

A bibliometric review of Korean pop culture tourism

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Abstract: The inbound tourism market in South Korea has experienced a notable expansion over the past few decades, attributed to the pervasive influence of the Korean popular culture (pop culture), also referred to as Korean Wave. In light of the increasing body of literature on Korean pop culture tourism, this study aims to conduct a systematic review of the literature on Korean pop culture tourism to provide a comprehensive view of emerging themes and to construct a knowledge map. A bibliometric approach was employed to review and analyze 137 articles published in Korea Citation Indexed (KCI) journals through May 2023. Network analysis illustrated the dynamic evolution of the number of publications, exhibiting significant growth, decline, and rebound. This study revealed that the majority of articles were empirical research papers using a quantitative methodology. Keyword network analysis identified five clusters: K-tourist behaviors, K-content, K-fan behavior, K-impact in China, and K-medical. These clusters describe connections between keywords and emerging trends in Korean pop culture tourism over time. The findings provide a contemporary understanding of the current status and evolution of the Korean pop culture tourism and suggest potential avenues for future research.

Keywords: Korean pop culture tourism, Korean Wave, bibliometric analysis, co-occurrence analysis, VoS viewer, Korea Citation Index

1. Introduction

The Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu, refers to the popularity of South Korea's popular culture (pop culture) products, including dramas, films, and songs (Choi & Hyun, 2017). Initially, the Korean Wave was considered a short-lived trend that could easily fade away or be replaced by another trend (Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, 2012; Yoon, 2022). Despite initial concerns, the Korean Wave has become a significant cultural force and grown into a global phenomenon over the last two decades, with its influence spreading worldwide. In 2018, the Korean Wave contributed \$9.5 billion to the Korean economy, rising to \$12.3 billion by 2021 (MartinRoll, 2021). By 2030, spending on K-culture is projected to reach \$143 billion (Korea.net, 2024). With the continued growth and popularity of the Korean Wave, people have now become active consumers who desire to experience the Korean Wave phenomenon such as passive audiences watching dramas and listening to Korean pop music (K-pop) (Choi & Hyun, 2017; Kim & Nam, 2016). Moreover, the Korean Wave has motivated people to visit Korea (Jang & Shin, 2018; Lee & Lim, 2022; Sang & Choi, 2010; Qu & Chang, 2016), creating Korean Wave tourists (Korea Tourism Organizations, 2019).

With the significant growth of the inbound tourists, tourism scholars have paid attention to Korean pop culture tourism and tourist behaviors (Lee & Kim, 2012; Rho & Kwon, 2016), which suggests a need to gather relevant documents and to capture trends of Korean pop culture tourism (Kim & Kim, 2014; Yoo et al., 2022). Few studies have reviewed research articles focused on Korean pop culture tourism. For example, Kim and Kim (2014) used content analysis to review Korean pop culture tourism while Yoo et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis on the impact of the Korean Wave on travel intention. However, traditional research approaches have encountered limitations in keeping up with the rapidly expanding body of literature, leading to constrained insights (Donthu et al., 2021). In response, bibliometric analysis has emerged as a vital method that allows researchers to uncover conceptual developments and significant themes by leveraging advancements in databases and analytical tools. This growing need to capture these developments and themes has further driven the adoption of bibliometric analysis (Merigó & Yang, 2017).

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This study aims to analyze Korean pop culture tourism research using bibliometric analysis to unveil the evolution of specific research and shed light on developing research areas. Specific research objectives include: (1) exploring the publication trend and performance; (2) identifying research methods that have been used; and (3) discovering themes and trend topics. The outcomes of this study will provide an all-inclusive understanding of the current status and evolution of Korean pop culture tourism as well as suggesting potential research areas for future research.

Korean Wave

The Korean Wave or Hallyu refers to the popularity of pop culture products in South Korea (hereafter Korea), including Korean popular music (henceforth K-pop), film, drama, online games, fashion, beauty, food, and lifestyle (Han & Lee, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2014; Song, 2020). Scholars have divided the Korean Wave into several eras based on media, content, and diffusion area (Hwang & Park, 2020; Jun, 2017; Sun & Liew, 2019). The global popularity of the Korean Wave has led to a significant increase in the number of tourists visiting Korea. Korean Wave tourists are defined as tourists who prefer Korean culture and whose preference for Korean culture influenced their decision to visit Korea (Korea Tourism Organization, 2019).

