



FROM KITCHEN TO DIPLOMACY: KOREAN CUISINE AS SOFT POWER

¹Gadis Hilmi Nabiilah Rose, ²Alia Rahmatulummah, ³Siti Mardanita

¹⁻³Universitas Paramadina, Indonesia

*) Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to:

E-mail: gadis.nabillah@students.paramadina.ac.id

Abstract: *The rise of digital technology has reshaped the global communication landscape, shifting public diplomacy from traditional physical spaces to more interactive virtual platforms. Within this context, gastrodiploacy—the use of food as a medium for cultural exchange has become a strategic tool for nation branding and soft power. South Korea stands out as a success case, integrating its culinary traditions with the Korean Wave (Hallyu) to promote national identity and foster positive international perceptions. Through digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Netflix, various Korean cuisines is not only introduced to global audiences but also emotionally engages, particularly in countries like Indonesia. Despite its growing relevance, the specific role of Korean gastrodiploacy in shaping cultural identity in Indonesia remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by examining how South Korea leverages culinary diplomacy within digital ecosystems to construct a favorable cultural image. The research employs a qualitative approach, analyzing digital content, media campaigns, and audience reception in Indonesia to understand the dynamics between food, culture, and perception. Findings suggest that the synergy between Korean cuisine and digital media creates dynamic cross-cultural spaces where emotional connections are built through shared experiences. Food, in this context not just as a consumable item but as a narrative tool that conveys values, traditions, and identity. Consequently, Korean gastrodiploacy emerges as a powerful instrument of soft power, enhancing South Korea’s cultural presence and influence in Indonesia. This study concludes that culinary diplomacy, when effectively mediated through digital platforms, plays a significant role in contemporary cultural diplomacy.*

Keywords: *Gastrodiploacy, Digital Media, Korean Wave, Public Diplomacy, Nation Branding.*

Abstrak: Kemajuan teknologi digital telah membentuk ulang lanskap komunikasi global, menggeser diplomasi publik dari ruang fisik tradisional ke platform virtual yang lebih interaktif. Dalam konteks ini, gastrodipomasi—penggunaan makanan sebagai media pertukaran budaya—telah menjadi alat strategis untuk membangun citra bangsa dan kekuatan lunak (soft power). Korea Selatan menonjol sebagai contoh keberhasilan, dengan mengintegrasikan tradisi kulinernya ke dalam Gelombang Korea (Hallyu) guna mempromosikan identitas nasional dan membentuk persepsi internasional yang positif. Melalui platform digital seperti YouTube, Instagram, dan Netflix, berbagai jenis kuliner Korea tidak hanya diperkenalkan kepada audiens global, tetapi juga membangun keterikatan emosional, terutama di negara-negara seperti Indonesia. Meskipun semakin relevan, peran spesifik gastrodipomasi Korea dalam membentuk identitas budaya di Indonesia masih belum banyak diteliti. Studi ini berupaya mengisi kekosongan tersebut dengan meneliti bagaimana Korea Selatan memanfaatkan diplomasi kuliner dalam ekosistem digital untuk membangun citra budaya yang menguntungkan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, dengan menganalisis konten digital, kampanye media, dan respons audiens di Indonesia guna memahami dinamika antara makanan, budaya, dan persepsi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa sinergi antara kuliner Korea dan media digital menciptakan ruang lintas budaya yang dinamis, di mana keterikatan emosional terbentuk melalui pengalaman bersama. Dalam konteks ini, makanan tidak hanya menjadi barang konsumsi, tetapi juga alat naratif yang menyampaikan nilai, tradisi, dan identitas. Dengan demikian, gastrodipomasi Korea muncul sebagai instrumen soft power yang kuat, yang memperkuat kehadiran dan pengaruh budaya Korea Selatan di Indonesia. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa diplomasi kuliner, ketika dimediasi secara efektif melalui platform digital, memainkan peran penting dalam diplomasi budaya kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Gastrodipomasi, Media Digital, Korean Wave, Diplomasi Publik, Nation Branding.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology has become the main catalyst in fundamentally changing the global communication landscape. One of the most influential milestones is the presence of the internet, which has revolutionized the way humans access, produce, and distribute information. The internet not only enables connectivity without geographical boundaries but also creates a space for communication that is faster, more open, and interactive. Over time, this

advancement has given birth to various social media platforms as a result of the convergence between digital technology and the human need for more dynamic communication. Social media is no longer just a means of entertainment or personal communication; it has transformed into a hub of information and public opinion activity. The role of traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television is gradually being displaced by social media, which offers real-time access to information and greater freedom of expression.

Through social media, individuals can share various forms of content such as text, images, videos, and live broadcasts without having to go through the curation or censorship processes typical of conventional media. This transformation shows that modern society is no longer merely passive recipients of information. They now play an active role as producers, curators, and distributors of information in an increasingly complex and decentralized digital ecosystem (Castells, 2010). Social media also reflects the close connection between the real world and the virtual world, where activities in one realm can influence and shape dynamics in another realm. This interaction creates simultaneous and reciprocal phenomena that strengthen connectivity between individuals and communities globally.

In the current digital era, social media not only changes the way we communicate but also shapes a virtual public space that transcends national borders. This opens up great opportunities for the formation of cross-cultural and cross-national social networks, as well as expanding the scope of public diplomacy, including the practice of gastrodiploacy, a soft power strategy that utilizes culinary culture as a diplomatic tool. Thus, social media becomes a strategic instrument in building the nation's image, strengthening inter-state relations, and directly and effectively reaching a global audience.

Gastrodiploacy is a form of public diplomacy that focuses on the use of food as the main medium in conducting international relations. This concept positions cuisine not just as a part of daily life, but as a strategic instrument in introducing culture, building national image (nation branding), and strengthening inter-country ties. Rockower (2012) defines gastrodiploacy as "the act of winning hearts and minds through stomachs," which literally means the effort to win the

hearts and minds of the world through culinary approaches. This statement emphasizes that food can be an effective cultural bridge in conveying the values, identity, and character of a nation to the international community. In the context of cultural diplomacy, gastrodiploamacy has its own appeal because it can touch the emotional aspects and sensory experiences of a global audience. Food is not only consumed physically, but also enjoyed culturally and symbolically, creating an intimate and enjoyable space for interaction. Therefore, countries that recognize the great potential of cuisine as a diplomatic tool have developed gastrodiploamacy strategies as an integral part of their foreign policy.

