



Research Article

**THE EXPERIENCE OF KOREAN CUISINE AMONG KOREAN DRAMA VIEWERS IN
TÜRKİYE: A CULTURAL DIPLOMACY PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

This research discusses South Korea's gastrodiploamacy initiatives from a cultural diplomacy perspective by establishing an inductive inference connection between South Korean TV series (K-Drama) and South Korean food (K-Food) and explores K-Food consumption by K-Drama viewers in Türkiye using an ethnographic approach. It aims to reveal the connection between watching K-Dramas and consuming K-Food, assuming that food scenes in K-Dramas serve as a driving force for viewers to discover or access these foods. Survey questions were developed using a mixed-methods design. A total of 1084 surveys were collected through online communication channels. Closed-ended questions were analyzed using frequency analysis, whereas open-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive methods. According to the findings, 30.8% of the participants are between the ages of 16-20 and 96.6% are female viewers. 77% of them began trying Korean food after watching Korean dramas. Furthermore, 94.2% stated that the food scenes in Korean dramas influenced their preferences for Korean cuisine. These findings highlight the cultural impact of Korean dramas and the effect of food scenes on viewer behavior. It was concluded that South Korea's gastronomic initiatives have an influence on cultural and socioeconomic experiences in Turkey.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Gastrodiploamacy, Hallyu, K-Food, K-Drama, South Korea Tv Series Viewers in Türkiye

Introduction

Popular culture has evolved into a key element of soft power for nations, serving as a crucial tool for promoting their culture abroad (Gunawan, 2024). Music, movies, television series, fashion, cuisine, language, literature, art, and sports constitute a wide range of cultural elements. In this set of elements, cuisine is a special place. Rockower (2011) stated that the easiest way to conquer hearts is through the stomach, emphasizing the diplomatic effect of food on international relations, breaking down traditional barriers, directing societal perceptions, and regulating diplomatic relations.

Today, culinary cultures have become tools used by nations for the global dissemination of kitchen practices and are integrated into sustainable development plans (Grandi, 2023). South Korea has successfully used soft power through the Korean wave to increase its presence and influence on the global stage (Gunawan, 2024). The Korean Wave, or hallyu, caused a notable increase in the popularity of Korean music, film, and television in Asia in the 1990s and early 2000s (Cwierka, 2014: 374). From the perspective of globalization, explaining Hallyu seems like fitting. Hallyu encompasses the cross-border flow of cultural products, and the recent globalization process in East Asia has laid the foundation of the cultural industry sector through market liberalization and deregulation (Yang, 2012: 107). This wave, also referred to as the K-content industry, has been evolving, drawing criticism for governments perceiving cultural content not as a reflection of national identity but as a commercial product (Binark, 2019a). In parallel, it is emphasized that a deeper analysis of the roots is necessary for the creation of national identity, and this process is influenced by colonialism, war, and globalization (Cwierka, 2008: 97). The biggest facilitator of Hallyu's global acceptance has been the Internet, where international fans watch K-dramas (Korean drama) and connect with each other (Schulze, 2017: 124).

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From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, Korean TV dramas and popular music became popular in Asian regions such as China and Japan. In 1997, the TV series *What is Love*, broadcasted on CCTV in China ranked second in all-time imported video content, leading to the term Korean Wave, representing the Korean culture craze. The Hallyu wave has expanded from Asia to the broader world, including Latin America and the Middle East (Yang, 2012), and is particularly loved by people in their teens and twenties. It is suggested that the surge in the popularity of Korean dramas, especially in 2020, can be attributed to their rapid adoption in the global Over-The-Top TV (OTT) market due to COVID-19 (Korean Culture Center, 2025).

In parallel with these developments, the concept of gastrodiploacy has emerged to introduce foreign cultures in terms of taste and flavor as a form of public diplomacy. Gastrodiploacy is a form of diplomacy that aims to establish cultural relations with people in other countries or strengthen existing relationships by using a country's culinary culture and food. This concept is based on the idea that food reflects a culture's identity and can be an effective way to promote a country's cultural values. Gastrodiploacy is used to foster cultural understanding and empathy through food, as well as to contribute to a country's foreign policy (Rockower, 2012). Gastrodiploacy, in its simplest definition, is a form of kitchen diplomacy, gaining attention in the literature as a popular concept (Nair, 2021; Ranches, 2022). Many countries worldwide use gastrodiploacy to present their food culture to the global audience (Çevik and Aslan, 2020). In this context, it is important to understand food literacy correctly (Taşkın and Sert, 2022). South Korea is a country that best utilizes gastrodiploacy as a soft power element. South Korea's gastrodiploacy policy has had an impact on many countries globally (Lasari, 2021; Vellycia, 2021), and Türkiye is one of the countries influenced by this. The constant presence of food scenes in dramas, which showcase local food, creates curiosity and a desire among viewers to taste that food. Additionally, the cultural similarity between Koreans and Turks in terms of hospitality and helpfulness makes Turkish society feel close to the Korean people (Bozyer, 2023).

Although studies have analyzed the common cultural motifs of Turks and Koreans (Bozyer, 2023; Jung, 2019), cultural interaction may not solely rely on shared cultural elements. Even if there are no similarities between different cultures, certain cultural elements, especially in a universal domain like food, can gain popularity and be adopted. For example, although there are not many common values between American and Turkish culture, fast food, defined as American food products, creates a popular food culture in Türkiye as well as around the world. Factors such as globalization, media, travel, and trade promote cultural exchange and facilitate interaction between different cultures. Therefore, there are many reasons or influences behind the presence of another nation's cultural elements in the food culture of a nation. To understand these influences, examining detailed cultural diplomacy strategies may be necessary. These strategies can help us understand how cultural interaction occurs, which factors are influential, and the ways in which a culture spreads to another.