Table 1 illustrates the evolution of the Korean Wave. Sun and Liu (2019) noted that the definition of ‘Korean Wave’ can vary depending on the perspective of the recipient and producer. While there is no clear consensus on the evolution of the Korean Wave, some scholars define the period from the 2010s to the present as Korean Wave 3.0, while others divide it into two eras: Korean Wave 3.0 and Korean Wave 4.0. However, since the early 2010s, the Korean Wave has encompassed various forms of Korean culture beyond K-drama or K-pop (Kim & Nam, 2016).

Table 1. Evolution of Korean Wave

	Korean Wave 1.0	Korean Wave 2.0	Korean Wave 3.0 - 4.0
Stage	The emergence of Korean Wave	The growth of Korean Wave	The expansion-golden age of Korean Wave
Period	1997-2005	2006-2013	2014-2023
Media	Analog media	Online	Social Network Services, OTT platform
Content	K-drama, K-pop	K-drama, K-pop, K-film	K-drama, K-pop, K-film, K-beauty, K-food etc.
Regions	Asia	Asia, North America and Europe	Global

Note: This table is reconstructed based on data retrieved from Jun (2017), Hwang & Park (2020), Sun & Liew (2019), Song (2020)

The expansion of Korean pop-culture products overseas began in the 1980s. The Korean Wave gained popularity when the Chinese Central Television (CCTV) broadcast the TV drama, ‘What is Love?’. The Korean boy band, H.O.T. concert further elevated the popularity of K-pop in China along with other K-pop musicians such as Baby VOX, S.E.S., NRG, and An Jae Wook (Sun & Liew, 2019). This period is defined as Korean Wave 1.0 (Sun & Liew, 2019). However, Korean Wave 1.0 appeared to decline as several K-pop bands disbanded between 2001 and 2005.

The advent of new K-pop bands and musicians, in conjunction with the utilization of online platforms, marked the beginning of Korean Wave 2.0 (Sun & Liew, 2019). Notably, the primary demographic of fans shifted from women in their 40s-50s to fans in their 10s-20s (Hu, 2012). As

the driving force behind the Korean Wave transitioned from dramas to K-pop, the age demographics of Korean Wave consumers also shifted. The influence of Korean Wave 2.0 expanded geographically, while the impact of Korean Wave 1.0 was limited to Asia. Consequently, the dissemination of the Korean Wave was perceived to be contingent upon cultural affinity or cultural proximity, and researchers attempted to comprehend the phenomenon through this lens (Lee & Park, 2014; Yohan & Somsamone, 2011; Yoo et al., 2022). Additionally, the number of international visitors has continued to grow since 2006, a trend that can be attributed to the Korean Wave phenomenon (Figure 1).

Korean Wave 3.0-4.0 was led by BTS, a popular K-pop band, meokbang, and over-the-top (OTT) platforms (Song, 2020; Yoon, 2022). BTS's music conveys a message to young people worldwide, and Korean meokbang shows have become a new form of entertainment, garnering millions of viewers globally (Song, 2020). In 2019, the number of inbound tourists who visited Korea reached an all-time high of 17.5 million, representing the highest number of tourists to visit the country (Figure 1). Additionally, Korean movies and dramas have also made their way to Western small screen and film industries (Song, 2020) suggesting that the Korean Wave has become part of a global cultural phenomenon.

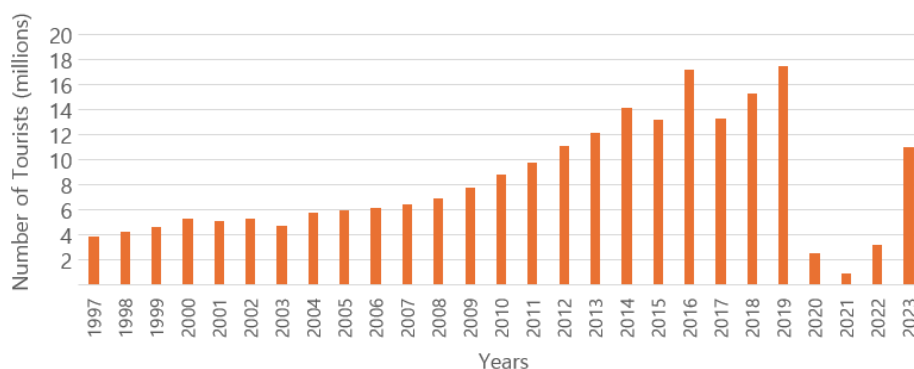


Figure 1. The Number of Inbound Tourists to South Korea

As the impact of Korean pop culture tourism has been recognized, numerous scholars have conducted studies on its effect on tourists' decision-making processes and destinations. As the number of publications increased, efforts were made to provide an understanding of this phenomenon by conducting review papers. For example, Kim and Kim (2014) employed content analysis to review Korean pop culture tourism, highlighting that most Korean Wave research focused predominantly on China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. They recommended expanding studies to include countries outside of Asia and a broader range of subjects. However, their research relied on a limited sample size and only included studies published before the emergence of Korean Wave 3.0. Similarly, Yoo et al. (2022) investigated the impact of the Korean Wave on travel intention using meta-regression analysis, a method effective for analyzing relationships between variables and providing empirical evidence (Carney et al., 2011). However, this approach is less suited for managing large volumes of research data (Donthu et al., 2021).