Several countries in Asia, such as Thailand, South Korea, and Taiwan, have demonstrated their success in implementing gastrodiploamacy. Thailand, for example, launched the "Global Thai" campaign aimed at opening thousands of Thai restaurants around the world as a form of cultural promotion. Meanwhile, South Korea has cleverly integrated gastrodiploamacy with the Hallyu phenomenon or Korean Wave, which includes K-pop music, dramas, films, and Korean cuisine. This campaign is reinforced by the use of digital technology and social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and streaming services like Netflix, which actively disseminate a positive image of Korean culture to various countries, including Indonesia (Jang & Paik, 2012). Through this holistic approach, gastrodiploamacy has not only become a complementary tool in public diplomacy but has also evolved into a form of soft power capable of shaping global perceptions of a country. The experience of enjoying a nation's traditional cuisine can evoke a sense of closeness, curiosity, and even interest in its culture.

Thus, the strategy of gastrodiploamacy is capable of creating effective cultural communication channels, strengthening international relations, and expanding a country's influence peacefully and persuasively through the power of taste. Furthermore, digital media not only serves as a means to expand the global audience reach but also opens up space for active public engagement in the process of shaping the image and perception of a country's cultural identity. Through interactions on digital platforms such as social media, blogs, vlogs, and video-sharing channels, the public can now participate in spreading cultural narratives, including national cuisine, more widely and interactively. In this context,

gastrodiplomacy is undergoing a transformation from a top-down strategy controlled by the state to a more participatory and organic approach, where the community and diaspora also play a role as agents of cultural diplomacy.

The use of digital media allows gastrodiplomacy strategies to become more flexible, dynamic, and responsive to changing global trends. Local culinary content published through YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, or Netflix can quickly go viral, sparking international interest in certain food cultures while simultaneously strengthening the positive image of their home country. This makes gastrodiplomacy a form of nation branding that is not only representative but also capable of building stronger emotional connections with a global audience through visual experiences, personal stories, and direct interactions in the digital space.

The synergy between advancements in digital technology and gastrodiplomacy strategies demonstrates that digitalization has become an important pillar in modern public diplomacy. In the fast-paced and interconnected information era, the use of digital platforms has become a necessity for countries that want to maintain their image competitiveness on the international stage. Gastrodiplomacy, in this case, is becoming increasingly relevant as a contemporary soft power instrument that not only reflects cultural richness but also creates bridges between nations through a subtle, enjoyable, and easily accepted approach. Thus, the presence of digital media has expanded the dimensions of gastrodiplomacy, from mere food promotion to an integral part of inclusive and sustainable cultural diplomacy. Collaboration between the government, culinary industry players, the diaspora, and digital media users has become the main key in strengthening gastrodiplomacy strategies that are adaptive to the times and global communication needs. Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu, is a global phenomenon that describes the spread of South Korean popular culture to various parts of the world.

This phenomenon occurs as a result of the process of cultural hybridization that combines traditional Korean elements, Confucian values, and Western popular culture, particularly in the form of music (K-Pop), television dramas (K-Drama), and filmmaking. Since the 1990s, Korean entertainment products have found a special place in the hearts of East Asian societies, and in the early 2000s, this wave

began to reach Indonesia, significantly influencing cultural preferences and strengthening South Korea's dominance in the international entertainment sector (Novyanti et al., 2021: 1221).

Geographically, South Korea is located on the Korean Peninsula, which stretches between China and Japan. After World War II ended in 1945, this region was divided into two countries with opposing political systems: the Republic of Korea (South Korea), which adopted a democratic system, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), which embraced a communist system. In its development, South Korea succeeded in building a strong cultural identity, one of which is through the popularity of the Korean Wave. In addition to being known for K-Pop, K-Drama, technology, and films, Korean cuisine also plays an important role in shaping a positive national image in the eyes of the world (Masbudi et al., 2014: 1).

Korean cuisine has unique characteristics that reflect a blend of culture, geographical conditions, climate, and local traditions. Although sharing several similarities with Chinese and Japanese cuisine, Korean cuisine stands out in its use of unique spices, fermented ingredients, and traditional cooking techniques that make it distinct. One of the iconic dishes is kimchi, a result of fermented vegetables with spicy seasoning, which according to the Korean Tourism Organization, ranks among the top five healthiest foods in the world, alongside olive oil and soybeans (Masbudi et al., 2014: 1). The uniqueness of this cuisine then became an integral part of South Korea's soft power strategy, helping the country to emerge as a global trendsetter in fashion, technology, pop culture, and food.

South Korea's success in integrating culinary culture into public diplomacy has made gastrodiploamacy an effective strategic tool for reaching the international community. Indonesia, as one of the main target market countries, has shown great enthusiasm for Korean culture, including in the culinary sector. In recent years, the trend of Korean food, especially street snacks, has experienced significant growth in various cities in Indonesia. This is reflected in a 2019 survey which recorded that 59.8% of Indonesian respondents considered Korean food very popular, 26.8% somewhat popular, 11.6% popular among enthusiasts, and only 1.8% stated it was

not popular (Manurung, 2023). This popularity is closely related to the compatibility of Korean food flavors, which are characterized by sweetness, spiciness, and rich spices, with the tastes of the Indonesian people (Geun, 2014).

This study aims to examine how South Korea's gastrodiploamacy can function as a means of digital branding in building national cultural identity in Indonesia. To that end, this research will explore the history and development of the Korean Wave as a global cultural phenomenon, starting from East Asia and extending to the global community. The researchers will also examine the digital media strategies used by South Korea to develop its cultural image and reach international markets, as well as sustainable policies that support the implementation of public diplomacy within the framework of expanding Korea's cultural influence worldwide. In the theoretical framework, gastrodiploamacy is understood as an integral part of public diplomacy.

