



**THE STUDY OF CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS
TOWARD USING KOREAN WAVE AS AN
ENDORSEMENT TO THE BRAND IN THE
AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY IN THAILAND**

BY

MISS ROSESANANT PUNITHIPANDKUL

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAM IN MARKETING
(INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM)
FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND ACCOUNTANCY
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2016
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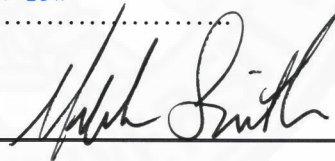
ENTITLED

THE STUDY OF CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD USING KOREAN
WAVE AS AN ENDORSEMENT TO THE BRAND IN THE AUTOMOTIVE
INDUSTRY IN THAILAND

was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Science Program in Marketing (International Program)

on..... 8 MAY 2017

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Independent Study Advisor	Professor Kenneth E. Miller, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

This study is a contemporary topic in applied marketing focusing on international business. The first objective is to explore the roles and importance of using celebrities to endorse brands in automotive industries. Second is to understand perceptions towards Korean Wave in general and its effect on brand endorsements. Third is to understand perceptions and consequences toward brands in automotive industry in Thailand if they are to use Korean Wave as an endorsement. Forth is to identify possible ways for brands in Thai automotive industry to use Korean Wave as an endorsement. Findings of this study illustrate consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards using brand endorsement, Korean Wave as well as using Korean Wave and Korean celebrities as brand endorsers in automotive brands in which the result will assist the reader on decision-making in marketing strategy. Data and insights were obtained through primary and secondary data. Qualitative research was employed through face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews of 25 car owners and intenders as well as fans and non-fans of Korean Wave aged between 18 – 45 years old who live in Bangkok. 4 Expert

interviews were also conducted among those who are currently working in automotive industry; Brand Manager and Public Relation staff of automotive brands, staffs in advertising agencies whose client is an automotive brand as well as an automotive journalist in Thailand. Respondents were recruited using non-probability sampling through personal connection. Observations were taken at concerts and meetings of Korean celebrities to witness consumer behavior and relevant factors to Korean Wave. Key research variables are car ownership, types of cars own as well as being a fan or non-fan of Korean Wave. In conclusion, this study would give a better understanding of how consumers perceive of Korean Wave, how Korean Wave can be exploited as brand endorsement in automotive industry in Thailand. It would give the readers, who are marketers or relevant parties, the insights and implications on how to effectively and to what extent the Korean Wave can be exploited in automotive industry.

Keywords: Korean Wave, K-POP Culture, Brand Endorsement, Automotive Industry

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Miss Rosesanant Punithipandkul

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement and Research Purpose

Korean Wave is the South Korean pop culture, which includes film and television (k-dramas), K-pop music, comics, Korean language and Korean cuisine. Korean Wave has been gaining its popularity not just in South Korea but also in Asian countries and also western countries and its success is mainly driven by the strong support of Korean government as a part of cultural content export policy. (Leong, 2014)

Undoubtedly, with the rise of Korean Wave in other Asian countries, it has also been successfully introduced to Thai market, especially k-drams and k-music in particular, for more than a decade and its popularity is expected to continue rising. Various brands of various industries in the market are exploiting this market opportunity by using Korean-pop celebrities to endorse their products. However, not many brands of high-involvement products such as brand in automotive industries have used Korean Wave to endorse their brands. 16 brands and more from different industries, mostly in food and beverages and personal cares, have been recorded to use Korean celebrities endorsing their brands (PositioningMag, 2013). However, only 4 brands in the list are high involvement categories and only 1 in automotive industry, which is interesting on why brands in automotive industries and relevant high involvement categories are not interested in exploiting the rise of Korean Wave like most products are.

In order to study further on this matter, initial understanding about Korean Wave in Thailand is then studied. It is found that the 2 major areas of Korean Wave that are popular in Thailand, which are k-dramas & varieties programs and k-music and these areas seem to be attractive among different group of target users. Based on observation on Internet and social media, K-music (boy brands and girl groups) seems to be attractive among younger groups of consumers; students to first jobbers. This group is considered and perceived to be a “hardcore” fan clubs and contributes to a higher contribution of total Korean Wave market in Thailand. While K-dramas &

varieties programs (actors / actresses) are more attractive among older groups; first jobbers to established workers. But overall, it is found that perceptions to Korean Wave in Thailand associated more with younger generations and is rather niche; it is not a generalized pop-culture like western pop culture, which has been in the market for a longer period. This fact made it even more interesting in a way that it may affect consumers' perceptions when it comes to brand endorsement, thus it is worth exploring in this study.

This study is a contemporary topic in applied marketing focusing in the area of international business in Thailand. The result of this study will directly benefit brand managers or relevant parties who are working in automotive industries as well as international agencies who are working on dealing international celebrities to support brand campaigns and activities. It is aimed to support their decisions on whether to exploit Korean Wave trend to endorse their brands and if so, to what extent the trend can be exploited without having negative effects to the brand.

1.2 Background to the Automotive Industry

Automotive industry is considered as one of the most competitive and vital industries to economy of Thailand in which the value of total car production contributes to approximately 11% of Thailand's GDP in 2015 (Federation of Thai Industries, 2015). Many key automotive brands have already set their presence in Thai market both in terms of sales and production facilities.

Currently, the automotive market is mainly driven by Japanese manufacturers such as Toyota and Honda which are considered the dominant players accounting for more than 95% of the total market compared to European manufacturers such as Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Volkswagen (The Thai Automotive Industry Association, 2015).

In terms of brand building strategies of these brands, celebrity endorsement is widely used in the market. Most brands do have celebrities as their brand endorsers both local and international celebrities. Not just mass brands that are using celebrity endorsements, luxury brand like Mercedes-Benz also uses local celebrity as a part of their brand building strategy as well. Thus, it is quite obvious and proven that

celebrity endorsement technique is effective in Thai market in terms of building brand equity, or at least in building brand awareness.

However, among all of these automotive brands that use celebrities to endorse their brands, it is interesting that only one model from one brand has ever used Korean celebrity to endorse their brand and product. The so-called model is Mitsubishi Mirage who has ever used Nichkhun from the famous Korean boy band, 2PM to endorse their product. In fact, Nichkhun may not be able to be fully regarded as Korean celebrity as he is actually Thai by his nationality. However, he was scouted by a Korean entertainment company and was debuted as a part of the group called 2PM in South Korea. And apart from Nichkhun, no other Korean celebrities have ever endorsed automotive brands in Thailand, unlike products and brands in other industries, which have been exploiting the rising of Korean Wave culture continuously.

