Chilean Hallyu Fans and Their Serious Leisure Practices in South Korea's Digital Public Diplomacy

Los fans chilenos de hallyu y sus prácticas de ocio serio en la diplomacia pública digital de Corea del Sur

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the effectiveness of the digital public diplomacy of the Korean Embassy in Chile, with a focus on The Online Supporters program. Specifically, it examines whether the program fosters serious leisure of Hallyu fans, reflects the key characteristics of serious leisure as defined by Stebbins (1982), and contributes to the embassy's digital public diplomacy. To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach was employed: an analysis of the content and the comments of the 123 posts created by the Online Supporters and published on the embassy's official Instagram account between 2021 and 2024, followed by in-depth written interviews with program participants. The findings indicate that the embassy's social media functioned as a platform through which both the Online Supporters and the public engaged in serious leisure. Furthermore, the six core characteristics of serious leisure were clearly reflected in the Online Supporters' activities. This study confirms that the serious leisure practices of the Online Supporters and the digital public diplomacy efforts of the embassy have generated a synergistic relationship, which contributes to the advancement of Korea's digital public diplomacy.

Keywords: Digital public diplomacy, Hallyu fans, Serious leisure, Chile, Online Supporters

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la eficacia de la diplomacia pública digital de la Embajada de Corea en Chile, con un enfoque en el programa de Online Supporters. Específicamente, se analiza el programa que fomenta el ocio serio de los fans del Hallyu, refleja las características del ocio serio como lo define Stebbins (1982) y contribuye a la diplomacia pública digital de la embajada. Para ello, se empleó un enfoque metodológico mixto: se realizó un análisis del contenido y los comentarios de las 123 publicaciones creadas por los Online Supporters y publicadas en la cuenta oficial de Instagram de la embajada entre 2021 y 2024, seguido de entrevistas escritas en profundidad con los participantes del programa. Los resultados indican que las redes sociales de la embajada funcionaron como una plataforma a través de la cual tanto los Online Supporters como el público practicaron el ocio serio. Además, las seis características del ocio serio se reflejaron en las actividades de los Online Supporters. Este estudio confirma que las prácticas de ocio serio de los Online Supporters y los esfuerzos de diplomacia pública digital de la embajada han generado una relación sinérgica que contribuye al avance de la diplomacia pública digital de Corea.

Palabras clave: diplomacia pública digital, fanáticos de Hallyu, ocio serio, Chile, Online Supporters

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Received: 2024-12-12 - Accepted: 2025-05-12 - Published: 2025-12-30
https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-1529.2025.76811

1. Introduction

Hallyu, which initially referred to the enthusiasm for Korean popular culture, has gradually expanded beyond entertainment to encompass broader aspects of the Korean lifestyle, including fashion, food, and consumer products (Korea Tourism Organization, 2019). The popularity of Hallyu has become so global that it is no longer surprising to hear it described as a "craze on the other side of the world," even in geographically distant regions like Latin America. This is because, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, Hallyu continued to build its fanbase and expand its market through new global media platforms, establishing its position as a universal and influential cultural phenomenon impacting global popular culture (Cho, 2022).

The global spread of Hallyu has been made possible by the dedicated support of Hallyu fans worldwide. This expansion has contributed to an increasing awareness and knowledge of South Korea (hereafter, Korea), improving its national image, and building a base of international support, underscoring Hallyu's significance as a tool of public diplomacy (Son, 2016). Notably, the active and productive activities of Hallyu fans often serve as a form of voluntary civilian diplomacy, benefiting public diplomacy efforts (Ko, 2021). Therefore, it is worthwhile to analyze how Korea's public diplomacy strategy leverages fan activities and the synergetic effects generated through their interaction.

In the past, Hallyu fans passively consumed content through television or videos. Today, they actively select and enjoy it through various OTT platforms. Instead of the one-way interactions such as leaving comments on agency-run social media posts, fans now engage in real-time, two-way communication with stars. They add subtitles or dubbing in various languages to Korean content and even create their own Hallyu content. Fan activities continue to evolve, blurring the lines between the real and virtual worlds and driving new trends in content production, adding value to the market (Lee *et al.*, 2013).

