

## **Cross-Cultural TV Drama Viewing, Parasocial Acculturation, and Host Country Branding: Empirical Evidence and Implications**

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Against the backdrop of the increasingly globalized media content market facilitated by over-the-top (OTT) services, this study aims to demonstrate empirical evidence for parasocial acculturation and its implications. According to a nationwide survey of young South Korean OTT viewers, the perceived narrative appeals that define and distinguish U.S. TV dramas can be empirically identified. These perceived narrative appeals of US TV dramas helped enhance not only young South Korean OTT viewers' attitudes toward such media content but also their parasocial acculturation. In addition, attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas and parasocial acculturation significantly influenced attitudes toward the United States. Implications and insights were discussed in view of globalized media content and country branding.

*Keywords: parasocial acculturation, over-the-top (OTT), cross-cultural viewing, popular media content, country branding*

Owing to over-the-top (OTT) services, global media users' content-viewing behaviors have significantly altered (Park, 2018). OTT services based on subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) have freed media users from traditional, linear, and unilateral TV scheduling to more self-directed, curated, and interactive content choices (Lobato, 2018). Insofar as media users have Internet access, they can enjoy watching TV content anywhere at any time through OTT services with multiple devices, including TVs, computers, tablets, and mobile phones (Chalaby, 2016).

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One altering media user behavior that deserves scholarly attention is wider and more frequent consumption of and exposure to international and cross-cultural TV content by global audiences. Large OTT companies operating at a global level, such as Netflix, Disney Plus, Apple TV Plus, and Prime Video, are not only filming their original content in many different locations with nationally and culturally diverse creators but also purchasing copyrights for several international shows (Jenner, 2016). Global audiences, on the other hand, have enjoyed an increasing number of such foreign TV shows with ease through web streaming services (Ju, 2020). As a result, OTT services have dramatically facilitated the global distribution and consumption of cross-cultural content (Aguiar & Waldfogel, 2017).

In this study, we attempted to look at the antecedents and consequences of this increasing cross-cultural TV content consumption in the age of web streaming and SVOD, focusing on the theoretical notion of parasocial acculturation, which was conceptually conceived and suggested in this study. Given the theoretical frameworks of parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and acculturation (Berry, 2003), we define parasocial acculturation as an individual's psychological adjustment to a foreign culture as a result of cross-cultural TV consumption and subsequent parasocial interaction. We also consider global audience's perceived narrative appeals of cross-cultural media content as a potential antecedent of acculturation and their attitudes toward such media content. Finally, global audiences' acculturation to such cross-cultural media content is anticipated to positively influence their perceived country brand of the exposed media content. Using structural equation modeling, the theoretical concept of parasocial acculturation is empirically demonstrated by clarifying its relationships with potential antecedents and consequences.

## **Theoretical Background**

### ***Acculturation by Mass Media Usage***

Acculturation is a concept that describes individuals' psychological and behavioral processes in an intercultural setting (Dona & Berry, 1994; Gibson, 2001). Acculturation involves various cultural agents. Cultural agents for acculturation include personal contacts, such as friends, colleagues, and classmates, and impersonal sources, such as mass media (Lee & Tse, 1994). As one of the most influential and pervasive agents for acculturation (Yang, Wu, Zhu, & Southwell, 2007), mass media offer a vast archive of information and knowledge that helps individuals easily navigate and find necessary cultural protocols in acculturation processes. Mass media facilitate acculturation by providing "not only topical events but also societal values, norms of behavior, and traditional perspectives for interpreting the environment" (Kim, 1988, p. 114). As impersonal agents, mass media could help individuals avoid interpersonal interactions in acculturation processes, thereby reducing the psychological burden and stress potentially associated with uncertainty and face threats (Kim, 1988).

Media dependency theory predicts that those who use mass media in an acculturation process are more likely to be affected by and dependent on the images, stories, and ideologies portrayed in media programs as "real" (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1982; Loveless, 2008). In addition, as social cognitive theory posits, mass media can result in the acculturation of audiences, specifically through program contents and

stories that make audiences observe, retain, and emulate foreign cultural values and protocols (Bandura, 2002; Moon & Park, 2007).

As one of the fastest growing global media platforms, OTT appears to alter how different cultures are disseminated and watched and how acculturation takes place. More frequent and more diverse cross-cultural TV content consumption has facilitated the learning and absorption of information and knowledge about foreign cultures (Braun, 2013), largely because of giant OTT channels, such as Netflix or YouTube. In addition to providing a vast archive of foreign cultural programs, audiences can enjoy curated and concentrated cross-cultural content viewing, which seems to be effective for learning and embracing foreign cultures (Shon, Lee, & Kim, 2021).

### ***Parasocial Acculturation: A Consequence of Cross-Cultural Media Content Exposure***

Much acculturation research up to this point has paid analytic attention to immigrants or sojourners who permanently or temporarily reside in foreign countries. With the emergence of global media platforms, including OTT services or social media, however, acculturation can also occur among audiences who still live in their homelands, watching and enjoying a considerable amount of foreign media content (Ferguson & Adams, 2016; Frau-Meigs, 2006). As a result, acculturation accompanied by cross-cultural media content exposure has become an interesting subject of scholarly discussion.

