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## **Korean Wave Creating New Appetite Beyond Entertainment: The Role of the Korean Entertainment Industry in Promoting Korean Culture**

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**Abstract.** The growing influence of the Korean entertainment industry is well documented. Since the late 1990s, the Korean wave or Hallyu has continued to have an unprecedented influence on the lives of people across the world. Until recent times, gastrodiploacy remained a government-to-people affair where the Government of a particular country organises various programs to promote its cuisine abroad. Against this backdrop, this research investigates the role of K-dramas in promoting Korean cuisine among the international viewership. This study looks at the impact the K-dramas have had on the food preferences of Sri Lankan viewers and uses a mixed research design, and both primary and secondary data are used to address the research objectives. A total of 145 e-questionnaires were distributed. These questionnaires were predominantly closed-ended and analysed using frequency analysis. Apart from the questionnaires, a total of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted to better understand the impact of K-dramas on the food preferences of Sri Lankan viewership. These open-ended questions were analysed using descriptive method. As per the findings, K-dramas have a significant impact on the food preferences of the Sri Lankan viewership, where 93.8% admitted that K-dramas made them try out Korean cuisine. In conclusion, while this study contributes to the literature on the growing influence of the Korean entertainment industry on the lives of people, it also underscores the impact the Korean entertainment industry has on promoting various cultural products among the international community.

**Keywords.** Gastrodiploacy, Korean Wave, K-dramas, Korean cuisine

### **Introduction**

Korean Wave, or ‘Hallyu’, which began with K-drama exports during the late 1990s (Kim, 2015), represents the global outreach of Korean popular culture. Over the last two decades, the growing demand for popular culture has been unprecedented, and thanks to the entertainment industry of South Korea, the country has now become the Hollywood of the East (Kim, 2013). For others, it offers a country punch to the Western mediascape (United Nations,

2022). Looking at the numbers, according to the Korea Culture Industry Promotion Institute, the overseas exports of the Korean Culture industry in 2019 amounted to USD 1,322 million (Sun, 2024), and this global content-based industry is expected to grow at around 5.2% per year on average between 2021 and 2026. This popular culture, which began with the export of K-dramas, now includes movies, popular music (K-pop), dance, video games, food, fashion, tourism, and language. Against this backdrop, the main objective of this study is to examine the role of Korean dramas in promoting Korean cuisine in Sri Lanka. For centuries, food has been a source of connecting people, and today, countries use food as a tool of diplomacy, which is often identified as gastrodiploamacy. Gastrodiploamacy is a diplomatic tool in which food is used as a communication tool that explains the national identity of a given country (Swastiwi & Ringo, 2023). Traditionally, gastrodiploamacy was very much government-sponsored, where different governments used to organise various food promotion programs across the world. However, the unprecedented advancements in media and the advent of social media have made every single citizen a potential gastro-diplomat. As far as Korean dramas are concerned, they have continued to make a profound impact on the lives of the audience and a number of studies have underscored the impact of Korean dramas, in particular, on the food preferences of those who watch them. Looking at Sri Lanka, over the last three decades, largely due to the telecast of Korean dramas in domestic television channels, Korean popular culture has been able to attract many Sri Lankans and create a strong fan base. Despite not sharing strong cultural and historical ties, the Korean Wave has been able to add a different cultural dimension to the dynamic Sri Lanka-South Korea relations (Fernando, 2022). As of 2024, over 30 K-dramas have been dubbed and/or telecast in Sri Lanka, and some of these dramas have had a significant impact on the lives of ordinary Sri Lankans. Sometimes this impact is so profound that, after watching the drama *Jewel in the Palace*, Sri Lankan women tried to learn how to cook and give medicine like Jang geum (Jinasena, 2014). However, no significant study has been carried out on the impact of the Korean entertainment industry on the food preferences of Sri Lankans. Out of the vastly extended entertainment industry, this study is limited to Korean dramas. The main rationale behind this is, as stated earlier, over the last two decades, a number of Korean dramas were dubbed and telecast in Sri Lanka, making K-dramas, which have made so many Sri Lankans embrace Korean culture.

