

Effect of Gender on Character Evaluation: Factors Affecting Enjoyment

Ezgi Ulusoy, Hye Eun Lee

¹*Department of Communication, Michigan State University, USA*

²*School of Communication and Media, Ewha Womans University, Korea*

¹*ulusoyez@msu.edu, ²hyeeunlee77@ewha.ac.kr*

Abstract

This study attempted to extend Korean Wave literature by investigating (a) the influence of protagonists' personality characteristics and the role of empathy under the affective disposition theory, and (b) the power of some external factors in the entertainment media selection. After watching an episode of the popular Korean drama, Secret Garden, participants completed a survey in the United States. Results demonstrated that (a) the effect of personality characteristics varied across gender and (b) external factors affects the entertainment media selection positively. Findings indicate that media enjoyment is dependent on the audience's external factors.

Keywords: *Korean Wave, Affective Disposition Theory, Enjoyment of Dramas, Korea-related Network, Empathy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The surge of Korean culture throughout other countries is referred as the Korean Wave [1]. While cultural products include entertainment media, technological advancements and fashion, entertainment media, specifically television programs, has been the most noteworthy part of the Wave [2]. Research on Korean shows has focused on the content, format, effects on culture, and enjoyment [1-4]. The current study inquiries from an entertainment perspective. Using affective disposition theory, we ask how both the protagonists' characteristics, whether positive or negative, and the viewers' external factors affect the overall enjoyment of the foreign audience.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Korean Wave

Korean Wave describes "the rapid growth of Korea's cultural industries and their exports of cultural products" [2]. There are numerous 'waves' focusing on different types of cultural products. The first Wave

has consisted primarily of Korean dramas and movies, followed by the second Wave consisting of Kpop in the early 2000s [5]. However, it was not until the 2010s, thanks to the increased use of social media, that previous and current Korean popular culture has become notably popular and easy to access across the globe [6]. Netflix first bought the international license of the Korean movie *Pandora* in 2016 [7] and announced its plan for the first Korean original series for their viewers in over 190 countries in 2017 [8]. As a result, Korean dramas have reached to a newer, broader population that is not necessarily interested in Korean culture. Since then, Netflix has broadcasted several globally and locally popular dramas, such as *Kingdom*, *Memories of Alhambra*, and *Mr. Sunshine*.

2.2 Affective Disposition Theory

Affective disposition theory (ADT) has been widely used in understanding entertainment media, specifically media enjoyment [9, 10-12]. According to ADT, media enjoyment can be explained by two main factors: emotional responses to and empathy with the media characters [13]. The morality of the media characters plays an important role in enjoyment and other emotional responses toward the content [14]. ADT posits that morality of characters enhances character liking. When the liked characters get the positive outcome – which is the deserved outcome – viewers experience a higher level of enjoyment [15]. However, moral judgments do not always predict enjoyment as was originally proposed. Research on the enjoyment illustrates that negative characters, even when they do not lead to affective disposition, can still lead to enjoyment [16-18]. Empathy is “a response...to another individual’s behaviors presumed to be precipitated by acute emotional experiences, that (d) is associated with an appreciable increase in excitation, and that (e) respondents construe as feeling with or feeling for another individual” [19]. It is reinforced by affective dispositions [19, 20]. Based on the proposed model of the effect of empathy and counter-empathy [19], empathy is felt only when the disposition has already been formed. Nevertheless, once created, empathy can then alter affective dispositions since it can affect moral judgment about the character, eventually affecting dispositions [19]. Consequently, in order to achieve enjoyment, both empathy and affective disposition should co-exist. This is supported by previous research on Korean entertainment media, which depicts that a higher level of empathy and positive feelings toward the character lead to a higher level of enjoyment of the content [21]. However, their study did not look at the negative feelings toward the character. Based on the recent representation of antihero narrative enjoyment, we propose the following hypotheses.

H1: The development of affective dispositions towards characters by positive personality traits (H1a) and negative personality traits (H1b) in Korean dramas is a positive predictor of enjoyment of Korean dramas.

H2: Viewer’s empathy is a positive predictor of enjoyment of Korean dramas.

2.3 Korea-related Network and Enjoyment of Dramas

Previous literature in music consumption explains that familiarity is a vital predictor of enjoyment [22]. In terms of movie and TV series, the effect of familiarity is more complex [23]. Elasmr explains that watching a foreign TV program is predicted by the attitude toward the country of origin and the content, and that these are envisaged by beliefs and knowledge about the foreign country [24]. Similarly, recent research suggests that Korea-related network of people is related to Korean media consumption [25]. Straubhaar further posits that enjoying a foreign TV series requires cultural capital like knowing the foreign language, traveling abroad, or familiarity with the culture [26]. We suggest that having a social environment that is knowledgeable about the foreign culture might further increase cultural capital and thus the enjoyment of the content.

