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Behind the Korean Media Strength

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Abstract

Korean Media have reached a wide range of Asian audience, including Malaysian audience. The rising popularity of Korean entertainment content in Asia has created Korean pop culture in the entertainment industry. There seemed to be a gap in previous research concerning the strength of Korean media. This research is an attempt to explore Korean media strength behind the scene that continuously getting the attention and maintaining the popularity. The research uses qualitative methods to address the Korean drama phenomenon. Four (4) informants from selected Korean Broadcasters were identified to participate in the in-depth interviews. Based on the findings, it shows that the Korean Broadcasting Media are not born to the real strategy. The experience of hardship to survive, economically poor country, and challenges from other developed countries has made them compete and creatively work to improve their lives. The findings are significant in explaining the global success of Korean media.

Keywords: Korean media, Korean drama, background, economy and government

Introduction

The globalization of Korea through the acceptance of its culture in Asia was achieved rapidly. Subsequently, its popularity spread to various European countries and also, worldwide. In particular, interest in Korean television dramas, songs and movies escalated rapidly across North and Southeast Asia, specifically in Japan, China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand. Kim (2007) observed that the rapid rise of the Korean Wave has left scholars in a state of shock and perplexity, concluding that the Korean culture craze also evident in other Asian countries, has led researchers to seek better understanding of this sudden phenomenon. Hence, she suggested that the increased interest in Korean dramas also developed the younger generation's admiration for Korean culture, language and fashion.

Background

Called as "hallyu" in Korean, the Korean wave focuses on the skyrocketing increase in the visibility of Korean culture around the globe. Started in East Asia in the 1990s, the wave has recently reached the United States of America, Latin America, the Middle East and some parts in Europe (Ravina, 2008). The Korean wave has managed to demolish the US dominance of the global entertainment industry, specifically due to the unique cultural and aesthetic styles of the Koreans. Its advance into the United States, India and Brazil for example has ensured more cultural diversity in the global media landscape (Cho, 2005; Shim, 2006; Nam, 2013a).

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At the same time, the Korean pop culture wave highlight on the rise of its culture in Asian countries through its well-known dramas, dances, films, music animations as well as games involving fan clubs which generally have been taken up by media around the globe. Nevertheless, it is claimed that the Korean Wave was started in the 1990s though its television dramas. According to Mee (2005), the first reports of "Korean Wave" came in 1999 and ever since, its popularity has reached China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and other Asian countries. The unprecedented phenomenon created attention and stirred excitement in Korea's cultural industry as well as the government and academia (Mee, 2005).

Following that, Korean popular culture successfully penetration into neighboring Asian countries began to remarkably increase over the past several years. It also moved to diverse parts of Asia in 2000 through 2002, including Southeast and Central Asia (Hyejung, 2007; Lee, 2011). In the 2000s, the presence of the Internet and social media has influenced the popularity of the Korean Wave (Jang & Paik, 2012) which was initiated with television dramas and young idol groups including K-pop, movies and several cultural aspects.

From another angle of the Korean wave, it actually gave a further impact. According to Lee (2001), Korea is believed to be one of the significant histories of the 20th century where the presence of Korean Wave has somehow shaped the global perception and image of South Korea. As it only started as a cultural presence in a specific region, the Korean Wave has now penetrated the whole Asia and Lee claims that its deep-rooted ancient heritage and cultural practice have influenced Korea in being a prosperous, democratic and liberal nation.

Related to the argument above, it is crucial to look into the behind of the scenes and understand the real situation that sparked the Korean media successes in the world of media entertainment. This paper will reveal the real situation of the successfulness of Korean media behind the scene that never been explore before. The finding and result that highlighted in this paper will reveal the strength that help to built-up the future as well as changed the life of the Korean nation which was once considered one of the world's poorest countries.

Literature Review

The effects of the cultural phenomenon not only permeated popular culture though the size of a positive lifestyle for many Asians. Like Mee (2005), Lee (2007) argued that many Asians often held stereotypical things about South Korea that were mostly seemed to be unpleasant and related to the Korean War, famine and political unrest (Lee, 2007). Nevertheless, the presence of cultural explosion has removed all those spiteful perceptions as a result of fashionable entertainers and advancement of technology development (Lee, 2011).