Several experts such as (Rockower, 2012; Pham, 2013; and Nirwandy & Awang, 2014) place gastrodiploamacy within the realm of public diplomacy, which encompasses all activities of state and non-state actors in efforts to build cross-cultural understanding, influence international public opinion, and strengthen national interests through non-coercive approaches (Gregory, 2008). Public diplomacy itself serves as a medium of communication aimed at conveying positive information about the country to a global audience, to build understanding that fosters appreciation and, ultimately, support for the country's strategic goals (Leonard et al., 2002).

The concept of public diplomacy itself began to develop systematically during the Cold War, with the United States as the pioneer through the establishment of the United States Information Agency (USIA). This institution played a crucial role in communicating democratic values and countering the influence of communism in Latin America, Europe, and Asia. The success of USIA in shaping a positive image of the United States serves as evidence that public diplomacy can be a powerful tool in winning the hearts and minds of the global community (Buckle et al., 2012).

In the context of contemporary international relations, South Korea has adopted a similar approach by establishing various institutions and cultural initiatives aimed at expanding the influence of the Korean Wave, including through cuisine. This strategy aligns with the liberalism approach that emphasizes the importance of cooperation and mutual understanding among countries in an anarchic international system. Interstate competition is no longer confrontational; instead, it resembles healthy competition with clear rules, where countries act rationally to achieve common interests (Setyowati et al., 2018). In this framework, South Korea has successfully utilized cultural diplomacy and gastrodiploamacy to expand its influence on the global stage, including in Indonesia, with a cooperative, persuasive, and innovative approach. Along with global dynamics and advancements in information technology, the phenomenon of the Korean Wave or Hallyu is gaining significant popularity in Indonesia. This increase is also driven by the ease of access to Korean entertainment content through various digital devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and internet-connected smart TVs (Adi, 2019).

The presence of digital media not only expands the reach of Korean cultural content to various layers of society but also opens interactive spaces for the public to participate in shaping perceptions, sharing experiences, and creating new narratives about Korean culture in the digital realm. In this context, gastrodiploamacy, which is a diplomatic effort conducted through traditional food and culinary culture, is no longer limited to conventional promotional activities but has transformed into a dynamic and responsive national branding strategy in line with the times. Digitalization provides South Korea with a competitive advantage in building a global cultural identity through food imagery, lifestyle, and cultural narratives that are attractively packaged on social media, video platforms, and cross-border online campaigns. Therefore, the synergy between advancements in digital technology and the practice of gastrodiploamacy is becoming increasingly important within the framework of modern public diplomacy.

The role of digitalization not only strengthens the effectiveness of cultural message dissemination but also solidifies the position of gastrodiploamacy as one of the most relevant soft power instruments in the era of globalization. With this

approach, South Korea not only introduces their culture but also forms emotional and symbolic connections with a global audience, including the Indonesian community, which ultimately supports the broader and more sustainable goals of cultural diplomacy.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method, aiming to provide a deep and comprehensive understanding of South Korea's gastrodiploamacy practices and how these practices serve as instruments of soft power, particularly in the context of South Korea's cultural relations with Indonesia. This method allows for a detailed exploration of complex social and cultural phenomena by examining the narratives, symbols, and meanings contained within Korea's culinary promotion strategies. Data collection in this research was conducted through library research, utilizing various relevant and credible secondary sources. These sources include policy documents from the South Korean government, reports from cultural institutions such as the Korean Foundation or KOCIS (Korean Culture and Information Service), scientific articles from international journals, and academic publications discussing theories of soft power, nation branding, and intercultural communication. This approach was chosen to build a strong theoretical and analytical framework in understanding the role of cuisine as part of cultural diplomacy strategies.

In the context of contemporary international relations, food is no longer positioned merely as a daily consumption need, but has evolved into a strategic medium in public diplomacy. Through food, countries can convey values, identity, and national image to a global audience in a more emotional, personal, and easily accepted manner. This phenomenon is known as gastrodiploamacy, which is a diplomatic practice that uses cuisine as a means to build international relations and enhance cross-cultural understanding. This research specifically aims to analyze how South Korea utilizes digital media as the main channel to spread its culinary cultural influence in Indonesia. The digital branding strategies examined include the use of social media (such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube), online campaigns conducted through food promotion content, and the representation of

Korean food in Korean dramas and reality shows widely consumed by the Indonesian public. Using a descriptive-qualitative method, this research evaluates the social and cultural dynamics formed by the penetration of Korean culinary culture, as well as how it is accepted, adapted, or even criticized by the Indonesian society. In addition, this research also aims to identify the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of South Korea's gastrodiploamacy in Indonesia, such as differences in taste preferences, cultural perceptions, and economic factors that influence the appeal of Korean cuisine. With this approach, it is hoped that a comprehensive picture can be obtained regarding the effectiveness of cuisine as a diplomatic tool and its contribution to shaping a positive perception of South Korea as a country that has successfully integrated culture, creative economy, and soft power simultaneously.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

South Korea's Strategy: Promoting Identity through Cuisine

The bilateral relationship between Indonesia and South Korea, which has been established since 1973, continues to strengthen, especially in the fields of economy and investment. One of the important indicators is the increase in South Korean foreign direct investment (FDI) in Indonesia. In 2023, the value of FDI from South Korea reached approximately USD 2.5 billion, an increase of 8.7% compared to the previous year. This trend continued in 2024, with the value of FDI reaching USD 2.4 billion or around IDR 38.1 trillion, making South Korea one of the top six main investor countries in Indonesia (Setiono, 2024; and Medina, 2024). This investment is generally concentrated in the manufacturing sector, particularly related to the development of electric vehicle ecosystems and the steel industry. In addition, the collaboration also extends to the infrastructure and technology sectors, including renewable energy and digitalization, which strengthens South Korea's confidence in Indonesia's long-term economic potential. However, the relationship between the two countries is not solely based on economic aspects. In the context of cultural diplomacy strategies, South Korea also actively utilizes its soft power, one of which is through promoting national identity via the culinary sector. The phenomenon of

the Korean Wave or Hallyu, which was initially limited to music (K-Pop) and Korean dramas (K-Drama), has now expanded to lifestyle, fashion, and most notably, Korean food. This trend is strategically leveraged by the South Korean government through institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs and the Korea Agro-Fisheries & Food Trade Corporation, which actively support the expansion of the K-Food market in countries like Indonesia (Supriyatna, 2024).