Since the 1980s, cultural globalization, which influences the world, has started to manifest its impact on Türkiye from the 2000s onwards. In particular, Korean culture, including films, series, music, and food, has begun to be introduced in various fields in Türkiye. After 20 years, Türkiye now has a strong young audience that has experienced or wishes to experience Korean culture (Toprak and Ökmen, 2022: 17). While the impact of the Korean Wave has been researched in many countries (Jang and Paik, 2012; Shim and Gajzago, 2023; Toprak and Ökmen, 2022; Thanabordeekij et al., 2022; Wulandari, 2023; Yang, 2012), the absence of a study in Türkiye examining the impact of the K-drama and K-food waves and the relationship between them creates a gap in the literature.

Cultural diplomacy is an important tool for deepening intercultural interaction, strengthening mutual understanding, and reinforcing international cooperation. Culture can be an effective method for laying the foundations of mutual respect, peace, and security worldwide. On the other hand, while cultural diplomacy offers great opportunities for countries in international relations, if not carefully managed, it can lead to issues such as cultural hegemony, commercialization, stereotyping, and cultural homogenization. Therefore, it should be emphasized that cultural diplomacy activities must be conducted with a sincere, multi-dimensional approach based on mutual respect. Additionally, the promotion of cultures should not only be used as an economic or diplomatic tool, but their deep meanings and values should also be accurately reflected.

This research aims to identify the relationship between diplomacy and food based on an inductive inference approach and an ethnographic perspective, as well as to determine the types of social, economic, and cultural changes that have occurred by discussing South Korea's gastrodiploacy initiatives. Investigated within the context of gastrodiploacy, the formation of cultural diplomacy and how it shapes culinary culture are also discussed. In this context, factors influencing the culinary culture of a country are also emphasized by the dishes of another nation are also emphasized. Therefore, this study aims to investigate and reveal the tendency

of viewers who watch South Korean dramas in Türkiye to consume South Korean cuisine within the context of gastrodiploacy. It makes a significant contribution to the literature by addressing the lack of in-depth examination of the impact of Korean culture in Turkey, particularly through the K-drama and K-food phenomena. Since the 1980s, the influence of Korean culture in Turkey has been steadily growing as part of the broader process of cultural globalization. Investigating how the complementary phenomena of K-drama and K-food are interconnected offers an important step in filling a notable gap in the existing literature. In doing so, this research unveils an underexplored topic within the context of cultural globalization and gastrodiploacy, providing a fresh perspective to the academic discourse in this area.

Conceptual Framework

The use of culinary practices as a soft power element in today's world is gaining importance daily, stemming from the idea that food appeals to all senses (Aksoy and Çekiç, 2018; Özkaya, Aksoy, and Işın, 2020). In this context, the concept of gastrodiploacy, which represents culinary diplomacy, has emerged as a public diplomacy that aims to introduce foreign cultures in terms of taste and flavor (Rockower, 2012).

Gastrodiploacy aims to deepen relations with other countries and create a positive image by sharing a country's food culture, recipes, culinary traditions, and cooking techniques (Gunawan, 2024). Nations implement gastrodiploacy activities by establishing various strategies to promote their identities and disseminate food products and culinary cultures of high economic value (Nair, 2021). These strategies may involve organizing food festivals, gastronomy events, food fairs, and cooking competitions. Additionally, international collaborations in areas like culinary tourism and food promotion can also be part of gastrodiploacy strategies (Suntikul, 2019). These initiatives can help a country position itself more effectively in the international arena by emphasizing its cultural and economic richness.

Today, South Korea is one of the countries effectively using gastrodiploacy as a soft power tool. Through the Korean Wave, it has strengthened its global image, built socio-cultural and economic ties in East Asia, and promoted economic growth by increasing the popularity of Korean products and lifestyle (Gunawan, 2024). Successes in the economic life of societies, the development of science, modern advanced technologies, IT, the Internet, and social networks create conditions for an even faster acceleration of this influence (Ergashev and Farxodjonova, 2020).

In this context, internationally imported mass communication products such as television programs, films, books, and music from other countries have emerged as tools that can be used to measure cultural globalization (Kluver and Fu, 2004). Transmitting one's culture to other societies is successful through strategic steps (Gündel, 2021: 286). There is no inherent national identity in food; it can be acquired over time, and chefs, food writers and journalists can play a role in shaping it (Cwiertka, 2008).

Consumers are inclined toward food not only because they desire to consume it but also because they find something of their own in that culture. Furthermore, consumers influenced by the same popular culture are drawn to that culture for similar reasons, creating a bond among these consumers and bringing them closer together (Otmazgin, 201: 2). This situation can perhaps explained by the sense of "we-ness" mentioned by International Relations Expert Andrew Hurrell (Hurrell, 1995: 331).

The Hallyu wave, which spread globally from the late 1990s, starting in China, formed the basis of South Korea's soft power elements. The influence of Korea on the world, especially through K-dramas (Korean dramas) and K-pop (Korean pop), is increasing daily (Bozyer, 2023). The Korean wave has also been influential in Korean cuisine. Korean restaurants are increasing worldwide, including in metropolitan areas such as Paris, London, and New York, and evaluations of Korean cuisine by food enthusiasts are changing very positively. Food representing Korean cuisine, such as Kimchi, Bulgogi, and Bibimbap, are now found on menus worldwide (Korean Culture Center, 2025).

According to Kim and Kim, the term "Hallyu" was first used by the Chinese media in the 1990s to describe the influence of Korean dramas and music (Binark, 2019a: 62). By the late 1990s, Korean culture had begun to gain popularity worldwide (Firat, 2017: 67-68). Korean films, dramas, pop music, food, technology stores, and beauty products constitute the core of cultural products (Oh and Chae, 2013: 78-79). All elements of South Korean culture are referred to as the "Hallyu Wave," with music being called K-pop, dramas as K-drama, and food as K-food (Toprak and Ökmen, 2022: 19). According to Yoo (2019: 22), the "Hallyu" termed as the Korean Wave, was divided into three periods based on development and years. The first period of Hallyu from 1997 to the early 2000s indicates the emergence of trends in China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, centered around K-dramas and K-pop. The second period, in the early 2000s, witnessed the acceleration of Hallyu's influence

worldwide through dramas, music, films, and other derivative products, coinciding with the third period that saw an increase in the mid-2000s and beyond, especially in Türkiye, with the rise of PSY's "Gangnam Style" music (Toprak and Ökmen, 202: 28).

