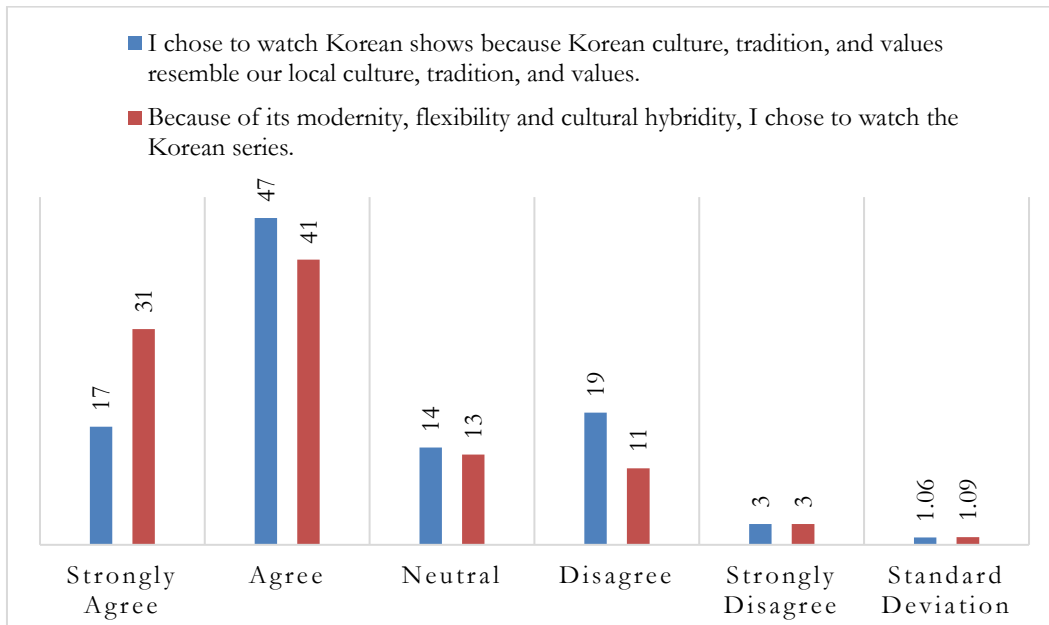
**Figure 2.** Comparison of the cultural elements perceived by Turkish fans in Korean dramas.  
%



Further evaluating the cultural proximity, we asked the audience the reason for choosing Korean content. The audience members stated that they watch Korean serials because of flexibility and modernity in content, having a resemblance with their local culture and tradition. As for Parc and Moon (2013), the cultural proximity thesis could be partially effective but not at all as, according to him, the hypothesis of cultural proximity, filtered Western values, and Asian preference for Korean televisions production could be the motive for the expansion of Korean dramas. Nevertheless, these findings cannot support the Korean wave's expansion from Asia to Western nations, such as Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, which has cultural differences with South Korea and other Asian countries (Parc & Moon, 2013). Other researchers, however, have employed the concept of "cultural proximity" in the case of the expansion of Korean Wave to transnational fans (Kim et al., 2009; Siriyuvassak & Hyunjoon, 2007). Schulze, (2013), argues that researchers have adopted the Straubhaar's concept of "cultural proximity" that the expansion of Korean dramas in East Asia resulting from East Asian cultural harmonies e.g., "Asian sentiments" originated from the Confucius legacy such as family norms and values, filial piety, and respect for elders. Previous research says that some other proximities such as "multiple proximities" "genre proximity", and "emotional proximity" are also playing a vital role in attracting the audience to foreign content, see for example (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005; Özalpman & Sarikakis,

2018; Lu, Liu, & Cheng, 2019). Our study, however, strongly support the hypothesis of “cultural proximity” and “emotional proximity” (Figures 2 & 3).

