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"CREATIVE KOREA":

Political and Cultural Drivers of South Korea's Nation-Branding Campaign and its National Reception (2016-2017)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the political and cultural factors that shaped South Korea's Creative Korea nation-branding campaign and analyses how its domestic reception contributed to its discontinuation in 2017. The emergence of the campaign reflected broader transformations in South Korea's international image-building strategy, particularly through the growing relevance of cultural industries and creativity within the country's soft power framework. In this context, the study explores how the government attempted to build a coherent national identity centred on creativity, innovation and cultural dynamism.

The research hypothesises that the Creative Korea campaign was shaped by broader political and cultural transformations and that its discontinuation resulted from a mismatch between governmental expectations and domestic reception. To examine this argument, the study adopts a qualitative methodology based on academic literature, official government documents, institutional reports and media sources published during the campaign's implementation between 2016 and 2017.

The findings indicate that although the campaign aimed to strengthen South Korea's international image through creativity and cultural soft power, it faced significant criticism regarding the originality, clarity and credibility of the slogan. Media controversy, declining public trust and the broader political crisis surrounding the Park Geun-Hye administration weakened the legitimacy of the campaign and contributed to its early discontinuation. The study concludes that the Creative Korea case illustrates the importance of domestic legitimacy and political continuity in sustaining nation-branding strategies, demonstrating that symbolic branding efforts alone are insufficient without domestic support, political legitimacy and coherent implementation.

Este trabajo analiza los factores políticos y culturales que dieron forma a la campaña de nation branding Creative Korea y estudia cómo su recepción doméstica contribuyó a su desaparición en 2017. El surgimiento de la campaña se enmarca en un contexto de transformación de la estrategia de proyección internacional de Corea del Sur, marcado por la creciente importancia de las industrias culturales y de la creatividad dentro de la estrategia de soft power del país. En este contexto, la investigación examina el intento del gobierno de construir una identidad nacional coherente basada en la creatividad, la innovación y el dinamismo cultural.

La investigación parte de la hipótesis de que Creative Korea estuvo condicionada por transformaciones políticas y culturales más amplias y que su discontinuación fue consecuencia del desajuste entre los objetivos gubernamentales y la recepción social de la campaña. Para analizar esta cuestión, el estudio adopta una metodología cualitativa basada en literatura académica, documentos oficiales, informes institucionales y fuentes periodísticas publicadas entre 2016 y 2017, periodo en el que la campaña estuvo activa.

Los resultados muestran que, aunque la campaña pretendía reforzar la imagen internacional de Corea del Sur mediante la creatividad y el poder blando cultural, recibió importantes críticas relacionadas con la originalidad, la claridad y la credibilidad del eslogan. La controversia mediática, la pérdida de confianza pública y la crisis política vinculada al gobierno de Park Geun-Hye debilitaron la legitimidad de la campaña y favorecieron su rápida desaparición. En conclusión, el caso de Creative Korea pone de manifiesto la importancia de la legitimidad doméstica y de la continuidad política en el desarrollo de estrategias de nation branding, demostrando que las iniciativas basadas únicamente en discursos simbólicos resultan insuficientes sin apoyo social, legitimidad política y una implementación coherente.

Aquest treball analitza els factors polítics i culturals que van donar forma a la campanya de nation branding Creative Korea i estudia com la seva recepció interna va contribuir a la seva desaparició l'any 2017. L'aparició de la campanya s'emmarca en un context de transformació de l'estratègia de projecció internacional de Corea del Sud, caracteritzat per la creixent rellevància de les indústries culturals i de la creativitat dins l'estratègia de soft power del país. En aquest context, la recerca examina l'intent del govern de construir una identitat nacional coherent basada en la creativitat, la innovació i el dinamisme cultural.

La investigació parteix de la hipòtesi que Creative Korea va estar condicionada per transformacions polítiques i culturals més àmplies i que la seva discontinuació va ser conseqüència del desajust entre els objectius governamentals i la recepció social de la campanya. Per analitzar aquesta qüestió, l'estudi adopta una metodologia qualitativa basada en bibliografia acadèmica, documents oficials, informes institucionals i fonts periodístiques publicades entre 2016 i 2017, període en què la campanya va estar activa.

