

# What makes them consume Korean food from Korean franchisees? The case of the consumption behavior of Thai Generation Z in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region

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## Abstract

The Korean Wave (Hallyu) has captured the hearts and minds of fans worldwide these days. K-food, or Korean cuisine, is one of the exported cultural goods of South Korea. However, localization of K-food overseas could lead to misconceptions among foreign consumers. As a result, franchising may be able to preserve the authenticity of cuisine. The goal of this study was to investigate the consumption behavior of Thai Generation Z concerning Korean franchise businesses due to their strong inclination towards Korean food consumption by using the theory of planned behavior (TPB) as a main theory for this research. Additionally, the scope of study is in the area of Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) because it has the greatest number of branches. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) was applied in the analysis. An online survey was used for research on 400 people. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were used at the 0.05 level of statistical significance to analyze the data. The findings demonstrated the significance of every variable. In the same light, perceived behavioral control has the greatest impact on behavioral intentions.

**Keywords:** Korean Food, K-food, Korean franchise business, Thai Generation Z, Thai consumer

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## Introduction

Korean culture is today recognized as having had a major impact on the world largely. Korean food (K-food) was first prioritized as a cultural export product during the government of Park Geun Hye, utilizing the creative economy concept. Subsequently, cultural "K" initiatives, K-food, K-content, and K-beauty, together with other efforts of the Moon Jae-in government, contributed to the advancement of Korean culture's globalization (The Hankyoreh, 2020). From an economic standpoint, it is not exaggerated to argue that the Korean food industry has a promising future in global markets. In 2020, consumers of Korean restaurants overseas spent over 87 trillion Won (2.3 trillion Thai Baht), while those at home spent 23 trillion Won (614 billion Thai Baht) (Kim, 2022). According to Thailand, the market value of Korean cuisine in Thailand was around 2 billion Thai Bath (Bangkok Post, 2022).

Concerning the consumer side, it makes sense to point out that those who adore Korean culture, including Korean dramas (K-dramas) and Korean music (K-pop), are more likely to indulge in K-food. In Southeast Asia, Thailand has the greatest number of followers. In this regard, it was estimated that there would be 17 million Thai fans in 2022. Nevertheless, when it comes to internationalizing Korean food, excessive localization is not the most appropriate thing to accomplish since it might cause foreign consumers to misunderstand Korean food (Korea Foundation, 2023). Franchising is, therefore, a great business model in terms of preserving the authenticity of food. The stringent regulations imposed by franchisors make franchising an excellent business strategy for maintaining the authenticity of cuisine. In addition, the franchisees have to follow all of the many rules that the franchisor gives them. The same materials and equipment must be used by franchisees in order to deliver the same level of customer service (Salar & Salar, 2014). Secondary research indicates that most Korean franchisees in Thailand initially set up business in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR), which comprises the cities of Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Samut Prakan, Pathum Thani, Samut Sakhon, and Nakhon Pathom. For example, Saemaeul Sikdang, a well-known Korean BBQ restaurant, opens its first eight locations in Bangkok (Wongnai, 2023). Additionally, most of RedSun Thailand Tokpokki, also known as Topokki Hotpot, and DOOKKI Topokki Buffet are operating locations in BMR (11 out of 13) (Food

Addicts, 2023; Ryoii, 2023). BMR is a desirable location for Korean franchise restaurants because of its large population of over 10 million. Bangkok is economically appealing to immigrants from rural areas. Interestingly, the population is constantly growing. The labor force, manufacturing, capital investment, and population have all grown dramatically. As a result, the city has grown to encompass five adjacent cities in addition to the surrounding lands, modern technologies, transportation networks, and real estate projects (Srivanit et al., 2012).

