

*The Analysis of Japanese Youth and Their Perspectives on National Identity on
Twitter: #韓国人になりたい #I want to be Korean*

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Abstract

This study explored the identity and national sentiment of Japanese youth after the official debut of a Korean girl group, TWICE, through social media platforms. Japan is known as one of the nations where nationalism has been the core of the society; previous post-war generations of Japanese may not condone the younger generation's tweet messages and pictures with #韓国人になりたい (#I want to be Korean). What happened to these young Japanese? Are these youngsters giving up their Japanese identity and national sentiment? The sudden rise of this trend on Twitter is owing to three native Japanese members of TWICE: Mina-chan, Momo-chan, and Sana-chan. This study adopted the digital ethnographic approach and the analysis of the content that has been posted on Twitter. This data was collected after the official debut of TWICE, 28 June 2017 until 28 February 2018 with the mentioned hashtag above. The online interview was conducted with purposive sampling techniques to seek the reasons why participants want to be Korean, what elements of Korean style they subscribe to, and to investigate the decline of the national sentiment among the young Japanese. This research will be a relevant example for researchers who would like to conduct studies on the relationship between youth and nationalism.

Keywords: nationalism, #I want to be Korean, twitter

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Introduction

Japan is one of the well-known nations for its strong nationalism. To explain the expansion of Japanese troops, nationalism is often associated with political power that motivates the formation of arm force (Tønnesson, 2016). Tracing back to Second world war period, nationalist ideology and patriotism drove the Empire of Japan to colonise in many places in the Asian region, including Korea. Annexation of Korea (1910-1945) was one of the great victories of Japanese Empire; presenting its power and military abilities to other nations. During occupation period, Korean people were forced to assimilate with Japanese from adopting Japanese names to showing respect to the Japanese emperor. “Korea and Japan as one body” was a slogan that pushes every Korean to register and attend any ceremonies at Shinto shrines, a Japanese native religion. Later 1939, the Name Order compelled Korean people to use Japanese names and 84% of Koreans were reported to adopt Japanese names in 1940 (Seth, 2016). To be highlighted, Japanese culture was favoured by some Koreans, particularly, educated and upper-class Koreans were fond of Japanese literature, music, and movies (Seth, 2016). Whereas, Korean culture and literature were oppressed and restricted as Korean edition newspapers and Korean book publishers were ceased; Korean language was restricted in schools (Seth, 2016). The flood of foreign culture, American culture, in particular, devastated Japanese society after the surrender of Imperial Japan in 1945 (Matsushima, 2017).

Former of Japanese colony, South Korea, gradually becomes the cultural producer and competitor in Japan. Korean wave (韓流) arrived in Japan around the mid-2000s, *Winter Sonata* was broadcast in 2004 and became the starting point of Korean Wave’s history in Japan (Matsushima, 2017). Later, there are more and more Korean idols who made their ways to be accepted by Japanese fans. For instance, Boa, Tohoshinki, FT Island, Big Bang, Girls’ Generation, BTS, and recently TWICE. The office debut of TWICE, a girl group, on 28 June 2017 in Japan led to a great change in Japanese K-pop fandom. Since there are three native Japanese members in the group: Mina-chan, Mono-chan, and Sana-chan, they might play a great role in influencing young Japanese girls, in particular. After their debut, the hashtag #韓国人になりたい (#I want to be Korean) slowly popped up on Instagram and Twitter. Currently, there are more than ten-thousand posts on Instagram and over two-thousand tweets on Twitter with the hashtag #韓国人になりたい (#I want to be Korean). This paper aims to obtain a better understanding of nationalism among Japanese youth on Twitter behind the influence of the Korean Wave.

Research objectives

1. To find the actual meanings behind the hashtag #韓国人になりたい (#I want to be Korean)
2. To study the elements of Korea-ness that young Japanese people are fond of
3. To investigate the sense of nationalism among Japanese people on Twitter

Research questions

RQ1: Why do Japanese people put hashtag of #韓国人になりたい (#I want to be Korean) on Twitter?

RQ2: What do Japanese teenagers like about Korea?

RQ3: How do Japanese people react to this hashtag?

RQ4: Does this hashtag indicate the decline of nationalism among Japanese youth?

RQ5: What is the major factor that drives young Japanese to want to be Koreans?

Literature Review

K-pop and Twitter

Kim, Heo, Choi, and Park (2014) explored the communication patterns and structures from the trend of #*kpop* hashtag on Twitter, one of the online communication platforms. Their research combined the data collection method on Twitter from 9 November 2011 to 15 February 2012 under the framework of the duality of media along with the webometric method. Among 16,788 Twitter users who put the #*Kpop*, this study was able to identify the location of 10,197 users. Japan was in the second place where the mentioned hashtag was used; there were 2,744 Indonesian users and 2,470 Japanese users. The result of this research indicated that Japanese Twitter users were likely female high school students and 32 percent of total tweets by Japanese users were about Korea/Korean wave and 29.6 percent were about Korean singers.