H3: Korea-related network of people is a positive predictor of enjoyment of Korean dramas.

3. METHOD

3.1 Participants

Participants were 114 undergraduate students (age $M = 21$ years, $SD = 2.84$, age 57.3% females) from a major state university in Hawai'i. All participants were U.S. citizens including Asian American (50.9%), Caucasian (16.7%), and Pacific Islander (4.4%). 78.9% of the participants reported that they never/almost never watched any Korean TV dramas/shows before, and 93.3% said that they did not know any Korean actors/actress well.

3.2 Stimulus and Procedure

One of the most popular Korean dramas, *Secret Garden*, was used as the show stimulus. *Secret Garden* is a 20-episode drama where an arrogant CEO and a poor stunt woman switch bodies. One of the most noticeable genres in Korean dramas is romance [21]. The show received high viewership ratings ranging from 20% to 35% when it aired in Korea in 2011, and it was sold to 13 countries throughout Asia and the United States [27]. Right after watching the first episode of *Secret Garden* from a website created by the researchers, participants answered an online survey. The length of the drama was about one hour, and completing the online survey required an additional 20 minutes.

3.3 Measures

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and reliabilities of the variables and correlations among the variables. All items except Korea-related network of people were adapted from Weber et al.'s study [12]. The items were measured via a 5-point Likert scale response format (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) unless the response format was specified.

3.3.1 Screening questions.

In order to ensure that participants actually watched the show, three screening questions were asked pertaining to the content of the episode. For example, one question asked "What is Ra Im's job?" with three choices: "a sales woman," "a stunt woman," or "a doctor." Three participants who incorrectly answered at least two questions were excluded from the study.

3.3.2 Empathy.

Six items were asked about the participants' general empathy using a 5-point Likert scale. For example, "I am the type of person who is concerned when other people are unhappy." The reliability of the scale was .77.

3.3.3 Korea-related network.

Respondents answered the number of Korean, Korean-related, and non-Korean friends who recommend to them Korean culture products, as well as the number of non-Korean friends who like Korean culture products. This scale was adapted from Kim and Nam's study [28]. Since the range of participants was not fixed like other responses, the score was standardized with its mean and standard deviation. A higher score means more exposure to Korean-related people.

3.3.4 Character evaluation.

The leading male and female characters' positive personality traits and negative personality traits were measured for character evaluation. Participants evaluated how much they enjoyed watching each character in terms of positive character traits, such as warm, good-natured, trust-worthy, and a good person. Its reliability

was .78. Negative character traits were measured with evil, selfish, mean, and a bad person. Reliability was .80.

3.3.5 Show evaluation.

Four items were asked regarding whether the show was entertaining, unpredictable, humorous or made viewers want to tune into the next episode. Reliability for the show evaluation was .80.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables and correlations among variables

	Empathy (E)	Korea-related Network (KN)	Positive Male Character Evaluation (PMCE)	Negative Male Character Evaluation (NMCE)	Positive Female Character Evaluation (PFCE)	Negative Female Character Evaluation (NFCE)	Show Evaluation (SE)
E	(.75)						
KN	-.06	(.78)					
PMCE	.08	.15	(.83)				
NMCE	-.17	-.12	-.60**	(.81)			
PFCE	.13	.21*	.21*	-.11	(.74)		
NFCE	-.18	-.21*	-.24*	.45**	-.59**	(.78)	
SE	-.20*	.30**	.26*	-.09	.36**	-.31**	(.80)
Mean	3.62	0	3.06	2.67	3.79	1.90	3.46
SD	0.55	-0.66-4.47	0.70	0.80	0.60	0.63	0.65
Range	2.67-5.00	2.75-5.00	1.50-4.75	1.00-4.00	2.00-5.00	1.00-3.25	1.00-5.00

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

4. RESULTS

The multiple regression analysis showed significance, with $adj. R^2 = .23$, $F(6, 113) = 6.55$, $p < .001$ (See Table 1). Various results showed that there was minimum collinearity among the six predictors (i.e., positive and negative personality traits of the leading male and female characters, empathy, Korea-related network). Tolerance of the predictors ranged from .48 to .94, and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) ranged from 1.06 to 2.09. Positive ($\beta = .28$, $t = 2.60$, $p < .05$) and negative ($\beta = .24$, $t = 2.00$, $p < .05$) personality traits of the leading male character positively predicted drama enjoyment; whereas positive ($\beta = .15$, $t = 1.40$, $p = .165$) and negative ($\beta = -.19$, $t = -1.57$, $p = .118$) personality traits of the leading female character did not affect drama enjoyment. Empathy ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.05$, $p < .05$) and Korea-related network ($\beta = .23$, $t = 2.65$, $p < .01$) predicted drama enjoyment as well. H1 predicted that affective dispositions towards characters by good (1a) and bad personality (1b) traits are a positive predictor of drama enjoyment. Because male leading character evaluation is a positive predictor, but not female leading character's, H1 was partially supported. H2 and H3 were supported since empathy and Korea-related network are positively related to the enjoyment of Korean dramas.