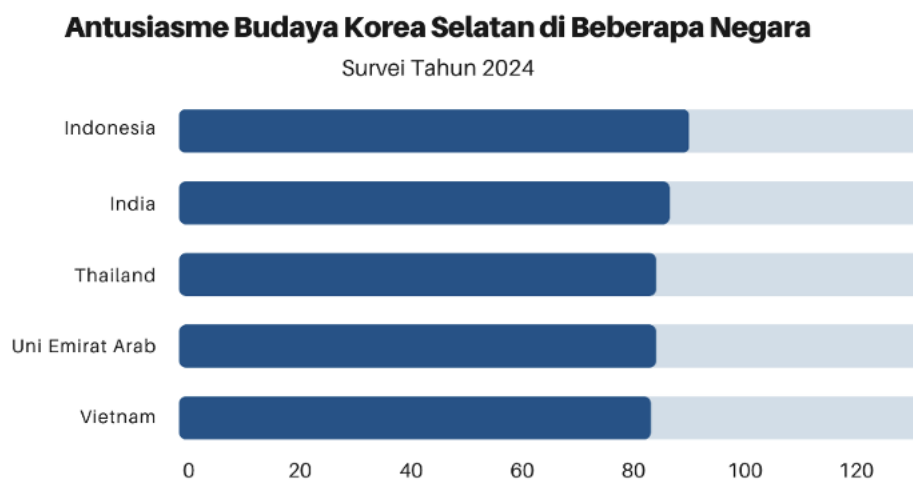


Figure 1. The Enthusiasm for South Korean Culture in Several Countries

Figure 1 displays the level of enthusiasm among the public in several countries towards South Korean culture. Indonesia ranks first with an interest percentage of 86.3%, followed by India, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam. The high interest of the Indonesian people in Korean culture, which includes music, drama, fashion, and especially cuisine, reflects the success of South Korea's soft power strategy in spreading its national identity through the popular culture sector. Cuisine has become one of the main mediums in this cultural diplomacy, where Korean food is not only introduced through restaurants or export products but also through strong integration with media content such as K-Dramas and K-Pop. In many Korean series, local food is attractively showcased both as part of the story and cinematic visuals, thereby building curiosity and interest among international audiences, including those from Indonesia. The South Korean Ambassador to Indonesia, Park Soo Deok, in his statement at the K-Festival 2024

in Jakarta quoted from (Octavia, 2024), stated that cultural diplomacy efforts are not one-sided. In addition to introducing Korean culture to Indonesia, the South Korean government is also striving to support the promotion of Indonesian culture to the Korean public. This statement indicates a reciprocal cultural exchange approach, while also strengthening the position of cuisine as an open and cooperative instrument of diplomacy.

In Indonesia, especially, enthusiasm for Korean food has increased along with the spread of Korean pop culture. Products such as kimchi, gochujang, ramen, and various types of Korean snacks are now not only easy to find in shopping centers but have also become part of the culinary preferences of urban communities seeking fast, healthy, strong-flavored, and unique food. This popularity shows that Korean cuisine is not only a consumer product but also an effective instrument of cultural diplomacy—establishing an emotional connection between the Indonesian people and Korean culture through taste experiences. This strategy aligns with South Korea's efforts to promote national identity through food as a form of culinary diplomacy. The South Korean government positions kimchi as a symbol of national culture, with the narrative that this traditional food reflects values of health, balance, and cultural heritage (Prameswari et al., 2022). In the framework of nation branding, the promotion of K-Food is not only commercially aimed but also strengthens South Korea's image as an innovative country while remaining rooted in tradition. Furthermore, the promotion of K-Food is also utilized as a means to deepen cross-sector cooperation. For example, the increase in the volume of Korean food imports to Indonesia is also accompanied by cooperation in the field of quality assurance and food safety. This collaboration is evident from the important meeting between Indonesia's BPOM and South Korea's Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (MFDS) held in December 2024. The meeting aimed not only to strengthen the supervision of drugs and food but also to open up collaboration opportunities in preventing foodborne diseases and developing a digital food safety supervision system (National Agency of Drug and Food Control, 2024).

Thus, the promotion of South Korean cuisine in Indonesia is not merely a market expansion strategy, but rather part of a comprehensive cultural diplomacy strategy. Food is used as an emotional bridge and a symbol of national identity that

strengthens bilateral relations. On one hand, South Korea has successfully utilized soft power through cuisine as a subtle yet effective tool for cultural penetration. On the other hand, Indonesia benefits from the increasing variety of international cuisine, food technology transfer, and strengthened cooperation in food health and safety aspects. This strategy makes cuisine an inclusive diplomatic medium, strengthening inter-country relations through everyday experiences that can be enjoyed by all layers of society. South Korea's strategy in promoting its national identity through cuisine goes beyond just the promotion of food products; it also includes broader educational and regulatory cooperation with partner countries like Indonesia. One concrete implementation of this strategy is the collaboration between Indonesia's BPOM and the Criminal Investigation Division of the MFDS in December 2024. This meeting marks the commitment of both countries to enhance food quality and safety, particularly in the context of the increasing threat of illegal product distribution through digital platforms (Desti, 2024). This cooperation includes strengthening surveillance, exchanging intelligence information, technical training, and developing digital systems to monitor the circulation of food and medicines. The initiative demonstrates how cuisine and food, which were previously viewed merely as consumer products, are now elevated to an important part of diplomatic strategies and international cooperation.