Korean wave in Japan

Mori (2008) examined Korean cultural practices by middle-aged women in Japan. *Winter Sonata* built three different aspects of Japan – Korea relationship: 1) reconsidering the cultural relationship between two countries 2) Japanese women were cultural agency 3) establishing social and cultural practices and initiating interest in Korean culture. The popularity of *Winter Sonata* demonstrated how Japanese people changed their views of Korea and Korean people. Importantly, *Winter Sonata* fans were seen as a wealthy middle-aged housewives who fell in love with Bae Yong-joon. This Korean drama did not only portray the new Korea and Koreans to Japanese, but also reflected the thoughts on colonialism. In short, *Winter Sonata* allowed the transnational capability of middle-aged women's politics in the globalisation era.

Lie (2012) investigated the origins of K-pop's commercial triumph along with South Korean society and culture. K-pop is likely the largest cultural products of South Korea, but there is no vibrant independent music scene like in Japan. More importantly, relevant aspects of 'Korean' is missing in K-pop when relating it to the traditional cultural aspects. K-pop, therefore, is a part of commercial products under a Brand (South) Korea. Also, the traditional Korean aesthetic and figure are annihilated in K-pop industry; tall and skinny are the most important key not the traditional beauty of round face and chubby body. Certainly, the Confucian notion of valuing one's body as parents' gift no longer exists since the plastic surgery and the current beauty standard are widely appreciated as a norm. In brief, 'Korean culture' is still questionable and unfilled in the contemporary cultural studies as the Korean Wave or K-pop is rather a naked commercial than the traditional values.

Matsushima (2017) studied the Hate Korean Wave and national identity in Japan. After the end of the Second World War, Japan's identity was deconstructed due to the loss of political control, economic stabilisation and cultural sphere. Additionally, Korean Wave or *Hallyu* has been stirring around Asian region since the mid-1990s, nevertheless, it had not hit Japanese shore until the mid-2000s. Owing to a Korean drama *Winter Sonata* in 2004 and a male protagonist Bae Yong-joon, Japanese middle-aged women embraced the arrival of Korean Wave. However, this popular cultural phenomenon brought the Anti-Korean Wave campaign as well. The Hate Korean Wave or *Kenkanryu* was driven by a 'cyberspace right wing' or '*netouyo*' group, a majority of '*netouyo*' are young Japanese people who actively criticise Korean Wave on the internet. The *Kenkanryu* series began to publish online as a webcomic by Yamano Sharin in the early 2000s, then the first printed book was released in 2005 and made the sale record of 450,000 copies. Despite the author, Yamano, stated that his comic book tried to establish the real friendship between the two nations, the content denounced Korea and Koreans. Yamano also argued that Japanese media did not show the real nature of Korea, Koreans, and resident Koreans in Japan. Takaoka Sosuke, a Japanese actor, tweeted on 23 July 2011 on how Fuji Television Network attempted to brainwash Japanese people by broadcasting Korean TV programmes and K-pop. *Netouyo* like Yamano claimed that Japanese media covered a real Korea and praised Korean popular culture, while Yamano believed that Korea stole Japanese culture. In the *Kenkanryu* series, one character wondered why Korean people did not understand how one felt when his culture was stolen, and other two characters said that they could not understand because there was no Korean culture that Koreans could be proud of. Yamano emphasised that Korean culture was Japanese culture's inferior twin.

Japanese and Korean beauty trends

Maynard and Taylor (1999) analysed girlish images that targeted young girls in Japanese and the United States magazines without political context. The objective of this research was to comprehend the concept of girlishness in advertising that of societal and media levels. This could also indicate the formation of a girl's self-image. Their study shows the high tendency of the presented images reflects the 'self' of young readers. The imagines of female girls were portrayed in girlish poses or spoke in girlish manners. One example from Japanese *Seventeen* January 1996 issue, VO5 shampoo advertisement was featured with a girl smiled and faced to the camera that conveyed a friendly message to the readers. Importantly, numerous of Japanese ads depicted a cheerful childlike image, whereas American one portrayed the image of independence and defiance. Indeed, a particular group of popular culture in Japan can lead to the philosophical issues of an individual or a group cultural acceptance, but these various cultures allowed their members to form their identity within their society.

Võ (2016) studied the multi-dimensional and diversified social agency that influenced young Asian American girls in consumption of beauty products. Drawing attention to the consumption of circle contact lenses among the subcultural groups in Japan, *gyaru* or *kogyaru* is an English loanword that equals to 'gals'. This subcultural group in Japan could be a case that demonstrated how Japanese youth demanded their freedom of fashion choices. *Gyaru* style required heavy makeup and other beauty products,

circle contact lenses were a must, in order to achieve the big-round-eye look. Additionally, *Ulzzang* style became another beauty style in South Korean. *Ulzzang* can be translated as 'best face' or 'good-looking'. The popularity of *Ulzzang* look was owing to the rise of the Korean Wave. Again, circle contact lenses were the key item to achieve the *Ulzzang* look. Although both styles initiated the large consumption of circle lenses, they had some distinctions as *Gyaru* style was rather sexy, while *Ulzzang* was rather childlike innocence. Due to the advent of the internet and borderless communication, both looks were adopted by many Asian American females. For instance, Michelle Phan, a beauty Youtuber, produced many makeup tutorial videos of these two styles and of course she wore the circle coloured contact lenses to achieve these looks. This phenomenon reflected the transnational consumption and the influence of Asian popular culture among Asian American girls.