With aforementioned details on the automotive industry as well as the Korean Wave in Thailand, it is very interesting to identify key reasons in which most automotive brands in Thailand are not keen to exploit the rising trend of Korean Wave in Thailand.

1.3 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to beneficially help brand managers or relevant parties in automotive industries as well as international agencies who are working on dealing international celebrities to support brand campaigns to understand how endorsement by Korean Wave may affect their brands in order to effectively make decisions on executions. This research is guided by following objectives:

1. To understand roles and importance of using celebrities to endorse brands in automotive industries
2. To understand perceptions towards Korean Wave in general and its effect on brand endorsements
3. To understand perceptions and consequences toward brands in automotive industry in Thailand if they are to use Korean Wave as an endorsement.
4. To identify possible ways for brands in Thai automotive industry to use Korean Wave as an endorsement

- a. When should they be used
- b. How should they be used

Important questions that this study answered are whether automotive brands can use Korean-pop celebrities to endorse their brands, to what extent can Korean Wave culture and celebrities be exploited in endorsement and whether there would be any negative effects with the brand image.



CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A literature review is part of secondary research and is aimed to capture the overview of using celebrity endorsement and its effect. The literature review was mainly extracted from online published sources and articles of various contexts such as Thailand, US, and the UK. The essential information and insights are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Using celebrity endorsement is one of the popular techniques in creating awareness to the public as well as in communicating out the messages related to desired brand images such as credibility and trustworthiness. It is likely that the credibility associated with the celebrity will then be transferred or be associated with the brand. Thus, choosing the right celebrity to endorse the brand is one of the possible way to positive perceived quality perceived by consumers which will subsequently resulting in strong brand equity. (Kotler & Keller, 2013)

From a consumer perspective, brand equity refers to additional value that is added by a brand equity on to a product. Kotler & Keller (2013) explained that brand equity is a set of assets consisting of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty and other proprietary assets, which is combination of the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. Brand awareness and brand association show how strong the brand is in terms of presence and understandings in consumers' mind, which are more fundamental factors in building strong brand equity. Perceived quality shows how consumers judge or evaluate the brand based on the information they have, both functional and emotional elements. Brand loyalty shows how likely consumers will repeat on purchasing particular brand.

Using celebrities to endorse brands may be an easily applicable tool for marketers to send out desired message about the brand to the world, which will result in desired brand equity to be perceived by target consumers. However, result of using celebrities may vary according to cultural values. Celebrities are the key source of creating attractiveness and building credibility to the brand. However, the match

between characteristics of celebrities and brands endorsed are more effective in representing the brand, implying the importance of the cultural meaning when using celebrity endorsement. For example, if to compare between differences of US culture and Korean culture, using celebrity endorsement also results differently. A significant difference is found in the research that celebrities portrayed as themselves in American commercials while Korean celebrities played different roles other than themselves. Collectivism-related values were also spotted to be significantly different between two cultures. Korean commercials employ more collectivism-related executions such as family gathering or group belongings while US commercials do not. This shows that, even though celebrity endorsement may help in building brand awareness and credibility, which subsequently promotes stronger brand equity, right executions of how celebrities are applied and portrayed also matter in different cultural context. (Choi, Lee, Kim, 2005). Cultivation theory by Gerbner (1969) also supports the relationship between media and culture that media has influences on beliefs and perceptions on the real world.

A cultural wave causes an increase in consumption of products, culture and tourism of the country of origin as well as having effects in changing attitudes and behaviors of consumers (Mariani, 2008). The effect from cultural wave definitely has an impact in product and brands' images as we can witness many brands exploiting the effect from culturing wave from endorsements to sponsorship such as in dramas i.e. having main actors / actress to use their products. According to Gregorio and Sung (2010), attitudes toward brands of product placements are positive. Some reports have shown that the market share of a mobile phone brand was increased due to the impact of product placements in drama and other medias (Naripan, 2011)

Based on online observation, Korean-pop culture fan clubs can be easily found in twitter. From Thailand Zocial Awards 2016 Event, it was announced that popular social media sits in Thailand are Facebook, Instagram and LINE (instant messaging application) in terms of numbers of user, while twitter came the 4th place. However, it is found that most Twitter is the most popular among Korean Wave fan clubs, IT Geeks and News Reporters and Journalists. And it was found that these Korean Wave fan clubs tweet various things about their favorite celebrities including their works and also the cars they drive. They also show positive perceptions towards the car

brands that their celebrities drive as well. For example, there were top tweets about a popular Korean singer who had just bought his new car and fans were praising about it. There were mentions which show that the fact this celebrity use this brand of car make them perceive the brand cool, aspiring (Report by Zanroo, 2016)



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research process started with the own interest of the author of this research proposal who is currently working in one of the automotive brands in Thailand. The author had recognized that Korean Wave does not seem to be popular in automotive industries, unlike other industries, and was keen on understanding this matter deeper. With this interest as the original idea, objectives of this study were then set and secondary data from different sources including literature reviews had then been gathered to understand the market better. After understanding overall picture of both Korean Wave market and automotive market, research methods then had been designed which was to focus only on exploratory research with deeper insights to answer the set objectives.

3.1 Research Methodology

In order to understand overview of consumers' perceptions, secondary research, observation, consumer's in-depth interviews and experts in-depth interviews were employed. The collected data helped enhance the understanding of consumers' perceptions towards the role and importance of using celebrity endorsement, perceptions towards Korean Wave in general as well as perceptions towards automotive brands if they were to be endorsed by Korean celebrities.

3.1.1 Secondary research

The secondary data was collected by searching in existing sources such as related article and news as well as interactions on relevant social network sites. However, in order to maintain the quality of the research data, sources were made sure to be reliable, up to date, and cover the right topics.

3.1.2 Observation

Observations in terms of Korean Wave culture in Thailand were conducted including shopping centers, entertainment shops as well as concerts and meetings of Korean celebrities. These observations were aimed to identify characteristics of Korean Wave fan clubs in terms of perceived demographic profiles as well as their reactions and activities to the Korean Wave culture.