Advancements in digital technology have enabled the public to form transnational online communities around shared interests, transforming them from passive consumers into active producers, disseminators, and selectors of information (Abd-Rahim, 2019). Hallyu fans, in particular, are driving a more participatory culture of communication in the online space (Yoon & Labarta Garcia, 2024). As public communication and behavior evolve in the digital era, the importance of integrating digital technology into public diplomacy has become increasingly clear (Kim, 2023).

In 2010, Korea declared the "first year of public diplomacy" and has since focused on building trust and goodwill with foreign publics by promoting a positive national image. To achieve this, 178 overseas diplomatic missions serve as forward bases, carrying out tailored and interactive public diplomacy initiatives respecting local customs, culture, and diplomatic contexts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Moreover, public diplomacy now involves not only government entities, but also a diverse array of non-governmental actors. In particular, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, digital transformation, and experiences like the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened the focus on "digital public diplomacy" through digital platforms (Noh *et al.*, 2022).

Within this context, social media has emerged as a key tool for digital public diplomacy (Kim, 2012). It enables the rapid dissemination of vast information to both domestic and international audiences, facilitates extensive two-way communication between the government and foreign publics, and allows real-time monitoring and response to public reactions. Furthermore, collaboration with the private sector can synergize with governmental public diplomacy efforts (Choi, 2021).

Currently, Korea's public diplomacy in Latin America is conducted through 21 overseas missions[1] across 20 countries, led by the Korea Foundation and the Korea International Cooperation Agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Korean Cultural Centers in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, under the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, along with various King Sejong Institutes, also play key roles. Thus, Korea's public diplomacy in the region is primarily government-led, with the private sector in a supporting role (Noh *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, public diplomacy institutions are strengthening communication via social media (Kim, 2012). All the 21 overseas diplomatic missions in Latin America operate Facebook accounts to connect with local citizens, with about half also managing Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and

YouTube accounts. Some embassies, like those in Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Panama, and Brazil, collaborate with Hallyu fans to create social media content through programs named "Supporters," "Amigos de Corea" (Friends of Korea), and the like. Among these, the Korean Embassy in Chile's "The Online Supporters" program stands out, producing content in various formats such as infographics, videos, and card news, which are shared on the embassy's Facebook and Instagram to reach a broader audience. Additionally, it promotes interactive digital public diplomacy by encouraging comments and facilitating a two-way engagement[2].

Therefore, this paper examines the Online Supporters program of the Korean Embassy in Chile and the involvement of Chilean Hallyu fans. To explore this topic, the study addresses the following research questions: Does the Online Supporters program foster Hallyu fans' serious leisure? Do the activities of the Online Supporters reflect characteristics of serious leisure? And do their activities contribute to the embassy's digital public diplomacy efforts?

2. Theoretical Framework

Given its recognized importance, the use of social media in diplomacy has been the subject of various studies. Kampf, Manor, and Segev (2015) analyzed the use of social media by foreign ministries and overseas diplomatic missions by applying Kent and Taylor's Dialogic Theory. Carneiro (2020) examined the Facebook account of the Korean Embassy in Brazil, while Huang and Wang (2021) analyzed the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' activities on social media such as Weibo and Twitter during the U.S-China trade war. Kim (2024) explored the activities of the U.S. Embassy in Korea on Facebook, focusing on recipient-centered public diplomacy.

These studies have contributed to a better understanding of how diplomatic players in various countries communicate with the public through social media, as well as the limitations of such approaches. Many of them emphasize the importance of two-way communication and fostering mutual understanding. However, few studies have examined public diplomacy strategies that actively incorporate the local audiences, especially those that produce and share content on social media from the audience's perspective.

Korean overseas missions are trying to work with Hallyu fans in conducting public diplomacy through social media. These fans are not merely passive recipients of content but actively engage in its production and dissemination —an activity that reflects the characteristics of serious leisure as proposed by Stebbins (1982).

Accordingly, this section first outlines the core concept of serious leisure and then applies it to Hallyu fandom activities to examine how these practices embody the features of serious leisure.

