

*A Content Analysis of Online Streaming's Popular Korean Drama Series in Thailand:
Alcohol Imagery and Scene*

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Abstract

Exposure to alcohol-related imagery in the media is linked to increased regular use and initiation of alcohol consumption among youth and young adults. This association is particularly evident on online streaming platforms, where portrayals of alcohol are often unrestricted. This study aims to conduct a content analysis of alcohol-related imagery and scenes in five popular Korean drama series broadcast on online streaming platforms from 2012 to 2022. The content was coded at 1-minute intervals for the presence of alcohol. Images of alcohol were categorized into three groups: (1) Actual Use, representing explicit consumption of alcohol by actors or actresses; (2) Implied Use, indicating the presence of alcohol in the hands of characters; and (3) Other Alcohol References, encompassing any alcohol-related objects. Additionally, the alcohol imagery was classified according to the types of alcohol featured, the camera shot distance, and the depicted locations. The results showed that 17.37% of the intervals contained some form of alcohol content. Of these, Other Alcohol References accounted for 9.60%, Implied Use for 4.49%, and Actual Use for 3.18%. Soju and beer were the most frequently seen types of alcohol, at 15.85% and 14.90%, respectively. The medium shot was the predominant camera shot for alcohol scenes (67.10%), and restaurants were the most common locations depicted (44.96%).

Keywords: Alcohol, Content Analysis, Online Streaming

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Introduction

Alcohol consumption is a significant public health concern and a leading cause of mortality worldwide, an issue highlighted by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Public Health globally, and particularly in Thailand. According to a report on the smoking and alcohol consumption behavior of the Thai population in 2017 (Social Statistics Bureau, National Statistical Office, 2018), among individuals aged 15 and above, approximately 15.9 million people engaged in alcohol consumption, with 6.98 million regular drinkers and 8.91 million occasional drinkers. In 2019, liver cancer, which is often linked to alcohol abuse, resulted in approximately 16,288 deaths within the Thai population—a figure projected to rise (Ministry of Public Health (Thailand), 2019) Furthermore, alcohol-related accidents, particularly those involving driving, are a serious concern. Annually, Thailand witnesses over 10,000 deaths from accidents during festival periods involving alcohol, with the New Year festival seeing a spike in fatalities—almost 1.5 times the daily average (Matichon Online, 2560).

Peer pressure, influencing 38.9% of Thai individuals to begin drinking, has been identified as the primary factor for initiating alcohol consumption. This susceptibility may stem from behavioral influence within peer groups or the emulation of behaviors portrayed in media. Extensive evidence suggests that exposure to alcohol-related imagery in entertainment media, especially in films or television dramas, correlates with the initiation and regular consumption of alcohol among youths and young adults. (Hanewinkel et al., 2014; Hanewinkel et al., 2012; Kaewpramkusol et al., 2019; Koordeman et al., 2014) Contemporary formats, channels, and consumption behaviors of entertainment media have increasingly gravitated towards online streaming platforms (Over-the-Top, OTT). These platforms offer viewers the autonomy to select films, genres, or viewing times, as well as the flexibility to indulge in repeated viewings as per their preferences. Consequently, there is an increased opportunity for viewers to access and engage with a vast array of content, including alcohol-related imagery and scenes, more readily and frequently than through traditional channels. The ease of access to alcohol-portraying content has the potential to influence and shape behaviors and attitudes significantly.

In Thailand, South Korean entertainment media holds a dominant position. Flixpatrol (2022) noted that 6 out of 10 dramas on Netflix in Thailand were Korean series. The wave of Korean culture and entertainment, such as films, K-pop (Korean music), and Korean drama series, has seen a surge in popularity in Thailand over the past two decades. Since the 2000s, Korean dramas have influenced and shaped Thai preferences, attitudes, behaviors, and cultural aspects, including fashion, makeup, food, and alcohol consumption patterns.

This study aims to conduct a content analysis of alcohol-related imagery and scenes in the five Korean drama series most popular among Thais on online streaming platforms. The analysis will categorize the types of alcohol presented, assess the distance of the alcohol scenes (camera shot), and identify the locations or settings in which alcohol appears.

Methods

The sample for this study comprises the five most popular Korean drama series, as voted by the Thai Korean Drama Series community on Facebook. These series were broadcast between 2012 and 2022 and each consists of at least 16 to 20 episodes. They were all accessible on online streaming platforms. Alcohol-related content was analyzed in the

selected series using the 1-minute interval coding method, similar to the approach used in previous studies by Barker et al. (2018) and Lyons et al. (2013). The series were divided into 1-minute intervals, then analyzed and counted the occurrences of alcohol-related content within each interval. Each instance of such content was recorded as a single "alcohol interval." If alcohol-related content recurred within the same category, it was still counted as one alcohol interval. However, if different categories of alcohol-related content appeared within the same interval, they were counted as separate alcohol intervals—two or three, depending on the number of categories presented. The following categories were used for analysis:

Any alcohol content: Any depiction of alcohol on screen

- (1) Actual use: Characters are seen consuming or drinking alcohol.
- (2) Implied use: Alcohol is held by the characters.
- (3) Other alcohol reference: Alcohol-related objects or materials such as bottles, glasses, or beer pumps.