Things changed when the cultural wave alongside the media and commercial nationalism represented an extraordinary sight of Korean famous culture (Hyejung, 2007). Due to this, the cultural wave is established as a sign of Korea's regional cultural trend (Lee, 2011).

Despite the huge achievements of the Korean wave, the Korean government has played a definitive role. It is said that the government has leveraged on the nation's Wave and turned it into a tool to advance the country's cultural and public diplomacy. Jang and Paik (2012) state that Lee's presidency has put a "complex diplomacy" and "value diplomacy" as a focus in improving the image and brand of the country. To be specific, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Presidential Council on Nation Branding have taken the chance of Korean Wave's reputation to promote the country's national interest in order to improve its image internationally (Jang & Paik, 2012).

In the meantime, Chua (2010) highlighted that the government of Korea was being supportive in determining the victory of the Korean Wave which could be seen in its continuous support of its entertainment and culture industry. According to Schwab (2013), this stand by the government was a

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wise move as it boosted the economy of Korea, turning it into among the best fifteen largest-economies in the world in 2012 with a GDP worth US$1,155.9 billion. South Korea's almost magical transformation has been dubbed as ′The Miracle of the Han River′ by many of its underdeveloped neighbours (H'ng & Yazdanifard, 2014).

The Asian media industry seems also keen to create their own Asian 'Hollywood'. Iwabuchi (2010) and Newsweek Asia (2001) are of the view that collaborations and partnerships are usually formed once media industries engage in international marketing and span transnational markets. Thus the idea of 'Asiawood' emerges, with Inter-Asian promotion and co-production of media cultures as a direct result of the said industry collaborations within the region.

Combining different media types helped to launch the Korean wave as a successful industry. As was observed by Ryoo (2009), the arrival of cable television and satellites created a powerful technological platform which could accommodate multi-channel broadcasting. When South Korean music, television drama and cinema began flourishing in the Asian market, it was combined with the technological advancements mentioned to create the cultural phenomenon which entails in-depth analyses on the international environment and the demands of media contents (Ryoo, 2009).

However, according to Ju (2010) the Korean Wave was supported by specific fiscal techniques of marketing developed by the Korean media industry including: star marketing systems, partial copyright options, joint enterprising and collaboration arrangements.

The star-marketing system involved employing top Korean stars so that the movies were more marketable. Various strategies were used to promote local Korean productions in Asian markets, including holding public relations events featuring Korean stars, local fan meetings and star interviews as well as news conferences were shown on local TV before screening the first movie or serial. Kim (2005) suggested that such strategies can contribute to the success of international programs nationally.

When Korean TV dramas are exported, they also sell off the Korean TV stations′ copyrights to the buyer. Usually, the copyrights belong wholly or partially to the TV stations and production companies, and terms and conditions of the sale are highlighted in the contract. Numerous copyrights are purchased by television companies, Korean network TV syndicators or independent production companies. Specifically, the contract will stipulate the types of copyrights sold as well as the legal aspects for airing and distributing the movies or TV serials.

Joint ventures of Korean drama production have been seen as another way of not only the flexibility of financing options with different companies, it has also opened up another opportunity of making it into foreign countries through foreign investment.

Joint productions in Korea are often successfully undertaken with regional TV networks and production companies. These joint productions within the industry will increase the capacity and variety of multicultural audiences that are present in a specified partner's domain (Kraidy, 2005).

As a result, the Korean media industry has managed to expand and develop into an international market quite easily with the foreign partner. The foreign partner participation has benefited the Korean media industry in a sense of funding, technology as well as international appeals.

Methodology

The research was conducted through qualitative method to address the research problem. This method is best used as it aims to investigate human phenomena and investigate interpretations and meaning that are unknown and needed to be explored. Due to pandemic Corona virus, online face-to-face in-depth interview was conducted with four (4) informants from Korea. There consist of two public

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relations officers and two program television producers from Korean Broad Casting System (KBS) and Seoul Broad Casting System (SBS) respectively.