2. Methodology

2.1 Research approach

Bibliometric analysis incorporated mathematical and statistical methods to analyze literature, helping researchers identify trends, evaluate the impact of authors, journals, and articles, and understand the structure and evolution of knowledge in specific fields (Donthu et al., 2021). It is especially effective for processing large volumes of scientific data and providing insights into intellectual structures and research trends. The increasing adoption of bibliometric analysis

highlights its role in managing extensive data and driving advances in research (Donthu et al., 2021). Tools like Bibliometrix (R package), Gephi, and VOS Viewer have further established bibliometric analysis as a valuable methodology across disciplines (Agbo et al., 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021).

The application of bibliometric analysis spans diverse fields, including business (Albort-Morant, 2016; Castillo-Vergara, 2018; Donthu et al., 2020; Forliano et al., 2021), psychology (Krampen et al., 2011; Milfont & Page, 2013; Tur-Porcar et al., 2018), and social sciences (Nederhof, 2006; Zhang et al., 2021), illustrating how it facilitates the exploration of vast scientific data and tracks the development of specific research areas. In tourism, for instance, Agapito (2020) reviewed sensory-related articles using bibliometric analysis, while Fauzi (2023) examined knowledge management research. Palmer et al. (2005) explored statistical methods in tourism research, however, Koseoglu et al. (2016) noted a lack of bibliometric studies in this field.

Compared to systematic reviews and meta-analyses, bibliometric analysis is particularly suited for examining large volumes of academic literature, identifying trends, and mapping the intellectual structure of a research field. While systematic reviews focus on nuanced, topic-specific syntheses (Scheerder et al., 2017) and meta-analyses are limited to studies with comparable quantitative data (Gurevitch et al., 2018), bibliometric analysis provides a broader perspective. It captures the evolution of a research domain and identifies overarching themes and emerging trends, making it especially valuable for dynamic or interdisciplinary fields.

2.2 Research procedure

The search strategy utilized broad and commonly associated terms with senior tourism, such as 'senior,' 'silver,' 'elderly,' 'aging,' 'tourism,' and 'travel' (Otoo & Kim, 2020; Pestana et al., 2020). We used Boolean operators (e.g., AND, OR) to combine related terms rather than relying on exact phrase searches to ensure inclusivity and comprehensiveness. For example, instead of searching for the exact phrase "baby boomer travel trends," we used combinations such as "baby boomers" AND "travel" AND "trends." This approach minimized the risk of missing relevant studies due to variations in phrasing while capturing a diverse array of literature on the topic.

Figure 2 illustrates the bibliometric analysis procedure employed in this study (Donthu et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019). The aims of this study were to: (1) examine publication trend and performance; (2) identify the research methodologies that had been used; and (3) discover themes and trend topics.

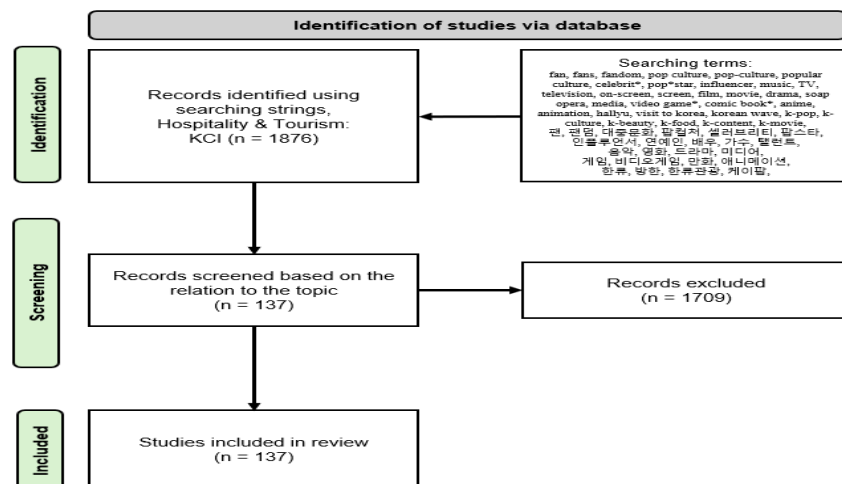


Figure 2. Roadmap of the bibliometric analysis

It is crucial to carefully consider the bibliometric indicators utilized in evaluation procedures within the social sciences. Unlike in scientific disciplines, social science research frequently