Nationalism in Japan

Tønnesson (2016) states that nationalist ideology has not faded away in East Asian nations. He explains that nationalist ideology can raise only at a particular stage of socioeconomic development and disappeared when the societies engaged with globalised culture and economy. In this case, Japanese culture has not be globalised; therefore, the nationalist ideology has been gone away from Japan.

Nagy (2014) studied on nationalism in the twenty-first century and believed that nationalism might not motivate war and it would continuously strengthen and weaken at different periods of time. Under the lead of Priminister Shinzo Abe, the idea of nationalism was brought up in Abenomics. Utilising nationalism would pull Japan out of the economic decline as well as gain the political goal.

According to Professor Brown, there are three factors that strengthen national sentiment in Japan: the State Shinto cults, the political implication of Confucianism and Buddhism, and the pressures of other nations (Jones, 1955). By the eighth century, the cult of State Shinto was acknowledged and secured the inherit ruler of the Yamato kingdom (Jones, 1955). In addition, Buddhism and Confucianism were the means of political control as they nourish the importance of monarchy; the idea of nationalism, in fact, gradually began in Tokugawa era (Jones, 1955). Importantly, Japanese nationalism fully developed in the nineteenth century, when Japan re-opened its state to the West; as Japanese people were afraid of the Western interventions, so they stated to raise national consciousness in order to protect their traditions (Jones, 1955).

Machida (2016) conducted a study on Japanese people's attitudes toward the boosted of military defence against China in regard to the Senkaku Island dispute. In his research, 'national identity' was divided into two elements of nationalism and patriotism. He defined 'nationalism' as a sense of one's nation was superior to others, whereas 'patriotism' was not. His hypothesis was nationalism rather than patriotism as a national pride of Japanese citizens would increase and stimulate military actions. To examine the given hypothesis, Machida made an internet-based survey in Japan and analysed the association between nationalism or patriotism and public support for the rise of defence against China. According to his research, those who had the strong sense of nationalism were likely to support the idea of military defence as the dispute of the Senkaku Island was considered by Japanese citizens as a topic of national pride.

However, the growth of nationalism among Japanese people did not imply that this would lead to a war between the two nations.

Fukuoka (2017) explored the banal nationalism and the nature of Japanese youth nationalism through the national symbols. Japan's official national and flag are called the *Kimigayo* anthem and the *Hinomaru* flag respectively. These two are the representatives of Japanese imperialism, Pan-Asianism, and Asian encroachment in the pre-war time. In 2009, the Tokyo board of Education proclaimed that the *Kimigayo* anthem must be sung and the *Hinomaru* flag must be saluted in public schools. Unarguably, national anthems and flags are the explicit and ultimate symbols of national identity as they eminently differentiate one nation from others. Many scholars utilised state-centred approaches and studied various kinds of Japanese nationalism; for instance, ethnic nationalism, economic nationalism, techno-nationalism, and cultural nationalism. However, the research on the sentiments of young Japanese is neglected. Fukuoka reviewed the neo-nationalist discourse and the previous studies on Japan's youth nationalism. His methodology was exploratory that based on the surveys and interviews with Japanese students. According to the surveys and interviews conducted by Fukuoka, it can be said that young Japanese still have the sense of national pride, but they are not ethnocentrism as the interviewees felt apologetic for the past events. In addition, the interviewees found difficulties in giving the proud events of Japan, while they could name many negative past events. When mentioning the role of the *Hinomaru* flag, the interviewees did not see any political meanings behind the national flag and they were apathetic as the *Hinomaru* only symbolised Japan as a country not the Japanese imperial in the 1930s.

Transcultural and Transnational studies

Welsch (1999) attempted to clarify the existence of 'transculturality' and there is no longer the ideal of single cultures in the present world. The traditional concept of single cultures is referring to social homogenisation, ethnic consolidation, and intercultural delimitation. He argued that modern societies should be fitted with the concepts of interculturality and multiculturalism rather than the traditional concepts. To describe the characteristics of the present culture, Welsch emphasised on 'hybridisation' since every culture likely became satellites in every level. Then, the concept of 'transculturality' was stressed as cultures were interrelated and associated with each other, nothing was foreign in the society as modern lifestyles went beyond the national cultural borders. Transculturality is established when a culture is formed. It should be not that cultural identity is not national identity. Importantly, when an individual cultivated distinct cultural interests that should be when his identity was formed.

Iwabuchi (2008) explored the transnational intersects between the postcolonial and the multicultural. The rise of Korean Wave in Japan is built on the contemporary recognition of its cultural neighbour and this is likely a positive signal of bilateral cultural exchange after the colonial period. The Seoul Olympics in 1998 could possibly be the very first sight of South Korea that changed Japanese people's views on Korea and Koreans, from an undeveloped nation to an urbanised modern nation. Therefore, the late 1990s should be noted as the beginning of the bilateral relationship between the two nations. Later, the development of popular cultural exchange between Japan and South Korea is a significant step of the relevance of cultural

diplomacy to East Asia region. The exchange of popular culture led to the discovery of similarities between Japanese and Korean people and the charm of their cultural elements. Although there are more Japanese people who warmly welcome the Korean Wave, the social discrimination and dissimilarities remain unchanged.