The majority of consumers of Korean culture products are in their teens and twenties (Korean Foundation, 2022). According to facts, the majority of people in their teens and twenties are members of Generation Z. Generation Z is one of the largest age groups in Thailand (Statista, 2022). These individuals are those who were born between 1997 and 2012. As of 2023, they range in age from 11 to 26 (Kasikorn Bank, 2021; Manawa, 2023). Given that Thai legislation grants more rights to citizens who turn 18 (Muntawijuck, 2023), Generation Z in this study will consist of those who fall between the ages of 18 and 25. There are around 1.2 million members of Generation Z in the age group in BMR (National Statistical Office, 2023).

Readers would thus be better able to understand how Thai customers in the area see this business by researching Korean food franchise businesses in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. The study conducted on the consumption patterns of Thai consumers of K-food in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region is significant due to its qualitative and quantitative aspects. There is an ongoing increase in demand due to qualitative factors. For quantitative reasons, the Southeast Asian area is home to the most customers. As such, this research will help readers understand the perspectives of Thai customers and Korean franchise restaurants on K-food.

## **Literature review**

### **Hallyu and K-everything**

The phenomenon known as "Hallyu" or "Korean Wave" refers to the global enthusiasm for Korean culture that originated in China in the middle of the 1990s, fueled by the success of

K-pop and K-dramas on the international stage. International consumers are being compelled to purchase more Korean cultural products, services, or assets, such as Korean cuisine, Korean cosmetics, or Korean technology, especially those who live in low-culturally distant nations like Asian nations. K-everything is the term used to describe products, services, or content that are influenced by K-dramas or K-pop (Adams, 2022; Korea Foundation, 2023). Through the Korean diplomatic mission abroad, the foreign diplomatic offices of South Korea collected statistics on the number of members and online communities. Southeast Asia's largest Hallyu fanbase is still centered in Thailand. In 2022, there were 17 million members in 112 online communities, up from 15 million in 105 in 2021. After the epidemic, there is now hope around the consumption of K-everything; offline communities have recovered as a result of the range of Korean cultural items (K-everything) and the easement of strict COVID-19 rules in many countries (Korea Foundation, 2023).

### **Globalization strategy**

Glocalization is the result of combining localization with globalization. The creator of this lexicon is British sociologist Roland Robertson. In order to more amiably appeal to local customers, Korean popular culture adapts to the local context. To please their fans throughout the world, K-pop musicians release their songs in foreign languages. International audiences may watch Korean dramas with multiple language dubbing and subtitles. The concept of adapting traditional Korean food to suit local tastes can also be seen in K-food businesses. However, in terms of losing the distinctiveness of Korean culture, localization can only be profitable in the short run. Over-localization is an undesirable result that leads to customers misinterpreting the original Korean food (Korean Foundation, 2023).

### **Authenticity of food**

Authenticity is the preservation of a particular cuisine or food product's traditional and authentic qualities. The original flavor, ingredients, and cooking methods must be followed in order to maintain a certain ethnic or regional identity (Abarca, 2010; Groves, 2001). Authenticity is crucial, particularly in the food industry, since it impacts trade relationships, market demand, and

customer preferences. When it comes to business practices, it may demonstrate how the genuineness of the items gives every business an edge over competitors. Food authenticity is frequently associated with customer trust. Authenticity can appear in a couple of forms. The first concerns a product that is made from traditional raw materials and using traditional methods. On the other hand, another sense of authenticity highlights what is thought to be authentic products while acknowledging the changing character of national cuisine. Customers seem to like culinary authenticity since it indicates a transparent, reliable production process and a better-quality final product. As a result, customers may therefore assess a product's authenticity by relying on their perspective on the features of the goods and the circumstances surrounding the purchase. This serves as a sign of the advantages the product will have for both their mental and physical health (Beer, 2008; Groves, 2001).

### **The behavior of Thai Generation Z**

Based on their behavior, Generation Z in Thailand prefers to collect information through social media. Enrolling in quick online courses can help them learn more. This generation is keen to show empathy and express their opinions. They like performing, especially when it comes to social change-related topics (McCargo, 2021). Generation Z is usually the source of trends or viral material. In addition to using it as a platform for entertainment purposes, such as streaming games, people may create material for the YouTube channel or other social media platforms in order to make extra money. Brand image is important when choosing what to buy. When they post photos on social media, they carefully consider how they appear. Businesses should value internet word-of-mouth as Thai Generation Z finds it more effective when it comes to food consumption, and they are often willing to test new goods and write opinions about them (Rungtrakulchai & Setthapat, 2021).

### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a psychological theory for determining someone's intention. In theory, consumers' intentions influence their actions. For this reason, when researching consumer behavior, researchers ought to concentrate on the aim of the consumer.

The idea also enables researchers to examine consumer behavior at a specific location and time. The measure of intention is based on three motivating variables: subjective norm, attitude, and perceived behavioral control. The factor of subjective norm is to investigate how individuals perceive their social contexts. In some circumstances, people may even behave in ways that go against their beliefs, provided that those around them also tolerate the behavior. The factor of attitude motivates academics to look at how much people's behavior reflects their feelings, whether they are positive or negative. The factor of perceived behavioral control measures people's perceptions of how simple or complex an action will be to complete (Ajzen, 1991). Researchers have utilized this theory extensively to examine the intentions and actions surrounding food consumption. For instance, the eating of fish and dairy products (Ajzen, 2015, p. 131). Consequently, TPB seems to be a suitable theory for this study, which focuses on the dietary habits of Thai Generation Z in connection to Korean franchise restaurants.

## **Methodology**

Purposive sampling (Etikan, 2016, p. 3) will be used in this study to interview 400 Thai Generation Z (Yamane, 1967) people who live, work, or attend school in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR). Also, they must have prior experience eating Korean food from Korean franchise restaurants.

## **Data collection and analyses**

The main research approach for this study will be an online survey. The item-objective consistency index from three experts was used to verify the content validity of the study instrument. Through Thai-language fan pages featuring Korean culture-related content—such as those for Korean food, artists, stars, tourism, etc.—the researcher will disseminate information and solicit survey responses. Consumer demographics, subjective norms, attitude, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention are all included in the survey questions concerning

Korean food from Korean franchise restaurants. The survey consists of four screening questions. Four conditions must be met. Prior to taking part in the survey, the respondents must grant their consent. Second, the ages of the respondents have to be between 18 and 26. In addition, the respondents must be residents of Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Samut Prakan, Pathum Thani, Samut Sakhon, and Nakhon Pathom, which together make up the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR), where they study, work, or reside. Finally, but just as importantly, the responders must have direct experience eating Korean cuisine from one of the franchise restaurants in the study (Bonchon, Choong Man Chicken, Dookki Topokki, Kyochon, Red Sun, Saemaeul, Sulbing, Tom N Toms, and Tudari). From November 1 to November 25, 2023, data was gathered. The three research hypotheses will be measured using data analysis, a statistical program for social science.

The three hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Subjective norm has a positive influence on a consumer intention to consume food from a Korean franchise restaurant.

Hypothesis 2: Attitude has a positive influence on a consumer intention to consume food from a Korean franchise restaurant.

Hypothesis 3 Perceived behavioral control has a positive influence on a consumer intention to consume food from a Korean franchise restaurant.

The statistical method of multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the hypothesized correlations between the variables.