Table 1: Events of observation with time, location and types

Event	Date & Venue	Type
Ricky Kim and Kids Fan Meeting in Bangkok 2016 :Super Baby's Journey'	21 January 2017 Central World	Fan Meeting of a variety show celebrity
Park Bogum Asia Tour Fan Meeting in Bangkok	11 February 2017, Muang Tong Thani	Fan Meeting of an actor
Masita New Presenter with NCT	4 March 2017 Siam Paragon	Press Conference of new presenter using Korean boy band
Taokaenoi New Presenter with GOT7	7 March 2017 Siam Paragon	Press Conference of new presenter using Korean boy band
Red Velvet Special Fan signing Event in Bangkok	27 March 2017 EmQuartier	Fan signing event of girl group

3.1.3 Consumers' In-depth Interviews

The face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted among those who are the current users and potential users of cars (mixed brands) in Thailand. The interviews were aimed to gain information from participants in term of their cars usage experiences, expectations and perceptions towards automotive brands and Korean Wave. The question guide framework was developed during the first round of in-depth interview during October to December 2016. In this period, total of three

in-depth interviews were conducted to identify key variables as well as hypothesis to be studied further. The data from in-depth interviews are analyzed and combined with data from secondary sources and observations.

After the first round of interviews with question guide design, the second round of interviews were conducted between January to early April 2016. Total of 25 in-depth interviews were conducted to gain key insights on perceptions towards the role and importance of using celebrity endorsement, perceptions towards Korean Wave in general as well as perceptions towards automotive brands if they were to be endorsed by Korean celebrities.

The information on demography profiles was also needed for screening interpreting the commonalities and differences among samples. All respondents were required to provide the following information; age, gender, household income before expenses and tax, number of family members, current occupation, highest education level.

3.1.4 Experts In-depth Interviews

The experts' in-depth interviews were conducted among brand manager and public relation staff of automotive brands, staffs in advertising agencies whose client is an automotive brand as well as an automotive journalist in Thailand. The interviews were aimed to gain information in term of their experiences in the industries, successful and failure cases on using celebrity endorsements that they could share as well as their perceptions towards using Korean Wave to endorse brand in automotive industry in Thailand. The data from experts' in-depth interviews were analyzed and combined with data from consumers' in-depth interviews, secondary sources and observations.

3.2 Target Respondents Selection and Sample Size

In order to effectively gather information, certain criteria of target respondents and sample size for this study were planned and achieved as described below;

Consumers In-depth Interviews (N = 25)

- Males & Females residing in Bangkok
- Aged between 18 – 45 years old; starting from 18 years old due to the fact that it is the legal age eligible to have driving license in Thailand.
- Currently possess a car (doesn't have to be registered under his / her name but should be the main user of the car) OR intend to purchase a new car in the next 12 months (doesn't have to pay by him / herself but should be the key or co-decision maker in brand selection)
- Should have a mix of segments of the possessed or intended-to-purchase cars
- Should have a mix of those who are the fan of particular Korean Wave areas

Expert In-depth Interviews (N = 4)

Those who are currently working in automotive industry; Brand Manager and Public Relation staff of automotive brands, staffs in advertising agencies whose client is an automotive brand as well as an automotive journalist in Thailand

3.3 Data Collection Plan

Secondary Research and Observation.

The data was collected in a form of literature reviews and other published articles mainly via online sources. Observations were conducted at shopping centers where target respondents hang out, entertainment retailers where Korean Wave-related products are sold as well as at Korean Wave events such as fan meetings and concert

Consumers and Experts In-depth Interviews

Due to the limitation of time and financial constraint, respondents were selected through non-probability sampling and acquired through personal connection. In-depth interviews were conducted via face to face interview or telephone interview based on the convenience. They were recruited mainly in Bangkok area with different

age, occupation, income range as well as other quotas as specified earlier. Respondents were interviewed using prepared topic guides. The interviews were taken approximately 30 – 45 minutes per interview.

3.4 Theoretical Framework -- Key Research Variables

Based on initial market study through observations and literature reviews combined with research objectives, following key variables were used as the guideline to study further in this study:

- Demographic profiles
- Automotive brands usership; being current car users or potential users
- Segment of the possessed cars or intended-to-purchase cars
- Being a fan club or non fan club of particular Korean Wave areas
- If a fan, areas of Korean Wave they are attracted to i.e. a fan of K-pop music or K-drama

3.5 Key Hypotheses

1. Korean Wave is a niche pop culture specific to only certain target groups such as younger generations only, thus not appropriate for high involvement products like automotive
2. Korean Wave is associated with strong association towards “hardcore” fan clubs in which those who are not the fan clubs will reject it
3. Korean Wave is suitable to only products that are originated from South Korea
4. Korean Wave can be exploited in automotive industry however segments of the cars i.e small cars or SUV cars will be the key factor

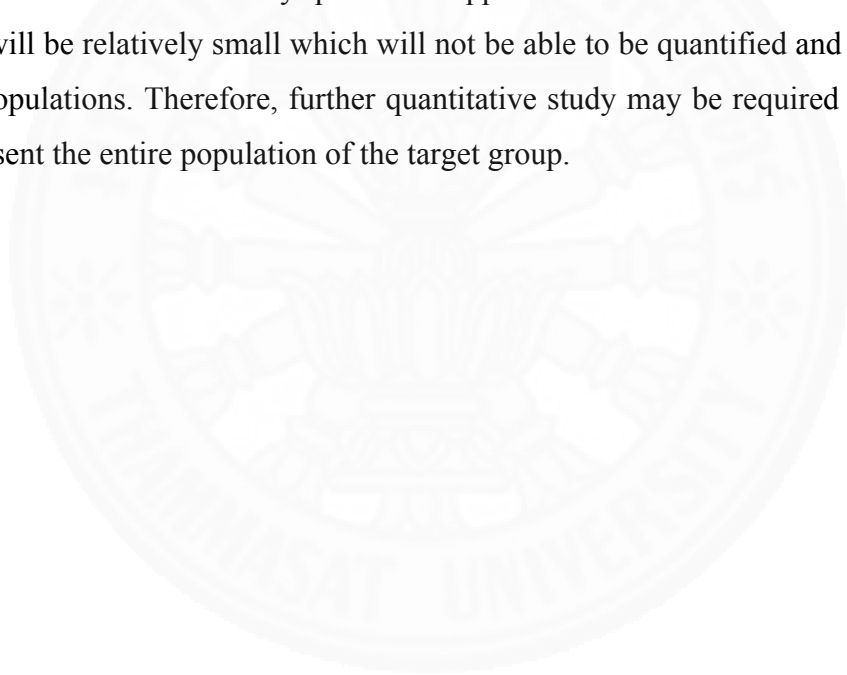
3.6 Data Analysis Plan

Data of this study was fully obtained from in-depth interview therefore, the unstructured and subjective data were transcribed and then grouped into attributes in order to evaluate and identify the linkages to the Korean Wave and usage of celebrities as endorsements with automotive products. Data gathered were used to interpret and analyze based on set objectives as well as aforementioned key variables and hypothesis. As a result, the segments of consumers were identified from the