**Figure 3.** Motives for chosen Korean content (Cultural Proximity, %)



### Gaining soft power, media-induced tourism and capitalization

Elements of hegemonic soft power such as Hollywood movies, *Disney*, *Ghibli*, *Coca-Cola*, and *McDonald's* are the examples for soft power, we have adopted in our daily life (Lee, 2017). A growing body of the literature says that the Korean popular cultural products are one of the sources for gaining soft power, nation branding and culture exportation (Kim & Jin, 2016). Nye (2011) points out that in China, American and Japanese cultural ideas tend to be considered more attractive when they arrive via South Korea. The Chinese audiences feel closer to the lifestyles, political systems, and economies portrayed in Korean dramas than American dramas, even though they are somewhat similar to each other. Thus, one can assume that the Korean Wave as a non-hegemonic power, unlike the hegemonic soft power of the West.

Statistic of our survey supports the hypothesis of ‘gaining soft power’ and ‘cultural diplomacy’ attaining by Korean popular cultural products precisely the serials (Figure 4).

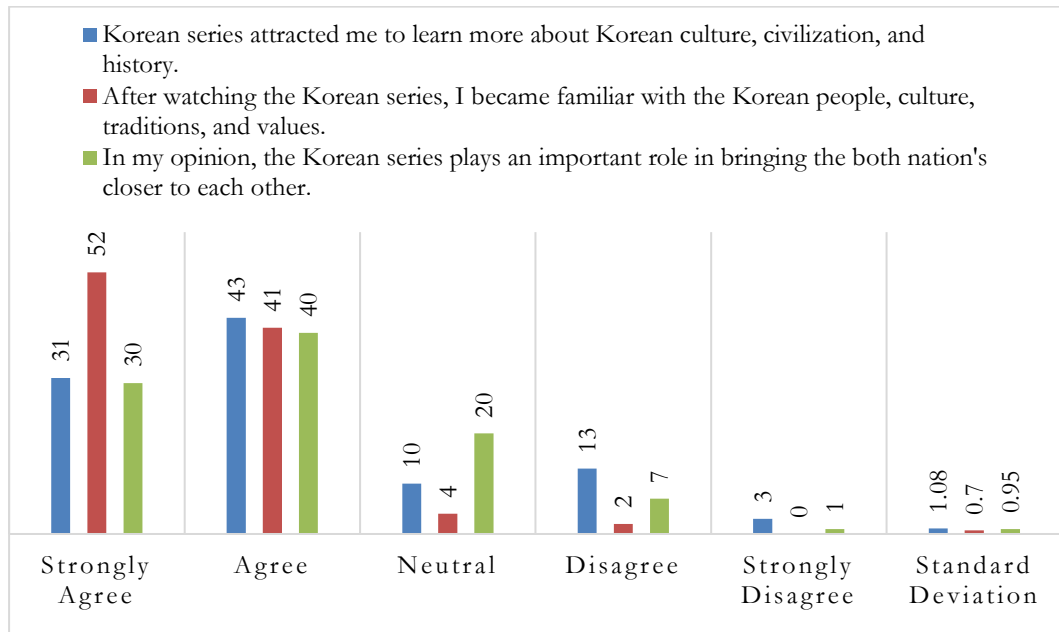
Korea was facing trouble in terms of economy during the 1997 economic crisis, which became a source of motivation and provocation to boost and drag the popular and creative cultural industry into the national political economy. To attract the people belong to other countries, the popular culture has been used to boost the economy and country with other means of soft power (Lee, 2009; Nye, 2004). According to previous research, during the economic disaster, the Korean authorities facilitated the capitalization and commodification of popular cultural products to combat the crises.





Consequently, the revenue from Korean TV which was less than \$ 8 million in 1998, boosted to \$ 132 million in 2006 and whizzed to \$ 172 million in 2010 (Ju, 2014). The “commodification” of the popular culture took place in Korea since the mid-1990s (Jin, 2016) which was once for nation-building and cultural sovereignty (Yoon et al., 2017).