Unlike Western countries, Asian countries have begun to develop different marketing methods (Gündel, 2021: 287). In this context, the South Korean government categorizes activities related to cultural products under "Creative Content." Rockower (2011) states that the easiest way to conquer hearts is through the stomach, emphasizing the diplomatic effect of food on international relations, breaking down traditional barriers, directing societal perceptions, and regulating diplomatic relations. In 2008, with the goal of making Korean cuisine (hansik) one of the world's top five ethnic cuisines by 2017, South Korean Minister of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, Chang Tae-pyong, launched a campaign called "Globalization of Korean Cuisine" (hansik segyehwa ch'ujin) at the Korea Food Fair under the government's leadership (Cwiertka, 2014: 363). This initiative increased the number of Korean restaurants outside of Korea to 4,000 (Bozyer, 2023). What initially seemed like a regular promotional effort evolved over time into an arena for various individuals with different roles (business managers, producer cooperatives, chefs, food writers, cinema actors) to gain economic benefits from Korean products. This, in other words, signifies "the commodification of Korean culinary culture" (Cwiertka, 2014: 380). It is underlined that social media plays an important role in the commodification of South Korean culture in the 21st century (Giudice, 2023:15).

Since the twenty-first century, interest in Korean food has begun to increase, as some entrepreneurs have drawn attention to the health and esthetic aspects of Korean food. Indeed, the foundation of the K-Food trend has been laid with the increase in local interest in traditional Korean cuisine (Kim, 2010: 18).

The Korean government allocated 40 million dollars to promote Korean cuisine (Rockower, 2012). When K-dramas are examined, regardless of the subject of the drama, scenes depicting Korean culture, especially food scenes featuring traditional Korean dishes and street flavors like ramon, kimchi, tteokbokki, and deng, are always present. Some participants even mentioned ordering Korean noodles or attempting to make kimchi at home after watching a series (Bozyer, 2023).

On the other hand, Osetrova (2021: 79) criticizes the idea of gastronationalism by analyzing the characters in the Sikkaek Series, finding that the image and gender identity related to Korean culture do not entirely align with reality. Defining a nation solely based on eating habits does not adequately fill the broader and significant concept of culture. A nation's culture should not be represented solely through eating habits or gender. Because culture is a rich concept that includes food but is not limited to it. Therefore, countries' promotional policies should evolve into genuine representations of their culture rather than merely serving as marketing tools.

Cwiertka (2008: 97) emphasized the need to delve deeper into the roots of the creation of national identity, highlighting the impact of colonialism, war, and globalization and providing concrete examples to explain this influence. For example, one of the 800 terms found in the Korean food guide published under the auspices of the Korea Foundation in 2003, "red chili pepper," is actually a plant native to South America, and similarly, "kimbap" is a dish with origins in Japan. Kimbap, on the other hand, is a popular lunch item among Koreans. Since 1987, in the *Koreana Journal*, numerous articles have been published that emphasize the unique features of Korean cuisine to convey Korea's cultural heritage to overseas countries. These articles delve into the deep-rooted traditions surrounding the production, preparation, and consumption of food.

After the widespread popularity of K-dramas, it is evident how important gastrodplomacy is due to the easy accessibility of noodle products in almost every Turkish market. Noodle products are sold in almost every market, school, dormitory canteen, or cafe in Türkiye. The ease of preparation is considered a determining factor in their preference among young people. Additionally, the recent increase in the number of Korean restaurants in Türkiye is noteworthy. For example, on December 10, 2024, a search was made on the Google search engine with the keyword "Korean Restaurants in Türkiye". Accordingly, 26 Korean restaurants were identified in Türkiye, 15 of which were in Istanbul, eight in Antalya, and three in Ankara. There are also Korean restaurants in other cities, such as Kayseri, Bursa, Izmir, Eskisehir, and Adana.

The Korean Culture Center in Ankara, Türkiye, organizes Korean cooking courses. These courses are also organized by some state universities, and participants receive certificates. For example, Hacı Bayram Veli University in Ankara has a Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, which is the first institution in Türkiye to offer undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral education. This department provides practical courses on Korean cuisine at various time intervals every year to introduce Korean culture. Projects supported by the

Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs of Korea are prepared, and workshops are organized (HBV, 2020; HBV, 2023). As can be seen, culture influence and nourish each other.

The concept of cultural globalization has been widely used since the 1980s. Transmitting one's culture to other societies achieves success through strategic steps (Gündel, 2021: 286). In this ideology, South Korea stands out as the most successful and concrete example of the modern era. The South Korean government has taken significant steps to facilitate the adaptation of television series in other countries (Toprak and Ökmen, 2022).

The restructuring of the media in South Korea, in line with the information society discourse that rose globally after 1980 and the citizens' demands for a more liberal communication environment, was effective in South Korea's global success in TV series exports (Tüzün-Ateşalp and Sefjula, 2022: 20). There are currently available studies explaining the connections between K-Dramas and mental health. It is said that K-Dramas are goal-setting and inspirational. They provide us with the opportunity to strive for a better tomorrow, achieve success, and hope (Chang, 2024: xviii).

Notably, Korean dramas have even produced series centered solely around the theme of food, such as the Let's Eat series, which includes multiple seasons. For example, in the TV series "Let's Eat" in Figure 1, Koo Dae-Young (played by Yoon Du-Jun), a gourmet, experiences a downfall as he reaches his thirties. To find solace for his wounds, he decides to visit his university friend Lee Ji-Woo (played by Baek Jin-Hee), whom he met in his twenties and whose cooking he loves. Dae-Young and Ji-Woo not only share delicious meals together, but they also relive their university memories. TV series with a main theme of Korean cuisine have raised viewers' awareness of Korean food.