Ferguson and Bornstein (2012) proposed the concept of remote acculturation, drawing on their observations of Americanized Caribbean adolescents. In their study comparing domestic Jamaican teenagers with Jamaican youth immigrants living in the United States, a similar pattern of acculturation was found as empirical evidence for remote acculturation. Based on the findings, they asserted that intermittent or indirect contact with a foreign culture could result in acculturation even in geographically distant circumstances (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015). Remote acculturation extends the traditional definition of acculturation, which requires continuous and direct cultural contact and exchange. It highlights that acculturation can take place, regardless of geographic location or mode of cultural interaction (Ferguson, Ferguson, & Ferguson, 2017).

In this study, the acculturation process and outcome taking place in a remote setting, particularly through an increasing amount of media exposure to cross-cultural content because of advanced media technologies including OTT, was conceptualized as “parasocial acculturation” with reference to the theoretical notion of parasocial interaction from mass communication scholarship. Parasocial interaction refers to imaginary and vicarious relationships a TV viewer can develop and maintain with characters appearing in a program (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Perse & Rubin, 1989). A series of studies based on the concept of parasocial interaction have specifically focused on the effect of TV content (e.g., Hoffner, 1996; Sood & Rogers, 2000). The role of TV, on the other hand, has been acknowledged in the acculturation literature as well. For example, Stilling (1997) remarked that “the electronic melting pot hypothesis asserts that immigrants who view a large quantity of host-community television programming acculturate more quickly than those who view a lesser quantity of host-community programming” (p. 81). In light of the theoretical definition and empirical focus of parasocial interaction, this study suggests the term “parasocial acculturation” to conceptualize and demonstrate

the roles and consequences of cross-cultural TV drama exposure and consumption through OTT, particularly in geographically distant environments.

The classic definition of acculturation has conceptually emphasized immigrants' direct and daily experiences in a foreign society (Dey, Yen, & Samuel, 2020; Li & Shao, 2023). However, parasocial acculturation in this study should be viewed and understood as a process and outcome of mediated and sporadic cross-cultural media content consumption in a geographically and physically distant setting. In addition, parasocial acculturation specifically sorts out and concentrates on the impact of cross-cultural media content exposure and subsequent cultural adjustments by global audiences.

This study, in particular, examined the role of OTT services in parasocial acculturation. A recent study identified that a wide range of content, convenient interfaces, user control, and hedonic motivation enticed more global audiences into OTT services while facilitating cross-cultural media content exposure and consumption (Mulla, 2022). OTT services also offer a distinct platform where audiences can immerse and engage themselves with cross-cultural media content for a longer time, sometimes resulting in binge-watching (Sobral, 2019). Thus, OTT services are worth special scholarly attention, as they promote global audiences' easier exposure to, more frequent consumption of, and higher immersion in cross-cultural media content, which, in turn, are likely to stimulate more effective parasocial acculturation.

### ***The Role of Narrative Appeal in Parasocial Acculturation and Attitudes Toward TV Drama***

Parasocial acculturation, as proposed in this study, is built on the original concept of parasocial interaction. Nevertheless, parasocial acculturation differs from parasocial interaction both theoretically and analytically. First, unlike parasocial interaction, parasocial acculturation specifically looks into acculturation processes and outcomes through cross-cultural TV viewing. That is, parasocial acculturation aims to extend theories of acculturation in remote and mediated situations by considering interactions between domestic viewers and foreign TV content. In addition, parasocial acculturation is more likely to occur by watching, learning, and assimilating TV content and stories rather than by developing intimacy or interpersonal bonding with a TV character, as with parasocial interaction. Thus, parasocial acculturation focuses on the interaction between viewers and foreign TV content. It proposes that individuals can be acculturated because of frequent and continuous exposure to and consumption of foreign TV content. It is theoretically expected that the emergence of OTT, as well as easy and user-friendly access to TV content produced in various cultures, will likely accelerate parasocial acculturation among cross-cultural viewers (Brooker, 2001; Ju, 2020).

Why, then, do domestic viewers watch foreign TV content? What motivates cross-cultural audiences to expose themselves to foreign TV programs? Among a handful of empirical investigations, Jiang and Leung's (2012) study sheds light on the psychologies behind media users' viewing motivations that drive foreign TV exposure and consumption. Based on survey data collected from urban Chinese audiences who watch American and Korean TV dramas online, they found that learning about foreign cultures, such as language and fashion, was a statistically significant factor in the viewing frequency of foreign TV dramas (Jiang & Leung, 2012).

Jiang and Leung's (2012) study also revealed that narrative appeal was another notable predictor of the viewing frequency of foreign TV dramas. More specifically, those who liked complicated plots preferred watching American TV dramas, whereas those who liked slower story development preferred watching Korean TV dramas (Jiang & Leung, 2012). In the context of cross-cultural TV drama viewing, each foreign TV drama has culturally unique and distinct narrative appeals and storytelling styles that reflect different cultural values and elements. For example, Jiang and Leung (2012) highlighted that "the Korean style is more mature and homogenous, while the American style seems more diverse and dynamic" (p. 175). Thus, the narrative appeals or storytelling styles of TV dramas can be not only content-specific but also culture-specific. As culture-specific components, they can serve as an inducement for audiences to view foreign TV dramas (Jiang & Leung, 2012; Ju, 2020; Lu, Liu, & Cheng, 2019).

Considering the role of narrative appeal, this study postulated narrative appeal as a potential antecedent of parasocial acculturation. As perceived cultural cues that may stand out for media content produced in a specific country, narrative appeals are likely to facilitate audiences' levels of acculturation (Biltereyst, 1991; Lee, 2012). That is, they can boost audiences' acculturation by cognitively imprinting specific narrative appeals and storytelling styles in their minds (Jiang & Leung, 2012; Walter, Murphy, Frank, & Baezconde-Garbanati, 2017).