Alcohol types: The types of alcohol that characters use in a scene.

Alcohol scenes: The settings or locations where alcohol-related content is depicted.

Alcohol camera shots: The camera shot lengths used to portray alcohol-related content.

- (1) Close-up Shot: Focuses on the subject or object at close range to show greater detail.
- (2) Medium Shot: Captures characters from head to mid-body, offering a view of the characters' surroundings and contextual emotions.
- (3) Long Shot: Displays detailed scenes in a wide perspective, capturing characters, locations, and the surrounding atmosphere.

Results

The total duration of 5 Korean drama series was 111 hours and 24 minutes. Using a 1-minute interval, there were a total of 6,684 intervals, with 1,161 intervals containing any alcohol-related content, representing 17.37% of the total intervals. The most common type of alcohol-related content was 'Other alcohol reference,' accounting for 9.60% of the total, often used as props in the scenes. This was followed by 'Implied use' at 4.49% and 'Actual use' at 3.28%.

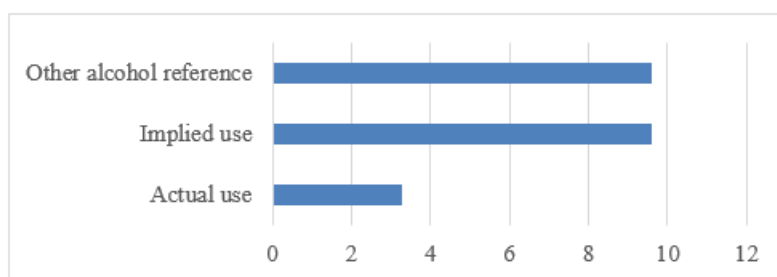


Figure 1: Any alcohol contents

Alcohol Types

Soju, a well-known Korean alcoholic beverage, was the most frequently occurring alcohol type, appearing in 15.85% of the total alcohol intervals, followed by beer at 14.90%, wine/champagne at 7.24%, unknown types at 3.36%, spirits at 2.50%, fermented fruit/herbal

wine at 2.24%, so-maek (Soju mixed with beer) at 0.60%. cocktails at 0.43%, and makgeoli (Korean rice wine) at 0.17%, respectively.

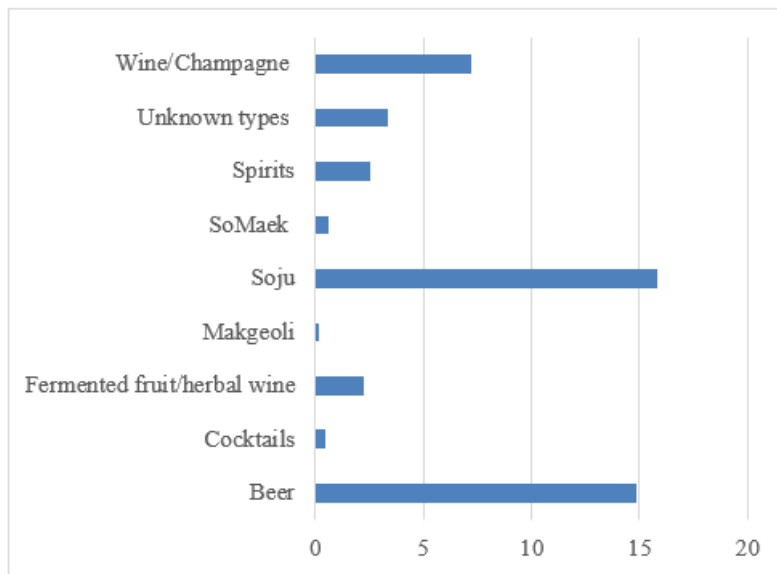


Figure 2: Alcohol types

Camera Shots

The medium shot was the most frequently used camera shot for portraying alcohol-related content, representing 67.10% of all alcohol intervals, followed by the long shot at 40.40%, and the close-up shot at 9.47%.