Els resultats mostren que, tot i que la campanya pretenia reforçar la imatge internacional de Corea del Sud mitjançant la creativitat i el poder tou cultural, va rebre crítiques importants relacionades amb l'originalitat, la claredat i la credibilitat de l'eslògan. La controvèrsia mediàtica, la pèrdua de confiança pública i la crisi política vinculada al govern de Park Geun-Hye van debilitar la legitimitat de la campanya i van afavorir la seva desaparició prematura. En conclusió, el cas de Creative Korea posa de manifest la importància de la legitimitat interna i de la continuïtat política en el desenvolupament d'estratègies de nation branding, demostrant que les iniciatives basades únicament en discursos simbòlics són insuficients sense suport social, legitimitat política i una implementació coherent.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, South Korea has developed various nation-branding strategies aimed at improving its international image, increasing its global competitiveness and reinforcing its soft power. During this period, the country has sought to position itself as a modern, influential, and culturally prominent actor on the global stage. However, this international projection represents a relatively recent development when viewed from a historical perspective. In the decades following the Korean War, South Korea was largely perceived as a war-torn and economically fragile state, often overshadowed by the regional presence of neighbouring powers such as China and Japan. Its global image was primarily associated with political instability, authoritarian rule, and developmental challenges rather than cultural or diplomatic influence.

This perception began to change significantly from the late twentieth century onward, especially as a result of South Korea's rapid industrialisation and technological development, which transformed the country into a globally competitive economy (Amsden, 1992, pp.18-23), a phenomenon widely known as the "Miracle on the Han River". Beyond its economic implications, this transformation reshaped South Korea's political legitimacy and international visibility, allowing it to emerge as an active participant in global governance and international cooperation. By the 1990s, democratisation, globalisation and increasing engagement in international institutions contributed to a gradual redefinition of the country's external identity. South Korea increasingly sought to present itself not only as a developing state, but as a dynamic middle power capable of exerting influence through diplomacy, innovation, and cultural production.

The expansion of globalisation further accelerated this shift. The worldwide diffusion of Korean cultural industries such as music, television, cinema, and digital media contributed to South Korea's growing international visibility and its association with creativity, modernity, and cultural vitality, as discussed in studies of the Korean Wave (Kim, 2013, pp. 1-5). As a result, culture and national image became strategic resources in South Korea's foreign policy framework, laying the foundation for the emergence of formal nation-branding initiatives. Since the early 2000s, the South Korean government has promoted official campaigns with distinctive slogans designed to project a coherent national identity and strengthen its international visibility.

Among these initiatives, Dynamic Korea and Creative Korea stand out, albeit they reflect different political, economic and cultural priorities within South Korea's nation-branding efforts.

As Simon Anholt argues (2007), nation branding involves the strategic use of culture, diplomacy and symbolic communication to shape and promote a country's international image. In the case of South Korea, national slogans such as Dynamic Korea and Creative Korea were part of broader attempts to construct a coherent and internationally attractive national identity. While Dynamic Korea emphasised dynamism and industrial modernisation, Creative Korea foregrounded creativity, cultural industries and soft power as central elements of South Korea's global image.

In December 2001, prior to the 2002 FIFA World Cup, the Kim Dae-Jung administration actively promoted Dynamic Korea as a national slogan. According to Lee (2015, p. 131), South Korea required a "brand-new image or an image makeover" to move beyond earlier representations associated with passivity and isolationism. The Dynamic Korea campaign therefore sought to promote a more modern, competitive and internationally visible image of the country, forming part of an early nation-branding strategy aimed at redefining South Korea's global identity.

The emergence of this slogan must also be understood within the broader political and historical context of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and the consolidation of democratic governance, South Korea increasingly sought to project the image of a modern and globally engaged nation. In this context, Lee (2015, pp. 130-131) describes Dynamic Korea as part of wider governmental efforts to redefine the country's international image through strategic nation-branding initiatives.

In this study, Dynamic Korea serves as a contextual antecedent to the later emergence of Creative Korea, reflecting an earlier emphasis on economic dynamism and international competitiveness. While Lee (2015, pp. 130-132) frames nation branding as a response to post-crisis economic transformation, Kwon (2016) shifts the focus towards cultural policy and creative industries as key drivers of South Korea's international image, suggesting a transformation from economic-based branding to cultural branding logics.

Creative Korea was officially launched in 2016 as a new nation branding strategy that marked a shift in South Korea's approach to international image-building. Unlike Dynamic Korea, which emphasised economic dynamism and modernisation, Creative Korea placed creativity, passion and innovation at the centre of the country's global identity. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the new slogan integrated values of Korea

coming from traditional and contemporary culture and suggested a future-oriented national vision (Kwon, 2016). Building on the already established global visibility of Korean popular culture, Creative Korea marked a strategic shift towards framing culture and creativity as central components of national branding. As Jin (2016, pp. 3-4) argues, the international expansion of Korean Cultural industries significantly increased South Korea's global cultural visibility and influence, creating favourable conditions for the use of culture within nation-branding strategies. In parallel, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (2024) highlights the growing importance of creative industries within broader creative economy frameworks, particularly in relation to innovation, competitiveness and international positioning. In this context, the South Korean government sought to further integrate cultural industries into broader nation branding and creative economy strategies.