Methodology

Method and approach

This study adopted the digital ethnographic approach including observation and online interview with purposive sampling techniques. Similar to the ethnography approach, digital ethnography is based on the anthropological idea that aims to understand a specific society and culture in the 2.0 world where communities are constructed on the internet (Varis, 2016). The analysis of the content was utilised to explore and comprehend young Japanese Twitter users. This research applied the seven building blocks of social media from (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011) to explain the reason why Twitter was used as a data pool. Social media platforms consist of seven functional aspects: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. Definitions and functions of each aspect are provided framework below (see Figure 1) (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

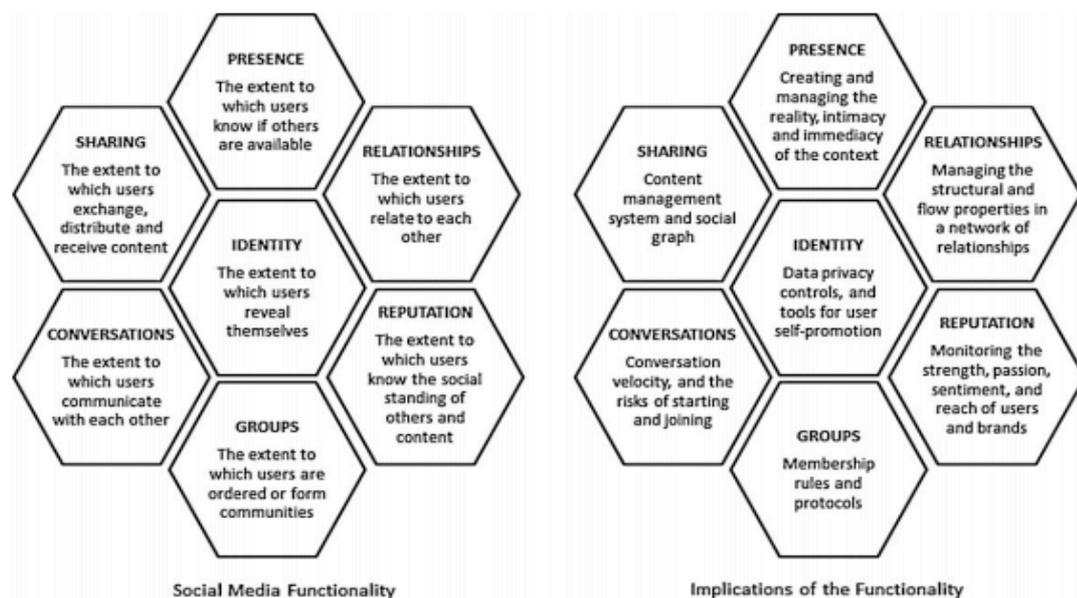


Figure 1: The honeycomb of social media



Social Media Functionality

Figure 2: Twitter

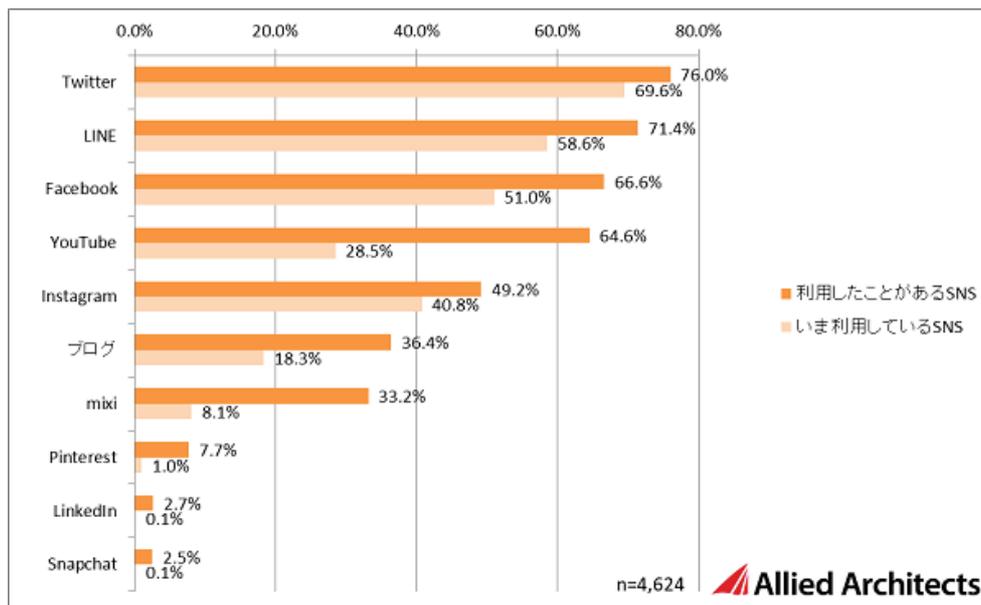


Figure 3: Social media users in Japan

● Twitterの利用状況

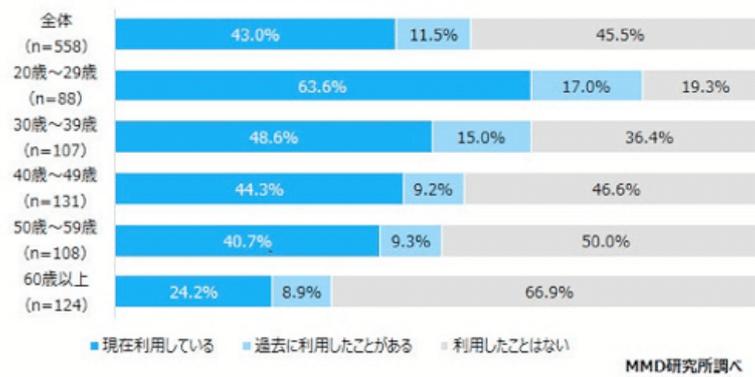


Figure 4: Twitter users in Japan

● Instagramの利用状況

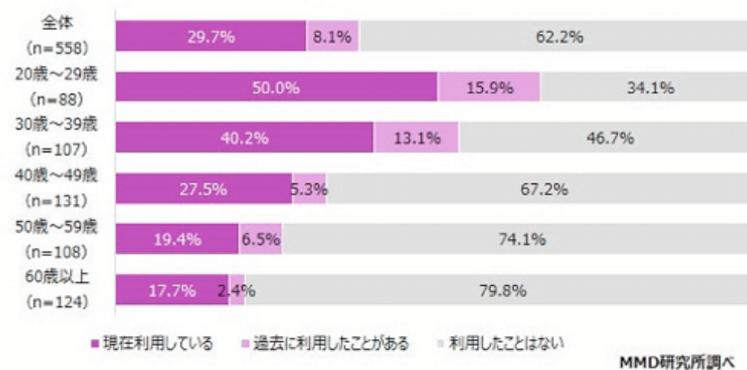


Figure 5: Instagram users in Japan

According to this concept of functionalities, Twitter appears to serve mainly for the function of *sharing* then *conversations*, *presence*, *identity*, and *reputation* along with *relationships* and *groups* (see Figure 2). Indeed, Twitter is a social media platform that users can share opinions, news and comments on various matters, while Instagram mainly serves the purpose of sharing pictures rather than opinions. Importantly, Twitter is the most used social media platform among Japanese people (see Figure 3) as 76% of the survey participants have ever used Twitter and 69.9% of participants still use Twitter at present (Careerconnection, 2018). Again, almost 64% of Japanese social media users (see Figure 4) who are below 30-year-old currently use Twitter, whereas 50% of Japanese social media users (see Figure 5) of the matched same age group currently use Instagram (Kawata, 2018).