analysis, which was harmonized through storytelling. Also, the verbatim statements were used to provide the evidence supporting the summary, and for assertions of the segments and insights.

3.7 Limitations of the study

With limited of time and budget, this study is aimed to be a preliminary research exploring the perceptions towards celebrity endorsements in automotive industry. It mainly focuses only on perceptions and attitudes toward Korean Wave and its effect on automotive brands if endorsed. Vehicle buying process as well as perceptions toward different brands of cars were investigated but not the key focus. Also, with the fact that only qualitative approach was used in this study thus sample size will be relatively small which will not be able to be quantified and projected onto the populations. Therefore, further quantitative study may be required for the data to represent the entire population of the target group.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Secondary Research Key Findings

As a result of bilateral and multilateral pressures on Korean to open its market, Korean economy began to promote production and commodification of media and cultural content since 1980s. By 2006, Korean cultural and entertainment productions have become widely consumed by Asian audiences and has now become popular not just in Asian countries but also the western country as well. This cultural phenomenon was called Korean Wave (Beng Huat Chua & Koichi Iwabuchi, 2008). Korean Wave started with the rise in popularity of Korean TV series with popular series like *Winter Sonata* and *Dae Jang Guem*. Later on, the music market then came into play with popular singers and bands such as Baby VOX, BoA, H.O.T and Dong Bang Shin Ki. As of now, Korean Wave includes not just TV series or music but also other cultural contents variety shows, performance shows as well as tourism.

However, Korean Wave phenomenon wouldn't have come this far without the strong support from the Korean government. With the continuous rising in popularity of Korean Wave in its early stage, the Korean government then tried to take the advantage of this Korean Wave as a tool to improve its cultural and public policy and diplomacy along with enhancing national image and national brand. (Gunjoo Jang & Won K. Paik, 2012). The Korean government designated "cultural technology" or Korean Wave as one of the six key technologies that would drive Korean economy into the 21st century (Beng Huat Chua & Koichi Iwabuchi, 2008).

With findings from these secondary sources, it shows that Korean Wave is expected to continue rising. It will also become stronger and more powerful, mainly driven by the combination of strong support from various parties, especially Korean government that makes Korean Wave different from other cultural trends in the world. Thus, it is a very promising opportunity and a very interesting topic to see how any products and brands in the market could exploit this opportunity.

4.2 Observation Research Key Findings

Total of 5 Korean Wave events were observed. These 5 Korean Wave events are timed to represent 4 different segments of Korean celebrities, which are boy bands, girl group, variety show celebrities and actor as it was found that different segments are attracted to different profiles of fan clubs. Based on the observations, common findings can be grouped as below:

Those who attended these events were mainly females and young

It was obvious that those who attended the events were mainly females and were relatively young – mostly are teenagers. However, there seemed to be a slight different in proportion of profiles in different events. Relatively more males can be observed in the event with the girl group compared to other events while relatively older consumers, first jobbers to established workers, can be observed in the actor and variety show celebrity events. This finding aligns with the preliminary finding found during proposal development phase with regards to consumers profiles who are attracted to different segments of Korean Wave. Thus, this confirmed that brands with target group of consumers who are females and young may be able to exploit the benefit of Korean Wave well.



Figure 1: Crowds of participants at Masita with New Presenter Event

Products and brands involved in these events seemed to focus more on sales activity on the day rather than building brand awareness along with the event promotion campaign.

It was obvious that people were very crowded at the event since early in the morning of the event day while the actual performance and show time started later in the evening. This shows how consumers who attended the event were very excited and involved with the event. Different products and brands showcased their booths at

the event and most were filled with participants who came to the event early. This seemed to be a great opportunity for brands who may have not joined the sponsorship package offered by the event organizer but rather rented a specific area for on ground activities on the day. However, products and brands participated seem to be low-involvement products such as foods and beverages, personal cares and cosmetics etc. This finding shows how brands could participate with the Korean Wave trend without spending high amount of **budget** as the key sponsor of the event if its objective was to stimulate brand familiarity or sales with on ground activity in comparison to building mass brand awareness from being the key sponsor of the event.

Products or brands who appeared at the events got free media benefits after the events as a result of crowd.

Due to massive interest by participants of the events, there were follow-up news in different channels of free media from newspaper to televisions. Brands and products which appeared at the event also got the benefits from the free media which may be effective among brands that are already well established but would like to keep the level of communication consistency and familiarity.

Fan clubs of boy bands and girl groups seem to be relatively more loyal, excited and attracted to the bands compared to fans of actor and variety show celebrities.

Even though all events observed were crowded. It is found that events of boy bands and girl groups were more crowded with lots of activities that were not just from the products or brands themselves only, but rather also from the fan clubs who formed groups and started their own activities. These activities include cover-dancing, exchanging photos and even selling products that are related to the celebrities themselves. Examples of products sold by the fan clubs were products used by celebrities or products endorsed by celebrities in other countries that these fan clubs have imported in themselves. These activities signal strong culture and community shared by the groups of fan clubs in which products or brands may be able to exploit the benefits from them. However, with the strong community shared by the groups of fan clubs, products or brands may have to study whether it will instead give the negative image to the brand for the “hardcore” image.