Utilizing South Korea's food safety standards as a reference, Indonesia not only benefits from the improved quality of imported food products but also gains knowledge and technology transfer that strengthens its own regulatory system. In addition to strengthening bilateral relations, this step also supports South Korea's soft power strategy through a collaborative and mutually beneficial approach. The Indonesian public's trust in Korean food products has also increased, creating a stronger foundation for the expansion of Korean cuisine in the domestic market. This effort is part of a larger approach known as South Korean culinary diplomacy. Since the early 2000s, the South Korean government has actively promoted K-Food as an integral part of the Korean Wave or Hallyu. Initially formed from the popularity of K-Pop, Korean dramas (K-Drama), and Korean films, the K-Wave was then expanded by the government to encompass other aspects of Korean lifestyle, including fashion, beauty, and food (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in

Indonesia, 2015). In this framework, traditional foods such as kimchi, gochujang, and ramyeon are not only introduced as trade commodities but also as symbols of cultural identity that embody the values of health, authenticity, and Korean tradition. The use of food as a tool of cultural diplomacy is a concrete example of the application of soft power, which is the ability of a country to influence another country through cultural appeal and persuasive cooperation (Trunkos, 2013). South Korea has proven successful in this regard. In recent years, this country has been able to create a global economic and cultural impact, with the K-Wave as its main driving force. This strategy has been very well received by the Indonesian public. Based on a Twitter report in 2019, Indonesia ranked third as the country with the most tweets about K-Pop, and second in global K-Pop video views on YouTube (So, 2020). This popularity serves as a strong foundation for the Korean government to expand its influence through culinary diplomacy.

Using food as a medium of diplomacy is a strategy that is not only effective but also sustainable. Because food is the part of culture that is most accessible to all segments of society. Therefore, by introducing and popularizing Korean cuisine abroad, the South Korean government not only expands the export market for its food products but also strengthens the national image in the eyes of the world. As stated by (Zhang, 2015), the promotion of K-Food plays a significant role in the globalization of the Korean food industry, strengthening international relations, and the more subtle and profound dissemination of culture. Thus, the cooperation between South Korea and Indonesia in the culinary sector not only impacts the increase in trade or investment but also contributes to the formation of cultural identity and emotional closeness between nations. South Korea's strategy of combining cultural diplomacy, food technology development, and food product safety cooperation is a concrete example of how cuisine can be a strategic instrument in international relations.

It is known that one of the most prominent strategies used by South Korea in building its national identity on the global stage is through gastrodiploamacy, which is cuisine-based diplomacy. This strategy is based on the fundamental principle put forward by Rockower (2014), that "the best way to win hearts and minds is through the stomach." In a broader sense, Pham (2013) interprets

gastrodiplomacy as a systematic effort by a country to explore and export its culinary wealth in order to create branding, which is a positive and distinctive image of a nation in the minds of the international community. In the context of South Korea, cuisine not only serves as a cultural expression but also as a strategic and effective diplomatic instrument. South Korea has carefully designed this approach by integrating culture, media, and business. Promotion of traditional cuisine such as kimchi, bibimbap, bulgogi, or tteokbokki is not only disseminated through restaurants or international culinary festivals but is also organically integrated into popular culture products such as dramas, films, and reality shows. For example, in the drama series *Itaewon Class*, the restaurant owned by the main character serves various Korean dishes that not only strengthen the narrative but also pique the curiosity of a global audience. Another example is *BTS: In the Soop* or the program *Youn's Kitchen*, where Korean celebrities showcase the warmth and deliciousness of Korean cuisine to an international audience. This shows that South Korean food has been successfully represented not just as physical consumption, but as a form of strong emotional and cultural narrative.

The achievement is reinforced by the use of digital media as the main pillar of South Korea's gastrodiplomacy strategy. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and streaming services like Netflix have become very effective vehicles for disseminating Korean culinary values visually, quickly, and emotionally. In the era of network society as explained by (Castells, 2010), the distribution of information and culture is no longer one-way. Digital media users are now not only consumers but also producers and distributors of content. Therefore, when someone uploads mukbang content, Korean culinary travel vlogs, or reviews Korean food that appears in dramas, they also become cultural agents who expand the reach of South Korean culture. This phenomenon is very noticeable in Indonesia. The enthusiasm of the Indonesian people towards Korean culture, especially in the form of K-Wave or Hallyu, has driven the increasing popularity of Korean cuisine in various major cities. Korean restaurants are popping up, Korean instant food products are flooding the retail market, and the demand for Korean dining experiences is rapidly increasing. Foods like kimchi, ramyeon, or traditional snacks like hotteok and odeng are no longer unfamiliar. Social media also reinforces this

trend, with viral content tagged #KoreanFood, #Mukbang, or #KoreanLifestyle, shaping public perception of Korea as a modern, clean, and flavorful country. Through a gastrodiploamacy strategy packaged in popular cultural narratives and reinforced by digital media, South Korea has successfully created a highly effective form of soft power. They are not only selling food, but also selling the image of the nation: family values, a healthy lifestyle, visual beauty, and integrated modernity. This strategy ultimately strengthens South Korea's position in the eyes of the world, builds an emotional connection with the global public, and makes cuisine an integral part of the national identity that is recognized worldwide.

Impact on Indonesia: Opportunities and Challenges

South Korea has shown remarkable success in utilizing culinary diplomacy as part of its soft power strategy. Not only has South Korea introduced traditional dishes such as kimchi, tteokbokki, bibimbap, and samgyeopsal to the international market, but it has also succeeded in building a strong and globally appealing cultural image. This success is supported by a systematic and multifaceted approach, including the use of social media, support from the entertainment industry, and collaboration with global celebrities as cultural ambassadors (Alam & Nyarimun, 2017; and Pangaribuan et al., 2024). Through popular entertainment platforms such as Korean dramas (K-dramas) and K-pop music, culinary elements are consistently integrated into the storylines and lifestyles of the characters. This insertion creates wide exposure and sparks the curiosity of the global community, ultimately increasing interest in Korean culture and products as a whole. The South Korean government is also actively initiating various international promotional programs, such as the K-Food Fair that was held in Jakarta, as an effort to expand the global market for Korean food. The festival showcased various products, from raw ingredients to ready-to-eat meals, and served as a concrete example of how cultural diplomacy is conducted through the culinary sector (Assa'adah, 2016). Not only that, advancements in the packaged food and logistics industries also allow Korean culinary products to spread more easily to various countries, increasing their accessibility and visibility on the global stage.

