

UDC 32

DOI: 10.34670/AR.2021.60.99.005

The Korean wave as a tool of South Korea's soft power in 1990-2020**Irina A. Gnedash**

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Abstract

The article deals with the soft power of the Republic of Korea from the 1990s to the present. The aim of the work is to identify the stages of transformation and indicators of the effectiveness of cultural activities as an imperative of South Korea's national branding. The emphasis is on the study of the Korean wave as the main direction of state soft power. The article presents the results of the analysis of the soft power Korean wave instrument, firstly introduced by the government in the early 1990s. The main indicators of measuring "soft" influence are noted, the authors independently visualized the collected statistical data to demonstrate the results of the South Korean government in achieving cultural goals and their effective policy of implementing soft power. The scientific novelty of the study lies in the fact that for the first time a comprehensive analysis of Korean foreign policy influence is presented using the analysis of social networks and digital platforms. As a result, the historical aspects of the formation of South Korea's soft power are revealed, the main indicators of measuring its influence are determined, and the collected statistical data are visualized to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Korean wave implementation. The obtained theoretical, methodological and practical results can be used in further studies of the soft power of the Republic of Korea.

For citation

Gnedash I.A., Ivanov N.S., Khaimina A.D. (2021) The Korean wave as a tool of South Korea's soft power in 1990-2020. *Teorii i problemy politicheskikh issledovaniy* [Theories and Problems of Political Studies], 10 (2A), pp. 44-55. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2021.60.99.005

Keywords

South Korea, soft power, Korean wave, image, culture, statistical data.

Introduction

The relevance of the study is determined by the importance of “soft power”, which continues to grow both in theory and in practice of modern international relations. Most countries are actively using this concept as a tool for pursuing foreign policy. At present time, one of the important factors influencing state actors is economic success, cultural attractiveness of the state, which together represents “soft power”. The Republic of Korea is a fast-growing country in economic, technological, and more recently, cultural dimensions. The state is building up its “soft” influence with the help of the Korean wave instrument, not only with the aim of generating income and prosperity for the South Korean economy, but also expanding its influence on the world stage. This system includes many different components that allow to export your image across culture.

To achieve the research aim, it is indispensable to solve the following objectives: firstly, to concretize the concept of “soft power”; secondly, to identify key historical aspects of the emergence of the Korean wave instrument; thirdly, to reveal the effectiveness of the soft power of the Republic of Korea through cultural activities in the digital dimension.

To achieve these objectives, the authors used the method of system-structural analysis, the statistical method. As a starting point, the interpretation of “soft power” by J. Nye is presented for studying this phenomenon. The researchers analyzed it through the prism of social constructivism, since it must be perceived as a construct capable of achieving the desired result in the international arena. Although, the authors do not analyze all the available approaches to the interpretation of “soft power”, the theoretical aspect is essential due to the understanding of the functioning of this concept and how it is applied to the specific example of the Republic of Korea. Finally, arguments are given for the effectiveness of the Korean wave tool using the above statistics, proving the importance of the attractiveness of South Korean culture and its ability to attract foreign audiences.

The practical significance of the work lies in the orientation of researchers towards the study of the soft power of the Republic of Korea from the point of view of its global cultural influence on the audience of foreign states.

Theoretical approaches to the study of the soft power phenomenon

“Power” is an important theoretical and practical category of international relations. By the end of the 20th century, most researchers agreed on the need to expand its interpretation. Thus, military power no longer corresponded to the global realities of the modern world, which was later recognized by the schools of realism, liberalism and structuralism. Thus, “soft power” was first mentioned in the writings of Professor J. Nye in the 1990s [Nye, 1990]. He interprets this term as the ability to achieve the desired results based on the attractiveness of culture, values, language and other aspects [Nye, 2004, 10]. In addition, it is a way to attract foreign audiences without being forced. J. Nye's works are the starting

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point for the development of the concept of “soft power” and are widely used as theory and practice in the foreign policy of states. A special place is given to soft power in Asia. J. Nye defined the resources of Asia as insufficient, but capable of playing a special role in the future, which is now observed in a number of Asian states.