prioritizes topics that are specifically relevant to their own nation, region, or local community (Nederhof, 2006). As a result, social scientists often publish their work in their native languages instead of English (Chi, 2012). For instance, in Korea, the birthplace of the Korean Wave, researchers were likely focused on Korean pop culture tourism and conducted extensive research on the topic. To better examine the status of Korean pop culture tourism, this study utilized the Korea Citation Index (KCI), a literature citation database that promotes Korean domestic academic journals managed by the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) (Ko & Park, 2013). The NRF evaluates journals based on specific standards, including various factors such as regularity and punctuality of publication, number of reviewers, establishment and publication of research ethics regulations, and diversity of publication. Even if journals have already been approved, they must be reevaluated by the NRF every three years to maintain their qualifications (Shin, 2012).

2.3 Data collection

For data collection, keywords related to ‘Korean pop culture tourism’ were identified through an extensive literature review, as careful extraction of appropriate keywords is fundamental to conducting an effective search. Based on existing research, the Korean pop culture encompasses fan behavior toward various forms of Korean cultural expression, including K-pop music, audiovisual works (e.g., K-drama, K-movie), and K-food (Kang & Lee, 2014; Kim et al., 2008; Lee & How, 2023; Shon, 2018). In addition, Korean pop culture encompasses various types of products, such as K-beauty which have been featured in Korean media (Hur & Kim, 2020; Kim & Nam, 2016). Based on these keywords, data were acquired by using KCI search engines (<https://www.kci.go.kr/>) in May 2023. A total of 861 documents published before May 2023 were identified. To identify relevant articles for this study, two researchers conducted a thorough literature review and excluded papers that did not focus on the Korean Wave. Finally, 137 papers were selected and analyzed using VOS Viewer software. The thesaurus file was utilized to merge synonyms such as ‘한류’, ‘Korean Wave’, and ‘Hallyu’ and correct spelling differences such as ‘tourists’ and ‘tourist.’ Additionally, general terms such as ‘Korean Wave’, ‘tourists’ and ‘tourism’ were ignored (Van Eck, 2023).

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive analysis

3.1.1 Number of Publications

Figure 3 illustrates the annual number of papers published on Korean pop culture tourism. The results indicate that research on Korean pop culture tourism is still in its early stages, with a limited number of annual publications each year (at most 20). The study of the Korean Wave began in 2004, with a modest volume of research produced up until 2013. However, there was a notable increase in 2014, with the number of papers reaching a peak in 2017. Although the number of papers published decreased between 2018 and 2019, there was a noticeable increase in 2020. Research output appears to have declined in recent years, likely due to the impact of the global pandemic.

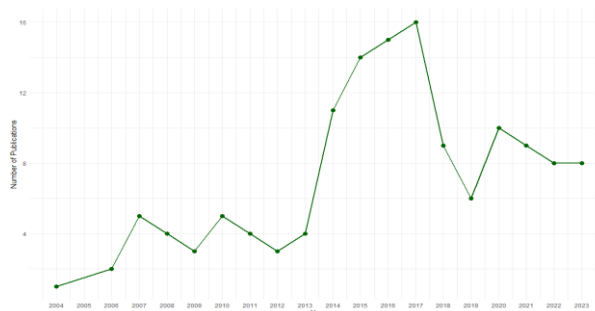


Figure 3. Evolution of the number of papers collected on Korean pop culture tourism

3.1.2 Journals

A total of 137 papers were published in 16 journals. Table 2 presents the list of the journals used in the analysis including each journal's number of papers, percentage of the total, and accredited year. The Journal of Tourism Sciences published the largest number of papers on Korean pop culture tourism (n=29, 21.18%), followed by the International Journal of Tourism Management and Sciences, International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research, Journal of Tourism and Leisure Research, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, and Korean Journal of Hospitality and Tourism. Other journals published fewer than 10 papers.