Table 01: Korean Dramas dubbed and telecasted in Sri Lanka (Till May 2024)

	The Korean Name	Sinhala name given	Number of episodes	Telecasted year	Local television channel
01	Full House Full house	Full House Full House	16 31	2009 2014	Independent Television Network
02	Autumn in My Heart Autumn In My Heart	Autumn In My Heart Autumn In My Heart	18 28	2011 2015	Independent Television Network
03	Sungkyunkwan Scandal	Asaliya Mala	39	2014	Independent Television Network
04	Chil Woo the Mighty/ Strongest Chil Woo	Chil woo	38	2014	Independent Television Network
05	West Palace	Batahira Maligaya	73	2015	Independent Television Network
06	City Hunter	City Hunter	35	2015	Independent Television Network

07	Flowers Of the Prison	Sooriya Kusuma	168	2021	Independent Television Network
08	Jewel in the Palace	Sujatha Diyani	78	2012-2013	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
09	Jewel in the Crown	Abheetha Diyani	102	2013	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
10	Great Merchant	Diriya Diyani	46	2013	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
11	Horse Doctor/Kings Doctor	Isiwara Wedaduru	91	2013-2014	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
12	Lee San, Wind of the Palace	Yahapath Maharaja	148	2014-2015	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
13	Goddess of Fire	Sirimati Sittaravi	69	2015	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
14	Moon Embracing the Sun	Hiru Sandu Adarei	35	2015	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
15	Queen Seondeok	Janahithakamee Rajiniya	119	2015-2016	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
16	Empress Ki	Suriya Diyaniya	90	2016	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
17	Legend of the Blue Sea	Sasara Kinnaravi	60	2020	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
18	Saimdang	Mathaka Sittam	77	2022	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
19	True Beauty	Ruwati Sittathi	67	2022-2023	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
20	Tale of the Nine Tailed (Season 01)	E Numba Nisa	60	2023	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
21	100 Days of My Prince	Ahimi Mathaka	70	2023	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
22	Live up to your name	Sihina Charikawe	69	2023	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
23	Melting Me Softly	Tuhiravi	32- Till May 2024	2023-2024	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
24	My Lovely Sam Soon	Hithata Horen	50	2018	Sri Rupavahini Corporation Lanka
25	Boys Over Flowers	Boys over flowers	-	2014	TV Derana

26	The Princess' man	Sihina Kumara	-	2015	TV Derana
27	Hwarang	Hwarang	-	2021	TV Derana
28	The Heirs	Urumakkarayo	-	2014	TV Derana
29	Melody Of Love	Melody of Love	-	2015	TV Derana
30	Descendants of the Sun	Himanthara	-	2020	Sirasa TV
31	My love from the star	Ananthayen Aa Taru Kumara	-	2020	Sirasa TV
32	Pinocchio	Ikkai Mai	-	2020	Sirasa TV
33	Secret Garden	Me Adambarakari	-	2020	Sirasa TV
34	The Emperor: Owner of the Mask	Yawes Lu Kumara	-	2021	Sirasa TV
35	<a href="#">The Last Empress</a>	Agra	-	2020	Sirasa TV

Source: Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation, Sirasa TV, Independent Television Network, TV Derana

### Literature Review

Food is often identified as an effective means of non-verbal communication (Taher & Elshahed, 2020), making it an effective tool for achieving diplomatic goals (Suntikul, 2017). Gastrodiplomacy- a major branch of public diplomacy (Niwandya & Awang, 2024; Farina, 2018; Elyta & Karyana, 2021; Huwaidaa, 2022) can be simply identified as an attempt to communicate culinary culture to foreign publics in a fashion that is more diffuse; it takes a wider focus to influence the broader public audience rather than high elites (Rockower, 2014). Public diplomacy, a term coined by American Diplomat Edmund Gullion in the 1960s describes the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. Distinguishing between the historical notion of public diplomacy and new diplomacy, Cull (2009) notes that while the historical analysis of public diplomacy focuses on the contact between one government and people of another state, the new public diplomacy highlights the importance of people-to-people relations. Furthermore, new public diplomacy uses new, real-time and global technologies to communicate with world politics.

The Korean Wave or 'Hallyu'- a term first coined by the Chinese media in the late 1990s represents the growing popularity of the Korean entertainment industry across Asia and beyond. Initiated by the export of TV dramas, the Korean wave now includes a wide range of cultural products, including Korean pop-music, films, animation, online games, smartphones, fashion, cosmetics, food, and lifestyles (Kim, 2013). The global outreach of the Korean popular culture is evident in the fact that in 2021, around 74% of foreign tourists visited South Korea to experience the Korean culture (Asy'ari et al., 2024).