Although, the introduced concept of J. Nye provided new opportunities for understanding some aspects of international relations, for example, non-violent ways of influencing others. However, the concept lacked a theoretical basis. It contained a descriptive instrument of how the power of the United States works [Cooper, 2004]. Thus, J. Nye explained the difference between hard and soft power without a theoretical component for understanding how this concept works [Nye, 1990, 188]. Nye's concept focuses on the nature of the force used rather than the resources of power, although there are some references to resources such as attractive culture, ideology, and international institutions [Ibidem]. From this point of perspective, the concept is relevant in order to develop the theory. Also, it is necessary to make a distinction between soft power and soft power resources. Symbols, culture, education, and others are soft resources that can be used to create soft power. For example, the Korean wave described in this research presents this kind of soft resource.

If we consider soft power through the prism of social constructivism, then the researchers initially note the importance of “power” itself in the international arena. They define it not as direct physical coercion, but as the creation of political structures that allow them to obtain the desired result, while exerting their influence on the identity, motivation, and behavior of other state actors [Hopf, 1998, 181]. Thus, for constructivists, “power” is the ability to construct, maintain, and transform desired goals. They believe that it can be aimed at both individual actors and the international system as a whole [Wendt, 1992, 163].

Constructivism views “socially constructed” knowledge as a factor of power that especially affects state interests. Besides, they are concerned what power means and what it does intentionally or not. The constructivist approach does not deny the importance of power and interests [Guzzini, 2000, 169]. It questions what state interests are and examines the ends and means by which power will be used. Norms shape interests, and interests shape actions. Changing norms can change state interests and create new interests [Finnemore, 2004]. For constructivists, in addition to power, identity and norms influence how interests are defined [Guzzini, 2005, 499]. In short, power means not only the resources needed to impose one's will on others, but also power define the common meanings that constitute the identity, interests and practices of states, and the conditions they create [Adler, 1997, 336]. There is a resurgence of interest in the conceptualization and study of power in constructivist analysis.

To conclude, constructivism's view of soft power is, therefore, based on the assumption that norms, values and identities are not defined by material power sources, but are social constructs. The need for soft power in the constructivist thinking means to have a positive impact on foreign population using effective tools of influence.

The emergence and evolution of the Korean wave instrument

The Korean wave is a national brand related to the spread of modern South Korean culture around the world, which combines both Eastern and Western cultures. President Kim Dae-Jung in his inauguration speech in 1998 emphasized that all efforts should be directed towards the globalization of Korean culture in general [Inaugural address..., www]. This speech became directive and it can be assumed that the phenomenon of the Korean wave is the implementation of the course towards “globalization of Korean culture”.

The Korean wave is rooted in the liberalization of Korean culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The social and economic reforms undertaken by President Kim Young-Sam in the early 1990s abandoned the old military regime in favor of popular freedom at home, a diplomatic style of foreign policy and economic recovery. South Korea started to open up to globalization [Yoon, 1996, 515].

However, the liberalization of economic policy led to the 1997 financial crisis. South Korean society was forced to move away from a strictly conservative society [Kihwan, www]. The economic collapse forced Koreans to abandon their rigid Confucian class structure. The foundations of the Korean wave lie in this panic, as the state was forced to carefully re-evaluate its existing corporate culture. In response, Koreans placed more emphasis on their culture and moved away from the culture of the producers. Moving away from a corporate culture was associated with sustainable modernization that encouraged creativity and entrepreneurship [Ibidem]. This revival allowed South Korea to develop a modern culture of its own that was unique to anything available in Japan or the West.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism began to emphasize cultural exports as a major aspect of economic development in 1999. With the introduction of the Korean wave, attempts were made to make South Korean culture as an international product. The Korean wave has spread overseas in the past few years thanks to cultural interest groups in non-Asian countries. The enthusiasm for Korean music has become especially strong among people in Latin America, the United States and Western Europe [Popularity..., www].

Following the proclamation of global export of Korean culture, the government introduced a new social media “Korea Herald” which meant the introduction of technology for transformation of mediated heritage and culture into a product that would help stimulate the Korean economy [Doobo, 2006, 32]. Thus, the Korean government established the Korean Culture and Content Agency under the Ministry of Culture. The agency was given an annual budget of \$90 million [Kim, 2007].