With the global spread of K-Dramas, viewers who wish to visit Korea but cannot find an opportunity have found a way to escape. Screen tourism is the provision of digital mobility through web services. Thanks to Google Maps, users can more closely examine the locations they are curious about in Korea and the places they have seen in K-Dramas. This way, through screening tourism, people can gain a greater opportunity to get closer to the culture they are interested in (Schulze, 2017: 123). These developments have contributed to the increased demand for Korean cuisine.

Hallyu's first Korean culinary success story was in the television series Dae Jang Geum (Jewel of the Palace, 2003), which discussed Chosön royal culinary traditions (Osetrova, 2021: 64). It was exported to 91 countries, including Japan, China, and Türkiye. This drama expanded the scope of Hallyu and drew global interest in Korean culture, including Korean cuisine, fashion, and medicine (Korean Culture Center, 2025). The synergy between Hallyu and Korean food represented by a growing number of food-focused films and television series (Cwiertka, 2014: 376).

Figure 1. Let Us Eat 3



Source: LevitMaysa, 2018.

Korean television series were first shown in Türkiye in the early 2000s. The first adaptation from Korea in Türkiye took place with the remake of the drama known as "I'm Sorry, I Love You" (2004), originally broadcasted with the title "Mianhada, Saranghanda" on KBS 2 television channel. The Turkish adaptation, titled "Bir Aşk Hikayesi" (2013-2014/ Fox TV), provided a new alternative source against previous adaptations

from the West, especially from the USA and the UK, and opened up a direction for the production of adapted dramas toward Asia. Following this adaptation, private channels consecutively aired adaptations of South Korean dramas, and on TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) screens, the adaptation of the drama "What Happens to My Family?" (Mun and Kim, 2014-2015) was broadcast under the title "Baba Candır" (Bayhan, 2015-2017) (Gündel, 2021: 300).

Subsequently, in 2005, an agreement was signed between Arirang TV, South Korea's English-language TV channel, and TRT, marking the first broadcast of a Korean drama on Turkish television. The first Korean drama (K-drama) broadcast on TRT was a historical series in Turkish under the name "Emperor of the Seas". With the romantic series "The Prince of My Dreams", which was the second South Korean series broadcast by TRT, Turkish viewers became interested in the series (Fırat, 2017: 69). This series is a turning point because after this drama, interest in K-dramas has increased. Viewers created signature campaigns to watch more K-dramas, and TRT received intense phone calls and demands on this matter (Toprak and Ökmen, 2022).

K-dramas contain patriarchal codes influenced by Confucian norms (Jang and Paik, 2012). The portrayal of men in K-dramas who protect and claim their loved ones is an indication of the patriarchal mindset (Bozyer 2023). Similar patriarchal codes were observed when examining Turkish cultural motifs (Gündel, 2021). The study revealed that K-pop and K-drama elements, the Hallyu effect, country image, and cultural proximity significantly affect the intention to purchase Korean products (Borazan Karadeniz and Özer Canarasan, 2022: 306). Most K-drama viewers are women (Zavalsız and Soydaş-Dağcı, 2019), and they show intense demand for these series.

The Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE) and the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) are the most important institutional actors in developing and implementing the cultural policies of the Korean government. According to a report prepared by KOFICE, until 2012, when referring to Hallyu, K-dramas were the first content that came to mind, while from 2016 onwards, K-food and K-pop took precedence (Binark, 2019b).

The arrival of K-dramas in Türkiye initially manifested as adaptations, but over time, the number increased through official correspondences and agreements between the two countries. As the Turkish audience showed interest in dramas that resonated with common patriarchal codes, there was a noticeable increase in the importation of K-dramas from Korea.

Methodology

This study uses a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) research design to examine the consumption tendencies of Korean cuisine among Korean drama viewers in Türkiye through an ethnographic and inductive inference perspective. Ethnography is a systematic approach to learning about the social and cultural life of communities, institutions, and other formations (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010: 1).

Induction is defined as "the act, process, or result of an instance of reasoning from a part to a whole, from particulars to generals, or from the individual to the universal." (Angluin and Smith, 1983: 238). Efforts are made to explore the tendencies of consuming Korean cuisine from the perspective of participants in Türkiye who watch Korean dramas, using both inductive and deductive approaches.

This study seeks to establish an inductive relationship between K-Dramas and K-Food. In simpler terms, the food scenes in K-Dramas, along with the gestures, facial expressions, and sounds displayed during food consumption, serve as a driving force for viewers to discover or access those foods. Therefore, the study assumes that there is a close relationship between the viewing of K-Dramas and the consumption of K-Food, and it aims to reveal this connection.

In the Hallyu wave, cultural products such as films, dramas, pop music, food, technology stores, and beauty products form the basis of Korean culture (Oh and Chae, 2013: 78-79). Within the scope of this study, K-food, which is a part of Korean culture, was addressed.

As expressed by Rockower (2011), the easiest way to win hearts is through the stomach, and food has a regulatory effect on international relations, breaking down traditional barriers, directing social perceptions, and regulating diplomatic relations. K-dramas, which are the most prominent medium displaying K-food, have been included as the second variable in the study. When examining K-dramas, it is observed that regardless of the plot of the drama, scenes featuring Korean culture, especially food scenes, are always present (Bozyer, 2023). Based on this, the research is shaped around the question of whether the food scenes depicted in K-

dramas influence consumers' perceptions of consuming K-food. Within this context, two research questions are formulated:

“Do K-drama viewers in Türkiye consume K-food?”

“Do the food scenes in K-dramas increase the interest in K-food among viewers in Türkiye?”

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University on October 23, 2024, during the meeting numbered 2024-11.

Document Analysis

This study employed an exploratory research method to answer the aforementioned questions and conducted a comprehensive literature review. No specific measurement tool was encountered for the subject. On the other hand, it was observed that the term "Hallyu," translated into Turkish as the Korean Wave, Korean culture, and its impact prominently appeared.