Table 1. List of Journals

No	Journals (Korean)	Journals (English)	Number of papers	(%)	AY
1	관광학연구	Journal of Tourism Sciences	29	21.18	2001
2	관광연구	International Journal of Tourism Management and Sciences	20	14.6	2006
3	관광연구저널	International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research	20	14.6	2010
4	관광레저연구	Journal of Tourism and Leisure Research	18	13.14	2005
5	호텔관광연구	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Studies	13	9.49	2012
6	호텔경영학연구	Korean Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	12	8.76	2006
7	관광경영연구	Journal of Tourism Management Research	6	4.38	2012
8	MICE 관광연구	JOURNAL OF MICE & TOURISM RESEARCH	3	2.19	2018
9	동북아관광연구	Northeast Asia Tourism Research	3	2.19	2016
10	호텔리조트연구	Journal of Hotel & Resort	3	2.19	2019
11	관광연구논총	Journal of Tourism Studies	2	1.46	2014
12	관광진흥연구	Journal of Tourism Enhancement	2	1.46	2019
13	외식경영연구	Journal of Foodservice Management	2	1.46	2005
14	한국외식산업학회지	Food Service Industry Journal	2	1.46	2016
15	융합관광콘텐츠연구	Journal of Convergence Tourism Contents	1	.73	2022
16	이벤트컨벤션연구	Event & Convention Research	1	.73	2018

Note: AY = Year of Accredited in the KCI

3.2 Research methods

3.2.1 Research approach and design

Table 4 presents the methodologies employed in research on Korean pop culture tourism. The results indicate that 94.16% of papers (n=129) adopted empirical methodologies, while only 5.84% of papers (n=8) employed conceptual methodologies. Among the empirical studies, quantitative methodologies were the most frequently applied (n=113, 82.48%), followed by qualitative approaches (5.11%) and mixed methods (6.57%). Within the quantitative approach, surveys (n=103) were the primary research design, followed by secondary data (n=9). Qualitative research consisted of interviews (n=4), secondary data (n=2), and a literature review (n=1) for the research design. In terms of mixed methods, the main data sources were surveys and interviews (n=6).

Table 2. Research Methodology

<i>Research Approach</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Data Analysis</i>
Conceptual (8)	NA	NA
Empirical (129)		
Quantitative (113)	Survey (103)	Descriptive analysis (2)
	Secondary data (9)	T-test (9)
	Survey & Secondary data (1)	ANOVA (10)
		ANCOVA (2)
		Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (65)
		Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (44)
		Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (44)
		Partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) (2)
		Correlation analysis (5)
		Path analysis (2)
		Regression analysis (43)
		Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) (2)
		Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) (3)
		Correspondence analysis (1)
		Cluster analysis (7)
		Input-Output analysis (2)
		Movement pattern analysis (1)
Qualitative (7)	Interviews (4)	Content analysis (2)
	Secondary data (2)	Semantic analysis (1)
	Literature Review (1)	Grounded theory (1)
		Transcript analysis (1)
		NA (2)
Mixed (9)	Survey & interviews (6)	Descriptive analysis (2)
	Survey & open-ended questions (2)	Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (1)
	Secondary data (1)	Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (1)
		Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (1)
		Content analysis (2)
		Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDS) (2)
		Q methodology (4)

Note: The number in parentheses are the number of articles

3.2.2 Sample and data collection

Figure 4 presents the nationality of the samples. The results indicate that the majority of research on Korean pop culture tourism was concentrated in Asia ($n=99$, 72.26%). The number of papers on Korean pop culture tourism targeting Asia increased significantly in 2014 ($n=7$), which coincides with the overall increase in the total number of papers. The number of papers targeting Chinese tourists decreased in 2018 and 2019, but this trend reversed in 2020.

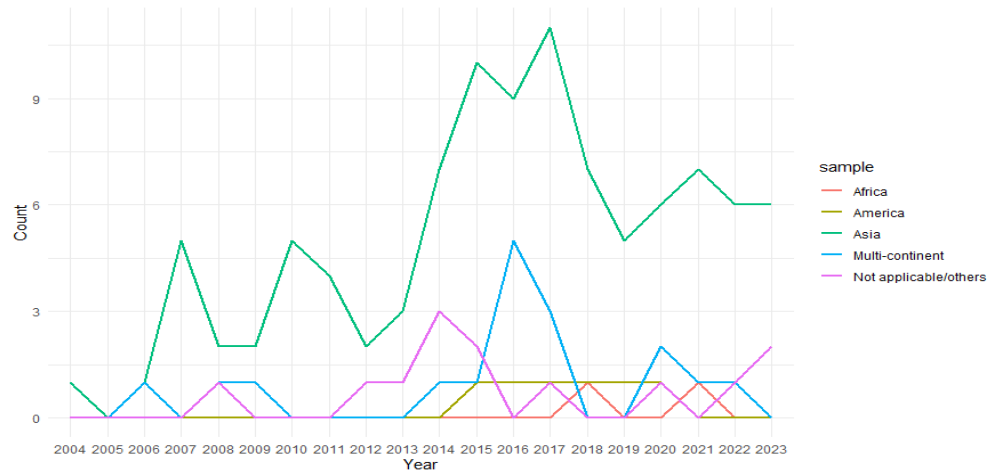


Figure 4. The nationality of studies' sample

3.2.3 Data analysis

The research which employed quantitative approach, utilized a range of various data analysis techniques, including exploratory factor analysis (EFA) ($n=65$), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) ($n=44$), structural equation modeling (SEM) ($n=44$), and regression analysis ($n=43$). Qualitative research employed data analysis techniques such as content analysis ($n=2$), semantic analysis ($n=1$), grounded theory ($n=1$), and transcript analysis ($n=1$). The mixed-methods approach involved the application of data analysis techniques, including Q methodology ($n=4$), descriptive analysis ($n=2$), and content analysis ($n=2$).