Kimchi has transcended its status as a daily food and has become a symbol of South Korean national identity. Not only does it serve as a side dish, but kimchi also contains profound cultural, social, and historical significance (Sik, 2006). It reflects the noble values of Korean society that uphold balance, health, and respect for tradition (Surya & Nugroho, 2023). In the philosophy of *yak sik dong won*, for example, food is considered to have a role equivalent to medicine—a view that food is not merely to satisfy hunger but also to maintain physical and mental health (Surya & Lee, 2022). In recent decades, kimchi has increasingly been recognized as a highly nutritious food, particularly due to its probiotic content that benefits the digestive system (Cha et al., 2024). As global awareness of healthy and sustainable eating increases, the image of kimchi is undergoing a transformation: from an exotic ethnic food to a symbol of modern healthy living. Although its sour-spicy taste and distinctive aroma may not immediately appeal to everyone, the presence of kimchi in packaged form and as a menu item in international restaurants has made it more accessible to the global public. This reinforces kimchi's status as part of effective culinary diplomacy. Furthermore, kimchi also represents Korean social values, such as respect for elders and the importance of family togetherness (Chung et al., 2016). Kimchi has also become a symbol of strong collective values, making food a medium to strengthen solidarity and create a nationally recognizable identity globally.

The popularity of kimchi is not only supported by its nutritional content and ease of access but also reinforced by the significant role of social media in shaping public perception, especially among the younger generation. Digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have become dynamic promotional spaces, where culinary influencers and Korean culture enthusiasts actively share their experiences tasting kimchi and various other traditional Korean dishes. Appetizing visuals, combined with personal narratives or entertainment, make kimchi appear not only delicious but also 'trendy' and worth trying. This phenomenon encourages the perception that tasting kimchi is not just about food, but also a part of the modern lifestyle connected to global cultural trends. Furthermore, the expansion of Korean restaurants in various countries, including Indonesia, has also strengthened exposure to and direct access to kimchi. The international community can now

directly experience Korean cuisine in an authentic atmosphere without having to visit its country of origin. All of this is part of a strategy that unites cultural diplomacy, creative economic growth, and efficiency in the distribution of cultural products. Through this combination, kimchi has now transcended its function as a daily food and has transformed into a representative symbol of South Korea's national identity on the world stage.

South Korea's success in making kimchi a global cultural icon offers valuable lessons for Indonesia. This shows that food not only serves to fulfill biological needs but can also be an effective means of conveying national identity, cultural values, and the philosophy of life of a nation. This phenomenon of culinary globalization opens strategic opportunities for Indonesia to revitalize the role of its culinary wealth as part of cultural diplomacy and a driver of the creative economy. Indonesia, with its geographical and ethnic diversity, possesses invaluable culinary treasures ranging from rendang, satay, tempeh, jamu, to pempek. These foods not only have distinctive flavors but also contain philosophical meanings that reflect local values such as mutual cooperation, respect for nature, and the heritage of traditional medicine. The wide-open opportunity lies in the potential to package this wealth into an integrated global promotion strategy that combines popular culture, the digital industry, cross-country cooperation, and a strong national identity narrative. With the Indonesian youth being very active on social media and in the digital culture, there is ample opportunity for platform-based culinary promotion strategies such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. Collaboration between content creators, culinary SMEs, and the Indonesian diaspora abroad can create organic exposure for local food that is interesting, modern, and has international appeal. Products like jamu, for example, can be repositioned as part of the global wellness trend, competing with healthy drinks from other countries.

However, there are also challenges that cannot be ignored. One of them is the absence of a collective narrative and a strong and sustainable branding strategy for Indonesian food as a representation of culture. Many Nusantara cuisines are still positioned merely as consumer commodities, not yet integrated into national cultural diplomacy. Minimal documentation, limitations in standardization systems, and weak technological and logistical distribution support are the main obstacles to

penetrating the global market. Moreover, institutional challenges are also evident. Coordination between government sectors, industry players, and creative practitioners is still not optimal. The lack of synergy across ministries, such as between the Ministry of Tourism, Trade, Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and Culture, often makes culinary promotion efforts sporadic and inconsistent. On the other hand, the expansion of Indonesian restaurants abroad is still limited and unable to compete in terms of infrastructure or brand competitiveness with other Asian restaurants such as Korean, Japanese, or Thai. Indonesia also needs to face the challenge of maintaining the authenticity and quality of local cuisine that is adapted abroad. Without clear international regulations or standards, Indonesian cuisine is vulnerable to distortion of taste and meaning, which could potentially diminish its symbolic value as a cultural representation.

The phenomenon of South Korea's cultural expansion, particularly through gastrodiploamacy leveraging the power of the Korean Wave, has a complex impact on recipient countries like Indonesia. On one hand, this phenomenon creates opportunities in the form of economic cooperation, growth in the creative industry, and an increase in culinary tourism. However, on the other hand, Indonesia also faces various serious challenges, both in cultural, economic, and social aspects. One of the most evident impacts is the emergence of the challenge of cultural homogenization, which is the condition when local cultures begin to be marginalized due to the dominance of foreign cultures that are considered more modern, attractive, and globally relevant. In this context, South Korean culture has successfully instilled an image of lifestyle and consumption patterns packaged through digital media with strong visual narratives. Content such as Korean dramas, mukbang, and advertisements for Korean food products marketed massively, have made Korean cuisine a symbol of social status and a trendy phenomenon in the eyes of most Indonesian society, especially among the youth. This condition gives rise to the phenomenon of fear of missing out (FOMO), which is the feeling of being left behind if one does not follow the currently viral trends. FOMO drives people to consume Korean cultural products not because of their intrinsic value or cultural understanding, but rather due to the social urge to feel 'connected' with global

trends. According to Ritzer (2011), such cultural homogenization has the potential to suppress local diversity and cause the original culture of a country to lose its space for actualization, especially when the local culture is not packaged in a format that can compete visually and commercially on the global stage. In the long term, this dominance can develop into a form of culinary imperialism, where local tastes are indirectly directed to favor food from other countries that are considered superior, while local cuisine loses its appeal due to the lack of pop culture attraction. This challenge becomes even greater as mass media and digital technology drive the spread of global culture in an instant and highly accessible format.