4.3 Consumers' In-depth Interviews Key Findings

The investigations were done across the 25 in-depth interviews with cars owners and cars intenders who are and are not Korean Wave fan clubs. (Females = 15, Male = 10). Seventeen respondents hold the Master's Degree while the rest hold the Bachelor's degree. Most of them were office employees (n = 17) while others were freelancers and business owners in different field such as car accessories, jewelry and printing. They mostly live in single houses or condominium with their family. Some of them are already married (n = 10). Base on the interview results, key findings can be summarized into key points per below.

Car is not just a vehicle for transportation. It enhances convenience, lifestyles and represents status

To all the respondents, cars are not just items in their possession. It provides users with not just functional benefits but also emotional benefits. Key functional benefits of cars mentioned by respondents are convenience in commuting, safety and time manageability. Without cars, they will have to commute by public transportations, which are not convenient, not safe and may consume more time. In addition, cars also provide emotional benefits such as freedom and social status.. Cars allow them to travel freely; whether closely or farther, and also open them to new experiences from travelling. Cars also help boost up personal image and status of the owners; they find that owning a car makes owner looked more successful and accomplished. However, majorities admitted that there are downfalls of owning a car. For them, sometimes it is not that convenient when they need to find parking spaces in such a busy city like Bangkok. It also costs certain amount of maintenances. But all of them claimed that, by weighing out the benefits, owning a car is certainly better than not owning one. Interesting verbatim on perceptions toward cars is as follows.

“ If I do not have a car. I would probably stay at home more which limits my life experiences”

- Female aged 30 who owns a city car, Korean Wave fan

“Car is everything to me. I would feel like I am grounded if without a car”

- Male aged 36 who owns a city car, non Korean Wave fan

“It is not fun driving a car in city like Bangkok but I would rather drive my own car for my own comfort than to take public transportation which is unreliable.”

- Female aged 28 who owns a D segment car, non Korean Wave fan

Brand and design are the top purchasing factors

Being a costly item to possess, price and performance was expected to be perceived as important purchasing factors however, brands and design are surprisingly the top factors mentioned by respondents as their key purchasing factors to decide which cars to purchase, regardless of gender and age. Even among older groups of respondents whom were perceived to be slightly more conservative, they still care a lot about design and brand. Brand in this case refers to both functional side and emotional side. Functional side revolves around reputation and trustworthiness of the brand while emotional side revolves around brand image portrayed. After brand and design, other functional factors then come into their consideration set; performance, price, numbers of dealerships, warranty and after sales services which may vary on each respondents depending on their budget, past experiences and convenience.

Interestingly, it is found from the interviews that when referring to brand image and design, it does not mean that they would always want cars with a unique design or aspiring brand image. Some of them rather want cars with design and brand images that match their personalities. Another word, they want the cars that are “for them”, not too much nor too less whether in terms of image or design. Because even though there are brands that they may find aspiring, but if they feel that these brands are too far for them, they would not feel proud or may feel intimidated to use them. This signals that brands should identify the “perfect spot” to be familiar and well matched with personalities and needs of their target consumers. Building the brands to be very aspirational may no longer be the way as they may find it irrelevant to their needs. Interesting verbatim of this topic is per below

“Actually I really like Mazda 3 design. It is very chic and unique. But I do not think it suits me well. I am afraid someone will think that I am trying to look cool if I drive Mazda so I just come back to my comfort zone of Toyota”

- Male aged 38, a new car intender, non Korean Wave fan

Brand endorser is not mentioned as one of the purchasing factors but is widely agreed across all profiles to help create awareness once probed

When interviewing, brand endorser was never spontaneously mentioned as purchasing factors of a car. However, once probed, majorities agreed that it is one of the key elements to make them aware of particular brand or model. They agreed that brand endorsers help creating awareness and interests to the brand, especially brand recall which will help move the brands up to the top rank in their consideration set, which is very helpful for the newly launched models. In addition, respondents find that ambassadors also help create and portray particular images of the brand. Thus, even though all claimed that brand endorser is not considered as their purchasing factors, but it does subconsciously play a role in building up desired imaged or characteristics for the brand. However, once probed further, it is found that Korean Wave fans are very likely to consider the car brands that are endorsed by Korean celebrities very strongly. They cannot confirm that they will definitely purchase that particular brand, but the brand will surely be at the top list of their consideration sets.

With this finding, it can be confirmed that brand endorser may not be able to create sales directly but it can be a powerful tool to create brand awareness and brand recall as well as shaping desired brand images, which may eventually lead to actual sales transactions. However, different degree of attachment and interest in brand endorsers can be spotted among fans and non-fans of Korean Wave. Korean Wave fans seem to be easily attracted to a brand that is endorsed by their favorite Korean celebrities when compared to the view of non-fan towards other celebrities. Thus it seems like there is a higher chance of closing sales transactions among Korean Wave fans if a brand is endorsed by their favorite Korean celebrities. Interesting verbatim of this topic is per below

“I think brand endorser help me to recall the brand, especially the newly launched model. It makes the overall advertisements more lively than just cars driving”

- Male aged 36 who owns a city car, non Korean Wave fan

“Actually, I was very interested in one of the Mercedes-Benz model that my favorite Korean Idol is a brand endorser in China. If I have enough budgets, I would definitely buy one. At least it makes me consider Mercedes-Benz more”

- Females aged 31, new car intender, Korean Wave fan.

Korean Wave is believed to still be going strong in Thailand with a particularly strong cult among the fan clubs.

All agreed that Korean Wave is not a fad trend like what it has been claimed in the early days. It is going strong and is expected to be growing in terms of its fan base however it will still not become a generalized pop culture. It is perceived to be a strong niche of culture with strong identities of fan clubs. There are also sub segments of the Korean Wave products that both fans and non-fans perceive similarly; the music-related products and TV series-related products. The music-related products, which are boy brands, and girl groups are perceived to be relatively more niche, well-known among fan clubs who are relatively young but possess strong cult attachment. Korean Wave fans interviewed in this study also confirmed that the fan clubs of boy bands and girl groups are more attached to the brands, more willing to spend on products related to the artists including official goods released by the artists company and any products that are endorsed by them. While the TV series-related products are believed to be more generalized as Korean TV series are also aired through Thai Free TV channels, which make them more relevant and familiar to the mass consumers, not just young consumers. Non Korean Wave fans claimed that they do not really know much about boy bands or girl groups. They may know the name of the bands but do not know much about the names of each artists in the band or the song names. On the other hand, they claimed that they are more familiar with the names of actors or actresses of popular TV series even though they do not watch by themselves as their friends and acquaintances talk about them and are they got to watch them occasionally through Free TV channels. But all in all, females are particularly more

attracted to Korean Wave than males. Interestingly, even though majorities agreed that TV-series products are more generalized and mass but they actually firstly associate and recall Korean Wave with boy bands and girl groups due to the strong hardcore image and crowd of fan clubs.