## Research Framework

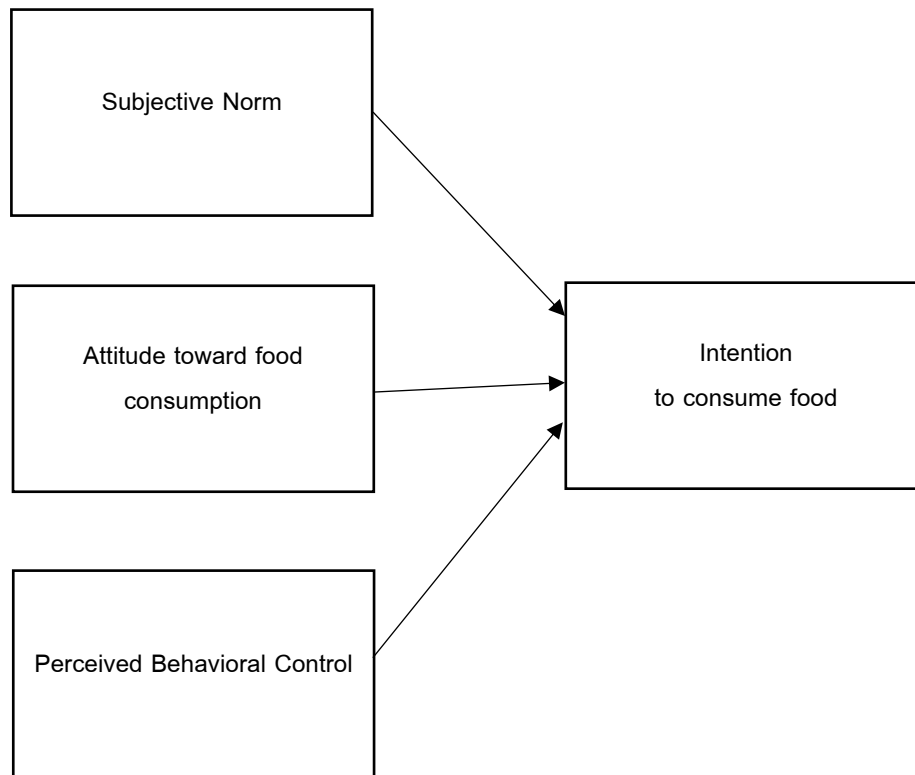


Figure 1: Research Framework

## Results

### Relationship between Research Hypothesis and Relevant Variables

The reliability of each variable is first tested for 400 respondents using Cronbach's Alpha. It is indicated that the data is not unidimensional when the Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.7 (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011; Thanabordeekij et al., 2022). This scale measure indicates that the variables in this study exhibit considerable variation, with values greater than 0.7 (Subjective norm = 0.814, Attitude = 0.845, Perceived behavioral control = 0.773, and Behavioral intention = 0.822).

**Table 1: The tests for relationship between attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention.**

Path of Hypothesis	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	VIF	Hypothesis supported
Subjective norm $\rightarrow$ Behavioral intention	0.225	5.097	0.000	1.597	Supported
Attitude $\rightarrow$ Behavioral intention	0.206	3.983	0.000	2.178	Supported
Perceived behavioral control $\rightarrow$ Behavioral intention	0.423	9.444	0.000	1.639	Supported

Notes:  $R^2=0.511$ , a significant level at 0.05, p-value < 0.05

Table 1 shows that Subjective norm ( $\beta = 0.225$  and  $p = 0.000$ ), Attitude ( $\beta = 0.206$  and  $p = 0.000$ ), and Perceived behavioral control ( $\beta = 0.423$  and  $p = 0.000$ ) have an impact on the intention of consumers to consume Korean food from Korean franchise restaurant. Perceived behavioral control has the strongest influence on behavioral intention. Subjective norm and attitude are statistically comparable toward the intention to consume Korean food of Thai consumers in BMR.

### A summary of the demographic data

The survey collected basic information from the 400 participants including their age, gender, level of education, place of residence, and consumption habits of Korean food. The results showed that all of them are Generation Z. 33.25% of respondents are men, 64.00% are women, and 2.75% are LGBTQ. Regarding the level of education, 2.00% have a vocational certificate, 45.50% graduated from high school, and 52.50% hold a bachelor's degree. For their place of residence, 31.00% are in Bangkok, 21.50% are in Nonthaburi, 36.25% are in Pathum Thani, 4.50% are in Nakhon Pathom, 3.75% are in Samut Prakan, and 3.00% are in Samut Sakhon. It was

found that most respondents (57.00%) would pay between 501 and 1,000 Baht each time they went out to eat Korean food. Then, less than 500 Baht per time (34.00%). Mostly, Korean food consumption occurs at dinner (65.00%). Then, Lunch (34.50%). In most cases, the respondents (42.25%) eat Korean food with friends or coworkers. Equally important, most of them prefer to eat Korean food on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays (65.50%).

## Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study indicated that perceived behavioral control had the biggest influence on the behavioral intentions of consumers. This outcome supported the findings of Thanabordeekij et al. (2022), who discovered that Thai consumers concurred that purchasing Korean cuisine is easier. Consequently, it appears that having places nearby makes it simple to purchase food for consumption. Also, Panjavinin (2019) study is consistent with the presence of Korean franchise restaurants in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR). Despite the fact that there are Korean restaurants all over the country, the research discovered that 70% of them are dispersed across Bangkok. The findings support the initial assertion of the researcher as well, according to which there is the highest concentration of Korean franchise restaurants in BMR. Equally important, Suksap (2022) added that it has been demonstrated that the decision of consumers in terms of using online meal ordering services in Bangkok depends on the distribution channel. It is particularly apparent when consumers are making decisions. Additionally, the research found that among consumers in Bangkok, LINE MAN is the most appreciated food delivery service. LINE MAN is a partner in the food delivery services of many Korean franchise restaurants included in this study, such as Bonchon Thailand, Kyochon Thailand, and RedSun Thailand Tokpokki (Wongnai, 2019).

Subjective norm and attitude are also significant in the findings. The significance of subjective norm in this research supported the research result of Ha (2019), who discovered that the decisions of consumers about eating Korean food were impacted by friends, family, and other relatives who had significant meaning for them. As mentioned earlier, Thai Generation Z values

heavily word-of-mouth marketing for food consumption (Rungtrakulchai & Setthapat, 2021). Subjective norm undeniably it important role in behavioral intention. The impact of attitude on intention in this research is a confirmation of the findings of Raksanawes (2023), who stated that the positive attitude of consumers toward Korean food leads to frequent Korean food consumption. Furthermore, the findings of Lampao (2013) regarding the influence of Korean trends on consumer behavior provide an explanation for the influence of both subjective norm and attitude on behavioral intention. According to the study, people who surround consumers have an effect on their attitudes and promote the purchase of Korean-related goods. Demand for the Korean marketing trend is still going in a positive direction across all product and service categories. Last but not least, the findings of Panudomluk (2015) can explain the significance of subjective norm and attitude in this study. The communication of international restaurant franchises delighted Thai consumers. Information availability, therefore, has the potential to influence both consumers and those around them. In one manner or another, there is a chance to enhance food consumption.

### **Practical implications**

Based on the theory of planned behavior, the first key idea of this study examined the behavioral intention of Thai Gen Z with regard to Korean food consumption. The findings suggested that Korean franchise restaurants have focused on increasing their businesses across BMR, including internet platforms. Furthermore, it is advantageous to work more closely with meal delivery services because consumers value convenience above all else when placing food orders. The research results indicated that the greatest impact on consumer intention comes from perceived behavioral control. In addition, the people around them have an impact on their decision to eat Korean food from a Korean franchise restaurant. According to the findings, the subjective norm also demonstrated statistical significance. It referred to a strong correlation with the opinions of reference persons. Attitude is still another important component, even though it has the smallest impact on intention in this study. However, it seemed the opinions of the

customers were therefore equally significant. Ultimately, by encouraging consumers and their reference group to have a positive view of Korean food, they tend to support Korean franchise businesses that have Gen Z as their target customers and grow sustainably in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region.

## Limitations

There are certain limits to this work that may be covered in this section. First, Thai Generation Z was the sole target of the research. The number of generations may have an impact on the research's findings. Second, the results may alter if there were a higher proportion of male and LGBTQ respondents, as the majority of respondents were women. Third, there might have been an issue with the respondents' actual dining experience because this study used a survey conducted online. Fourth, this study concentrated solely on Korean franchise businesses located in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. Examining several business models could also be helpful. Fifth, since the Korean wave has reached across the nation, it would be worthwhile to research other significant provinces in Thailand.

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