2.1 Serious Leisure Perspective

Leisure is defined as "an un-coerced, contextually framed activity engaged in during free time perceived as such, which people want to do and, using their abilities and resources, actually do in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both)" (Stebbins, 2020, p. 15). Stebbins' Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP) is a theoretical framework that categorizes leisure into three types —casual leisure, project-based leisure, and serious pursuits—, and explains their characteristics, and interrelationships. Serious pursuits are further divided into serious leisure and devotee work. Casual leisure refers to short-term, immediately gratifying activities that require no special training, and project-based leisure involves creative activities conducted on a one-time or occasional basis, often triggered by events such as sports competitions or art festivals. Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of core activity by amateurs, hobbyists, or volunteers. In most cases, participants develop specialized skills, knowledge, and experience, building a leisure career over time. When individuals feel strong devotion to a self-enhancing activity with high personal fulfillment, and the boundary between work and leisure fades, it is considered devotee work (Stebbins, 2020).

According to Stebbins (2020), serious leisure is distinguished from other forms of leisure by six unique characteristics: (1) perseverance, (2) a leisure career, (3) personal effort, (4) lasting benefits, (5) a unique ethos, and (6) a distinct leisure identity. Participants engage with persistence, investing

effort grounded in specialized knowledge, training, or skills. Over time, their sustained involvement leads to a leisure career, marked by a gradual accumulation of experience and achievement. Serious leisure offers durable benefits such as self-fulfillment, self-enrichment, enhanced self-image, and tangible outcomes (e.g., painting). Additionally, interactions and shared experiences with others help form a unique ethos and a distinct leisure identity.

In this context, a distinction can be made between consumers and buffs. Consumers engage with content such as sports, concerts, or art exhibitions primarily for entertainment. Buffs, by contrast, demonstrate deeper involvement by expanding their knowledge, exchanging information with others, and offering critical perspectives. Activities like reading reviews, exploring related materials, or visiting relevant sites exemplify the serious leisure of a buff (Stebbins, 2020). This distinction provides a conceptual basis for understanding Hallyu fandom as a form of serious leisure.

2.2 Serious leisure activities of Hallyu fans

While the SLP has rarely been applied to fandom, existing studies show its analytical value in understanding fan activities. Gibson, Willmin and Holdnak (2002) analyzed football fan engagement using the core features of serious leisure. Manoli, Dixon, and Antonopoulos (2024) examined football fan tokens as a form of serious leisure. In the context of Hallyu, Lee and Lee (2019) explored the relationship between Hallyu content consumption and the intention to visit Korea, using the concepts of destination image and serious leisure.

The growth of digital technology and online media has transformed the practices of Hallyu fans from passive consumption to active participation. Fans engage by subtitling, dubbing, and creating their own content, participating across both physical and virtual spaces. The changing activities of fans go beyond casual leisure and can be seen as serious leisure, which involves sustained participation based on skills and knowledge (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014).

These activities reflect Stebbins' (2020) six traits of serious leisure. Despite cultural and language barriers, fans continue their engagement, participating not only in consumption but also in production (Kim & Byun, 2020; Kim *et al.*, 2020). They make efforts to acquire, produce, and share information through online communities, and to overcome language and cultural barriers. Through continued involvement, fans build a leisure career and gain long-term benefits such as satisfaction, self-discovery, and a sense of efficacy (Kim e*t al.*, 2009). In fan communities, they create shared culture and form a sense of solidarity (Seo, 2016). Communication within these communities helps fans develop and strengthen their identities as Hallyu fans and cultural mediators (Lee *et al.*, 2013; Park, 2019; Jang, 2021).

Meanwhile, Hallyu, with its broad cultural scope and strong influence, serves as a key asset in Korea's public diplomacy, as fans voluntarily act as cultural creators and disseminators (Ko, 2021). The Korean Embassy in Chile aims to strengthen public diplomacy by utilizing these features through its Online Supporters program (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Chile, 2024).

3. Methodology

The Korean Embassy in Chile operates Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube accounts, sharing content about Korea-Chile relations, embassy events, and Korean culture. This study examines the embassy's Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/embcorea.chile), launched in March 2020, which has the most followers and receives active interactions[3].

The Online Supporters is a promotional network for the Korean Embassy in Chile, integrated by Chileans. Launched in June 2021, the program has continued through its fifth group in 2025, with each group consisting of five to ten members. The goal of the program is to support the promotion of Korean culture in Chile by creating, publishing, and disseminating Korea-related content through the embassy's social media, while also promoting cultural, academic, and knowledge exchange between Korea and Chile. As of the 2023 embassy announcement, these Online Supporters are recognized as key agents of public diplomacy, actively strengthening diplomatic ties between the two countries.