Apart from the sub segments perceived, there is another strong association towards Korean Wave fans by non fans, which may affect the decisions and directions of how the Korean celebrities should be used as brand endorsers. As Korean Wave is growing very strongly thus there are usually news regarding how strong the cult of the fan clubs is. This is associated relatively negatively by the non-fans as they are perceived to be young and hardcore in action. The characters and images portrayed are not preferred nor matched with the non-fans, the mass group of consumers.

This signals how marketers should be careful in using Korean Wave celebrities as brand endorsers or in any marketing campaigns as they may not be as generalized as local ambassadors and are also strongly with particular hardcore images of the fan clubs. However, if they are used correctly with the right target profiles, there is high potential in which brands can generate sales from them. Interesting verbatim of this topic is per below

“All I can think of about Korean Wave is a group of fan clubs that are very crazy of the bands they like. I don’t particularly like this kind of craziness. If I use the products that are endorsed by them, will I be perceived like that as well”

- Male aged 25 who owns a middle size car, non Korean Wave fan

With the strong associations and characters of Korean Wave, perceptions toward “Korea” and “Korean” are then shared with Korean Wave as well. It has become like a brand, not just a country.

With the strong growth of Korean Wave, the country of origin and nationality of South Korea and Korean become stronger. Majorities agreed that their perceptions towards Korea and Korean are unlike other countries. When refer to a product of other country, perceptions on country of origin may not be attached as strongly as Korea. The country of origin may signal certain level of quality but it does not limit its associations to particular product categories. However, when refer to Korea or

Korean products, certain categories of products are attached very strongly, partly driven by the rise and Korean Wave. In addition to the fact that images of “Korea” or Korean” are particularly influenced by Korean Wave trend, the country and nationality itself are also very well known for its nationalism. This nationalism triggers consumers to think and relate more with the country as if it is also one of the brands they consider.

The products that consumers find matched with Korea or Korean, regardless of their demographic profiles or whether they are fans of Korean wave, are something trendy, fashionable and young which are the characteristics associated with the boy bands and girl groups such as cosmetics, clothing and plastic surgery. In addition, it is not perceived as reliable as other countries like Japan or US as it is the new emerging country, but still in an acceptable level. While products that they do not find matched with Korean celebrities are banking and financial products because Korean celebrities are too trendy and young for this sophisticated product category. Thus, this may somewhat limits the usage and the extent of how much Korean celebrity can be used as brand endorsers or in marketing campaigns, especially in automotive industry where it is not well perceived with Korea or Korean. On the other hand, marketers need to be careful to make sure that the equity of Korea of the Korean Wave trend does not overwhelm the product or the brands endorsed. Interesting verbatim of this topic is per below

“When I think of Korean I only thing of something trendy and young like Samsung phones or Korean cosmetics. I do not think of robots or anything technical.”

- Male aged 28 who owns a middle size car, non Korean Wave fan

“When asked whether I use any products with Korean celebrities ambassadors, I only think of Korean products. I think the brand equity of Korea or Korean is very strong.

- Male aged 35 who owns a family car, non Korean Wave fan

Automotive product is considered acceptable to be endorsed by Korean celebrities, but there are certain extents to which it can be applied.

Even though automotive was not the category spontaneously mentioned by respondents that it is matched with Korean Wave trend and Korean celebrities however, once probed, it is considered acceptable and agreed that Korean celebrities can be used as brand endorsers of an automotive brand. But there is an extent to which it can be applied.

Overall, as Korean Wave is firstly associated with girl groups and boy bands among respondents, they find Korean Celebrities to be well matched with smaller colorful cars. This is because these cars are perceived to be trendy, urbanized and for new generations, which are the characters, associated with the boy bands and girl groups as well as their fan clubs. The cars do not need to be Korean brands or imported from Korea. However, as this segment is well known for its strong characters of fan clubs, respondents also raise concern whether the car will become a fad product for fan clubs, not as generalized as it should be. In addition, some males claimed that they would be interested if a car brand is to use the Korean girl groups as brand endorsers but they may not be reluctant to use it themselves as the images of fan clubs are very strong. This implies that if either boy bands or girl groups are to be used as brand endorsers with automotive brands, they are limited to only smaller cars with trendy image. On a positive side, it can be applied with not just Korean car brands but also other brands with trendy and fun image.

However, if to use TV-series actors or actress who are considered more mass and generalized, majorities believe that they would fit better with Korean car brands. This is because, even though they are perceived to be more generalized, they do not possess unique characteristics like what boy bands and girl groups do. They are just preferred with characters they portray in the Korean series. Thus, majorities believe that by employing them alone without the emphasis of being Korean from Korean cars may not create a huge effect to the brand.

But all in all, with the high level of nationalism of Korean associated by consumers, they all agreed that Korean celebrities, regardless of bands or actors, would fit the best with Korean car brands. In addition, majorities think that it will be

more relevant in a long run if local ambassadors are employed, as they are widely aware and familiar. Interesting verbatim of this topic is per below.

“I think Girl’s Generation (girl group) could fit well with small city cars like Nissan March. But I do not think you can use Gong Yoo with Toyota. It just does not feel right. But I think Goong Yoo with KIA will do well”

- Female aged 29 who owns a middle size car, non Korean Wave fan

If KIA is to used Korean Celebrities, all agreed and found it to be relevant to the brand. However, KIA brand itself needs to also build its awareness and should emphasize on its country of origin.

KIA is a Korean car brand that is used as an example in this study. When asked how they would feel if KIA is to be endorsed with Korean Celebrities, they all agree that it match well with the brand; mainly from its country of origin. However, there are also some of the respondents who did not know before hand that KIA is the car brand from Korea as KIA is not a strong brand in Thailand. With this problem, some think that KIA will not be able to exploit the benefit of Korean Celebrities fully. Instead, most agreed it is a chance for KIA to rebranding itself it the market. Interviewer then probed them with a scenario of launching a campaign for KIA. This scenario is if KIA is to launch a new campaign with the objective of to re-launch its position in the market and to emphasize that it is a brand from Korean, which possess trendy brand personality. All agreed and believe that with this campaign, Korean Celebrities would be able to create awareness and attention well. This is because there is a relevant and understandable linkage between the celebrities themselves with the country of origin of the brand. In addition, employing popular Korean Celebrities can create a buzz and gain attention from free media in which it will benefit the brand awareness and brand recall.