Several studies have identified the profound impact the Korean wave continues to have on the lives and decision-making of individuals, while certain studies have attempted to explore the influence of Korean popular culture on the food preferences of its audience (Vellycia, 2021; Kunt & Demirok, 2025; Dewi et al., 2022). As per a study conducted in Türkiye, 77% of the respondents began trying Korean food after watching Korean dramas, and 94.2% agree that food scenes in Korean dramas influenced their preferences for Korean cuisine

(Kunt & Demirok, 2025). Two different studies conducted in Indonesia (Wati et al., 2022; Setiawan et al., 2024) also underscore the growing impact of the Korean wave on the food-related decision-making of its population. Both studies identify a strong relationship between the Korean wave and food purchasing decisions.

### **Research methodology**

This study employs a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) research design to explore the impact of Korean popular culture on the consumption preferences of Korean cuisine among Korean drama viewers in Sri Lanka. The data collection and analysis consist of a number of stages. As the initial stage, a comprehensive analysis of existing literature is carried out. As the next step, the study attempts to get available data from both state and private television channels on the number of Korean Teledramas dubbed and telecast in Sri Lanka. As already mentioned, the Korean popular culture consists of a number of cultural products ranging from dramas to online games. Yet, Korean dramas remain at the heart of 'Hallyu' in Sri Lanka. During the last two decades, over 30 Korean dramas have been dubbed and telecast in the island nation.

To address the main research questions, on the one hand, an e-questionnaire is distributed. 145 respondents participated in the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of four sections. The first section is about some general information about the respondent, while the second section explores the respondents' overall perception of K-drama. The final section deals with respondents' familiarity with Korean cuisines depicted in K-dramas.

In addition, twenty face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand and explore the impact of Korean dramas on the food preferences among K-Drama fandom in Sri Lanka. As far as the nature of the sample is concerned, it consists of both male and female respondents aged between 14-34. The purposive sampling technique is used to collect the sample. The sample is limited to those who have watched the following Korean dramas: *Jewel in the Palace*, *True Beauty*, *Boys over Flowers*, *Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok-Joo*, and *Itaewon Class*. All five dramas listed above are among the most famous Korean dramas among the Sri Lankan fandom, and three out of the five dramas have been dubbed and telecast in Sri Lanka. In all five dramas, culinary aesthetics have been meticulously presented, transforming everyday meals into visual feasts that not only tantalise taste buds but also serve as a window into Korean culture and hospitality.

*Jewel in the Palace* is a critically acclaimed South Korean historical drama that tells the true story of Seo Jang-geum, the Joseon Dynasty's first female royal physician. Set in the 15th century, the drama follows Jang-geum, a determined and talented girl from a humble background who overcomes numerous obstacles to advance through the palace ranks. Jang-geum, who entered the royal palace as a kitchen apprentice, demonstrates exceptional talent in cooking, medicine, and ethics.

The Korean drama *Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok-Joo* played a significant role in popularizing Korean cuisine, particularly dishes like fried chicken. Throughout the series, food serves as a source of comfort, bonding, and celebration, with scenes often featuring characters enjoying delicious meals. One of the most memorable moments in the drama showcases the main characters indulging in crispy Korean fried chicken, highlighting its irresistible appeal. As the drama gained international popularity, fans around the world became curious about the food featured in the show, leading to a surge in interest in Korean fried chicken.

Tteokbokki, a beloved Korean street food made of chewy rice cakes smothered in spicy gochujang sauce, embodies the essence of Korean culinary culture. In *True Beauty* (Epi 1, 1:04:40), the female lead engages in lively conversation while sharing this dish. Through this

shared experience of enjoying tteokbokki, characters forge deeper connections and strengthen relationships. Further, the dish is depicted as a snack for school students to savour, highlighting its essence as a comfort staple for Koreans, which brings back the memories of school days for adults.

In "Boys Over Flowers," (Epi 11, 20:46- 22:08/ Epi 17, 42:12- 43:00/ Epi 18, 43:34-45:06/ Epi 19, 36:46-37:40/ 20:34- 22:42) ramyeon scenes are often depicted as moments of comfort, bonding, and shared experiences among the characters. These scenes typically occur during times of emotional stress or celebration, highlighting the role of food in providing solace and bringing people together. This popular Korean instant noodle dish, which is quick and easy to prepare, has become a staple of Korean cuisine, enjoyed by people of all ages. It is commonly seen as a comfort food and is consumed in a variety of situations, including quick dinners at home and late-night munchies.