3.3 Keyword network analysis

3.3.1 Co-occurrence network

Figure 5 depicts the keyword co-occurrence network, which illustrates the relationship between keywords based on their frequency of use and co-occurrence. The size of each keyword represents its frequency of use, while the lines connecting the nodes represent frequent co-occurrences of keywords in papers. The closer the nodes, the stronger the relationship between the keywords in terms of co-occurrence compared to other keywords and the colors of the nodes indicate different clusters. The results illustrate the connection between 28 keywords, which have been organized into five clusters using the VOS viewer.

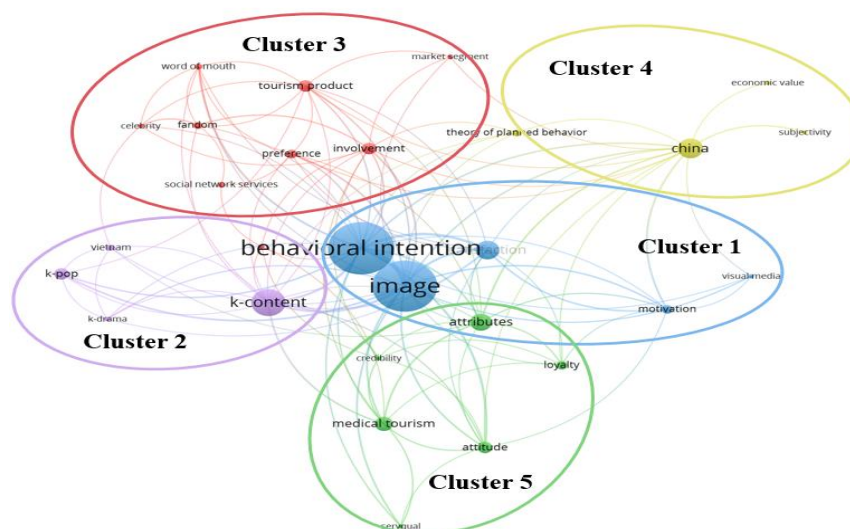


Figure 5. Co-occurrence of keywords of publications

Cluster 1 was led by the keyword behavioral intention and includes terms such as image, satisfaction, motivation, and visual media. These keywords align with research examining tourists' decision-making processes, including motivation, behavioral intention, and satisfaction, particularly within the context of visual media (Im et al., 2010; Yoon et al., 2017). Additionally, studies in this cluster focus on the influence of the Korean Wave on national image (An et al., 2018; Chang & Park, 2017; Oh & Oh, 2015) and destination image (Choi & Kim, 2012; Yoon et al., 2017; Yoo & Lee, 2021). Based on these themes, this cluster was labeled 'K-Tourist Behavior.'

Cluster 2 centers on Korean pop culture, with keywords related to K-pop (Kim et al., 2016; Lee & Kim, 2012; Park & Kwak, 2016; Shon, 2020), K-drama (Kim & Lee, 2020; Wang et al., 2015), and Vietnam's interest in these phenomena (Kim & Shin, 2022; Shon, 2019). Given its strong focus on Korean cultural content, this cluster was labeled 'K-Content.'

Cluster 3 features keywords such as celebrity, fandom, involvement, market segment, preference, social network services, tourism product, value, and word of mouth. It includes research on the influence of celebrities on tourism products and word-of-mouth intentions (Kim & Kim, 2008) and international K-pop fans' involvement in fandom (Min, 2017). As the studies revolve around fandom and the behavior of K-pop fans, the cluster was labeled 'K-Fan Behavior.'

Cluster 4 focuses on the economic impact of Chinese tourists, with keywords related to the theory of planned behavior and economic contributions. Research in this cluster examined the significant value of Chinese tourism to Korea (Chen & Jong, 2014; Kim et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2017; Lee & Chung, 2020). Reflecting its focus on the economic and behavioral impacts of Chinese tourists, this cluster was labeled 'K-Impact in China.'