In addition, foreign media exposure for acculturation has been understood as an active and voluntary activity (Aricat, Karnowski, & Chib, 2015; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997), as acculturation is often driven and accelerated by several motivational factors, such as better foreign language proficiency, smoother interaction with foreign people, and faster penetration into the mainstream of the host country (Alencar & Deuze, 2017). Thus, it can be asserted that narrative appeals of cross-cultural media content can serve as a psychological motivation to view and consume such media content more, thereby enhancing and facilitating global audiences' acculturation to the host country (Dalisay, 2012; Ju, Hamilton, & McLarnon, 2021; Raman & Harwood, 2016).

Based on this theoretical reasoning, this study hypothesizes that the perceived narrative appeals of foreign TV dramas likely drive domestic viewers to watch such TV content, leading them to form and develop higher parasocial acculturation. That is, the perceived narrative appeals of foreign TV dramas are likely to positively influence parasocial acculturation as a function of global audiences' active and voluntary exposure and consumption. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that perceived narrative appeals are positively related to attitudes toward foreign TV dramas and that attitudes toward TV dramas, in turn, positively enhance parasocial acculturation by increasing domestic viewers' spontaneous exposure and consumption.

To empirically demonstrate the subdimensions of narrative appeals in a cross-cultural TV content consumption setting, this study analyzes South Korean audiences' perceived narrative appeals with regard to U.S. TV dramas, specifically through OTT. East Asian countries, specifically China, Japan, and South Korea, are considered theoretically valid regions for acculturation research with reference to the United States because of cultural differences in many respects (e.g., Mao & Qian, 2015; Raman & Harwood, 2016). South Korea, in particular, is one of the fastest growing countries in relation to the OTT market (Evans, McDonald, Bae, Ray, & Santos, 2016; Park, 2018). Moreover, South Korean audiences have watched U.S.-imported TV dramas both online and offline for a long time, and, as a result, a solid fandom has already been established

among many audiences (Chang, Khang, Jeong, Chung, & Nam, 2013; Shim, Zhang, & Harwood, 2012; Yang, Ramasubramanian, & Oliver, 2008). Thus, this study suggests the following research question and hypotheses to be demonstrated by empirical analysis with a South Korean sample.

*RQ1: What are the dimensions of narrative appeal perceived by South Korean OTT audiences for U.S. TV dramas?*

*H1: Narrative appeal dimensions of U.S. TV dramas perceived by South Korean OTT audiences are likely to lead to positive attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas.*

*H2: Narrative appeal dimensions of U.S. TV dramas perceived by South Korean OTT audiences are likely to lead to higher parasocial acculturation.*

*H3: South Korean OTT audiences' attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas are likely to mediate between perceived narrative appeal dimensions and parasocial acculturation.*

### ***The Effects of Cross-Cultural TV Drama Viewing and Parasocial Acculturation on Host Country Branding***

One of the plausible consequences of cross-cultural TV drama viewing and parasocial acculturation appears to be place branding for the host country. Place branding centers on strategically creating and promoting an individual "place" by focusing on how to market such a place as an attractive product. Thus, place branding attempts to positively influence consumers' perceived images of a certain place for economic purposes (Hanna & Rowley, 2008). Perceived images of a place play a critical role in place branding because consumers make behavioral decisions based on their own images of a place (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002).

With this line of thought, this study analytically focuses on attitudes toward foreign TV dramas and parasocial acculturation as potential determinants of the perceived brand images of a host country. Based on the empirical findings concerning the interactive effects of product image and country image, it can be assumed that international TV dramas, as popular cultural products of a host country, are likely to affect audiences' attitudes toward the country of origin (e.g., Guzman & Paswan, 2009; Woo, 2019). In this sense, attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas among South Korean OTT viewers would likely be positively associated with attitudes toward the host country, the United States. The effect of parasocial acculturation can be expected along the same vein. As parasocial acculturation conceptually refers to both the process and outcome of acculturation through cross-cultural media exposure and vicarious interactions, culture-friendly and culture-acquisitive activities are likely to positively influence audiences' attitudes toward the host country. Therefore, this study attempts to demonstrate the following research hypotheses:

*H4: South Korean OTT audiences' attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas are likely to lead to more positive attitudes toward the host country.*

*H5: South Korean OTT audiences' parasocial acculturation is likely to lead to more positive attitudes toward the host country.*

## Methods

### *Survey Procedures and Sampling*

An online survey was conducted in South Korea to collect empirical data for statistical analysis. A professional research company in South Korea with its own research panel helped design and execute a nationwide online survey focused on recruiting young OTT audiences who were relatively familiar with U.S. TV dramas and more heavily viewed such content. As a result, a total of 310 respondents participated in the online survey. Among the respondents, 109 (34.9%) were male and 201 (64.8%) were female. The mean age of the respondents was 22.2 years ( $SD = 3.5$ ). Empirical data collected from the survey were analyzed with SPSS 21 for basic descriptive statistics. Furthermore, AMOS 21 was used for structural equation modeling to demonstrate the factor loadings of the narrative appeal dimensions and to conduct path analyses among the constructs.

### *Measurement*

To demonstrate the subdimensions of the narrative appeal of U.S. TV dramas perceived by young South Korean OTT audiences, questionnaire items used to explore narrative appeal dimensions in a previous study (Jiang & Leung, 2012) were employed. A few example items are as follows: "With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting American values," "With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting family love," and "With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting happy ending" (see Table 1). Seven-point Likert scales were used to assess the perceptions of young South Korean OTT audiences in terms of narrative appeals of U.S. TV dramas.