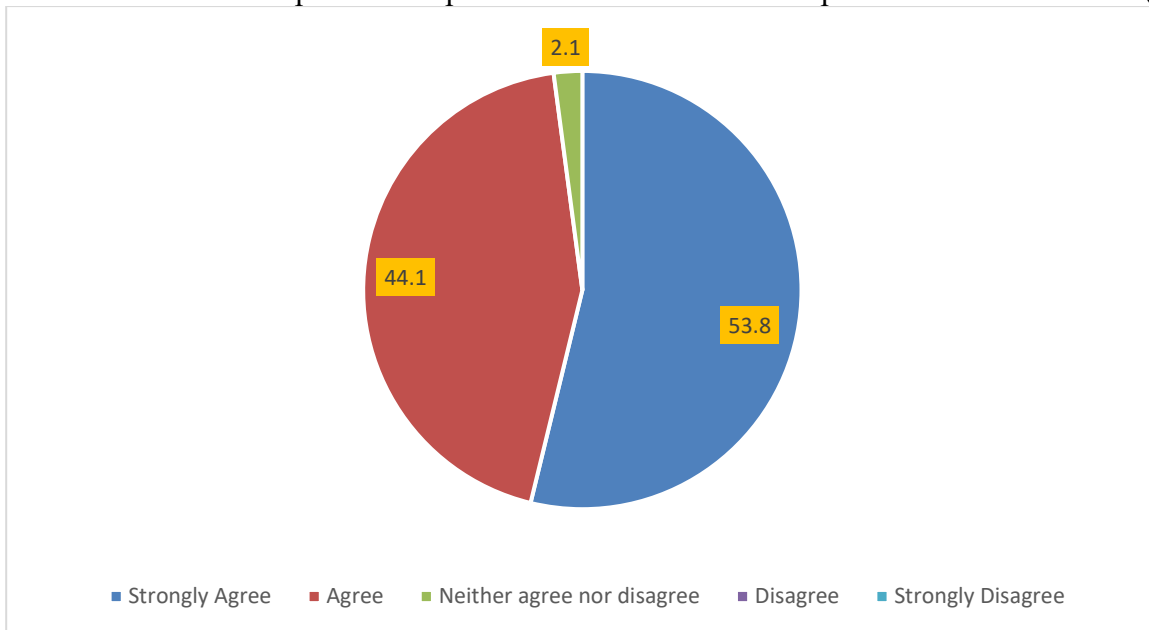
Moreover, drinking scenes in *Itaewon Class* often depict the consumption of traditional Korean alcoholic beverages such as soju and makgeolli. These drinks are not only an integral part of South Korean culinary culture but also serve as symbols of camaraderie and bonding. In many episodes, characters engage in drinking sessions to celebrate achievements, console one another during difficult times, or simply unwind after a long day.

### **Results and Discussion**

Just like in many countries, the Korean entertainment industry continues to expand among the Sri Lankans, creating a significant impact on the lives of the viewers. For example, after the telecast of *Jewel in the Palace* in 2012, Sri Lankan women tried to learn how to cook like Jang Geum and how to give medicine like her (Jinasena, 2014). The Korean wave has been able to create a new cultural dimension to the dynamic Sri Lanka-South Korea relations (Fernando, 2022).