Cluster 5 included keywords such as medical tourism, SERVQUAL, attitude, credibility, and loyalty. Research in this group investigated the role of service quality, credibility, and attitude in medical tourism influenced by Korean pop culture (Chang & Park, 2017; Oh et al., 2011). Reflecting its focus on medical tourism and related service dimensions, the cluster was labeled 'K-Medical.'

3.3.2 Keyword trend

Figure 6 displays the distribution of keywords based on the average publication year of the papers. The color bar located in the bottom right corner of Figure 5 represents the average publication years (Van Eck, 2023). Blue-colored keywords indicate earlier appearances, while yellow- and red-colored keywords illustrate later appearances. This analysis enables us to identify dominant keywords at the beginning of the study and hot topics that hold high potential.

Before 2014, commonly used keywords included tourism product, theory of planned behavior, attributes, credibility, market segment, and word of mouth. By 2016, the focus had shifted to behavioral intention and image. In more recent studies, there is a growing interest in social network services, SERVQUAL, subjectivity, Vietnam, and fandom. Notably, the findings underscore that K-drama, a key driver of the Korean Wave, remains a popular research topic.

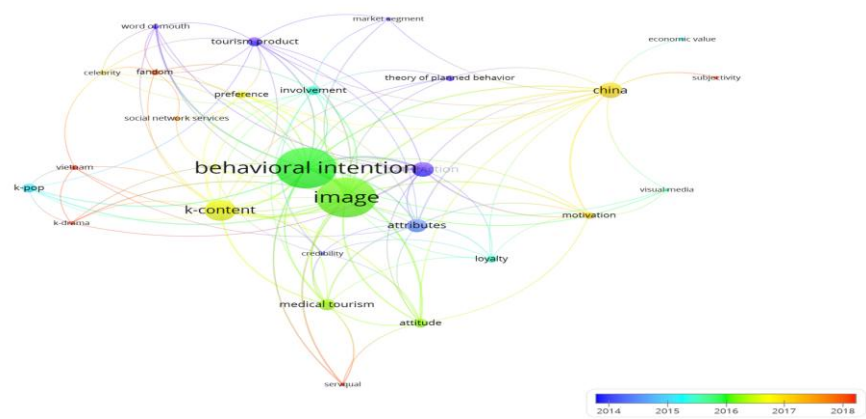


Figure 6. The distribution of keywords over time

4. Conclusion

4.1 Discussion

This study provided an overview of the evolution of research on Korean pop culture tourism from 2004 to 2023, as published in KCI journals. The findings indicate that research on the Korean Wave remains in its early stages, with relatively few publications annually. Significant growth was observed in 2014, peaking in 2017, followed by a decline between 2018 and 2019. However, a rebound in 2020 suggests an upward trend in Korean pop culture tourism research. The most productive journal was the *Journal of Tourism Sciences*, followed closely by the *International Journal of Tourism Management and Sciences* and the *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*.

The study revealed a significant imbalance in research methodologies, with most studies being empirical and fewer than 6% categorized as conceptual. Quantitative methods dominated empirical research ($n=113$, 82.48%), utilizing techniques such as EFA, CFA, SEM, and regression analysis to examine tourist behavior and trends. While empirical research holds a strong position in tourism studies and the social sciences (Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018; Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015), qualitative approaches offer critical value by serving as a decolonizing force, amplifying alternative perspectives, and challenging positivist tendencies in social science inquiry (Flick, 2013; Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2018). Consequently, qualitative research may be essential for identifying and understanding emerging phenomena such as Korean pop culture tourism.

The study also revealed differences in research samples, with the majority focusing on Asia. Research targeting Asian populations, especially Chinese tourists, has increased alongside the overall growth in publications. China, as an early adopter of the Korean Wave (Han & Lee, 2008), contributed significantly to the surge in Chinese tourists visiting Korea—over eight million in 2015. This led to numerous studies focusing on Chinese tourists' experiences. However, this trend reversed in 2020 as the Korean government diversified its tourism market, resulting in more varied sample populations. The global rise in K-content popularity, driven by the proliferation of OTT services during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jang, 2022; Kang, 2020), created new opportunities for Korean Wave tourism. Consequently, research on this topic has expanded, reflecting its growing global appeal.

Keyword network analysis identified five clusters and trend topics related to Korean pop culture tourism. The first cluster, 'K-Tourist Behaviors,' focused on tourists' motivations, with most keywords explored before 2016. For example, Jang and Shin (2018) used the motivation keyword to study tourists' behaviors in various contexts (Lee & Lim, 2022; Sang & Choi, 2010; Qu & Chang, 2016; Zhou et al., 2021). Given the growing influence of pop culture domains such as influencers, social media, and OTT platforms, further research is needed to understand tourists' decision-making processes. The 'K-Content' cluster examined Korean content such as K-dramas and K-pop. The rise of OTT platforms has amplified the global popularity of K-dramas, making them a relevant focus in tourism research (Dutta, 2021; Jang et al., 2022). In contrast, research on K-pop has stagnated since 2015, despite its significant global fandom (Han, 2017; Yoon, 2017). Renewed exploration of K-pop's influence on tourism is warranted.