4.4 Experts’ In-depth Interviews Key Findings

The investigations were done among 3 experts in the industry who are Brand Manager and Public Relation staff of automotive brands, staffs in advertising agencies whose client is an automotive brand as well as an automotive journalist in Thailand.

Base on the interview results, key findings can be summarized into key points per below.

For brand manager and public relation staff, they believe that brand endorsers are important. It is because that it makes their work a lot easier given that the chosen ambassadors are there right choice with certain level of popularity. For them, key objective of brand endorsers is to create brand awareness and brand recall, so they can spend their effort in building after aspects of the brand and communication strategy without worrying about awareness if the chosen ambassador is right. This is very important with the newly launch product or new campaign launch so that relevant parties can focus on educating the market instead. In addition, brand endorser can convey the desired image that brand manager would like to portray without spending too much time and effort in educating customers.

Similarly for advertising agency staff that he also believes that brand endorser is very import. The right choice of brand endorser proposed by the advertising agency would help him and his team to sell their work to clients easily. Especially if the chosen brand endorser is strong in terms of characteristics portrayed, clients would not argue on the proposed work and will instead focus on other elements of proposals to make the whole strategy fruitful and effective. Also, not just about selling the work to clients easily, brand endorsers will also help make the strategy proposed to client successful faster given that the choice is right, securing his business in the long run.

However, for journalist, he feels indifferent whether a brand is using brand endorser or not, specially motoring journalist. This is because the content he mostly writes will be revolving around the product design and performance itself. However, he thinks that the brands that use brand endorsers signal certain level of commitment to market this product as well as certain level of budget allocated. For him, it means that there is a higher chance that this product will be pushed by the company and will be successful in the market. In return, it makes his content alive and lasts long especially nowadays that consumers can just find news articles online anytime after it was first published.

In addition, all parties agreed that the key important factor of a good brand endorser is popularity. This is because the role of brand endorser is to create brand

awareness and brand recall. Image portrayed by the celebrity is also very important as he or she will be the one who will present the product, but not the first priority, as long as the image of the chosen celebrity is not way too off from what is originally planned. They believe that different images can be portrayed throughout product life cycle but they need certain level of attention, especially during the launching phase, in which the popular celebrity will be more beneficial.

However, all of them believe that the most crucial element is the execution of the communication plan. Even though the chosen celebrity is the right choice, he or she may be able to help only creating brand awareness and brand recall. But it is the other elements of the whole communication strategy that will help make the product successful or fail.

With regards to using Korean celebrities as brand endorsers in automotive industry, they believe that it can be done but will need to beware of the images associated with Korean Wave. Similar to consumers, they find that images associated to Korean Wave are very strong which may somehow affect the brand endorsed. However, if the target consumers of the brand are well matched with Korean celebrities, they believe that it will be a powerful tool as fan clubs of these celebrities are very strong. However, it should be used exclusively or periodically in order to make sure that the images of Korean Wave will not stuck with the brand permanently.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the data analysis and result of how respondents perceive towards Korean Wave and brand endorsement, the implications are then concluded in the view of business, education, and social as follows.

Roles and importance of using celebrity's endorsements

The result shows that celebrities' endorsement is very important especially if the objective is to create brand awareness and brand recall. With their popularity, their role is to attract the attention of target consumers. They also help in portraying the desired image set by the brand management team to the target consumers. All relevant parties; both consumers and marketers, find the usage of celebrity endorsement important and effective especially for newly launched products or new campaign. While, most think that non-celebrities with the right images portrayed can be used as endorsers in the later stage of the product or campaign for example, follow-up campaign or just a communication phase that is planned to stimulate sales only. Thus, it can be concluded that celebrity endorsement should be used exclusively depending of objectives of the communication strategy in order to create attention and awareness to the brand.

Perceptions towards Korean Wave

Korean Wave is a growing trend in the market with strong associations of images driven by fan clubs. However, it was not spotted that any of the respondents feel strongly negative towards Korean Wave. It is just that those who are not the fan clubs of Korean Wave may not be really familiar with the celebrities, unlike local celebrities whom they are more familiar with even though they are not the fans of them.

However, there are also sub segments of Korean Wave; music-related segments revolving around boy bands and girl groups with TV-series related segments revolving around actors and variety show celebrities. There are different

levels of familiarity toward each segment from non-fans. TV-series related segments seem to be more generalized and mass and are more familiar among non-fans than music-related segments. In addition, Korean Wave is more attracted and familiar among females relatively more than males. This affects how they should be used with any marketing activities or campaigns by any products or brands.

Exploiting Korean Wave trend in automotive industry in Thailand

One of the finding confirmed in this study is how Korean Wave has unique characteristics and images associated to it; whether it be from characters of fan clubs to the nationalism image of the country itself among Thai consumers. It seems to be one of the reasons why no automotive brands in Thailand had ever employed Korean celebrities as their brand endorsers or in any of their marketing activities.

But once investigated and probed further, it is not wrong nor negatively perceive to use Korean celebrities to endorse an automotive brand. But the choice of the celebrities should be carefully reviewed to match with the product to be endorsed as Korean celebrity is firstly associated with trendy and young image mainly derived from boy bands and girl groups. Thus, any products that do not possess trendy and young characters or do not want to portray the trendy and young images may need to build other “reasons to believe” factors in order to effectively employ Korean celebrities as endorsements. Strongest reasons to believe found in this study is country of origin i.e. cars that are Korean brands or imported from Korea.

Risks associated with using Korean celebrities as brand endorsers in automotive industry

The most visible risk of using Korean celebrities as brand endorsers in automotive industry is the strong images associated with Korean Wave i.e. strong images and cult of fan clubs that they can be perceived with “hardcore” image. For very popular celebrities, fan clubs may express their preferences toward the brand very strongly and may be perceived relatively negatively among nonfans. This, the level of usage needs to be reviewed.