Based on the literature search using the key term "Hallyu," a questionnaire was developed by examining studies (Aksoy and Çekiç, 2018; Binark, 2019a, 2019b; Bozyer, 2023; Çevik and Aslan, 2020; Eser and Karaosmanoğlu, 2023; Jang and Paik, 2012; Jung, 2019; Nair, 2021; Oh and Chae, 2013; Ranches, 2022; Rockower, 2012; Shim and Gajzago, 2023; Thanabordeekij et al., 2022; Toprak and Ökmen, 2022; Vellycia, 2021; Zavalısz and Dağcı, 2019) relevant to the research purpose.

Development of a Questionnaire

The questions on Korean culture were reviewed by three experts, and their opinions on the suitability of the draft questions for the research purpose were obtained. Necessary corrections were made in the draft questionnaire based on expert opinions. To test the clarity of the corrected questions and their response status, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 50 individuals through face-to-face interviews. The sample for the pilot study consisted of individuals who attended a Korean cooking course in Ankara. Validity and reliability analyses of the pilot study data were conducted.

Unclear and unanswered questions were eliminated, and the final questionnaire was completed. The questionnaire comprises five sections.

The first section includes questions about participants' age and gender under the category of demographic characteristics. The second section focuses on screening questions related to watching Korean dramas. The third section contains questions about Korean food consumption. The fourth section explores the issues of consuming K-food and watching K-dramas.

The final section includes an exploratory question on the reflection of K-dramas on Turkish consumers' K-food consumption tendencies. The questionnaire comprised 11 questions with 10 closed-ended and 1 open-ended. Therefore, a semi-structured questionnaire was used in the study.

Sample and Data Collection

A snowball sampling method was used in this study. The snowball sampling method relies on reaching other individuals to be interviewed through the individuals reached by the researcher (Kümbetoğlu, 2017: 99). The second author of the research, who participated in a Korean food and language course in Ankara, had the opportunity to observe individuals interested in Korean culture and Korean cuisine and establish a network. Using this network, the second author used online communication channels (WhatsApp, Instagram) to obtain questionnaire data.

To reach participants, the second author used a WhatsApp group created by Korean food and language course members themselves, as well as Instagram pages dedicated to Korean dramas and movies. After sharing the Google Forms link with the members, she asked the participants to forward the link to other individuals who watched or had watched South Korean dramas and consumed or had consumed the food, thus collecting data over a period of 1 month. Due to the study's ability to reach a larger audience and its easy accessibility, an online questionnaire was preferred in this study. The majority of participants in the study consisted of attendees of Korean language and food courses in Ankara, followers of online pages dedicated to Korean dramas, and students studying Gastronomy and Culinary Arts at Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University. Google Forms was used to create the questionnaire, and the questionnaire language was Turkish. Questionnaires were collected online through communication channels between October 31, 2024 and December 10, 2024, and the study obtained 1084 usable questionnaires.

Analysis

The collected data were transferred to an Excel file. Frequency analysis was used to analyze the questionnaire data. Pie charts were used to visualize the findings. Descriptive analysis was performed to the open-ended question. In the descriptive analysis stage, participants were coded based on the order in which they answered the questionnaire, such as K235, K778, etc.

Participants' answers to open-ended question were randomly selected and are shown as direct quotes in the findings. The questionnaire included two screening questions: "Do you watch K-dramas (Korean dramas)?" Furthermore, "How frequently do you watch K-dramas?" The purpose of the screening questions was to determine whether those who watched Korean dramas completed the questionnaire. Participants who do not watch K-dramas did not fill out the questionnaire. In summary, the questionnaire completed by participants who watched K-drama in Türkiye and had a certain viewing frequency.

Validity and Reliability

There are criteria and strategies to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative and quantitative research. One of these criteria is diversity (Eisner, 1991). According to Denzin (2009), diversity involves the use of two or more sources, theories, or methods in the diversity of a dataset. Mixed-methods design was adopted during the research, and various data development tools, such as document analysis and survey forms, were used. Differences in place, time, and people also create differences in the data (Yılmaz, 2013).

In this study, data were collected from two different units, WhatsApp and Instagram, between October 31, 2024 and December 10, 2024. The population comprised Korean language and food courses in Ankara, followers of online pages dedicated to Korean dramas, and students studying Gastronomy and Culinary Arts at Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University.

Another criterion is systematic data collection (Yin, 2009: 41). A systematic process was followed in the study: literature review, questionnaire form design, expert opinion, pilot study, questionnaire implementation, data processing, analysis, and reporting. The questions on Korean food culture were reviewed by three experts, and their opinions on the suitability of the draft questions for the research purpose were obtained. Necessary corrections were made in the draft questionnaire based on expert opinions. To test the clarity of the corrected questions and their response status, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 50 individuals through face-to-face interviews.

The questionnaire included two screening questions. These questions; "Do you watch K-dramas (Korean dramas), and How often do you watch K-dramas?" it is in the form. The purpose of the screening questions is to determine whether the questionnaire is filled out by those who watch Korean television series. The questionnaire filled out by participants who watched K-dramas and had a certain frequency of watching in Türkiye. Participants' answers to open-ended questions were randomly selected. The research was conducted on a voluntary basis, and no personal information was collected to ensure user privacy.

Results and Discussion

Pie charts were used to visualize the findings, such as Graphs 1, 2, 3, and 4. Participants' answers to open-ended questions were randomly selected and are shown as direct quotes in the findings.