The emergence of this campaign was also closely connected to the domestic political context of the mid-2010s, particularly the policy agenda of the administration of Park Geun-Hye. During this period, the government actively promoted the concept of the "creative economy" as a central national development strategy aimed at fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and the integration of cultural and technological industries.

Within this framework, cultural production and creative industries were increasingly framed not only as sectors of economic growth, but also as strategic components of national development policy. As Jin (2016, pp. 6-7) notes, the Park Geun-Hye administration increasingly shifted cultural policy towards a "creative content policy" centred on the development of creative industries. Similarly, UNCTAD (2024, pp. 22-23) emphasises the growing role of creative industries within broader creative economy strategies associated with innovation, competitiveness and state-led economic development. In this context, the Creative Korea slogan reflected broader governmental attempts to connect national identity construction with economic modernisation and creative economy policies.

The launch of the Creative Korea campaign was closely connected to the domestic policy priorities of the Park Geun-Hye administration, particularly the promotion of the "creative economy" as a central national development strategy during the mid-2010s.

The study of nation branding is relevant to understand how states manage their international reputation in a highly competitive global context. South Korea constitutes an especially compelling case due to its rapid economic transformation and the growing role of its popular culture in shaping the country's external projection, especially through soft power. The expansion of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) and the increasing institutionalisation of nation-branding policies have positioned culture and creativity as central elements of South Korea's

international strategy. In this context, the Creative Korea campaign provides a valuable lens through which to examine the interaction between political priorities, cultural dynamics, and national image-building. On a personal level, this topic aligns with my growing interest in international relations and the use of culture for political purposes in East Asia, particularly South Korea.

Despite the growing scholarly attention to South Korea's soft power and the global expansion of the Korean Wave, existing research had largely focused on cultural exports themselves rather than on the institutional strategies through which the state seeks to manage and coordinate national image construction. In particular, while Dynamic Korea has received some attention as an early nation-branding initiative, the Creative Korea campaign remains comparatively underexplored within academic literature, especially in terms of its political context, strategic objectives and reception in the international arena. By examining Creative Korea as a state-led branding strategy situated at the intersection of political priorities and cultural diplomacy, this study seeks to address this gap and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how nation branding operates as a tool of soft power in contemporary international relations.

This study examines the political and cultural factors that influenced the formulation of the Creative Korea nation-branding campaign and analyses its domestic reception between its launch in 2016 and its discontinuation in 2017. Rather than providing a comparative evaluation of multiple branding strategies, the study situates Dynamic Korea as a contextual antecedent and focuses primarily on Creative Korea as the central object of analysis. By exploring how political priorities and cultural dynamics shaped the campaign, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how South Korea utilises culture and creativity to construct and project its national identity in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

Consequently, this paper seeks to answer the following research question: What political and cultural factors shaped the Creative Korea campaign in 2016, and how did its domestic reception contribute to its discontinuation in 2017?

This study hypothesises that South Korea's Creative Korea nation-branding campaign was shaped by broader political and cultural transformations, and that its discontinuation resulted from a mismatch between governmental objectives and domestic reception.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Nation Branding as a Concept

Nation branding has emerged as a relevant analytical framework to understand how states seek to shape their international image and reputation in an increasingly globalised and competitive environment. As countries compete for visibility, influence, tourism, and cultural recognition, the construction and communication of a coherent national image has become a strategic concern closely linked to international relations, public diplomacy, and global communication. For the purposes of this study, nation branding is understood as a process that extends beyond traditional marketing practises, involving the management of perceptions, narratives, and symbolic representations associated with a country, often extending into the realms of policy, diplomacy, and culture.

The concept of nation branding is most closely associated with the work of Simon Anholt, who argues that nations operate in ways comparable to brands, insofar as they must project a clear, credible, and attractive identity internationally. However, Anholt (2007) strongly emphasises that a nation's reputation cannot be shaped through promotional campaigns alone. Instead, he introduces the notion of competitive identity, which highlights the interaction between a country's policies, culture, governance, and international behaviour as the primary determinants of its global image. From this perspective, nation branding is not a superficial exercise in image-making, but a long-term process grounded in political action and cultural expression.

A complementary perspective is offered by Keith Dinnie, who conceptualises nation branding as a multidimensional and interdisciplinary process involving not only marketing activities, but also governance, public policy, and stakeholder coordination. As Dinnie argues (2010, pp. 16-17), the construction of a coherent nation brand requires coordination among different stakeholders and alignment between national narratives and broader strategic objectives. This approach reinforces the idea that national identity is not fixed or static, but rather an evolving and strategic construct shaped by diplomatic initiatives, cultural production, and domestic policy choices.