Possible ways for brands in Thai automotive industry to use Korean Wave as an endorsement

Possible execution that can prevent or soften the aforementioned risk and effectively use Korean Wave as an endorsement to the brand is to make sure that there is no publicly exposed event or situation that allows fans to express their affection towards their favorite celebrities freely as it may affect the brand. For example, brands may not be able to host events with Korean Celebrities attendance frequently as there might be lots of news published which will expose certain images to the non fans.

In addition, brands may use Korean Celebrities for only a short period or short campaign with the key objective to create attention and awareness to the brand but not to the level that the images of the celebrities themselves or the fan clubs will be heavily associated with the brands. For example, once the new brand or new campaign is widely aware, local celebrities may be consider to replace the Korean celebrities in order to soften the risk as well as enhancing the familiarity to the brand. While Korean celebrities can be added in periodically just to stimulate attention along the product life cycle.

Future Research Suggestions

This study was aimed to be an initial research to explore and understand the insight of car owners and intenders towards Korean Wave and how it can be employed as brand endorser. However, this study has certain limitations which are limited budget, timeline as well as the usage of qualitative research methodology in which its data may not be able to projected onto the overall population with statistical confidence.

Thus, future research studies are required for those who would like to extend and enhance the results further with the following suggestions.

1. To conduct a quantitative of how target consumers aware and perceive of a particular Korean celebrity chosen or planned to use as brand endorser.
2. To expand further from this study by broadening the target sampling from only Bangkok area to the major city in Thailand in order for the data to represent the population better.

3. To include other planned communication executions in future research as brand endorser is not the only tool to success of the brand.
4. To evaluate other local celebrities in parallel with Korean celebrity. This should be done to see whether and how well the local celebrities could replace Korean celebrities in order to lower down the risk of particular images of Korean Wave attaching with the brand or product as well as lowering the budget.



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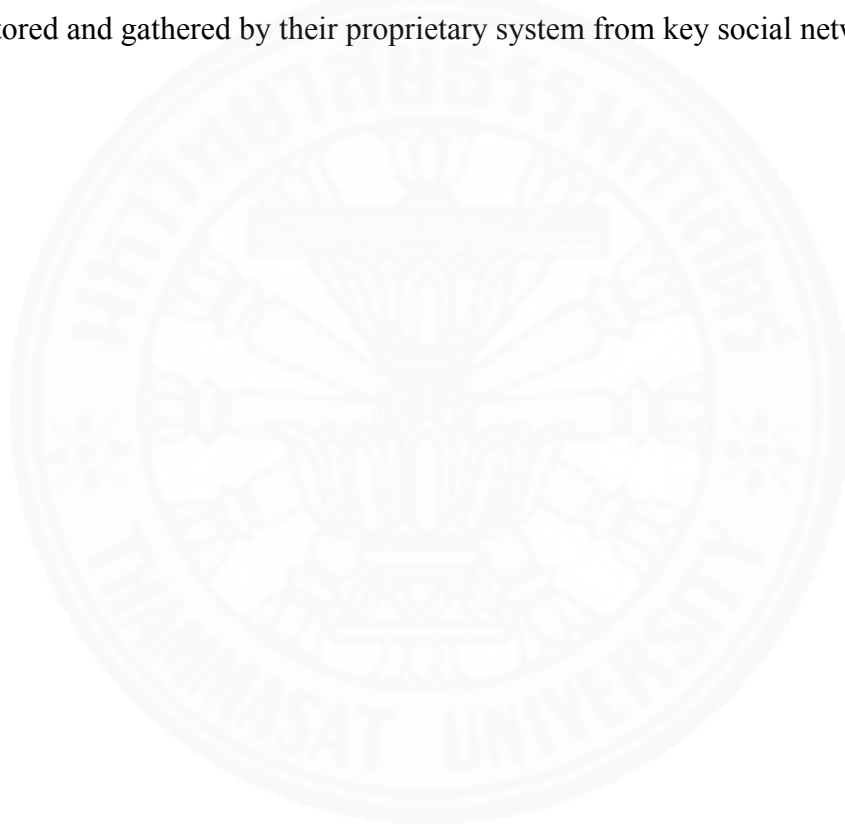
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PROJECT TIMELINE

Activities	Time Period
Identify interested topic	9 th September – 23 rd September 2016
Set the research objectives	23 th September – 7 th October 2016
Secondary research and literature reviews	23 rd September -19 st December 2016
Primary research (In-depth Interviews)	
- In-depth interview with consumers	9 th January – 9 th March 2017
- In-depth interview with experts	1 st February – 9 th March 2017
Final report	
- Writing	10 th March – 26 th March 2017
- Review and Finalize	27 th March – 7 th April 2017

APPENDIX B**QUESTION GUIDE FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW*****General information (to ask prior to the interview)***

Name: _____

Gender: Male / Female Age: _____

Occupation: _____

Household income (Baht /month):

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1) less than 35,000 | 2) 35,001-50,000 | 3) 50,001-85,000 |
| 4) 85,001-160,000 | 5) more than 160,001 | 6) Refuse to answer |

Highest education level:

- 1) lower than Bachelor's degree 2) Bachelor's degree
3) Master's degree 4) Higher than Master's degree

Resident Location: _____

Questions Guide for In-Depth Interviews

- Perceptions toward Owning Cars and Purchasing Behavior
 - What does car mean to you? Why do you need a car?
 - How does it feel like to own a car? How does it feel if you do not have one?
 - When you are purchasing car, what factors do you consider?
 - Is brand endorser important in your decision making process? How?
 - What is the difference between a car with and without brand endorsement?
- Perceptions toward Korean Wave and Having Korean Wave Endorsements
 - Do you know Korean Wave?
 - What is the perception toward Korean Wave; positive or negative?
 - For a fan; why are you a fan of Korean Wave culture?
 - For non -an; why are you not a fan of Korean Wave culture?
 - Have you ever used any products which have Korean celebrities as brand endorsers? How do you feel? What is the perception towards those brands?
 - What product categories do you find suitable to be endorsed with Korean celebrities? What about categories that are not suitable? Why?
 - What about automotive? How does it feel like if it is endorsed with Korean celebrities?
 - In which case for brands in automotive industries do you think can be endorsed with Korean celebrities i.e Korean car brands or smaller cars?

BIOGRAPHY

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