The Korean wave has passed through several historical steps. The term “Hallyu” is used here to denote stages, which from Korean means “wave”. The Korean wave began with the export of TV series and films in the late 1990s. However, the mid-2000s saw a boom in the music industry and the concept of Hallyu 2.0 (Korean pop music) emerged [Doobo, 2006, 28]. Thanks to digital technologies, interest in Korean music has grown worldwide and has already spread beyond East Asia. Along with Hallyu 2.0, there was also Hallyu 3.0 (K-culture), which later merged into Hallyu 4.0 or K-style [Kuwahara, 2014, 33].

The goal of Hallyu 2.0 was to combine contemporary and traditional Korean culture for achieving global promotion of this kind of culture through the music industry. Hallyu 3.0 was aimed at spreading Korean traditional culture around the world. Thus, from the beginning of 2010, Hallyu was no longer limited to the film industry and music, but began to include all genres of Korean culture [The Korean wave..., 2011]. Hallyu 4.0 is already flowing into K-style, which has been designated as the massive appeal of Korean culture overseas.

The development of Hallyu is directly related to the activities of the Government. Its support has been provided in a variety of ways, including using diplomatic resources and networks, building social solidarity with the concept of promoting Korean culture internationally, fostering an environment that encourages creativity and innovation in manufacturing, and helping companies wishing to work in this field. It formally began with a cabinet meeting in 2005 at which the government recognized the importance of the creative content industry and developed a plan to support them on a systematic basis to support all sectors [Lee, 2005, 12]. Since then, coordination between agencies and policy makers has expanded and created incentives for private sector cooperation.

Referring to the official documents of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the

phenomenon of the Korean wave is presented in the White Papers. The latter document indicates the impact of the pandemic on culture and art: “The more seriously we become aware of the various issues associated with the Korean wave, the more we will have a desirable future that will help us prepare for the future of the cultural industry” [Hallyu White Paper..., [www](#)].

Effectiveness of the Korean wave of the Republic of Korea through cultural activities

According to the Global Soft Power Index 2020, the world’s most comprehensive research study on perceptions of soft power, South Korea is the 14th place in the list with 48.3 score which is made up of components such as familiarity, influence, reputation [Global Soft Power Index 2020, [www](#)]. Hard power does not prevail over soft power comparing with other states. However, soft power components are becoming more and more popular all over the world and Korea’s success lies in influential culture, which can greatly boost its economy and empower its diplomatic ties with others. Korea's soft power lies mainly in its cultural dimension as it was previously mentioned. This emphasis is primarily due to the specificity of culture, since Asian states are characterized by closeness and vigilance in relation to foreign policy. Therefore, states are willing to share with is culture, which is unique and distinct from the Western culture [Lee, [www](#)].

The driving force behind the Korean wave is music industry, represented by a wide variety of Korean companies. The government is using this thriving industry as a tool of soft power to make it political mark in the international stage. Korean music has grown into a popular subculture among people around the world, driven by an interest in contemporary South Korean styles. Thanks to the availability of digital content, Korean music is reaching a wide audience previously unthinkable [Markeeva, 2017]. Let's turn to statistics of the Korean entertainment companies stock prices and market values for 2020 (Figures 1-2) [Korean entertainment companies..., [www](#)]. It is indispensable to outline main companies which participate in the formation of the image of South Korea by closing cooperation with the Government. Below you can observe charts with the price value and the market value of these companies in 2020. Price means the share price, and market value (*the current market price (per share) * total number of outstanding shares*), so market value provides a better estimate of a company’s worth. Price is reported in won.

Such digital platform as YouTube is an excellent soft power tool not only for South Korea, but also for any state to promote its image and values. Music videos are one of most watched content on YouTube, attracting new people not only to listening to Korean music, but to explore their culture, language and other aspects of life. Further, the authors suggest to familiarize with the processed statistical data presented in the form of graphs which are connected with influence.

Figure 3 is describing groups that have the most views. YouTube views supports musical performers to be in trends across all platforms, which gives the Republic of Korea the opportunity to broadcast its modern culture in the digital space [Distribution..., [www](#)].