Data collection, sampling, and coding

Data was collected after the official debut of TWICE, 28 June 2017 until 28 February 2018 with the hashtag #韓国になりたい (#I want to be Korean). I would like to disclose that the top tweets were collected by 7 April 2018, as the top tweets may change over the period of time. In order to explore the usage of #韓国になりたい and purposes behind, I have collected 569 top tweets over six months. The collected tweets were posted by Japanese users, I discarded the tweets that were posted by none

Japanese users. Additionally, I did single coding to find the frequency of tweets posted and placed them into seven categories (see Table 1).

1. K-pop idols – messages and pictures of K-pop idols such as BTS, TWICE, and Big Bang
2. Korean fashion and makeup look – any posts that Twitter users posted their selfie photos
3. Interests – any posts about Korean cultural elements, Korean language, finding friends, looking for Korean boyfriends/girlfriends, marriage, dance, and food
4. Negative critiques – criticise harshly about this hashtag
5. Defence against the negative critiques – respond to the bad criticism
6. News – news links about the trend of this hashtag, negative news about Korea such as suicidal rate and food poison, news that criticised how bad South Korea was as a host for Pyeongchang 2018 Olympic winter games, and Senkaku Island dispute news
7. Advertisements – Skincare products, clothing, and beauty book

Furthermore, the double coding was utilised to explore the common aspects of Korea and Koreans when Japanese users tweeted with the mentioned hashtag (see Table 5).

Results

Table 1: Tweets by categories

Categories	Frequency	%	Related to
K-pop idols	21	3.7	RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4
Korean fashion and makeup look	138	24.2	RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4
Interests	28	4.9	RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4
Negative critiques	170	29.9	RQ1 and RQ3
Defence against bad critiques	21	3.7	RQ1 and RQ4
News	170	29.9	RQ1 and RQ3
Advertisement	21	3.7	RQ1
Total	569	100%	