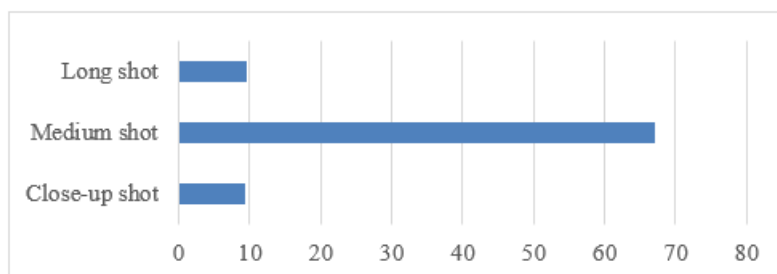


Figure 3: Alcohol camera shots

Alcohol Scenes

Restaurants were the most common setting for alcohol-related content, observed in 44.96% of all alcohol intervals, followed by residences/homes at 40.31%. pubs/bars and funeral venues each accounted for 2.41%, public spaces or tourist destinations for 1.98%, community centers for 1.98%, hotels for 1.71%, and military camps for 1.21%. hospitals were depicted in 0.95% of intervals, rooftops in 0.60%, abandoned houses and wedding venues each in 0.43%, trains in 0.34%, and convenience stores in 0.17%.

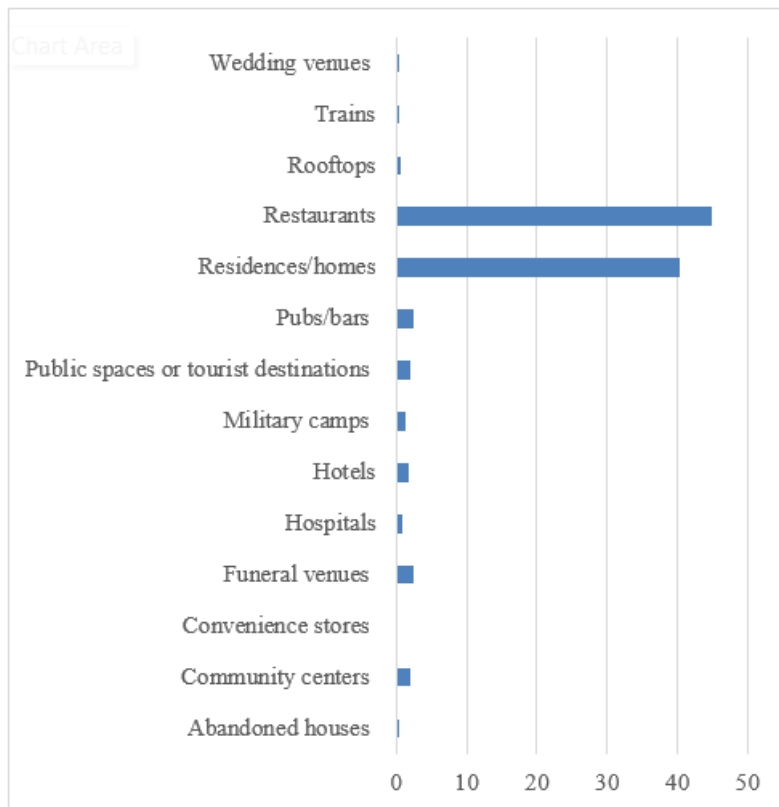


Figure 4: Alcohol Scenes

Discussion

This study found that images or scenes related to alcohol are prominently featured in all the samples, appearing in nearly every episode (100% of all five Korean drama series in the sample contained alcohol-related content). The total percentage of alcohol-related intervals was 17.37%. This finding is consistent with previous studies analyzing alcohol content in entertainment media across various countries. For example, research in the United Kingdom on alcohol imagery in popular television content, including films on online streaming platforms (Lyons et al., 2013), found that alcohol imagery accounted for up to 12% of popular television programs and advertisements. Utilizing the same analysis method, a subsequent study in 2018 observed that alcohol imagery constituted 14% (Barker et al., 2018). Moreover, a study focused on alcohol imagery in films streamed online in the United Kingdom using a 5-minute interval analysis method reported a prevalence of 41.7% (Alfayad et al., 2022). These studies collectively indicate a consistent upward trend in the prevalence of alcohol imagery, suggesting that viewers may be exposed to an excessive amount of alcohol-related content, particularly on online streaming platforms where access to entertainment media with any alcohol-related content is convenient.

Various types of alcohol portrayals were found in the samples. The most frequent alcohol content was related to Soju, followed by beer. These two types of alcohol appeared significantly more often compared to others. This could be because beer is a globally recognized beverage and may also be attributed to the historical prevalence of Soju consumption in Korean culture, as well as the global promotion of Soju through product placement in Korean drama series. According to The Spirits Business (2022), Soju, produced by Jinro, a South Korean alcohol brand, was the world's most popular alcoholic beverage from 2019 to 2022. This corresponds with research by (Mungsong, 2022), which found that

Korean drama series viewers in Bangkok, Thailand, were receptive to alcohol advertisements integrated into Korean drama series, whether broadcast on traditional television or via online streaming platforms and were inclined to purchase and consume Soju more frequently after watching.