**Figure 4.** K-Dramas a source of gaining soft power and cultural exportation (%)

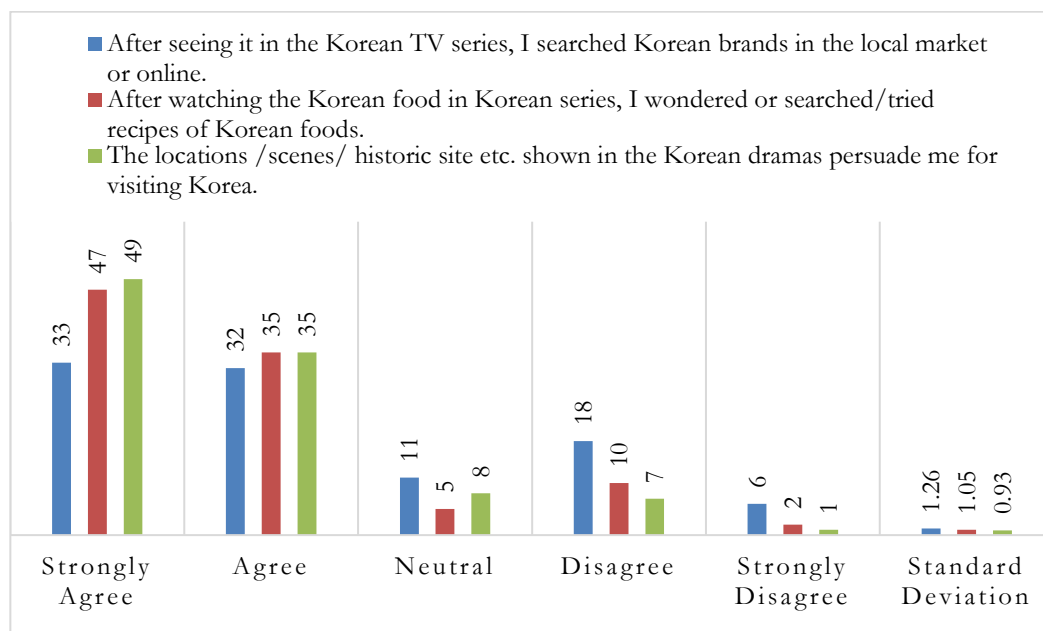


According to Kim (2017), Hallyu is a driving force and commodity in the era of the creative cultural economy, which helps in promoting the other Korean goods such as cars, electronics and digital products, and tourism. She adds that, after the success of Korean drama in the Middle East, the export of Korean products jumped dramatically in Iraq, KSA, and Iran in 2011. In other words, the success of Hallyu is the best advertisement for Korean products, such as cars, mobile phones, digital or home appliances, and even hospitals and infrastructure. Saberi (2018), reports in *The Diplomat* that the demand for South Korean products is increasing yearly, so to make stronger these ties South Korea has started the halal food industry and increased its agricultural export to UAE, as 90% of UAE's food is imported. The concern regarding the exportation of food culture is, however, witnessed in previous literature, see for example, (Copuroglu, 2018; Schuster, 2018). As for Roll (2015) and Jin (2016), visual content from the Korean Wave is very useful in promoting Korea and the consumption of Korean goods. Additionally, Hallyu has a vital impact on encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI) and the tourism industry in Korea (Jin, 2016; Roll, 2015). Lee (2011) also supports this concept that Korean Wave played a decisive role in increasing exports and foreign relations. In our research, the majority of the audience members bared their keen interest in Korean products after watching them in serials (Figure 5).