In addition, the 'K-Fan Behavior' cluster highlighted fan identity (Sohn, 2020) and fandom types, including music festivals (Kinnunen et al., 2021), sports (Cho et al., 2019; Smith & Stewart, 2007; Walters et al., 2017), and pop culture (Hur & Kim, 2020; Reichenberger & Smith, 2020). While existing studies focused on Korean celebrities (Ding & Nam, 2020; Oplustilova, 2022; Yang & Jang, 2009), fandom as a broader concept is emerging as a key research area, offering opportunities to explore diverse pop culture contexts. The 'K-Impact in China' cluster addressed the demand for Korean pop culture tourism among Chinese tourists until 2018. China's early embrace of the Korean Wave (Han & Lee, 2008) significantly boosted Chinese tourism to Korea. However, research in this area declined after the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in Korea (Lee, 2017) and the exclusion of Korean tourism products from Chinese OTAs (Jin et al., 2019). The final cluster, 'K-Medical,' examines the impact of the Korean Wave on medical tourism, particularly from 2016 to 2017 (Chen et al., 2018; Kim, 2017; Lee & Jung, 2017). While studies highlighted the credibility and influence of the Korean Wave in promoting medical tourism, findings revealed mixed effects (Chen et al., 2018; Kim, 2007; Lee & Jung, 2016, 2017). Further research is needed to identify key decision-making factors driving medical tourism, as this area remains underexplored.

4.2 Implications

This study made several important contributions to the Korean pop culture tourism context. First, this study revealed the intellectual structure of Korean pop culture tourism literature. Despite the importance of accumulating knowledge and gathering evidence from previous research, there have been few attempts to conduct review studies in this context. By addressing this gap, this study sheds light on the review research ignored in prior tourism studies and provides an overview of specific research fields.

Second, this study discovered research clusters and trend topics in Korean pop culture tourism research. Using network analysis, this study identified research topics that requires further development and investigation. These findings offer valuable insights for future researchers. According to the findings, research needs to focus on topics such as fandom, celebrity, and K-drama to make a breakthrough in stagnant research subjects such as K-pop and medical tourism.

Lastly, this study highlights the potential of KCI as a bibliometric database while previous studies have primarily used WoS and Scopus as databases. Considering the fact that social science researchers often prioritize locally-based topics and publish their research in local journals (Chi, 2012; Nederhof, 2006), KCI is a valuable resource for concepts originating in Korea such as the Korean pop culture and Korean Wave. Therefore, this study contributes to the development of domestic research by demonstrating the potential of KCI as a valuable bibliometric database.

4.3 Limitations and future research

This study provides valuable insights into Korean pop culture tourism through bibliometric analysis and suggests directions for future research. Since this research focused on KCI-indexed

papers, which primarily examine Asia—particularly China—its scope is somewhat limited. While this focus reflects the significant influence of Korean pop culture in East Asia, the global reach of Korean Wave 4.0 calls for a broader perspective. Future studies should incorporate research from non-Asian regions, such as North America, Europe, and Latin America, to offer a more comprehensive understanding of Korean pop culture tourism.

The findings highlight the dominance of empirical studies in Korean pop culture tourism research, underscoring a significant gap in conceptual work. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing the theoretical foundations of the field. Future research should prioritize the development of robust conceptual frameworks to provide deeper insights into the dynamics of Korean pop culture tourism. For instance, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate perspectives from cultural studies, sociology, media studies, and tourism management could offer innovative pathways for theoretical exploration. Such frameworks could examine the interplay between cultural identity, globalization, and consumer behavior in the context of the Korean Wave.

Additionally, specific conceptual frameworks, such as those related to cultural hybridity, fandom dynamics, or the influence of celebrity culture on destination image could be adapted or developed to address emerging research topics. Researchers could also consider applying theories like social identity theory, media dependency theory, or the experience economy framework to better understand the mechanisms driving engagement with Korean pop culture tourism. By addressing these conceptual gaps and incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives, future studies can enrich the field with more comprehensive theoretical contributions. This will not only deepen our understanding of the global impact of the Korean Wave but also provide valuable tools for researchers and practitioners exploring its implications in diverse cultural and regional contexts.

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