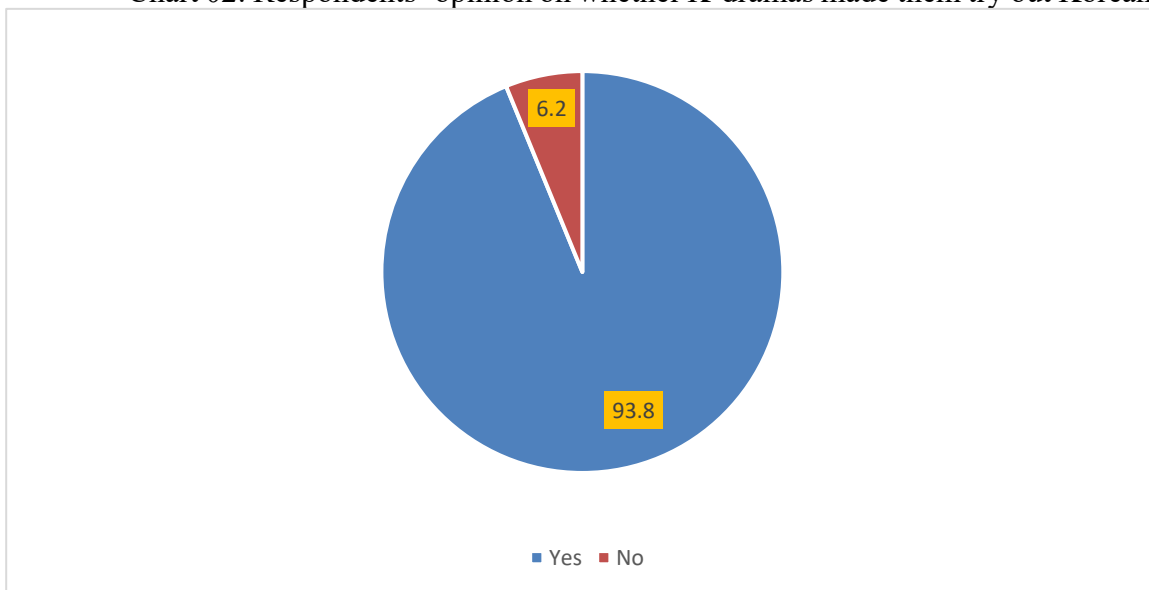
Looking at the basic demographic features of the respondents, the majority who participated in the e-questionnaire were female, aged between 21- 27 (82.8%), followed by 14-20 (11%) and 28-34 (6.2%). It's interesting to find that 86.2% of the respondents have been watching Korean dramas for more than three years. When inquired about the reasons which made them watch Korean dramas, the overwhelming majority agreed that the interesting storylines, followed by an attractive cast, and curiosity about Korean culture made them watch K-dramas. Furthermore, most of the respondents watch K-dramas as a source of entertainment and relaxation. When it comes to respondents' familiarity with Korean cuisine depicted in K-dramas, overall, 97% believe that K-dramas promote Korean cuisine (Chart 01), and 93.8% admitted that K-dramas made them try out Korean cuisine (Chart 02).

Chart 01: Respondents' opinion on whether K-dramas promote Korean Cuisine (%)



Source: Author Findings

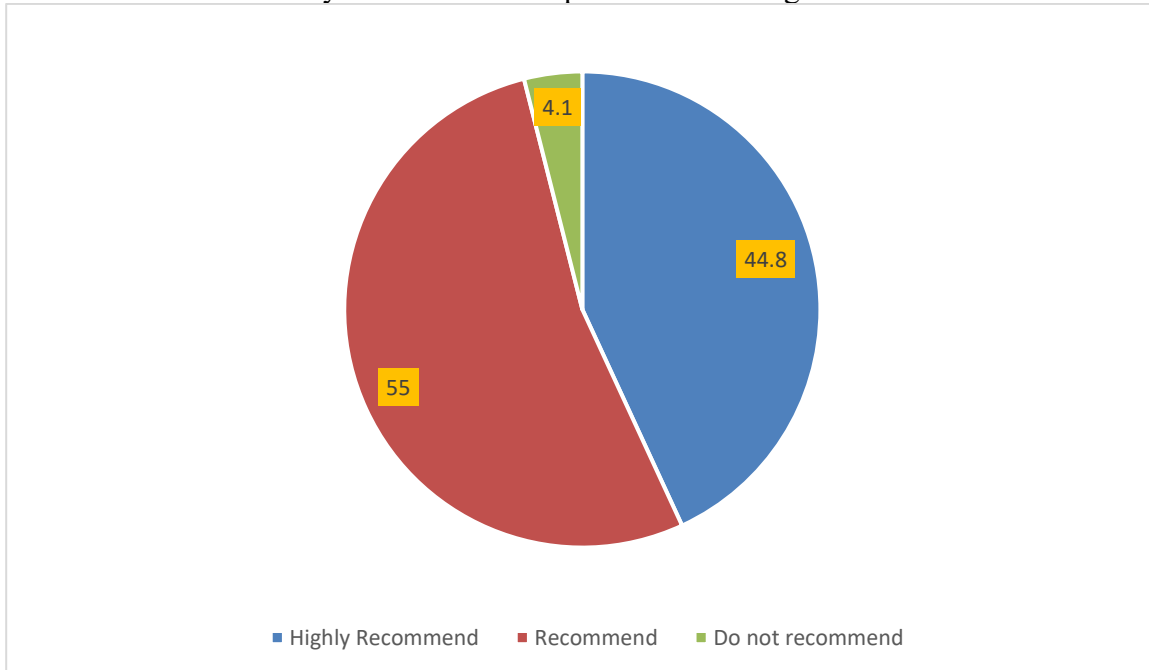
Chart 02: Respondents' opinion on whether K-dramas made them try out Korean food