According to the proposed structural equation model (see Figure 2), three endogenous constructs following the perceived dimensions of the narrative appeal of U.S. TV dramas were attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas, parasocial acculturation, and attitudes toward the United States. Measures for parasocial acculturation were referred to in several previous studies (e.g., Ferguson & Adams, 2016; Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012; Stilling, 1997). Items for measuring parasocial acculturation included "My favorite TV dramas are from the United States," "I enjoy watching U.S. TV dramas," "I like the people starring in U.S. TV dramas," "I watch U.S. TV dramas to learn about the US culture," "I watch U.S. TV dramas to understand American people," "I watch U.S. TV dramas to learn about the country," and "I watch U.S. TV dramas to learn English." For attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas and attitudes toward the United States, general semantic differential scales demonstrated in many previous studies (e.g., Asplund & Norberg, 1993; Dolch, 1980) were adopted. Respondents' attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas and the host country were measured, respectively, using three semantic differential scales (unfavorable-favorable, bad-good, and negative-positive). For all such measures, 7-point Likert scales were used to statistically assess the responses.

A series of tests helped confirm that the measures adopted in this study maintained statistically acceptable inter-item reliability. As for parasocial acculturation, Cronbach's alpha for the measure was 0.87

( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ). In addition, Cronbach's alpha for the measure of attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas was 0.90 ( $M = 4.94$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) and for attitudes toward the United States was 0.91 ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ). In sum, the measures used to empirically gauge the three endogenous constructs in the proposed model were found to be statistically reliable.

## Results

### *Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analyses*

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first conducted to statistically analyze and identify subdimensions of young South Korean audiences' perceived narrative appeals of U.S. TV dramas. Before extracting factors, this study adopted Kiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity to determine the statistical suitability of the data. The KMO test showed a coefficient of 0.92, which was greater than 0.6, indicating a statistically acceptable level of sampling adequacy (Williams, Onsman, & Brown, 2010). Bartlett's test of sphericity showed statistical appropriateness as well ( $\chi^2 = 5,437.49$ ,  $df = 406$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Among the numerous extraction methods, principal-component factor analysis was employed in this study (Williams, Onsman, & Brown, 2010). The analysis yielded five subdimensions comprising young South Korean audiences' perceived narrative appeals of U.S. TV dramas. The five subdimensions are as follows: American value, emotion, happy ending, competition, and science fiction. The aforementioned five principal components helped explain 61.69% of the total variance in young South Korean audiences' perceived narrative appeals. The factor loadings of each item were above 0.60. In addition, all five principal components as subdimensions of narrative appeals showed reliability coefficients above 0.70, which were statistically acceptable.

**Table 1. Constructs, Indicators, and Key Statistics.**

Latent Constructs	Indicators	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Factor Loadings
American Value	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting American value	3.52	1.71	0.61 <sup>b</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting American culture	4.45	1.71	0.70 <sup>a</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting various ethnicity	4.63	1.66	0.75 <sup>a</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting American dream	3.90	1.61	0.84 <sup>a</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting equality	4.33	1.56	0.74 <sup>a</sup>
	Index	3.98	1.25	Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$
Emotion	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting romantic love	4.88	1.65	0.79 <sup>b</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting human relationships	4.84	1.55	0.86 <sup>a</sup>



	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting neighborly matters	4.56	1.55	0.82 <sup>a</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting family matters	4.59	1.61	0.77 <sup>a</sup>
	Index	4.72	1.37	Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .88
Happy Ending	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting happy ending	4.99	1.56	0.71 <sup>b</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting good people	4.69	1.61	0.68 <sup>a</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting conflict resolution	5.04	1.45	0.88 <sup>a</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting better results	5.07	1.47	0.88 <sup>a</sup>
	Index	4.95	1.31	Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .88
Competition	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting strong characters	5.13	1.54	0.67 <sup>b</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting competitive rivalry	4.79	1.54	0.72 <sup>a</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting competitive abilities	4.71	1.62	0.78 <sup>a</sup>
	Index	4.88	1.29	Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .76
Science Fiction	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas starring superheroes	3.98	1.84	0.69 <sup>b</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas highlighting scientific stuff	4.64	1.76	0.78 <sup>a</sup>
	With OTT, I like watching U.S. TV dramas describing future worlds	4.88	1.80	0.71 <sup>a</sup>
	Index	4.50	1.50	Cronbach's $\alpha$ = 0.77

*Note.* The questions were based on 7-point Likert scales. The questionnaire was translated into Korean

M: Mean

SD: Standard Deviation

CFA: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

<sup>a</sup> Factor significance:  $p < .01$

<sup>b</sup> loading was set to 1.0 to fix construct variance.

Judging by the factor loadings, American dream ( $\lambda = .84$ ) was the most important and powerful variable for the American value dimension, followed by ethnicity ( $\lambda = .75$ ), equality ( $\lambda = .74$ ), American culture ( $\lambda = .70$ ), and American value ( $\lambda = .61$ ). The emotion dimension comprised four variables: human relationship, neighborly relation, family relation, and romantic love. Among them, human relationship was

the most significant variable ( $\lambda = .86$ ), followed by neighborly relation ( $\lambda = .82$ ), romantic love ( $\lambda = .79$ ), and family relation ( $\lambda = .77$ ). As for the happy ending dimension, conflict resolution and better results were identically loaded most highly ( $\lambda = .88$ ), while happy ending ( $\lambda = .71$ ) and good people ( $\lambda = .68$ ) were considerable variables that formed the dimension as well. Three variables constituted the competition dimension: ability ( $\lambda = .78$ ), rivalry ( $\lambda = .72$ ), and characters ( $\lambda = .67$ ). For the science fiction dimension, scientific stuff ( $\lambda = .78$ ) was the most conspicuous variable, followed by future worlds ( $\lambda = .71$ ) and superheroes ( $\lambda = .69$ ).