Table 2: Number of tweets by months

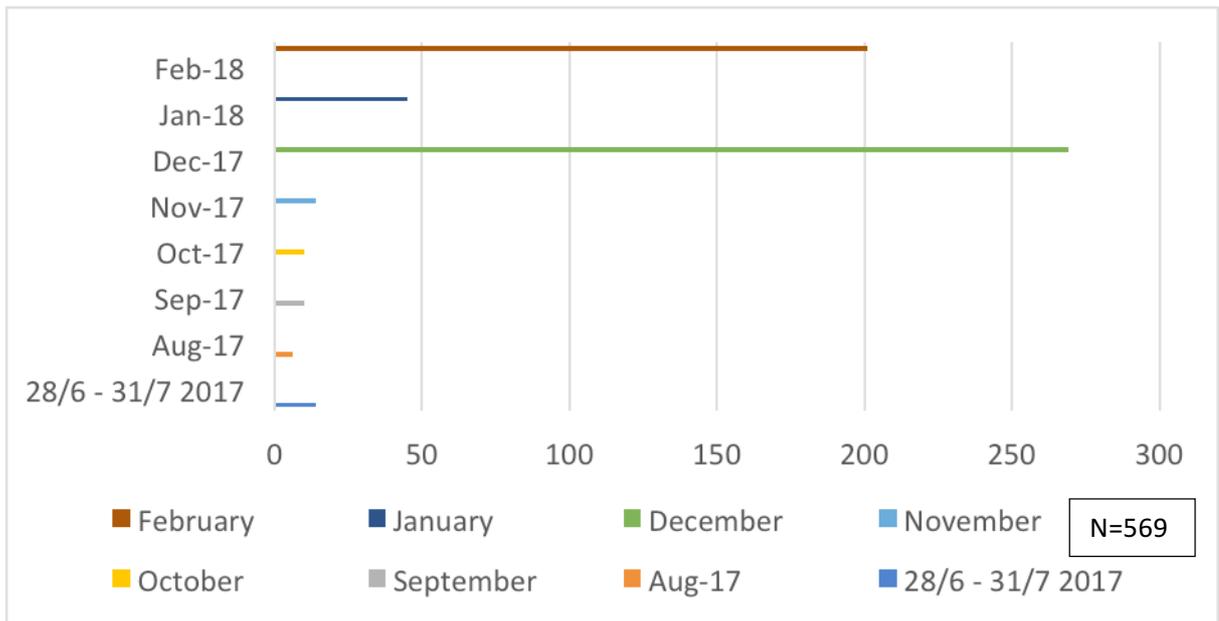


Table 3: Frequent categories by months

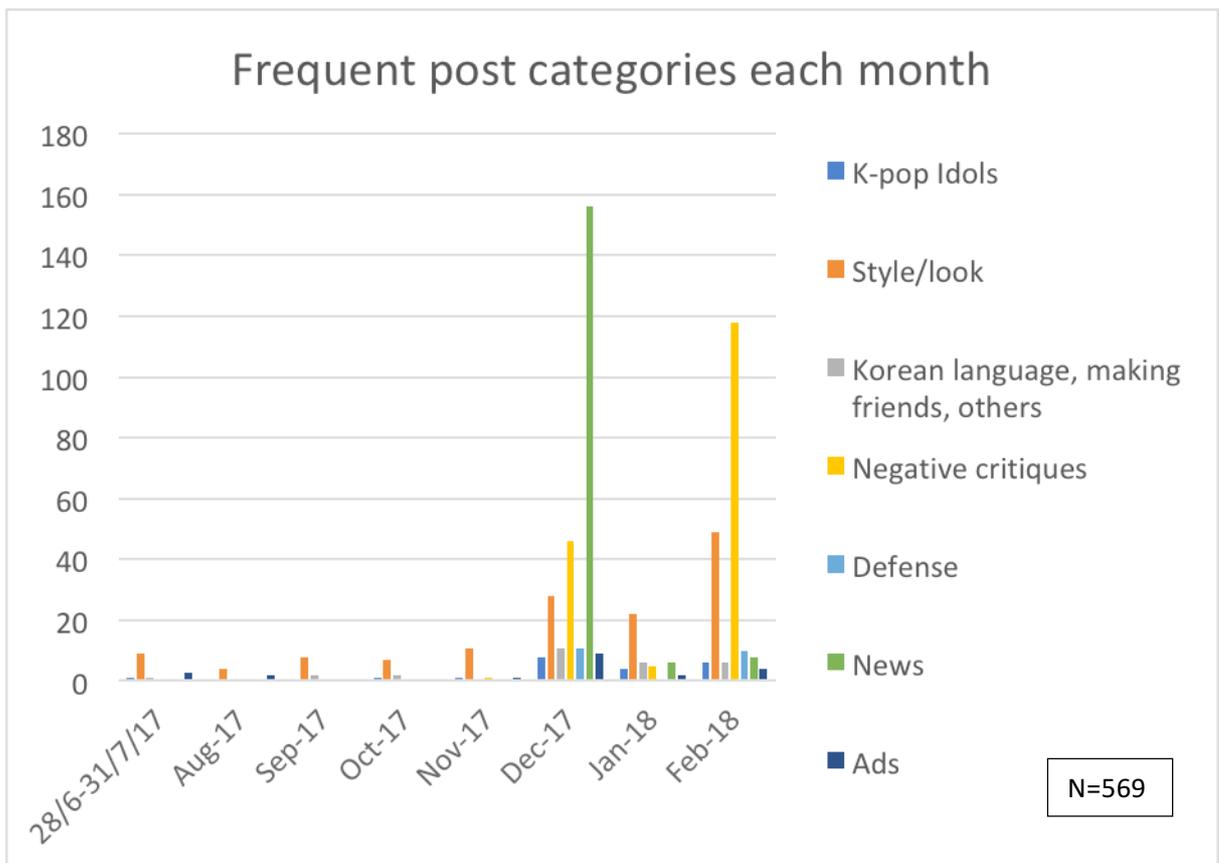