Figure 4 outlines most liked music videos and here are placed Korean music along with other foreign artists [Most liked music videos, [www](#)]. Korean groups are duplicated multiple times of the entire list, stressing the popularity and ability to compete with entertainment conglomerates as American ones. Likes present a relative unique indicator of identifying listeners and the ability to count them.

Figure 5 accentuates attention to the activity of people in the comments section, which is clearly emphasized in the diagram. Korean music outpaces Western artists by a wide margin on this list [Most

commented music videos, www]. Music videos evoke high emotional reactions, both positive and negative, and also reflect the interaction of interest groups. This indicator is also a measure of Korea's soft power.



Figure 1 - Korean entertainment companies 2020 share price

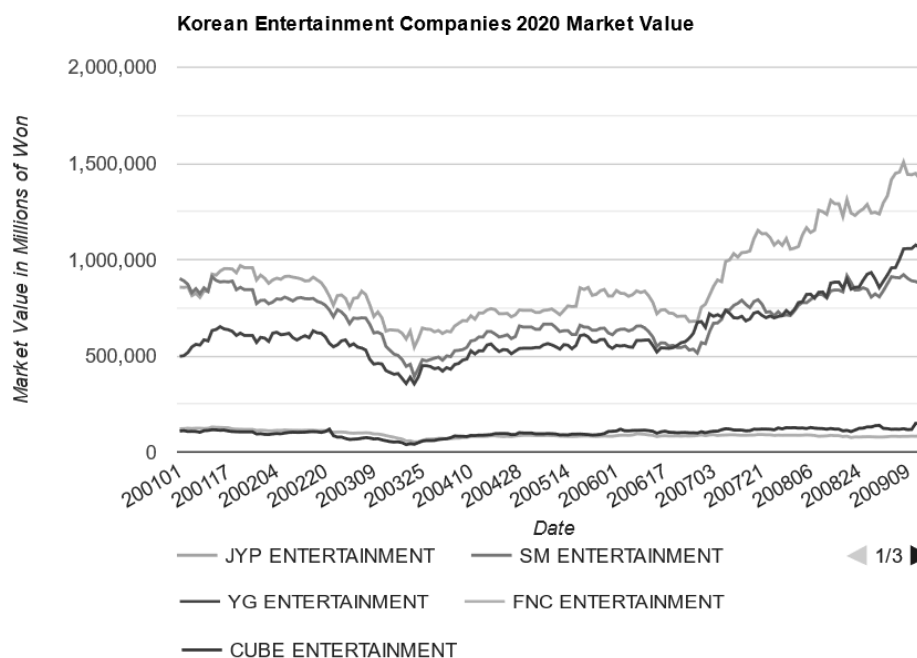


Figure 2 - Korean entertainment companies 2020 market value

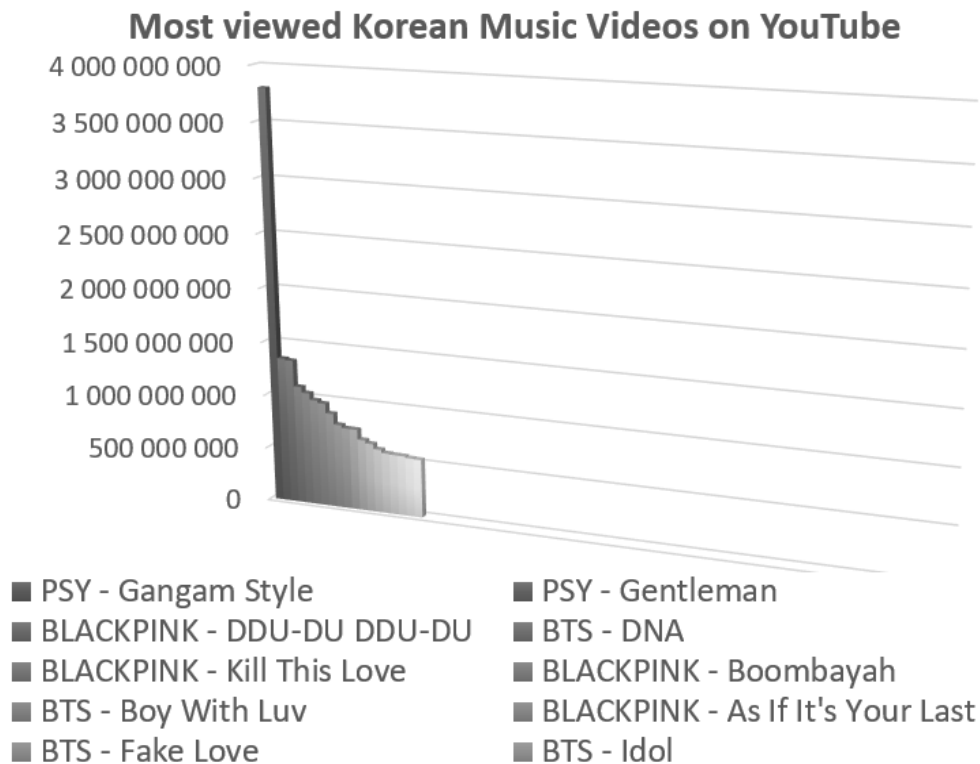


Figure 3 - Most viewed Korean music videos on YouTube

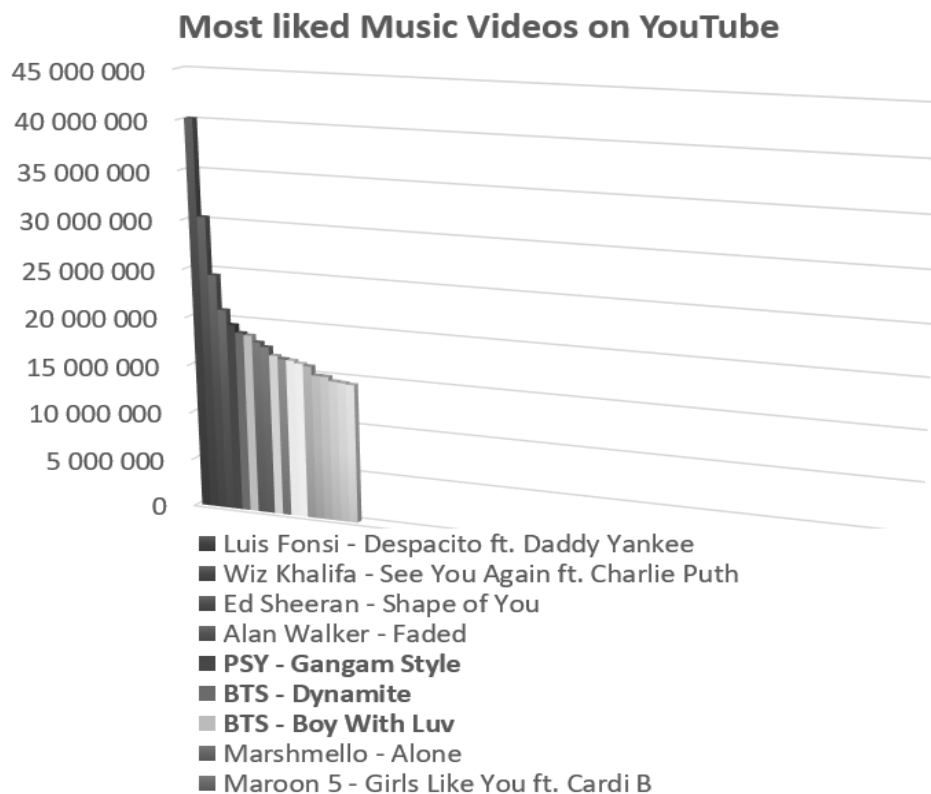