The embassy presented ten key thematic areas for each term and guidelines for the production of posts. The Supporters create content by composing the material and choosing the format, which may include

infographics, GIFs, or videos accompanied by explanatory text, and then submit it to the embassy. Once reviewed and approved, the embassy posts it on its Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube accounts. The embassy evaluates the activities of the Online Supporters and selects outstanding participants. All participants receive a diploma, and the first-place winner is presented with a special gift, such as a Certificate of Appreciation from the Ambassador (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Chile, 2022, 2024).

This study analyzes 123 posts created by the Online Supporters, drawn from 502 total posts published on the embassy's Instagram as of August 31, 2024. Focusing on both content and comments, it examines the information presented, the structure of the posts, the ways in which the Supporters encouraged public participation, and audience reactions. Data for analysis were collected between September 10 and 12, 2024. As the original posts and comments were in Spanish, the authors translated them directly into English.

Based on a review of all posts by the Online Supporters, this study established 15 analytical categories, drawing from the themes proposed by the embassy: economy and development, science, and technology, Korea-Chile relations, tourism, education, traditional culture, literature, society, sports (including e-sports), history, film and drama, arts (e.g., painting, calligraphy, architecture), music (industry), food, and environment.

Subsequently, we emailed all participants to schedule in-depth interviews: seven program participants responded. We then examined how the embassy's public diplomacy efforts and the participants' serious leisure activities generate synergy, with two interviews conducted in person and five via Zoom. Accordingly, individual direct messages were sent to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. Of the respondents, two interviews were conducted in person and five via Zoom. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven program participants to examine how the embassy's public diplomacy efforts and the participants' serious leisure activities generate synergy, with two conducted in person and five conducted as in-depth written interviews via Zoom. These interviews were carried out between August 11 and 18, 2023[4].

4. Hallyu fan's practice of digital public diplomacy through serious leisure

4.1 Promoting in-depth information sharing and encouraging active participatory communications

The Korean Embassy in Chile's social media functions as a platform that enables interaction and facilitates the practice of serious leisure -not only for the Online Supporters who create content, but also for the broader public who engage with the content. The information of the posts evolved over time, adjusted the structure and substance of their content to better capture the interests, needs, and level of understanding of the Chilean public regarding Korea. First, the content produced by the Online Supporters has shown a progression in the depth of information. Each new term moved beyond repeating existing topics, instead providing deeper insights. For example, in the music category, while early contents focused on general aspects like Korean music consumption culture and K-pop history, later posts explored more specific aspects like fan events in Chile and K-pop's economic impact on Korea. This evolution indicates that the content is gaining depth and fostering a deeper understanding of Korea.

Table 1. Deepening of information

Year	2021	2022	2024
Evolution	**Korean music culture**	**K-pop local events** →	**Economic impact of K-pop industry**
Title of the posts	How music is experienced in Korea History of K-pop	K-Pop World Festival 2022 Award Ceremony K-pop World Festival What's the motivation behind K-pop events?	How much does the K-pop industry contribute to Korea's economy? Is all music in Korea K-pop?

Source: Posts from the official Instagram account of the Korean Embassy in Chile, classified by the authors.

Next, the supporters introduced various cases and encouraged public participation to connect with locals in a friendly and accessible way. A representative example is content on Korea-Chile relations, which went beyond political themes to address diverse areas such as music, technology, sports, climate change, trade, and urban exchange. In 2023, a post on Korea's public and cultural diplomacy invited audiences to share what kinds of activities they would like to participate in to strengthening Korea-Chile relations, prompting active engagement through comments, requests for more information, and suggestions. This illustrates how the supporters moved beyond simply providing information to actively encouraging participation, fostering dynamic interaction not only between the supporters and the public but also among the public themselves.

Table 2. Engagement Inducement

Year	2021	2022	2023
Evolution	**Introduction of Various Types of Korea-Chile Relations**	→	**Encouraging Chileans to Share Ideas on Korea-Chile Relations**
Title of the posts	Chile-Korea: Musical connection Chile and Korea: United by economy and technology Chile and Korea: A long friendship through sports Chile and Korea in the fight against climate change	Bilateral relations between Korea and Chile Chile-Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) International seminar: "Democratic dialogue between Chile and Korea" Keynote speech by Han Duck-Soo at the ECLAC headquarters Visit to Chile by prime minister Han Duck-Soo	Do you know about cultural diplomacy? Initiatives for public diplomacy... in which you can participate Trade relations between Korea and Chile Sister cities: Building ties from opposite ends of the world

Source: Posts from the official Instagram account of the Korean Embassy in Chile, classified by the authors.