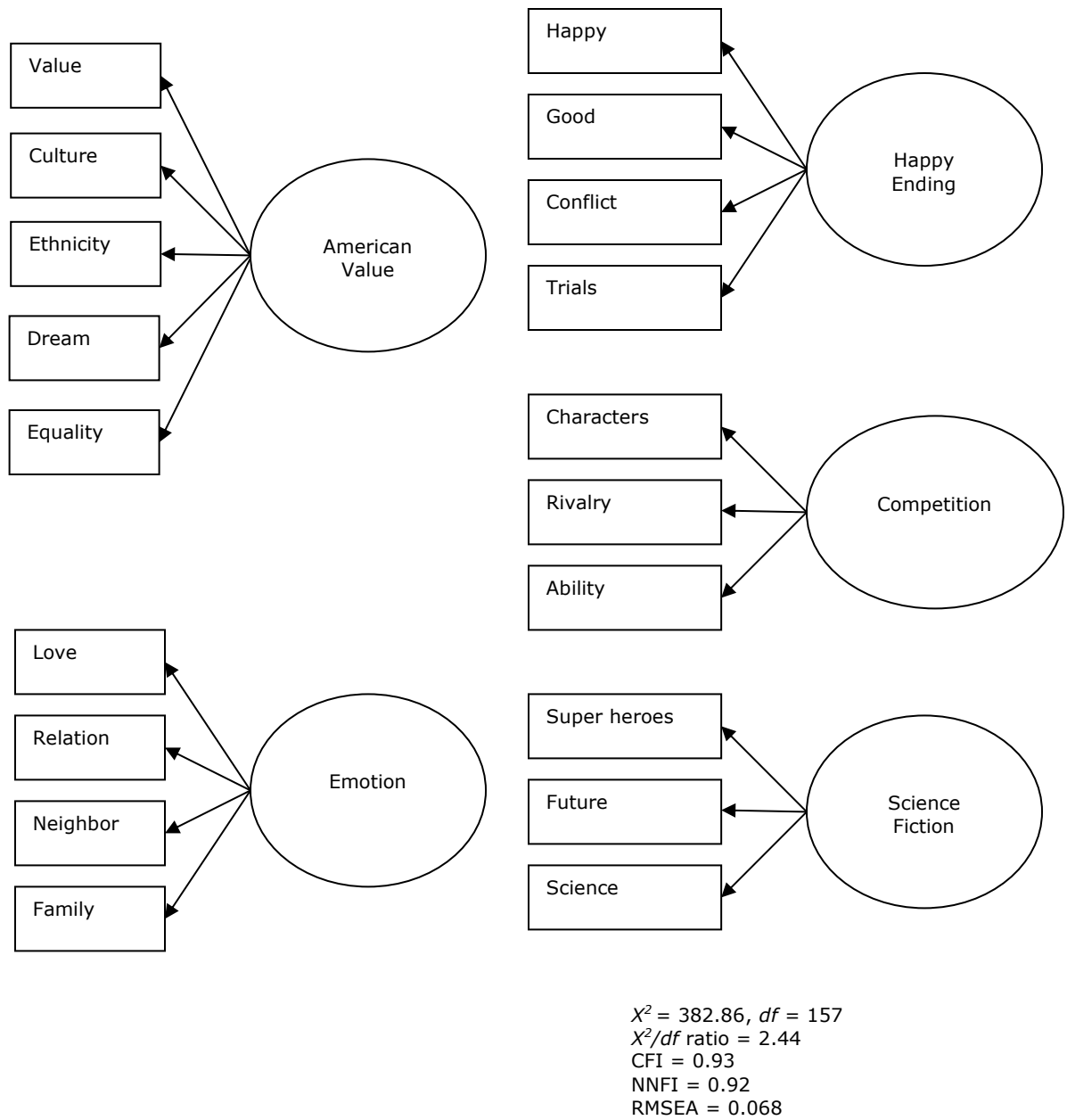
In Table 2, the statistical coefficients about the convergent and discriminant validity of the five subdimensions are presented. Coefficients necessary to determine convergent and discriminant validity include composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), maximum shared variance (MSV), and average shared variance (ASV). All the coefficients indicated statistically acceptable values to confirm the convergent and discriminant validity of the five subdimensions composing narrative appeals of U.S. TV drama.

**Table 2. Statistics for Convergent and Discriminant Validity.**

Construct	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
American Value	0.851	0.493	0.241	0.190
Emotion	0.884	0.657	0.355	0.218
Happy ending	0.870	0.629	0.355	0.243
Competition	0.768	0.525	0.280	0.234
Science fiction	0.771	0.530	0.277	0.146

Notes. CR: Composite Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted, MSV: Maximum Shared Variance  
ASV: Average Shared Variance.