Table 2. A multiple regression model of enjoyment

	B	S.E.	β	<i>t</i>
Empathy	0.28	0.14	.18	2.05*
Korea-related Network	0.20	0.08	.23	2.65**
Positive Male Character Evaluation	0.35	0.14	.28	2.60*
Negative Male Character Evaluation	0.27	0.13	.24	2.00*
Positive Female Character Evaluation	0.23	0.16	.15	1.40
Negative Female Character Evaluation	-0.26	0.17	-.19	-1.57

$F(6, 107) = 6.55, p < .001, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .23$

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

5. DISCUSSION

The current research began by examining the effect of protagonists' positive and negative characteristics, empathy and Korea-related network on enjoyment. Our data are mostly consistent with the proposed hypotheses. Results revealed that negative personality characteristics of the protagonist positively affected enjoyment as opposed to affective disposition theory. However, this controversy can be explained by Tamborini and colleagues' study [11]. They posit that the internal attributes of immoral behavior (i.e., personality) affect character liking negatively. Nonetheless, when the external attributes – situation (i.e., opposite person) – was the reason for immorality, those attributes increase character liking. In our study, viewers might perceive the main lead as likable by justifying his actions on the external causes. Korean dramas are high in morality and goodness [3]. Therefore, viewers might be more eager to receive his bad character as a problem to be fixed during the continuing episodes. An alternative reason for the relationship between negative characteristics and enjoyment might be identification. Research shows that when viewers identify with the characters, the morality of the character's behavior affects liking toward the character less than it otherwise would [18]. Another interesting finding is related to gender roles. In this study, the negative characteristics of the male protagonist showed a positive significant relationship to the enjoyment, whereas negative characteristics of the female protagonist showed a negatively correlated, insignificant relationship with enjoyment. There are possible explanations for this. One explanation can be the lack of insightful character exposition for the female protagonist. The first episode of *Secret Garden*, while having an equal number of scenes between genders, gives viewers a look at the thoughtful and worried side of the arrogant male protagonist, whereas the female protagonist endures every hardship she faces with a strong character throughout the episode. Viewers, after seeing both, might feel more empathy towards the male protagonist, thus liking him more. Future research should examine the effect of gender differences of the immoral characters on the enjoyment in more detail. Similar to the previous literature, empathy positively predicted enjoyment [21]. Furthermore, the more viewers have a Korea-related network, either by having Korean friends or by having friends who know about Korean cultural products, the more they enjoy the content. This supports previous literature and reinforces the importance of social influence and familiarity for media enjoyment [25]. Previous cultural comparison of attraction toward movies describes significant differences in liking, admiration, and identification with the main character [29]. Our results add to them by pointing out a direct effect from the familiarity to Korean culture to the enjoyment of the entertainment media. While the

results are intriguing, the study is not without its limitations. First of all, we only tested disposition after seeing the first episode of the show. Dispositions are known to change across episodes [12]. The current study looks at only one introduction episode and thus limited to the impression making which might affect viewers' perceptions of characters' behaviors. Even though there are many studies that look at disposition formation through single narrative, longitudinal analysis of the same show could have shown a different direction in negative characteristics and gender differences [10, 17]. The second methodological limitation is the student sample. Given the popularity of K-dramas across the younger generation, our method does take the most common group of users [30]. Nonetheless, the generalizability of the results is open to question.

6. CONCLUSION

Despite these limitations, we think this research offers an enhancement to our understanding of how users enjoy foreign melodrama. It is noteworthy that this paper found that disposition formation could be varied based on the protagonist's gender. In fact, the enjoyment itself is predicted by the characteristics of the male protagonist rather than female when empathy and familiarity with the culture are controlled. These results open up new ways to look at disposition and enjoyment for the melodrama genre. Furthermore, culture familiarity affects the entertainment media selection positively. That is the case even when we control for the dispositions toward characters. Showing that familiarity might have greater power than what previous literature has considered. Future research with more fine-grained measurements will help to understand and improve the findings from the current study.

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