Demographic Characteristics

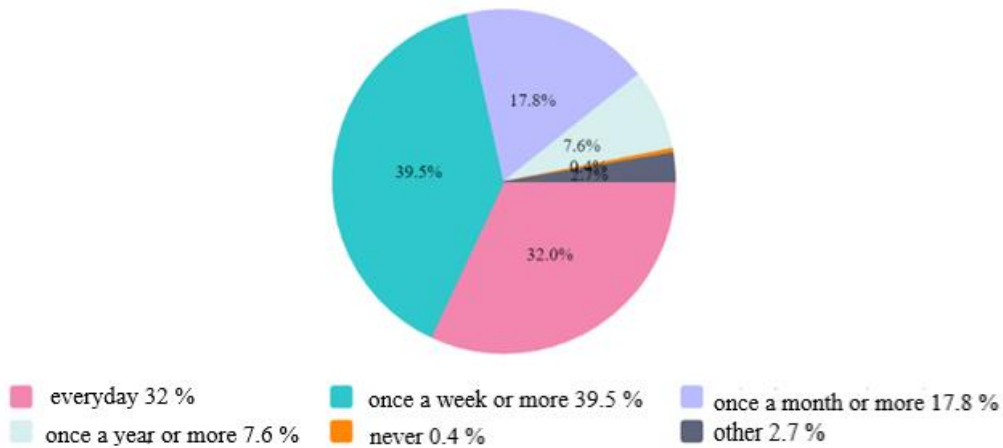
The study collected 1084 usable questionnaires. When the age distributions of the participants were analyzed, it was observed that young people aged between 16 and 20 constituted the majority (30.8%). This is followed by 20-25 years with 27.4%, 30 years and above 26.8%, and 25-30 years with 14.9%. According to a study conducted in 2022, the cultural products of Korea are on the rise globally, creating a positive impact on people, especially the younger generation in Türkiye, fostering sympathy toward Korean culture (Toprak and Ökmen, 2022). The "Korean Wave," known as Hallyu, is spreading from Asia to a broader world stage, including Latin America and the Middle East (Yang, 2012), and is particularly loved by people in their 10s and 20s (Korean Culture Center, 2025).

The research findings align with a study conducted in Europe, where Korean cultural elements are preferred by individuals under the age of 18 (Shim and Gajzago, 2023). In this context, the research findings can be considered to parallel the literature. By examining the distribution by gender, it was determined that 96.6% of the viewers were female. According to a study in Türkiye (Zavalsız and Soydaş-Doğacı, 2019), most K-drama viewers are female.

K-Drama Viewing Rates and Frequencies

98.1% of the participants watched Korean dramas, whereas the percentage of participants who did not watch Korean dramas was 1.9%. When analyzing the frequency of K-drama watching, 39.5% of the participants watched it once a week or more frequently, making up the highest percentage. This is followed by 32% for the frequency of daily observation (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Findings Regarding the Frequency of Watching K-Drama

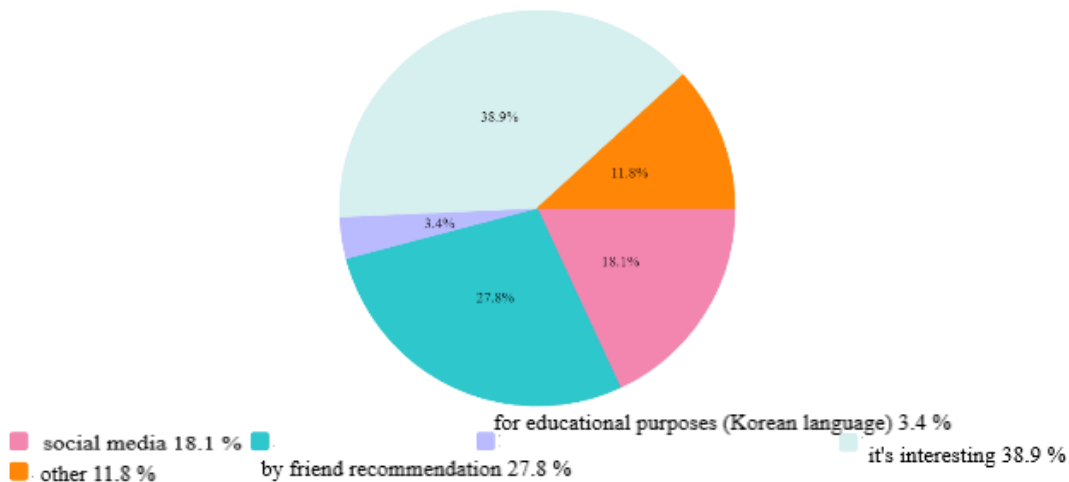


As shown in Graph 1, the highest segment, 39.5%, consisted of those who watched K-dramas once a week or more frequently. Participants were asked how they started watching Korean dramas. Korean dramas, known for their relevance and quality, gained even more international fans in 2020. This trend is attributed to their rapid growth in the global OTT market, particularly due to the impact of COVID-19 (Korean Culture Center, 2025). Since the pandemic, Korean-made dramas and films has been noteworthy (Chang 2024).

Findings on How Participants Started Watching K-Dramas

As Graph 2 shows, the highest percentage of participants (38.9%) stated that they started watching Korean dramas because they found them interesting. The second most common reason (27.8%) was that Korean dramas were started based on recommendations from friends (see Graph 2).

Graph 2. Findings on How to Start Watching K-Drama

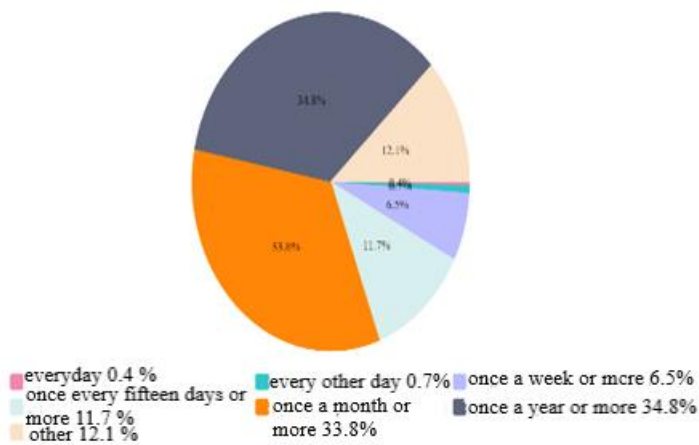


Based on the research framework (Graph. 2), it can be observed that the main reason for viewers in Türkiye to start watching Korean dramas is to find them interesting (38.9%). This is followed by 27.8% of respondents citing friend recommendations as the reason for starting to watch Korean dramas. The findings indicate an interest in Korean dramas in Türkiye. According to Jung (2019), Korean dramas have gained popularity in Türkiye because of the similarities in Turkish and Korean cultural motifs.