In addition, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was administered to further authenticate the five subdimensions identified by the prior exploratory factor analysis (see Figure 1). Based on the maximum likelihood estimation, the analysis helped demonstrate a generally good model fit. In analyzing goodness of fit, three types of model fit were considered: absolute fit, incremental fit, and parsimonious fit. Absolute fit can be assessed with Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The RMSEA of the studied model was 0.068, which was less than 0.08 and showed statistical goodness of model fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). Incremental fit can be assessed using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Normed Fit Index (NFI). According to the analysis, the CFI and NFI were 0.93 and 0.92, respectively, both of which were greater than 0.9 and statistically acceptable (Bentler, 1990). Finally, parsimonious fit, which can be assessed with an  $X^2/\text{degrees of freedom}$  ratio, was 2.44 ( $X^2 = 382.86$ ,  $df = 157$ ), also indicating a statistically acceptable value with less than 5.0 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985).

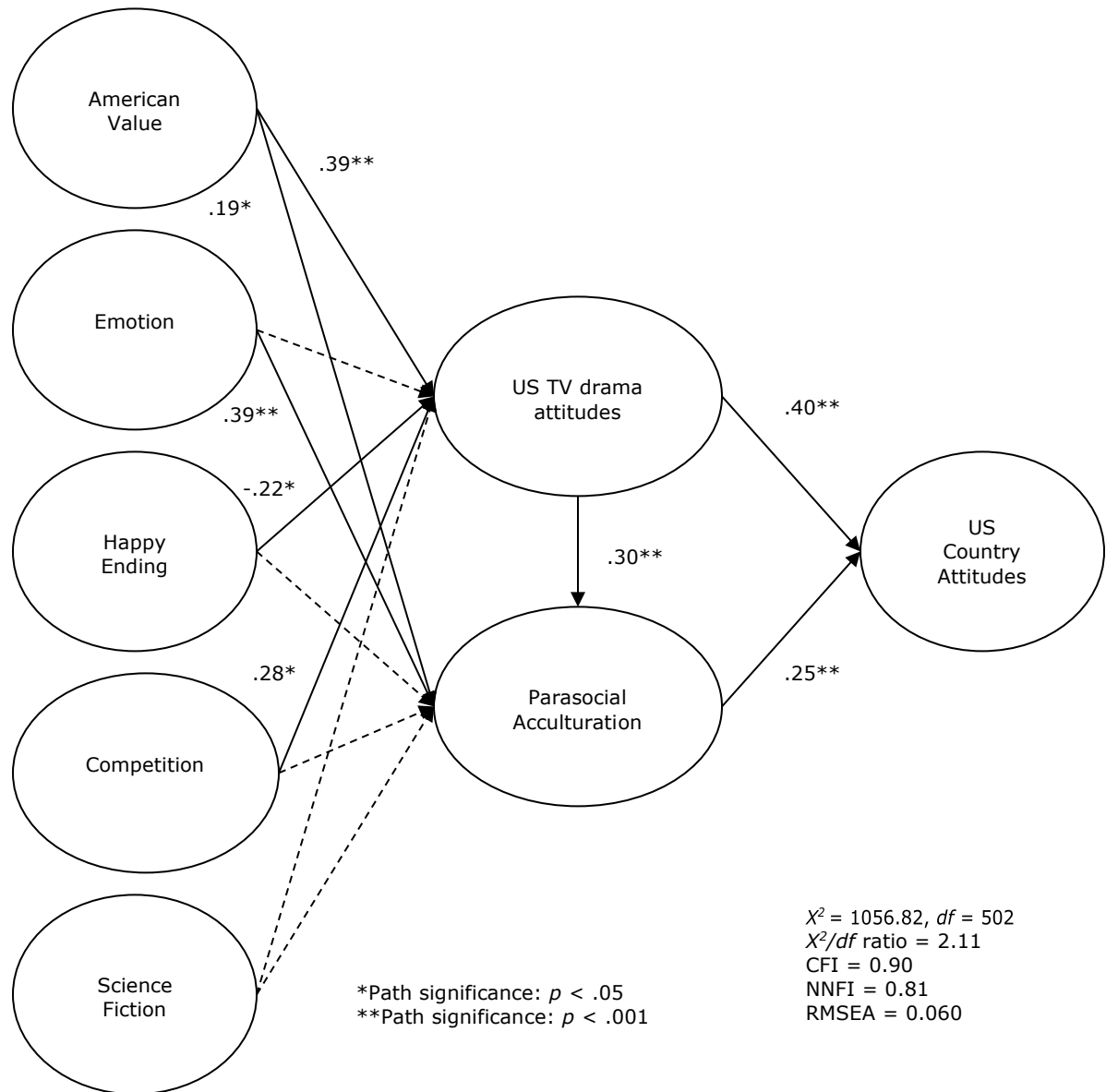


**Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis.**

### ***Path Analyses and Hypotheses Tests***

With narrative appeals of U.S. TV dramas as a set of exogenous variables, paths were hypothesized to and among endogenous variables, such as attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas, parasocial acculturation, and attitudes toward the United States. Structural equation modeling was employed to verify the statistical significance of the paths among the variables.

As described in Figure 2, the research model was hypothesized. The statistical appropriateness of the research model was tested by estimating goodness of fit. The analysis showed that the RMSEA of the research model as an absolute fit indicator was 0.060, which was statistically appropriate with the value less than 0.08. For incremental fit indicators, CFI and NFI were 0.91 and 0.90, respectively, both of which fulfilled an acceptable model fit. As a parsimonious fit indicator, the  $X^2/\text{degrees of freedom}$  ratio was 2.11, confirming the statistical appropriateness of the research model.