Source: Author Findings

While 97.9% have visited a Korean restaurant after watching K-dramas, 76.6% have tried preparing Korean cuisine at home or place of residence. Some of the main Korean cuisines they had tried at home/ place of residence include: Ramyeon, Kimchi, Tteokbokki, and Korean fried chicken. When inquired about the major challenges they encounter when preparing Korean cuisine, the majority identified the unavailability and expense of ingredients as a major hindrance to preparing Korean cuisine. While 95.9% would recommend Korean food to friends/ relatives or family based on their exposure to it through K-drama (Chart 03), over 90% identify K-dramas as an effective tool for promoting Korean cuisine.

Chart 03: Respondents' opinion on whether they would recommend Korean food to friends/relatives or family based on their exposure to it through K-drama.



Source: Author findings

A respondent made the following comment when inquired about his/her overall observation about *K-dramas and Korean cuisine*.

*“I think the K dramas have had a major influence in increasing my desire to try to Korean cuisine to the point that even if I am not a native of the country, I feel a lot of closeness to the cuisine. However, I do think there aren't that many restaurants in Sri Lanka that can provide a solid experience of the cuisine and even if you want to try it at home unless it's ramyeon everything else requires some imported items making accessibility an issue as well. Another thing I would say is the Alcohol culture too. As a non-drinker by choice, it would be untruthful if I said I haven't developed an insatiable thirst to try soju one day which shows the level of influence K drama s can have. Although at the end of the day I am nothing but grateful for being introduced to Korean cuisine even if it's because of K Dramas”.*

As mentioned earlier, in addition to the 145 e-questionnaires, 20 face-to-face interviews were conducted to have an in-depth understanding of the impact of Korean popular culture on the consumption preferences of Korean cuisine among Korean drama viewers in Sri Lanka. All participants were female and between 20 and 25 years old. Overall, most of the participants noted that K-dramas dubbed and telecast in Sri Lanka had a profound impact on their attachment to Korean culture and the entertainment industry. They believe that the K-drama *Jewel in the Palace*, which was telecast in 2012, was the most influential K-drama.

One respondent (R03) noted:

*“I have been watching K-dramas since 2015. I initially preferred American sitcoms but shifted to K-dramas for their fantasy elements and unpredictability. I saw the influence K-dramas have on the youth and I believe K-dramas intentionally promote Korean food culture”.*

The same respondent acknowledged that food scenes in dramas are well-shot and emphasised. She was particularly influenced by food scenes in K-dramas in *Descendants of the Sun* and *Squid Game*. She had tried out making dalgona candy and Korean corn dogs at home.

Another respondent (R07), who often visits Korean food restaurants after being influenced by K-dramas, reiterated that K-dramas are responsible for the global popularity of Korean food culture. She also revealed that she used to prepare Kimchi every weekend. She recalled the scenes from *Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok Joo* where the lead actress eats different food at her father’s fried chicken restaurant and university cafeteria. As per the respondent, the café-hopping culture is influenced by K-dramas.

### **Conclusion**

The main objective of this study was to examine the impact of the Korean entertainment industry on the food preferences among the Sri Lankan fandoms. This study was limited to K-dramas, as there is a considerable fan base for K-dramas, given that over 35 dramas had already been dubbed and telecast in the country. The study finds that K-dramas make a significant impact on the food preferences of the Sri Lankan fandoms. As per the data, most of the respondents acknowledged that their food preferences had been influenced by K-dramas. Moreover, they also identified K-dramas as a platform for popularising Korean cuisine. Overall, the findings of the research suggest that the Korean entertainment industry does make a significant impact on the lives of individuals, and this impact is so strong that it could influence even the food preferences of the audience. It should also be noted that the K-dramas, which were dubbed and telecast in the country, have made the fan base expand swiftly. This research contributes to the growing significance of the Korean entertainment industry, and at the same time, this research could also underscore the effectiveness of the Korean entertainment industry in promoting various cultural products among the international community.

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