Table 4: Negative critiques by gender

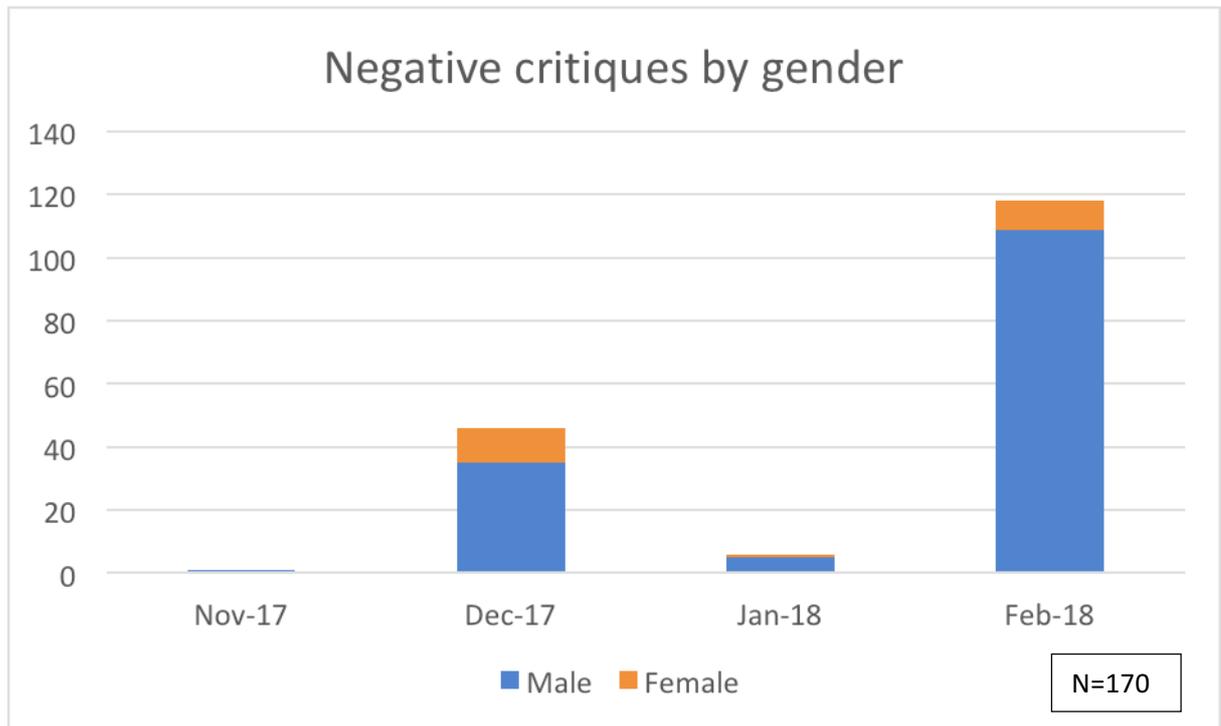
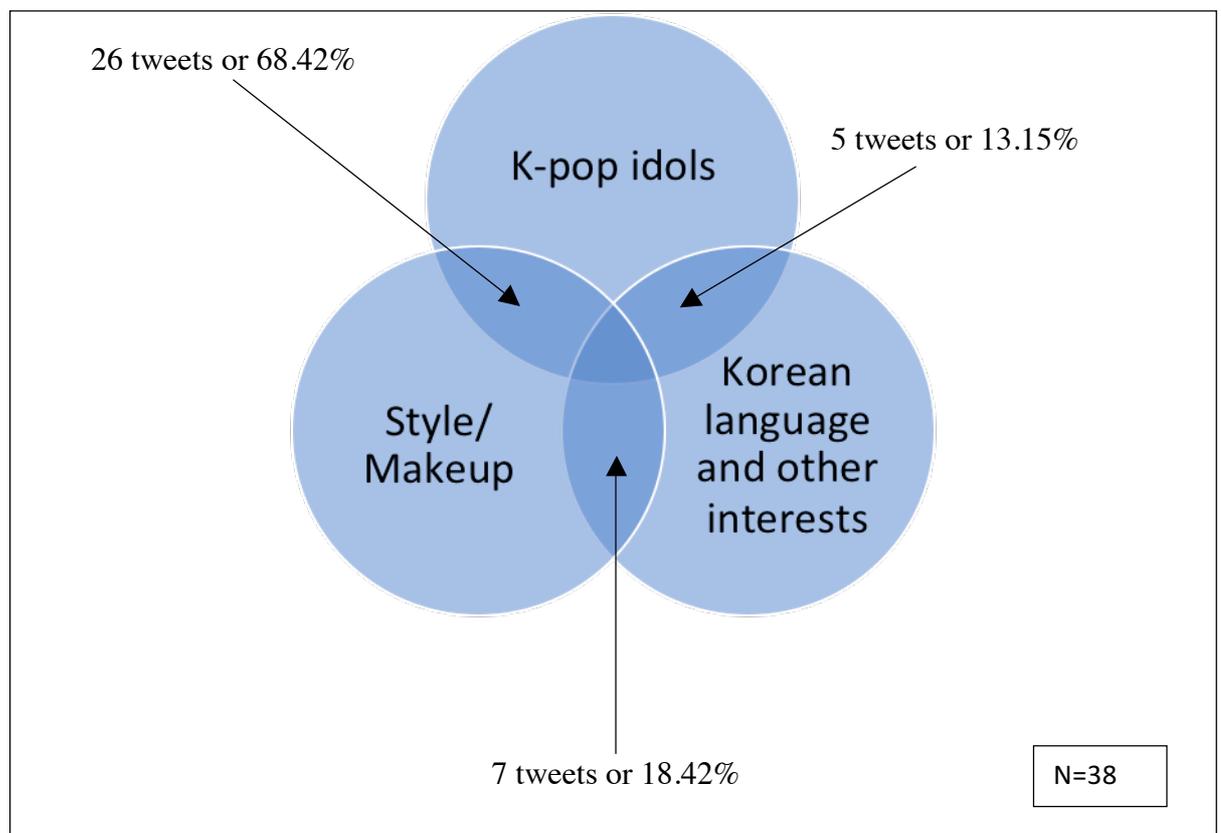