In parallel, the supporter's content enhanced cultural accessibility by offering practical information for direct and practical experiences -most notably through food-related contents. Rather than just introducing dishes, they provided concrete details on where to buy ingredients in Chile and how to prepare Korean food. Comment interactions also facilitated information exchange among the audience. A representative example of active engagement was the "Kimchi recipes" post, which received 173 comments involving detailed discussions about ingredients, fermentation process, and where to purchase necessary items in Chile. Below are some of the comments from that post.

lorxxx: Is it necessary to use sugar??😅🙄
└ **ltoxxx:** @lorxxx It depends. If you're going to consume it soon, add it. But if you want it to last longer without over-fermenting, it's not necessary, as the Korean apple or pear is enough (this is the traditional method) 😉.
marxxx: Where can I buy Chinese cabbage?
└ **yolxxx:** @marxxx Maybe you can find it at La Vega; I can't think of anywhere else
└ **karxxx:** @marxxx You can find it here in Santiago at Asian supermarkets in the Patronato neighborhood!
└ **gamxxx:** @marxxx At Líder, of course, not as big as in the video, but that's where I buy the cabbage

Many comments went beyond food, asking about various aspects of Korean culture, including film, books, language, and education.

yosxxx: When does the master's scholarship period begin?
└ **barxxx:** @yosxxx The GKS scholarship application opens in February.

These posts, along with the communication between the public, allowed local audiences to not only understand, but also experience Korean culture in their own context.

Table 3. Expanding accessibility

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024
Evolution	General information about K-food →	Details on specific dishes & where to buy in Chile →	Philosophy and recipes of K-food	
Title of the posts	Let's eat The flavor of Korean food What did the kings eat? Celebrations and Food Korean and Chilean Food	Today, we are going to talk about Kimchi!	Japchae (잡채) and the philosophy in Hansik Kimchi for Beginners Korean Cooking Essentials Miyeokguk: Motherhood in a Bowl	Kimchi Recipes Savoring Korea (Collaboration with the YouTube account)

Source: Posts from the official Instagram account of the Korean Embassy in Chile, classified by the authors.

Users of the embassy's social media did more than just share information; they engaged in active and participatory communication. And these activities were carried out not only with other Chilean users, but also with the broader Spanish-speaking audiences.

First, Audiences actively shared their experiences with Korean culture and some users compared their own country's experiences with those of Korea. These interactions offered valuable feedback to the embassy and the supporters, revealing needs and perceptions of the Chilean public. In addition, they actively expressed their opinions on various issues, showed mutual support, and sometimes engaged in discussions.

Furthermore, they shared supplementary information not included in the original content, suggesting places and ways to experience the culture, and inspiring others to explore further. This broadens interest and deepens the understanding of Korea.

bluxxx: It seems that Korea is still not fully prepared for Western tourists, especially Spanish speakers. Museums and historical sites often only have translations in Chinese, Japanese, and sometimes English. (Content omitted) It would be helpful to consider the number of Spanish-speaking tourists and provide at least one guide who speaks Spanish in the palaces and museums (like the War Museum), using the Spanish-speaking residents in Korea.

rovxxx: Interesting, in Peru it is necessary to listen to the teachers, who are directly involved in distance education. The higher-ups only want to burden us with paperwork, but they don't understand the needs of either the teachers or the students, especially in the public sector.

There was also interaction between the Online Supporters and other users of the embassy's social media. For instance, users expressed their appreciation to the Supporters and the embassy for sharing diverse information of Korea.

bfrxxx: The information is very interesting. I love history... It helps me understand better what I see in movies and K-dramas. Thank you so much!

pauxxx: I really love masks, but I didn't know about Korean mask culture. Thank you to @embcorea.chile for introducing this culture and to @aurxxx for preparing this information 😍.

The supporters often responded to questions and requests through personal accounts and indicated that they were monitoring public reactions by liking comments. By providing additional information or sharing experiences in replies, they helped deepen public understanding of Korea. However, their engagement was mostly limited to objective information or empathetic responses, avoiding sensitive issues.