Participants' K-Food Consumption Rates and Frequencies

Participants were asked closed-ended (Yes/No) questions about whether they consumed Korean food. 81.1% of the participants stated that they consumed Korean food, whereas 18.9% indicated that they did not consume K-food. Participants were asked about their frequency of consuming K-food. As Graph 3 shows, most participants (34.8%) consumed K-food once a year or more (see Graph 3).

Graph 3. Findings On The Frequency Of Consuming K-Food

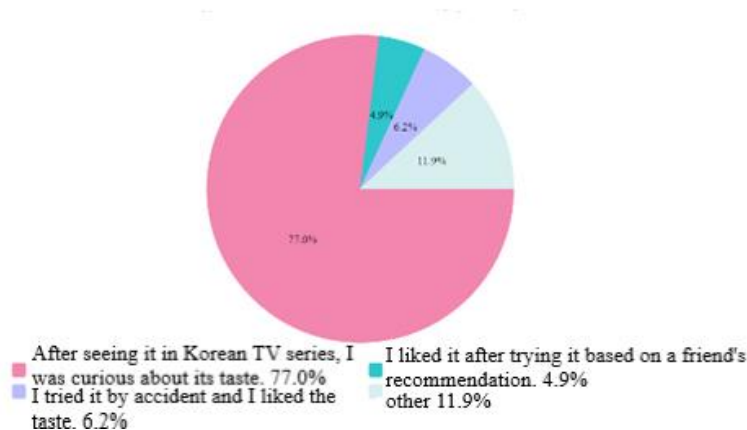


The second most common frequency was reported by 33.8% of participants, who consumed K-food once a month or more.

Findings on How Participants Started Consuming K-Food

Another closed-ended question directed at participants was about how they started consuming K-food. Based on the research framework (Graph. 4), the highest percentage (77%) stated that they started consuming Korean meals after seeing them in Korean dramas.

The importance of gastrodiplomacy is evident in the widespread availability of noodle products, which can now be easily found in almost every market in Türkiye, in schools and dormitory canteens, or in cafes. The ease of preparation of noodle products is considered a determining factor in their preference among young people. As Graph 4 shows, most participants (77%) started to be curious about and consume K-food after seeing them in K-dramas (see Graph 4).

Graph 4. Findings on how K-food consumption started

The continuous presence of food scenes in dramas, the display of local food in those scenes, and the repetition of these scenes create a sense of curiosity about the taste of that food. In particular, the cultural habit of Koreans smacking their lips while eating, creating the impression that any food eaten is delicious, arouses a sense of curiosity and a desire to try it. Additionally, similarities in the cultural traits of Koreans and Turks, such as hospitality and helpfulness, create a sense of closeness between Turkish society and the Korean people (Bozyer, 2023).

The Findings Related to the Impact of K-Dramas on Turkish Consumers' Tendency to Consume K-Food

The questionnaire includes questions to further examine the impact of K-dramas on viewers' tendencies to consume K-food in Türkiye. These questions are as follows: "Do you think watching K-dramas has an impact on your consumption of K-food?" and "Do the food scenes shown in K-dramas arouse curiosity about K-food?" Participants expressed that watching K-dramas influenced their K-food consumption, with 89.5% answering "yes." Regarding whether the food scenes in K-dramas arouse curiosity about K-food, 94.2% of participants answered "yes."

In the study, participants expressing high percentages of being influenced to consume K-food by K-dramas and K-food depicted in these dramas create the impression of a relationship between K-dramas and K-food. To explore the relationship between K-dramas and K-food and obtain more detailed information, participants were asked an open-ended question. The following is the question and responses provided.

Exploratory Findings Revealing the Relationship Between K-Dramas and K-Food Consumption

Graphs 1, 2, 3, and 4 show that high rates were obtained regarding the impact of K-dramas on consumers' eating tendencies in Türkiye. To support and reveal these findings, an open-ended question was included in the questionnaire. This question asks Do you think the food scenes in Korean TV series affect people's consumption orientation? Turkish viewers believe that watching K-dramas influences K-food consumption, and they express this with statements such as

"Yes. Seeing people eat something can make us want to eat that food. In the past, due to watching mostly American series, fast food-style food became popular in our country. Now, with the popularization of Korean culture, I think there is an increased interest in Korean food worldwide." (K235)

"They eat in more than one scene in each series, and their tables are very elaborate and diverse. Even if they just eat it, they will still have a great appetite. For this reason, if I feel like it and I can't find anything, I eat it from a ready-made package." (K778)

"I think it affects it because someone who watches Korean TV series for a long time inevitably becomes familiar with the food they eat. For example, I can tell whether a food I don't know the taste of is Korean food or not. We learn about their daily lives and their conversations. Food culture

is one such culture. I didn't consume it all, but after watching a Korean TV series for a while, I went to the market to buy noodles. After eating it, I liked it and bought it frequently. I even tried eating it with chopsticks. In this case, it is important not only to watch but also to be able to access what you watch. "Even though there are no restaurants serving Korean food everywhere in our country, people can buy a pack of noodles and eat them out of curiosity." (K935)

In Türkiye, Hallyu winds blow more and more widely. Many youths in Türkiye prefer to watch Korean television shows, listen to Korean music, and watch Korean movies. The effectiveness of Hallyu in Türkiye can also explained by the historical ties and good relations established between the two countries (Fırat, 2017).