Table 5: Double coding result



Discussion

Japanese nationalism and #I want to be Korean on Twitter

I observed the tweets with the hashtag #韓国人になりたい over a six-month period and collected 569 top tweets. To answer the RQ1, I would like to divide the collected data into two types. First, the positive tweet posted with this hashtag was used to show one selfie photos of Korean style or makeup look (n=138, 24.2%), interests (n=28, 4.9%), their favourite Korean idols (n=21, 3.7%), defence against the criticism (n=21, 3.7%) and advertise beauty products (n=21, 3.7%). Second, the negative tweets that are of news (n=170, 29.9%) and criticism (n=170, 29.9%). The positive tweets also correspond to RQ2 since data clearly shows that Japanese youth are fond of Korean fashion, K-pop idols, and other interest such as Korean language and finding friends who also wanted to be Korean. While, the negative tweets demonstrate the reactions of Japanese people on Twitter that respond to RQ3. Indeed, this hashtag was not unordinary until one online article インスタ女子の間で「#韓国人になりたい」流行中の意外と深い理由 (In-depth reasons why #I want to be Korean is a trend among female Instagram users) was published on 6 December 2017 and Japanese people started to share and comment on this topic. Hence, there was the highest number of tweets in December 2017 (see Table 2) and 156 tweets were the links to that article and several other news about Korea (see Table 3). Later, this hashtag went viral again in February as it was concurrent with PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, negative critiques on Korea and Koreans significantly rose to 118 tweets (see Table 3).

#韓国人になりたい (#I want to be Korean) indicates some degree of deterioration of nationalism among Japanese girls. It is important to highlight that those Japanese girls who put #I want to be Korean are between teenagers and young adult. In this study, Japanese girls refer to Twitter users who are in the age group between 13 and 25 years old. Also, the significant group of young Japanese females who posted #I want to be Korean, the Instagram posts were largely made by young Japanese females aged between 10s and 20s (Kuwahata, 2017). As they embrace the Korean Wave and other aspects of Korea especially Korean style and makeup trend as well as Korean language. When I was collecting the data, I came across with many Japanese youths who generated their Japanese names to *Hangul* or Korean alphabet. For instance, あゆみ (Ayumi) became 아유미 (Ayumi) in *Hangul*. In contrast, negative criticism was tweeted mostly by males and a small number of female *netouyo* or cyberspace right wing (see Table 4) and there was limited number of Korean style tweets posted by males (n=28) comparing to the total Korean style tweets of 138.

To explain, nationalists are those who highly love their nations with antagonism toward other nations, while patriots love their countries without hatred toward other countries (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). It is important to be highlighted that the female interviewees (n=4), all of them said that they wanted to look like Koreans because they liked Korean idols, fashion, and makeup. Three interviewees stated that they would not want to change their nationality, but they appreciated how pretty Koreans were. However, one interviewee avoided talking about the nationalist issue. Importantly, four interviewees agreed that Korean idols such BTS and TWICE were the great influence in making them want to look like Koreans. The double coding

result of the total number of 38 tweets shows that 68.42% of tweets were K-pop stars posted along with the selfie pictures of the users (see Table 5). Although popular culture is beyond the national boundaries, a broader transnational receiving in the region and constructed the relationship among young people in East Asia (Iwabuchi, 2008). Certainly, these Japanese youth, female particularly, might be a great example for the ‘transculturality’, but they also show the decline of Japanese nationalism, while remaining patriotists.

Conclusion

The use of #韓国人になりたい (#I want to be Korean) among Japanese people on Twitter was varied. This hashtag was first used to indicate what they liked about Korean fashion and K-pop idols as well as looking for friends who share similar interests. However, this hashtag was used to criticise those Japanese teens who wanted to be Koreans and denounce how awful Korea was as a host for the Winter Olympic Games along with other aspects of Korea and Koreans. Undoubtedly, Japanese youth are fond of K-pop, Korean fashion and makeup, and other Korea related elements. These are also the key reasons why they want to be (like) Koreans. Notwithstanding, this phenomenon can be taken as the ‘transculturality’ since Japanese girls received and accepted the specific culture and developed as their cultural identity while their national identity is still the same. However, this indicates that young Japanese females are losing the sense of nationalism as they want to look like Koreans as well as adopted *Hangul* for their Twitter usernames. It is important to note that Japanese nationalists are mostly males. To conclude, #韓国人になりたい shows the fall of nationalism among Japanese girls who are in their 10s and 20s, while guys are likely to have a strong Japanese national sentiment.

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