4.2 Online Supporters' practice of serious leisure

This section explores how Online Supporters engage in serious leisure and create synergies with the embassy's digital public diplomacy efforts. The participants, already active in Hallyu fandom, had followed the embassy's social media and applied to the Online Supporters program while pursuing Korea-related goals. Their continued engagement, knowledge building, and community involvement reflect serious leisure characteristics, which became more evident through their participation in the program. The following examines the six characteristics of serious leisure as manifested in the activities of the Online Supporters: (1) perseverance, (2) a leisure career, (3) personal effort, (4) lasting benefits, (5) a unique ethos, and (6) a distinct leisure identity.

Online Supporters faced challenges that required persistence, particularly the pressure to handle sensitive topics carefully, as their content represented the embassy, and to ensure proper use of copyrighted materials in their posts. To address this, participants sought solutions, such as testing posts on personal accounts before final submission.

> Although we had some creative freedom in our activities, speaking on behalf of the embassy meant that any misunderstanding could negatively affect its image. This made thorough and careful research essential. (A, Participated as an online supporter in 2021).

The supporters made continuous personal efforts to build a leisure career in Korea-related content creation. Though they started as beginners, they recognized their progress and consistently worked to improve their skills, especially in organizing content for Chilean audiences. When introducing topics beyond K-pop or K-dramas, they paid particular attention to structure and clarity. For K-pop-related content, they demonstrated professionalism by anticipating fan dynamics and adjusting presentation accordingly.

> In my case, part of my work involved searching for Korean news on a daily basis, which helped me stay as up-to-date as possible on relevant topics, given my language abilities. Portals like *Yonhap News* were particularly helpful. (M, Participated as an online supporter in 2022)

> I covered not only the popular K-pop of that time but also all the generations. I began by explaining how it started with the first generation and evolved to the current one, which captured the interest of a broad range of fans. The aim was to avoid creating competition among fans and instead foster an appreciation of K-pop's history. (I, Participated as an online supporter in 2021).

The supporters felt a sense of satisfaction from seeing their content shared via the embassy's official channels and receiving certificates of participation. They took pride in contributing to Korea's public diplomacy by helping introduce Korea to the Chilean public and strengthening bilateral relations. Including their personal Instagram handles in posts highlighted content originality and deepened their sense of responsibility and pride.

> In my case, part of my work involved searching for Korean news on a daily basis, which helped me stay as up-to-date as possible on relevant topics, given my language abilities. Portals like *Yonhap News* were particularly helpful. (M, Participated as an online supporter in 2022).

The supporters built up a community, collaborating to deepen their understanding of Korea and its cultural diplomacy. They aimed to share emotional connections among themselves and also draw public interest in Korea through social media, promoting interaction and a sense of belonging. As fans of Korean culture even before joining the program, they selected topics that appealed to the Chilean public, while also shaping their identities as practitioners of cultural diplomacy.

> Take all of this as an opportunity to dive deeper and have the courage to apply for scholarships, job opportunities, and shape your future around the culture you love. It's amazing how small steps can lead to big interests and opportunities. (A, Participated as an online supporter in 2021).

Interviews with the Online Supporters revealed that they thought that the embassy was effectively

promoting Korean culture and actively engaging with the Chilean audience about its activities and projects. They also noted that the embassy's activities were dynamic, receiving positive responses online through its flexible approach.

Furthermore, they assessed that the Online Supporters had made significant contributions to the embassy's digital public diplomacy. They attributed this to the supporters' diverse interests in Korea, which gave them insight into both Korean culture and the themes most likely to engage the Chilean public. Therefore, their activities could facilitate communication with the local public and present Korea in a more approachable way. They were also confident that creating content from diverse perspectives allowed them to promote Korean culture and diplomacy more effectively.

Overall, the Supporters pursued serious leisure related to Korea through the program and viewed themselves as cultural diplomats on social media. They introduced various aspects of Korea in an engaging and creative way, aiming to maintain Chilean public's interest in the embassy's activities. In doing so, the embassy's digital public diplomacy and the supporters' serious leisure practices interacted synergistically, reinforcing each other.

5. Conclusion: Reciprocal collaboration for expanding communication

Conventional public diplomacy largely focused on one-way, government-centered content, which often had limited impact in countries geographically distant from Korea or with fewer shared interests. Digital public diplomacy, however, helps overcome such barriers by diversifying methods and enabling smoother communication with local citizens. Korean embassies in Latin America are expanding their public diplomacy efforts through social media, enhancing their effectiveness by collaborating with Hallyu fans who actively participate on a voluntary basis.