Nevertheless, the success of South Korea's gastrodiploamacy also opens strategic opportunities for Indonesia to learn and develop its own culinary diplomacy. The phenomenon of the Korean Wave shows how the power of pop culture can be an effective diplomatic tool and economically beneficial. Indonesia, with its rich and diverse culinary heritage and strong cultural foundation, has the potential to develop a similar cultural narrative, of course with relevant packaging strategies that are adaptive to the development of media technology. Another challenge that is very contextual for Indonesia is the adjustment to halal standards. As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, the issue of halal is a key factor in the acceptance of foreign food products. Many Korean food products such as kimchi, gochujang, and other types of fermentation contain ingredients that, in terms of processing, may not necessarily meet the halal standards of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). The ambiguity of raw materials and the differences in certification systems between South Korea and Indonesia cause Indonesian Muslim consumers to hesitate in consuming these products. Although the South Korean government has responded to this challenge by initiating the K-Halal Food program since 2012 and collaborating with food regulatory agencies such as Indonesia's BPOM, its implementation still faces various obstacles (Assa'adah, 2016). Many Korean restaurants operating in Indonesia have not yet been officially halal certified, which ultimately hinders the expansion of Korea's gastrodiploamacy market among Muslim consumers. This challenge also presents an opportunity for Indonesia to strengthen regulatory

diplomacy in the halal sector, while becoming an important player in the global halal market by offering a credible certification system.

The findings of this research also indicate that South Korea's approach can serve as a strategic inspiration for other countries, particularly in the Southeast Asian region such as Indonesia. Indonesia has a very rich cultural capital in the form of traditional culinary heritage that is not only diverse but also full of meaning and philosophical value. Nevertheless, this great potential has not yet been optimally utilized within the framework of structured and sustainable culinary diplomacy. The main obstacles lie in the lack of strong synergy between government institutions, the limited use of digital technology as a cultural promotion tool, and the absence of an integrated narrative that can elevate Indonesian culinary identity as part of global cultural diplomacy. For that reason, a holistic and integrated national strategy is needed so that Indonesian culinary diplomacy can compete and present itself as a representation of the nation's identity on the international stage. Learning from South Korea's success in framing kimchi as an integral part of national identity through cross-sector strategies and effective use of social media, Indonesia has a great opportunity to do the same. If managed seriously and strategically, Indonesian cuisine can become a strong bridge to expand the influence of national culture, increase non-oil and gas product exports, and strengthen economic diplomacy as well as Indonesia's positive image in the eyes of the world. The key to success lies in the development of a national culinary ecosystem based on innovation, supported by pro-people public policies, competent technology, engaging cross-media promotions, and sustainable global partnerships. Thus, Indonesian food is not only known for its deliciousness but also appreciated as a profound expression of the nation's identity.

CONCLUSIONS

This research underscores that the rapid development of information technology has fundamentally changed the landscape of global communication. This transformation creates interactive spaces that allow the global community not only to be passive recipients of information but also to actively participate as content creators in shaping cultural discourse in the digital realm. This dynamic

presents significant strategic opportunities for strengthening gastrodiplomacy practices, especially since digital media has become the main channel for conveying cultural messages widely, quickly, and effectively as part of contemporary public diplomacy practices. In this context, South Korea emerges as the main actor that has successfully maximized that potential. Through the integration of popular culture such as K-Pop, K-Drama, and mukbang content with national culinary campaigns, South Korea has been able to position food as a strong symbol of cultural identity. This strategy not only creates visual and emotional appeal but also shapes public perception in target countries, including Indonesia, towards Korea's national image as modern, dynamic, and globally classy.

In Indonesia itself, South Korea's gastrodiplomacy strategy has proven to be very effective in attracting public interest, especially among the younger generation who are active on social media. The popularity of Korean food cannot be separated from the driving force of digital celebrities and lifestyle narratives constructed through online media. This shows that food has become a medium of cultural communication capable of transcending geographical and ideological boundaries. Furthermore, gastrodiplomacy no longer functions merely as a complement in efforts to introduce culture, but has evolved into a primary instrument in South Korea's soft power strategy. It unites the dimensions of diplomacy, culture, and economy within a cohesive framework. The bilateral cooperation between South Korea and Indonesia on strategic issues such as food security, import regulations, and halal certification reflects the expanded meaning of gastrodiplomacy. In this case, cuisine is not only a cultural bridge but also a vehicle of diplomacy that strengthens inter-country relations sustainably amid the increasingly intensive currents of digital globalization.

Bibliography

- Adi, G. K. H. (2019). *KOREAN WAVE (Studi Tentang Pengaruh Budaya Korea Pada Penggemar K-Pop di Semarang)*. Universitas Diponegoro.
- Alam, S., & Nyarimun, A. J. (2017). *MUSIK K-POP SEBAGAI ALAT DIPLOMASI DALAM SOFT POWER KOREA SELATAN*. 3. <https://jurnalhiusni.org/index.php/idu/article/view/176/52>
- Assa'adah, V. K. (2016). SOUTH KOREAN GASTRODIPLOMACY STRATEGY IN IMPLEMENTING K-HALAL FOOD (KOREAN HALAL FOOD) IN INDONESIA IN 2012-2021. *Journal of International Relations*, 1–3. <http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article.php?article=3500960&val=12333&title=SOUTH%20KOREAN%20GASTRODIPLOMACY%20STRATEGY%20IN%20IMPLEMENTING%20K-HALAL%20FOOD%20KOREAN%20HALAL%20FOOD%20IN%20INDONESIA%20IN%202012-2021>
- Badan Pengawas Obat dan Makanan. (2024). *Indonesia dan Korea Selatan Perkuat Kerja Sama di Bidang Pengawasan Obat dan Makanan*. <https://www.pom.go.id/berita/indonesia-dan-korea-selatan-perkuat-kerja-sama-di-bidang-pengawasan-obat-dan-makanan>
- Buckle, G. , Walker, C., & Black, R. (2012). Typhoid Fever and Paratyphoid Fever: Systematic Review to Estimate Global Morbidity and Mortality for 2010. *Journal of Global Health*, 2, 1–9.
- Castells, M. (2010). *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd Ed). Wiley Blackwell.
- Cha, J., Kim, Y. B., Park, S. E., Lee, S. H., Roh, S. W., Son, H. S., & Whon, T. W. (2024). Does kimchi deserve the status of a probiotic food? *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition*, 64(19), 6512–6525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10408398.2023.2170319>
- Chung, H. K., Yang, H. J., Shin, D., & Chung, K. R. (2016). Aesthetics of Korean foods: The symbol of Korean culture. *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, 3(3), 178–188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jef.2016.09.001>
- Desti. (2024). *BPOM Indonesia dan MFDS Korea Selatan Perkuat Kerja Sama Perangi Kejahatan Obat dan Makanan*. <https://www.pom.go.id/berita/bpom-indonesia-dan-mfds-korea-selatan-perkuat-kerja-sama-perangi-kejahatan-obat-dan-makanan>
- Geun, A. A. S. (2014). *Carilah Ilmu Ke Negeri Korea : Mewujudkan Hubungan Bilateral Yang Harmoni Antara Indonesia dan Korea*. Mutra Wacana Media.
- Gregory, B. (2008). Public Diplomacy: Sunrise of an Academic Field. *Sage Journals*, 616(1). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311723>
- Jang, G., & Paik, W. K. (2012). Korean Wave as Tool for Korea's New Cultural Diplomacy. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 02(03), 196–202. <https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2012.23026>
- Kedutaan Besar Republik Korea Selatan untuk Indonesia. (2015). *Hallyu : Gelombang Korea (한류: Korea Wave)*. https://overseas.mofa.go.kr/id-id/wpge/m_2741/contents.do
- Leonard, Mark., Stead, Catherine., & Smewing, Conrad. (2002). *Public Diplomacy*. Foreign Policy Centre. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/20958/Public_Diplomacy.pdf