Figure 4 - Most liked music videos on YouTube

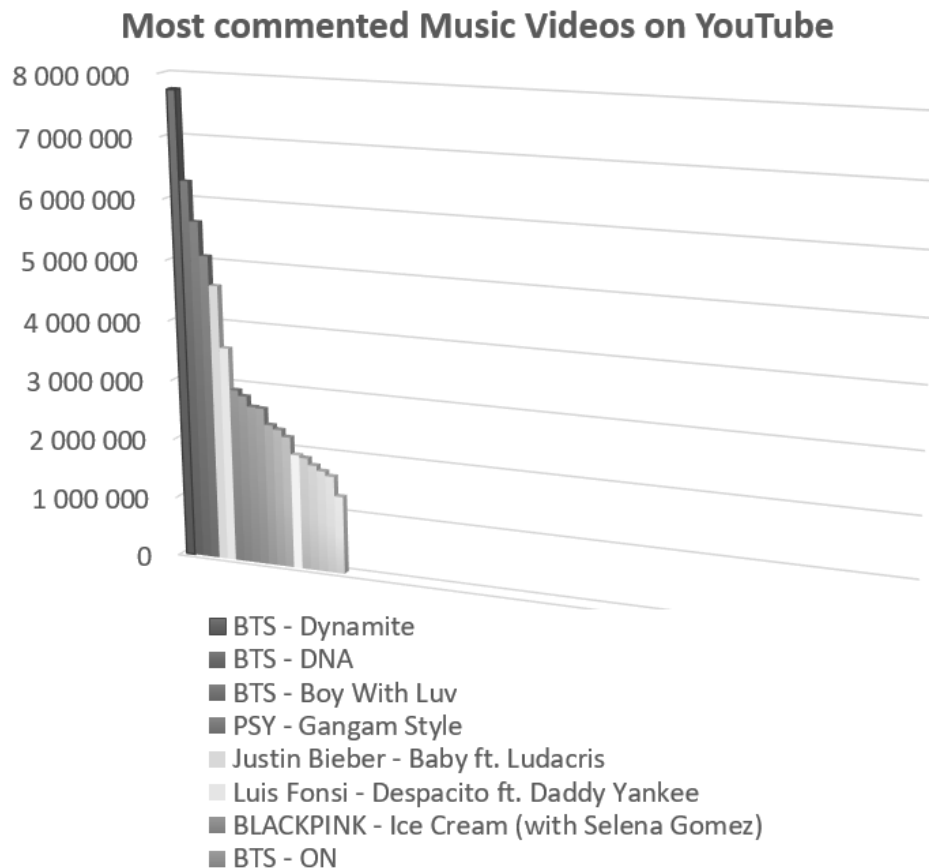


Figure 5 - Most commented music videos on YouTube

Indeed, Korean music is a part of South Korean soft power image. For instance, Korean group ‘Bangtan Sonyeondan’ (BTS) is formally recognized by the government as cultural ambassadors [BTS..., [www](#)]. In addition to the political image, it is also a significant engine for the growth of the national economy, with endless growth potential [Sajnach, [www](#)]. Korean content is not just a cultural domain, more a soft but strong power that enhances South Korea's brand value and competitiveness. Korean groups presented as a powerful engine of cultural expansion into the world markets [Hallyu White Paper..., [www](#)]. Previously, skepticism about strong cultural influence prevailed in the academic circles when was later recognized the value of promoting it for the country's development. Nowadays, taking only Bangtan Sonyeondan group has more than 40 million followers on Instagram, 35 million on Twitter, and 50 million on YouTube, where music video views reach from 500 million to 1 billion and higher.

For some additional visual data, it is indispensable to refer to the Next Big Sound study of music data, which measures the average activity per fan [Next Big Sound, [www](#)]. Moreover, Korean music followers are basically in a separate big group. One of the research metrics is engagement performance, which is how many times people interact with an artist's account (Twitter, Instagram, etc.).

If we look at the 20 artists who have surpassed the norm the most, we can observe that Korean artists make up the majority, with more than half. First is music group EXO, which has over 24 million views of its main Twitter page in a week, more than 15,000 times than expected. Then there is BTS, the audience of which is approximately five times more than the previous group has. BTS was mentioned about 35 million times. This is primarily due to the fact that Korean groups have multiple

official accounts on Twitter, which is why their cumulative volume is such a large number of mentions that we can observe. Figure 6 presents this data.