"They are very close to our culture. Family, respect for the elderly, wearing slippers at home. Besides, the topics in the dramas involve a lot of imagination and are very effective, especially dramas and historical series. I really like the series involving the Jaseon period; it somewhat resembles our Ottoman Empire in terms of heirs and intrigues. In particular, dramas with a poor girl caught between two men are really beautiful. The food is amazing, and I think they especially show it. You wonder their taste, and their effective way of smacking their lips while eating is impressive. Normally, I hate it when someone eats like that next to me, but in their case, it's a sign that the food is delicious. Even now, my mouth waters while telling this, even though I ate two hours ago." (K751)

"I think appetizing eating styles and visuals of food also have a positive effect. Sometimes they combine food perfectly with the emotion of the scenario. "I think it affects people because our emotional culture and importance given to food is similar." (K317)

"In series, everyone eats with such gusto and pleasure that it makes me crave every dish, and the Korean flavor I'm most curious about is jajangmyeon." (K30)

"Food-centric dramas like Let's Eat can particularly stimulate viewers' appetites." However, deciding solely on visuals without actually knowing the taste can be challenging. Perhaps these dramas encourage us to take an interest in different cuisines and provide an opportunity to try new dishes." (K9)

As can be understood from the above responses, factors such as participants in Türkiye finding Turkish and Korean cultures close to each other, the importance given to food in both cultures and its reflection in dramas, and the cultural significance of making noise while eating—a behavior specific to Koreans—are effective in directing and arousing curiosity in viewers in Türkiye toward K-food.

The authors of this study infer based on the participants' expressions that K-dramas influence K-food consumption and conclude that the food scenes in K-dramas play a significant role in this influence. On the other hand, it would not be appropriate to generalize based solely on these findings. There could be many reasons behind the experience of one culture's cuisine by another. For instance, the quick preparation of a dish like noodles can be cited as a factor that influences its preference.

Additionally, gestures, facial expressions, and sounds exhibited during a meal that give the impression of deliciousness can be considered effective in the preference of any dish. Therefore, it is important not to interpret this feature solely as behavior unique to South Korea. Furthermore, the frequency of meal scenes in series, the presentation of dishes, and many other factors (maybe even a marketing tactic) can serve as motivating forces for eating a meal. It is believed that deeper research and analysis are necessary to determine these factors.

Conclusion

Hallyu phenomenon in Türkiye provides a good starting opportunity to revitalize the cultural relations between Türkiye and Korea and to create a close and positive image between them (Oh and Chae, 2013). The deep similarities between Korea and Türkiye in emotional, cultural, and linguistic aspects have enabled the two countries to maintain long-term interactions (Türközü and Kahrıman, 2014: 87). The popularity of South Korean series in Turkey, cultural similarities and mutual interest are increasing the interaction between the two countries. South Korean series increase the interest of Turkish viewers in South Korean culture and especially South Korean cuisine, and as a result, popular culture elements such as the increase in demand for South Korean food and the increase in the number of South Korean restaurants in Turkey come to the fore. In addition, the increased visibility of South Korean culture in Turkey creates an important impact within the framework of cultural diplomacy.

The ethnic and cultural similarities between the two countries (Lee, 2021) have elevated their diplomatic relations to a higher level. As the exchange and cooperation progressed, it is anticipated that mutual perceptions between Turks and Koreans would deepen, and partnership and brotherhood between the two nations would be further strengthened through cultural similarities and creative synergies arising from the cultural differences of the two societies (Choi, 2014).

The portrayal of pure and innocent scenarios in Korean dramas, mirroring aspects of Turkish culture such as respect for elders, has further captured viewers' interest (Toprak and Ökmen, 2022). As Korean dramas have sparked interest in their content, Turkish viewers have become curious about cultural elements associated with Korea, attempting to access such products and content. With numerous food scenes depicted in Korean dramas, viewers develop a curiosity about the taste of these foods. Notably, Korean dramas have even produced series centered solely around the theme of food, such as the Let's Eat series, which includes multiple seasons. These developments have contributed to the increased demand for Korean cuisine.

According to the participants' statements, the gestures, expressions, and sounds used in the food scenes in Korean TV series created the impression that Turkish consumers enjoyed the food and encouraged them to experience these dishes. This suggests that media can shape consumer behavior by creating a connection between emotional cues and cultural products, in this case, Korean cuisine.

Recognizing this interest, the number of Korean restaurants in Türkiye has increased over time to cater to the demand generated by Turkish consumers. In this context, the efforts of the South Korean government to disseminate Korean culture have yielded results, placing Korean culture and cuisine on the agenda in Türkiye.

Recent observations, such as the growing number of Korean restaurants in Türkiye, the increased frequency of K-pop concerts, and the opening of Korean art exhibitions, indicate that Korean dramas not only boost the consumption of Korean food but also spark interest among Turkish consumers in various aspects related to Korea. Considering this background, this study explores the consumption tendencies of Korean food among Turkish viewers who watch Korean dramas.

Furthermore, it unveils the relationship between K-dramas and K-food on a global scale, driven by the impact of the Hallyu wave within cultural diplomacy. The elements of Korean drama and food, which are part of the Hallyu wave observed in various countries, have also influenced Turkish consumers' preferences. As a result, the impact of South Korean culture in Turkey constitutes an important example in terms of cultural diplomacy and global cultural interaction.

Limitations and Recommendations

This research has various limitations because it is the first research on this specific topic. The absence of a previously used measurement tool is the most significant limitation. Another limitation is the analysis type, as the research data were only examined through frequency and descriptive analyses.

To make an inference about the impact of gestures, expressions, and sounds used in food scenes in Korean dramas on consumers' consumption of Korean cuisine, a much more detailed analysis of food scenes in K-Dramas is needed.

Regression and correlation analyses, which are considered necessary to reveal the relationship and impact between Korean dramas and food, were conducted. The last limitation is that only age and gender were considered as demographic variables.

In future research recommendations, more detailed information could be obtained through qualitative and quantitative studies. Interviews could be conducted with Turkish consumers who prefer dining in Korean restaurants, exploring the viewership status and effects of Turkish dramas, and conducting correlation analyses to reveal the relationship between K-dramas and K-food.

More analysis can be made on how South Korea effectively uses gastrodiplomacy to introduce its cuisine to the world, food scenes in Turkish TV series can be designed in more detail, and strategies can be developed for other geographies of the world to further promote Turkish cuisine.

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