The interviews needed to be digitally recorded to enable transcription. Data collected were in the form of audio recordings. In order to organize the recorded data, all the raw data were transcribed into computer files format. Transcribing involved the process of listening and watching to the video and simultaneously wrote down everything that was said. The data then been analyze using a themes and codes.

Finding

From the finding of the strength of Korean media behind the scene was elaborate in three part, there are background, economical factor and governance.

Background

Korean has a very long and tragic background which has never been able to be told in deep and wholeheartedly to the world. They had gone through the war around 400 years ago which in some degrees of tragedies and poverty. The suffering had force them to stand up and built their pride and nations. Korean and Japanese background plays a vital role in shaping Korean broadcasting strategies. According to Paik (2001), Korean had to rebuild its strength from scratch in almost all aspects. It began vigorous efforts to catch up with the developed countries around the world, economically and culturally (Paik, 2001). Beside that Korean also faced a contemporary conflict with the North Korea democracy which also known as communism conflict. Due to the hard upbringing and the past suffering that Koreans have gone through, Koreans need to come out and stand up for their own future. That's the main reason that trigger Korean to rise again is to re-establish national identity.

Economy

South Korea does not have many resources except for its arable land (one fifth) in the southwest (Postlethwaite, 1988) and other raw materials such as Tungsten, limestone, and lead. Its water resources enable the production of hydro-electric power but besides these, the country relies heavily on imports, such as oil, iron ore, copper, gold, and silver. Agriculture also serves as the main income source for Koreans despite having the world's smallest average farm area per household (California Department of Education, 1992; Paik, 2001). The Korean tend to develop about their field, and they work really hard to make everything come out perfectly and professionally even in music or any other involvement in media. Everyone is working hard to live and they are forced to compete with each other to survive. Similarly, television stations are also aware of the need to produce programs are of international standing. These programs must create demand, universally attractive so that they may be globally marketed (Julina et al., 2018).

During the 2000s, 'Korean Wave' rose to become an economic phenomenon that contributing significantly to Korea's national economy (Kim, 2006). In due time, the wave transformed into a transnational phenomenon and was not only confined to the home country (Ravina 2009; Peichi, 2014). These economic developments have produced specific results. "South Korea is now the twelfth largest economy in the world, and its' entertainment companies are able to finance shows and movies with production values much higher than in most of Asia" (Ryoo, 2007, p. 140; Lee, 2011).

Governance

When South Korea was badly hit by the Asian Financial Crisis at the end of the 20th century, the government began aggressively seeking economic opportunities through the Korean Wave phenomenon that was already developing rapidly. This involved the government in taking proactive measures to support its domestic cultural industry (Kim, 2011). According to Julina (2020) the Korean government's own supporting body called Korean Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) is a

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government agency under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism which responsible for governing cultural content. The government has some funds to help any productions to expand their business however, the fund is very much in terms of promoting their finished production abroad.

The overall government support was focused exclusively on the sectors that showed the most promise and potential for growth, such as films, dramas, gaming and music (MCST 2009, KOCCA 2012). The government gave comprehensive backing to these sectors including technological support, skilled workforce development, the funding of infrastructure and export aid programs. The aid provided was enabled through initiatives between quasi-governmental organizations and the private sector and were specifically designed to promote the business activities of these cultural firms (Baek, 2009).

Conclusion

The hard upbringing and the past suffering that Koreans have experienced, the Korean believed that they need to come out and stand up for their own future. What they have gone through, and in particular, their devastating history, has opened their eyes and renewed their strength so that they are determined to stand up and fight for their people and to rebuild their beloved homeland. Due to the situation, Korean is inadvertently facing with an economy conflict. The conflict arises when everyone is looking and searching on how to make profit and expanding their businesses to overseas market as their local market is deemed insufficient to sustain profits.

Having said that, the government also aggressively advanced the nation's entertainment sectors that showed much growth potential such as films, dramas, gaming and music (MCST 2009, KOCCA 2012). The government provided comprehensive for these sectors in terms of technological assistance, skilled workforce development, infrastructure development and export assistance programs.

The findings reveal how intricately linked the Korean media broadcasting are with the grassroots such as background, economics and government support. Undoubtedly, lending their rich life experiences and historical background to the dramas made them hugely appealing, also leading to them being successfully promoted abroad.

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