The majority of alcohol-related content was observed in medium shots, which often depict characters drinking or consuming alcohol at dining tables, accounting for 67.10%. These medium shots typically frame characters from head to mid-body, allowing a view of their surroundings and contextual emotions. They also reveal alcohol-related details more clearly than long shots and close-ups and have been commonly used in the film industry for an extended period. The selection of camera shots in any entertainment media depends on the producer's intent, whether to convey content, information, or emotions to the audience. Moreover, medium shots facilitate subtle product placement, allowing for creative concepts where actors or actresses naturally use products, providing context without overwhelming viewers, unlike aggressive sales tactics. This approach provides a glimpse of the broader setting while maintaining sufficient detail visibility of the product, avoiding overt conspicuousness. Mungsong (2022) reported that viewers recall details of beverage products, such as color, packaging, and brand, and show a propensity to purchase these products.

The scenes where alcohol imagery is most frequently encountered are in restaurants, at 44.96%, and homes, at 40.31%. This is consistent with the findings of (Noppadol Inchan, 2012), who noted that Korean drama series often portray indoor scenes more than outdoor ones, depicting everyday life activities such as eating and sleeping. Characters are commonly shown drinking at restaurants or home with friends, colleagues, neighbors, and family members. These depictions reflect the drinking behaviors and culture in Korea, aligning with the research by Ko and Sohn (2018), which cites socializing as a primary motive for alcohol consumption in Korea, often involving friends or colleagues during dinner gatherings. Similarly, Thais tend to consume alcohol more at their own homes or friend's homes as reported by (Polathep Vichitkunakorn & Aship Tanaree, 2021). Cultural ceremonies, such as funerals and weddings, also feature scenes with alcohol illustrating its significant role in Korean religious rituals, past and present, as highlighted by Robert Koehler (2014). Furthermore, hospital scenes in dramas like 'Reply 1988' and 'Descendants of the Sun' inappropriately depict alcohol consumption involving characters such as patients, visitors, and medical staff, which are considered inappropriate and should not be depicted on screen.

Conclusion

This study, along with previous research, has found that alcohol imagery and alcohol-related content are prevalent and commonly found in entertainment media across various countries (Adams et al., 2014; Alfayad et al., 2022; Barker et al., 2018; Barrientos-Gutierrez et al., 2015; Chapoton et al., 2020; Cukier et al., 2018; Graham & Adams, 2013; Hanewinkel et al., 2014; Hanewinkel et al., 2012; Kaewpramkusol et al., 2019; Keller-Hamilton et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2013). This prevalence may reflect the influence of the cultural drinking norms conveyed through entertainment media from those nations and the absence of stringent regulations regarding the display of alcohol imagery. For example, in Thailand, laws and regulations that prohibit alcohol imagery and alcohol advertising in media are enforced in traditional mass media, such as television and radio, but not on online streaming platforms. This legal gap could inadvertently facilitate the integration of alcohol product placement and advertising within drama series.

From a media effects perspective, long-term viewers of Korean dramas may be more inclined to increase their alcohol consumption due to their prolonged exposure to such content. This exposure could lead to the cultivation of habits and behaviors associated with alcohol use, as proposed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross (Gerbner G. et al., 1986), who suggest that prolonged exposure to media content can shape an individual's perceptions and beliefs about reality. Specifically in Korean drama series, the consistent portrayal of alcohol consumption may create the perception that drinking is a normal and even essential part of daily life. As a result, viewers might become prone to imitating the drinking behaviors exhibited by characters, with alcohol consumption potentially acting as a model for viewers to emulate, as discussed by (Bandura, 1977).

Despite the adverse health effects of alcohol consumption, policymakers, public health ministries worldwide, and other relevant organizations in each country have been striving to curb the depiction of alcohol in entertainment media, especially on online streaming platforms. These platforms aggregate a vast array of media from various countries and, with their growing number and the likelihood of more emerging in the future, regulating alcohol-related imagery has become increasingly complex and challenging. Policymakers, government bodies, and stakeholders must collaborate in crafting regulations that form effective frameworks for controlling the presentation of alcohol-related content in entertainment media. Parents and educators also have a crucial role in fostering a protective environment and modeling behaviors that promote media literacy and responsible consumption. Given the media's impact on young audiences, it is essential to educate them about the risks and consequences of alcohol consumption and to promote self-awareness and self-control. Implementing media literacy programs is essential, as these programs teach individuals to critically evaluate media content, including scenes depicting alcohol, drugs, or violence.

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