An analysis of the Online Supporters' posts and the public's comments on the Korean Embassy in Chile's social media revealed that the platform functioned as a space that enabled both the Supporters and social media users to pursue serious leisure. With each new term, the content produced by the Supporters has become more diverse, adopting in-depth, participatory, and interactive approaches. Users engaged with the content by leaving comments, sharing experiences, comparing cultures, and expressing opinions. Notably, the audience included not only Chileans, but also Spanish speakers from other countries, reflecting the program's broader regional reach.

Interviews with Online Supporters revealed that many were already active Hallyu fans seeking deeper involvement with Korea. Their experiences in the program demonstrated key traits of serious leisure: they faced challenges but persevered, invested personal effort, and built meaningful leisure careers. They felt pride and fulfillment in promoting Korea and contributing to Korea-Chile relations. Through the Online Supporters community, they developed emotional bonds, deepened their understanding of Korea, and formed an identity not only as Hallyu fans but also as cultural and public diplomacy agents.

Overall, the collaboration between the Online Supporters and the embassy's digital public diplomacy efforts has produced a synergetic and mutually beneficial relationship. As Chileans with knowledge and interest in Korea, the Supporters are well positioned to create content that effectively promotes Korea among the Chilean public. In the past, one cited reason for the limited impact of Korea's public diplomacy efforts in Chile was a lack of understanding of local interests and context (Park, 2023). The Online Supporters help overcome these limitations by tailoring their content to local audiences. Moreover, the embassy's content guidelines and review process help prevent potential diplomatic issues while still enabling the Supporters to produce posts independently, thereby enhancing the program's overall significance.

Nevertheless, to further strengthen the effectiveness of digital public diplomacy through the use of Online Supporters, the embassy should adopt a more active and continuous monitoring approach and develop content based on observed interactions. The embassy has rarely responded to comments on its posts, which makes it difficult for users to know whether the embassy is paying attention to the discussions taking place in the comment sections. By showing attentiveness and responding at least to non-sensitive matters, the

embassy would demonstrate its engagement, foster trust, and identify topics that generate public participation, thereby improving its public diplomacy efforts in Chile.

This study analyzes strategies of digital public diplomacy that utilize social media, particularly those involving local citizens who create content from their own perspective. The findings show that, through the Online Supporters program, both the Supporters themselves and audiences were able to pursue serious leisure, which supported the embassy's digital public diplomacy efforts. The reciprocal relationship observed in Chile between Hallyu fans' serious leisure and the embassy's efforts offers a valuable example of citizen-participatory digital public diplomacy.

However, this study also has certain limitations. Its primary focus was on the experiences of Chilean participants, and thus it did not sufficiently analyze the perceptions and expectations of the program's administrators. In addition, while user engagement was analyzed through comments on the embassy's social media accounts, long-term outcomes such as changes or improvements in perceptions of Korea were not assessed. Future research should include interviews with embassy officials and surveys of social media users to address these aspects and provide a broader understanding of the public diplomacy policies of the Korean Embassy in Chile.

Notas

1. As of September 2024, Korean diplomatic missions are in 20 Latin American countries. Additionally, there is a consulate general established in São Paulo, Brazil.
2. In programs run by Korean embassies in other Latin American countries, the number of posts is small, participant involvement in content creation is unclear, and the use of separate accounts often weakens their connection with the embassies.
3. As of January 2024, Chile's internet penetration rate is 91%, with 77.4% of the population using social media. The most used platforms are WhatsApp (93.8%), Instagram (87.2%), and Facebook (85.6%). Preferred platforms include Instagram (33.8%), WhatsApp (27.7%), and Facebook (13.1%) (Dataportal, 2024).
4. We sincerely thank the students of the Master's Program in Korean Studies at Universidad Central de Chile for their valuable comments and contributions to the study design. We especially thank Macarena Alvarado for her support in coordinating the interviews.
5. This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2019S1A6A3A02058027).

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How to cite:

Jun, J., & Choi, J. (2025). Chilean Hallyu Fans and Their Serious Leisure Practices in South Korea's Digital Public Diplomacy. *Comunicación y Medios*, 34(52), 43-54. https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-1529.2025.76811