**Figure 2. Structural equation modeling and path analyses.**

Furthermore, the regression weights for the paths among the constructs were statistically examined for significance. With 95% statistical confidence, it was demonstrated that the research hypotheses proposed by the model were partially supported. First, a series of path analyses confirmed that the five subdimensions composing perceived narrative appeals of U.S. TV dramas partially helped explain and predict

young South Korean audiences' attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas. More precisely, American value ( $\gamma = .39, p < .001$ ), happy ending 9 ( $\gamma = -.22, p < .05$ ), and competition ( $\gamma = .28, p < .05$ ) as perceived narrative appeals of U.S. TV dramas influenced attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas at a statistically significant level. According to the findings, young South Korean audiences are more likely to form and develop positive attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas when they like the narrative characteristics of American value and competition they enjoy in U.S. TV dramas through OTT. An interesting finding was that the happy ending dimension of narrative appeals was negatively associated with attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas. This finding indicated that young South Koreans' attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas are inversely related to their level of liking for happy endings in story plots. In other words, it can be interpreted that a happy ending may not be an attractive component of narrative appeals for U.S. TV, particularly for young South Korean OTT viewers. Rather, happy ending plots embedded in U.S. TV dramas appear to work against young South Korean OTT viewers' favorable attitudes toward the programs.

A couple of narrative appeal dimensions—American value and emotion—were found to directly influence parasocial acculturation. Path analyses helped demonstrate that young South Korean OTT viewers are more likely to be parasocially acculturated, specifically when they enjoy story plots in U.S. TV dramas highlighting American value ( $\gamma = .19, p < .05$ ) and emotion ( $\gamma = .39, p < .001$ ). Meanwhile, attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas were significantly associated with parasocial acculturation ( $\gamma = .30, p < .001$ ). That is, more positive attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas are likely to lead to higher parasocial acculturation. In addition, not only do attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas directly influence parasocial acculturation but attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas also mediate the relationships between perceived narrative appeals and parasocial acculturation. According to the findings, young South Korean OTT viewers' perceived narrative appeals of U.S. TV dramas, such as American value, competition, and emotion, not only directly enhance parasocial acculturation but also indirectly facilitate parasocial acculturation by raising favorable attitudes toward the programs.

Finally, young South Korean OTT viewers' attitudes toward the host country—the United States—were significantly and positively affected by both their attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas and parasocial acculturation. More positive attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas were likely to drive more positive attitudes toward the host country. Likewise, higher parasocial acculturation led to more positive attitudes toward the United States. In addition to the direct influence of attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas and parasocial acculturation on attitudes toward the host country, a mediating effect of parasocial acculturation was also identified. Simply put, attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas are not only directly related to attitudes toward the host country but also indirectly related to such variables via parasocial acculturation.

### Discussion

According to the findings, U.S. TV dramas, which are narratively constructed with elements reflecting American value, emotion, happy ending, competition, and science fiction, are much more likely to be selected and watched by international audiences, such as young South Korean viewers, among a long catalog of programs provided through OTT services. This finding offers considerable insights into program making and content marketing at a global level. In the context of OTT, media content and programs compete beyond national and territorial boundaries (Shin & Park, 2021). Knowing and

considering narrative appeals that are most likely to attract and fascinate international viewers can help global content producers gain a competitive edge in a fierce market. As with the country of origin effect, global viewers perceive and recognize unique narrative appeals and elements that underlie the media content produced in a specific country.

Not only did the identified narrative appeals of U.S. TV dramas perceived by young South Korean OTT viewers offer some insights into global content marketing but also, in this study, they were regarded as important catalysts for international consumers' attitudinal reactions. As attitude has been considered one of the decisive antecedents for consumers' preferential behaviors toward a wide range of marketable objects (e.g., Argyriou & Melewar, 2011; Fazio, Powell, & Williams, 1989), this study placed an analytic focus on young South Korean OTT viewers' attitudinal responses to U.S. TV dramas as well as the host country, the United States. As hypothesized, viewers' perceived narrative appeals of U.S. TV dramas significantly affected their attitudes toward such media content. More specifically, viewers who preferred American value and competition embedded in narratives tended to manifest significantly more positive attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas, whereas viewers who preferred happy ending plots appeared to maintain significantly more negative attitudes toward such media content. It can be interpreted that at least according to the findings, American value and competition are particularly significant narrative components that can enhance young South Korean OTT viewers' positive attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas. The reason behind the negative relationship between happy ending plots and attitudes toward the dramas is beyond the analytic scope of this study and cannot be fully understood. Nevertheless, happy ending plots may not be the most attractive and fascinating narrative appeals for U.S. TV dramas, at least for young South Korean audiences. In the context of OTT, where several cross-cultural and international media programs compete against each other for global viewers' active and discretionary choices, the country of origin effect seems to be manifested in cultural products as well. Global audiences may choose certain media programs to watch while expecting culture-specific and idiosyncratic narrative components in view of the country of origin (Bose & Ponnamm, 2011). Perhaps this is why happy ending plots significantly exert a negative influence on attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas in this study, as happy ending seems to be a universal narrative appeal rather than a U.S.-specific and culturally unique storyline (Andehn & L'Espoir Decosta, 2016).