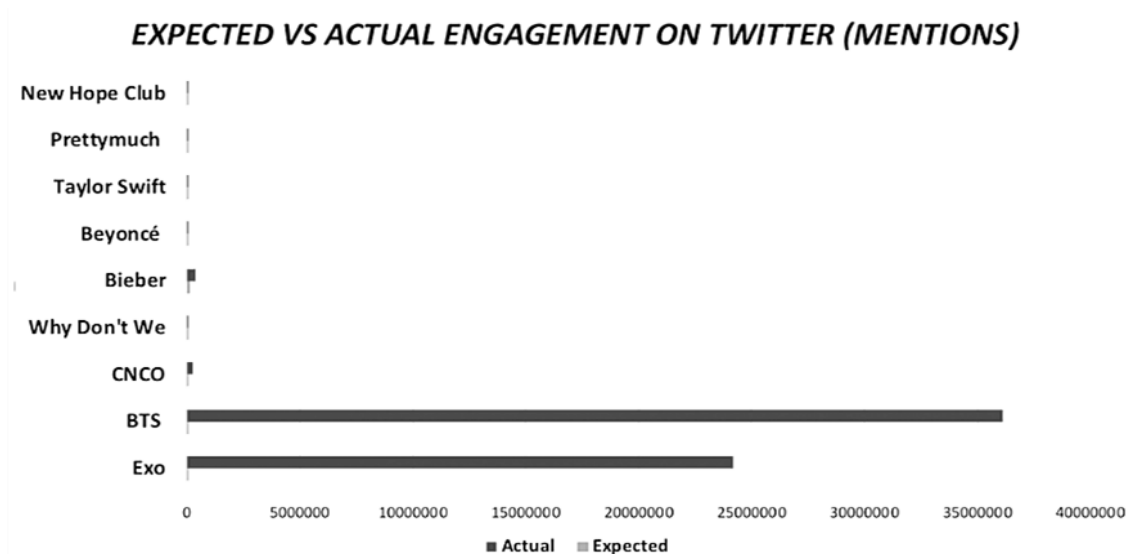


Figure 6 - Expected vs actual engagement on twitter (mentions)

Conclusion

The results of the objectives set in the article led to the following results. The result of the first objective provided the conclusion that J. Nye's concept of soft power is still relevant for states, which largely continue to rely on it in determining their foreign policy course. The concept focuses on the nature of the power used and the resources of power as an attractive culture.

The result to the second objective was to identify the stages of development and evolution of the Korean wave, how this instrument changed over time, and what features each stage had in itself.

The result of the third objective indicated that the Korean wave in the digital environment is effective instrument of soft power. It was vividly demonstrated by provided statistical data. In such way Korea proves that culture can significantly attract wide audience and achieve global influence and recognition through social media and digital platforms. Referring to the reports of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism on the Korean wave, we can observe that international image was boosted due to the Korean music as it has strong effect on foreign countries. Such reports also provide fundamental proofs that expansion into markets aside from East Asia is made due to various digital platforms and continues build up power.

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«Корейская волна» как инструмент мягкой силы Южной Кореи в 1990-2020 гг.

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена мягкой силе Республики Корея с 1990-х гг. по настоящее время. Цель работы – выявить этапы трансформации и показатели эффективности культурной деятельности как императива национального брендинга Южной Кореи. Акцент сделан на изучении «Корейской волны» как основного направления государственной мягкой силы. В статье представлены результаты анализа мягкой силы Южной Кореи, инструмента «Корейская волна», впервые введенной правительством в начале 1990-х гг. Отмечаются основные показатели измерения «мягкого» влияния, авторами самостоятельно визуализированы собранные статистические данные для демонстрации результатов правительства Южной Кореи в достижении культурных целей и их эффективной политики реализации мягкой силы. Научная новизна исследования заключается в том, что впервые представлен комплексный анализ корейского внешнеполитического влияния при помощи анализа социальных сетей и цифровых платформ. В результате выявляются исторические аспекты формирования мягкой силы Южной Кореи, определяются основные показатели измерения ее влияния, визуализируются собранные статистические данные для демонстрации эффективности реализации «Корейской волны». Полученные теоретико-методологические и практические результаты могут быть использованы в дальнейших исследованиях мягкой силы Республики Корея.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

Гнедаш И.А., Иванов Н.С., Хаймина А.Д. The Korean wave as a tool of South Korea's soft power in 1990-2020 // Теории и проблемы политических исследований. 2021. Том 10. № 2А. С. 44-55. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2021.60.99.005

Ключевые слова

Южная Корея, мягкая сила, корейская волна, имидж, культура, статистические данные.

Библиография

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