- Manurung, H. L. (2023). Keberhasilan Diplomasi Makanan (Gastro Diplomacy) ala Korea Selatan. *Honorary Reporters Korea*.
https://honoraryreporters.korea.net/board/detail.do?articlecate=1&board_no=10531&tpln=10
- Masbudi, M., Yuwono, E. C., & Kurniawan, A. S. (2014). Perancangan Buku Pengenalan Makanan khas Korea. *J. DKV Adiwarna*, 1(4).
<https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/77474-ID-perancangan-buku-pengenalan-makanan-khas.pdf>
- Medina, A. F. (2024). Indonesia's Record Investment Inflows: Key Highlights from H1 2024. *ASEAN Briefing From Dezan Shira & Associates*.
<https://www.aseanbriefing.com/news/indonesias-record-investment-inflows-key-highlights-from-h1-2024/>
- Nirwandy, N., & Awang, A. A. (2014). Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy Social Convention Culinary: Engaging Gastro Diplomacy Warfare for Economic Branding. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 130, 325–332.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.038>
- Novyanti, V., Sosianika, A., & Rafdinal, D. W. (2021). *Peran Country of Origin Image dalam Memprediksi Purchase Intention Makanan Korea*.
<http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article.php?article=2944192&val=26048&title=Peran%20Country%20of%20Origin%20Image%20dalam%20Memprediksi%20Purchase%20Intention%20Makanan%20Korea>
- Octavia, C. F. (2024, September 23). Kedubes Korsel: K-Festival untuk saling tukar budaya Korea-Indonesia. *Antara*.
- Pangaribuan, J. K., Resen, P. T. K., & Dewi, P. R. K. (2024). Peran Media Dalam Diplomasi Publik Korea Selatan Sebagai Upaya Penyebarluasan Soft Power Di Indonesia Tahun 2012-2022. *Diskusi Ilmiah Komunitas Hubungan Internasional*, 4, 232–248.
<https://ojs.unud.ac.id/index.php/hi/article/view/102199/56021>
- Pham, M. J. A. (2013). Food As Communication: A Case Study of South Korea's Gastrodiplomacy. *Journal of International Service*, 22(1).
<https://thediplotatistdotcom.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/jis-spring-2013-issue-gastrodiplomacy.pdf>
- Prameswari, N. M., Susiatiningsih, H., & Windiani, R. (2022). Gastrodiplomasi Korea Selatan dalam Upaya Nation Branding di Indonesia sebagai Negara Muslim Terbesar. *Journal of International Relations*, 8, 675–689.
<http://ejournal-s1.undip.ac.id/index.php/jihihttp://www.fisip.undip.ac.id>
- Ritzer, G. (2011). *The McDonaldization of society* 6 (6th ed.). Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications Co.
- Rockower, P. S. (2012). Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 8, 235–246. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2012.17>
- Rockower, P. S. (2014). The State of Gastrodiplomacy. *Public Diplomacy*.
<http://www.bidd.org.rs/the-state-of-gastrodiplomacy/>
- Setiono, H. (2024). Menyalakan Kilau Kerja Sama RI-Korsel. *SindoNews*.
<https://nasional.sindonews.com/read/1413907/18/menyalakan-kilau-kerja-sama-ri-korsel-1720706826>
- Setyowati, P. R. N., Mustika, M., Siti, K., & Habibah, M. (2018). *HUBUNGAN INTERNASIONAL DAN POLITIK GLOBAL*.

- Sik, H. (2006). Food and Nationalism: Kimchi and Korean National Identity. *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, 4(1), 207–229. <https://www.kjis.org/journal/view.html?spage=207&volume=4&number=1>
- So, W. (2020). Distribution of K-pop views on YouTube Worldwide as of June 2019, by country. *Statista*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1106704/south-korea-kpop-youtube-views-by-country/>
- Supriyatna, I. (2024). Impor Makanan Korea ke Indonesia Terus Meningkat. *Suara.Com*. <https://www.suara.com/bisnis/2024/07/25/083747/impor-makanan-korea-ke-indonesia-terus-meningkat>
- Surya, R., & Lee, A. G. Y. (2022). Exploring the philosophical values of kimchi and kimjang culture. *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-022-00136-5>
- Surya, R., & Nugroho, D. (2023). Kimchi throughout millennia: a narrative review on the early and modern history of kimchi. In *Journal of Ethnic Foods* (Vol. 10, Issue 1). BioMed Central Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-023-00171-w>
- Trunkos, J. (2013). *WHAT IS SOFT POWER CAPABILITY AND HOW DOES IT IMPACT FOREIGN POLICY?* <http://culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/pdf/participant-papers/2013-acdusa/What-Is-Soft-Power-Capability-And-How-Does-It-Impact-Foreign-Policy--Judit-Trunkos.pdf>
- Zhang, J. (2015). The Foods of the Worlds: Mapping and Comparing Contemporary Gastrodiplomacy Campaigns. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 568–591. <http://ijoc.org>.