Furthermore, young South Korean OTT viewers' attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas were positively associated with their attitudes toward the United States. A significantly positive connection between the consumption of foreign cultural products, such as films and arts, and international audiences' perceptions of the host country has been well demonstrated and documented in many prior studies (e.g., Huang, 2011; Lee, 2021; Mark, 2010). The findings of this study align with this stream of research. As young South Korean OTT viewers' attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas heighten, their attitudes toward the host country, the United States, become more positive as well. This empirical evidence highlights the transfer of attitudinal responses from international media content, such as TV dramas, to the host country. That is, international viewers' positive attitudes toward foreign media content can be translated into positive attitudes toward the host country, thereby possibly promoting nation branding and country of origin effects (e.g., Han, 1989; Hao, Paul, Trott, Guo, & Wu, 2019).

In this psychological process, the concept of parasocial acculturation is theoretically proposed and empirically demonstrated in this study. As a conceptual extension of remote acculturation (Ferguson &

Bornstein, 2012, 2015), parasocial acculturation specifically focuses on viewers' foreign media content digestion and its cultural consequences. According to the findings of this study, the perceived narrative appeals of young South Korean OTT viewers of U.S. TV dramas significantly influence their level of parasocial acculturation. These findings indicate that young South Korean OTT viewers who perceive and prefer American value and emotion narratives in U.S. TV dramas are more likely to be parasocially acculturated to the United States and its culture. It appears that American values and emotions are particularly perceived as U.S.-specialized and specific by young South Korean OTT viewers, so they might resonate well with the viewers and help facilitate their parasocial acculturation.

Young South Korean OTT viewers' attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas also significantly affect their parasocial acculturation. The path analyses revealed that young South Korean OTT viewers' level of parasocial acculturation is a function of their attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas: The more favorable attitudes they possess toward U.S. TV dramas, the more likely they are parasocially acculturated. Although the influence could be mutual, it can be argued that international OTT viewers' favorable attitudes toward foreign media content can raise their parasocial acculturation to the host country in general. It appears that favorable emotional responses to foreign media content make international viewers more open-minded and prepared to learn and embrace the foreign culture to which they are parasocially exposed, so their level of parasocial acculturation is likely to be enhanced as a result.

Parasocial acculturation also exerts a significant influence on attitudes toward the host country. This finding is theoretically valid and aligns with previous literature highlighting the relationship between acculturation and attitudinal responses toward the host country (e.g., Kizgin, Jamal, & Richard, 2018; Shoham, Segev, & Gavish, 2017). Meanwhile, the mediation effect of parasocial acculturation between perceived narrative appeals, attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas, and attitudes toward the United States looks interesting and deserves further discussion. Beyond its direct influence on attitudes toward the host country, parasocial acculturation bridged young South Korean OTT viewers' perceived narrative appeals and their attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas. Furthermore, parasocial acculturation provided a link between attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas and those toward the host country. Among the narrative appeals, American value and emotion specifically enhanced young South Korean OTT viewers' favorable attitudes toward the United States by facilitating higher parasocial acculturation. By the same token, attitudes toward U.S. TV dramas not only directly influenced attitudes toward the host country but also indirectly affected them via parasocial acculturation. Thus, this study empirically demonstrated that international viewers' exposure to foreign media content through OTTs and their perceptions of culturally unique narrative appeals could not only induce more positive attitudinal responses to such media content but could also activate higher parasocial acculturation. More positive attitudes toward foreign media content and higher parasocial acculturation, in turn, result in more positive attitudes toward the host country. In light of these findings, this study could be considerable and valuable for nation branding and public relations.

### **Conclusions**

A couple of insights should be highlighted from the empirical findings of this study. First, this study empirically demonstrates that popular media content products, such as TV dramas, can be subject to the country of origin effect in an international setting. Of course, popular media content products are an obvious



reflection of a host country's distinctive culture. However, relatively little empirical research has been conducted to demonstrate whether the country of origin effect comes into play in international viewers' psychologies when they choose which popular media content they will enjoy among a long list of available options, particularly in this quite saturated environment because of global OTT services. As identified in this study, international viewers easily recognize and consider the unique and distinctive narrative appeals of popular media content products, such as TV dramas, which are made and imported from a foreign country. In addition, such perceived narrative appeals appear to bring about the country of origin effect, as such perceptual cues not only help international viewers distinguish one foreign product from the other but also help them decide which program they will choose over the others. The findings of this study offer considerable implications for international media content marketing in an increasingly globalized market accelerated by global OTT services.

Moreover, such popular media content products can serve as a great gateway to enhancing the national brand of a host country. According to the findings, positive attitudes toward foreign media content products and parasocial acculturation facilitated by exposure to such foreign media content products can lead to more favorable attitudes toward the host country. The findings highlight the powerful effects of culture and cultural products. International viewers' exposure to foreign popular media content not only promotes acculturation to the host country but also arouses more favorable attitudes toward the host country. Thus, popular media content can offer leverage to win international viewers' minds by spontaneously provoking acculturation and favorable attitudinal responses to the host country. Popular media content can be used to boost a country's cultural visibility in an international setting, thereby promoting the nation's brand and its influence in an international marketing context.

More fruitful and meaningful findings could be demonstrated and discussed with the consideration of potentially influential variables that were not discussed in this research. For example, the actual time spent viewing cross-cultural media content could play a significant role in the parasocial acculturation process. There can be numerous mediating variables between viewers' attitudes toward foreign content and their attitudes toward a country of origin as well. In addition, viewers' demographic factors, such as gender, age, and education, could potentially moderate the relationships between parasocial acculturation and attitudes toward cross-cultural media content and the host country. Although this study has methodological limitations, future research may look into this confounding and moderating effect using a different statistical approach.

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