To take into consideration the media-induced tourism, the previous research reveals that media always played a significant role in attracting the audience towards the locations filmed in the stories, creating a positive image of a place and its socio-cultural and economic

situations (Anaz & Ozcan, 2016). The emergence of internet and social media further increased the tourism around the world. The shooting location of TV dramas and films in Korea also transformed into tourist destination. Also, companies advertise their products in particular areas using media stars who were famous in those locations (Won, 2017). In our survey, we found similar responses from the audience members regarding their developed mindset towards tourism in Korea after watching K-Dramas (Figure 5). Furthermore, though the majority of the respondents admitted that they had found no or fewer similarities between Korean and their local (Turkish) cuisine, however, they searched or tried the recipes of Korean food, and use to visit Korean restaurants after watching them in the serial(s).

**Figure 5.** Media-Induced Tourism and Products Advertisement via TV Serial(s) (%)



## Conclusion and final remarks

Following a growing body of the literature, and empirical analysis, this paper has highlighted the importance of the Korean television production in the context of its transnational role, such as cultural exportation, gaining soft power, cultural-encounters, and capitalization i.e., advertisement of Korean products, and media-induced tourism. It is examined that the enormous exportation of TV production is becoming a major means of economy, culture exportation, and gaining soft power.

To summarize the results of our survey, a manifold explanation could be provided; for instance, digital distribution and streaming TV's role in K-Dramas promotion, cultural proximity, commodification, fundamental motives for choosing Korean content, source of gaining soft power and nation branding. We have focused on assessing these elements from the insight of audience members. The data shows that the majority of the audience members are teen and middle-aged women having the profession of housewives and university students. Our data strongly support the hypothesis of cultural proximity and emotional proximity as the majority of the audience strongly believe that they have found cultural similiter in Korean



serials and their local culture, precisely family-friendly norms and values. Assessing the multidimensional diffusion of Korean TV serials, we found that 90% of the audience watch TV serials via streaming TV. The remarkable channels they use for watching K-Dramas are *Koreanturk*, *Ayafanatiklerim Netflix*, *Uzakdogu*, *Viki*, *YouTube*, *Korejin*, *Yeppudaa*, and *Onlinedizim*. This massive consumption of TV serials via streaming TV signifies the leading role of digital distribution in the expansion of Korean popular cultural products around the world. A significant number of the audiences have searched Korean products in the local or online markets after watching them in the TV serial. The hypothesis of media-induced tourism is also supported by data as the audience is pretty enthusiastic about visiting the sites and location they have watched in the serials. The audience members actively conceded that either they feel wonder or properly read about Korean history, culture, and civilization after watching K-Dramas, supporting the hypothesis of nation branding and gaining soft power.

The exportation of Korean TV serials to the rest of the world indicates that South Korea has commodified this tool and seems quite enthusiastic about spreading its culture for gaining soft power. However, we could not find adequate examples of the import of foreign content by South Korea except Hollywood media products. For instance, Turkey is an active importer of Korean popular cultural products and a big exporter of television products to more than 150 countries including Japan and China (Daily Sabah, 2019; Yesil, 2015). However, Korea is very inactive in this list. For example, only two Turkish serials *Phi* (2017) and *Magnificent Century* (2011), were imported by Korea so far. To analyze this, the criticism of Won (2017), Lee (2017), and Shim (2006) is conspicuous, stating that the unidirectional expansion of the Korean Wave is a pirated idea of Hollywood media imperialism. Shim (2006) argues in this regard that the anti-Korean sentiments in some Asian countries are based on resentment against the unilateral flows of the Korean Wave due to pirated nature and the hybridity of the Korean wave in Western style. This concern from the geopolitical rivals could be in terms of economy, cultural eroding, or political supremacy.

To encounter the issues with the rival's countries, the co-production and co-delivery policy could be adopted. For instance, co-production could be developed in terms of creativity (storytelling and technology), political, economic, and cultural/artistic aspects.

In our study, we conducted an online survey, and focused on the audience from Turkey. For future research projects, we suggest also including other states in polythetic way to analyze the transnational acceptance and barriers to TV content in a broad way.

## Acknowledgment

Musa Khan expresses his sincere thanks to Korean Foundation (KF Field Research Fellowship 2019) for providing financial support to carry out this research work.

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