Several scholars have emphasised the close relationship between nation branding and international perception. National images are not fully controllable by governments, as they exist primarily in the minds of foreign audiences and are influenced by pre-existing stereotypes, media representations, and historical narratives. In this regard, Anholt (2007)

argues that nation branding depends not only on promotional efforts, but also on how countries are perceived internationally through their policies, culture and global behaviour. Similarly, Dinnie (2010, pp. 17-20) highlights how countries increasingly seek to strengthen their international attractiveness and competitiveness through coherent branding strategies based on culture, reputation and symbolic differentiation. As a result, nation branding becomes closely connected to concepts such as soft power and public diplomacy, through which states attempt to enhance their international influence through attraction rather than coercion alone. This dynamic is particularly relevant in cases where culture plays a central role in national image construction, as is the case with South Korea (Jin, 2016, pp. 3-4).

At the same time, critical perspectives have questioned the application of branding logic to nations. Authors such as Aronczyk (2013) and Kaneva (2011) warn that nation branding may reduce complex and diverse national identities to simplified, marketable narratives, potentially obscuring internal social tensions and political contradictions. These critiques highlight the ethical and analytical limits of treating nations as brands, while also reinforcing the need for a nuanced and context-sensitive application of the concept.

Within this theoretical framework, South Korea represents a particularly relevant case for the study of nation branding. The country's rapid economic transformation, combined with the global expansion of its cultural industries (Jin, 2016), has made image management a central component of its international strategy. While earlier initiatives such as Dynamic Korea provided an important backdrop, this study focuses more prominently on Creative Korea, through which the South Korean government has sought to construct a coherent national image that emphasises creativity, innovation, and cultural vitality. The prominence of popular culture, especially through the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*), further illustrates how nation branding in the South Korean context relies heavily on cultural resources as a means of shaping international perception. For these reasons, South Korea offers a valuable case for examining how nation branding operates at the intersection of political strategy, cultural production, and international image construction.

2.2. Soft Power within Nation Branding: Relevance to Creative Korea

The concept of soft power constitutes a key analytical tool for understanding how culture operates within nation-branding strategies. Joseph S. Nye (2004) defines soft power as the capacity of states to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion, based on intangible resources such as culture, political values and foreign policy legitimacy. This contrasts with Anholt's (2007) framework of nation branding, which emphasises

reputation as a product of long-term structural factors such as governance, policy coherence and institutional performance, rather than cultural appeal alone. Within this analytical tension, soft power provides a framework for understanding how symbolic and cultural elements contribute to the construction of a positive national image abroad.

Among the different sources of soft power identified by Nye (2004), culture has become particularly significant in an increasingly globalised and media-saturated environment. Cultural soft power operates through the international circulation of cultural products, lifestyles, and narratives that generate familiarity, admiration, and emotional engagement with a country. Unlike traditional forms of power, cultural soft power does not rely on direct governmental control, but rather on the voluntary reception and consumption of cultural content by foreign audiences. In this regard, Jin (2016, pp. 3-7) highlights how the global expansion of Korean popular culture and cultural industries contributed to South Korea's growing international visibility and cultural influence. As such, cultural industries, popular culture, and creative sectors have become central instruments through which states seek to enhance their international attractiveness.

The increasing importance of cultural industries within nation-branding strategies also reflects the growing relevance of soft power in contemporary international relations. As Nye (2004) argues, states increasingly rely on attraction, reputation and cultural appeal to enhance their international influence. In this context, culture and values become important resources for shaping international perceptions and generating favourable attitudes towards the country. This perspective is particularly relevant to South Korea, where the global popularity of Korean popular culture contributed to external perceptions associating the country with creativity, innovation, and cultural dynamism.

In the case of South Korea, cultural soft power plays a central role in its nation branding efforts, particularly through the Creative Korea campaign. The campaign emerged in a context marked by the global expansion of Korean cultural industries, including K-pop, television dramas, film, fashion, and digital content. Rather than focusing solely on political messaging or economic performance, the strategy sought to project an image of South Korea as a creative, innovative, and culturally dynamic nation. This approach reflects a strategic use of cultural soft power, whereby creativity and cultural production are framed as core components of national identity and international appeal.

The relevance of soft power to *Creative Korea* lies primarily in this emphasis on culture as a vehicle for image construction. Rather than relying on explicit political discourse, the strategy sought to shape international perceptions through the global circulation of cultural

symbols and creative outputs. As Jin (2016, pp. 4-7) explains, the international expansion of Korean popular culture significantly contributed to South Korea's growing cultural influence and global visibility. In this sense, cultural soft power functioned as a bridge between domestic cultural production and broader nation-branding objectives, allowing South Korea to translate cultural popularity into reputational benefits.

For the purposes of this research, it is important to note that this study does not seek to analyse soft power in its entirety, nor all its political or diplomatic dimensions. Instead, the focus is deliberately limited to the forms of soft power that are directly relevant to the Creative Korea campaign, particularly cultural soft power as expressed through creative industries and symbolic representation. By narrowing the scope in this way, the analysis remains closely aligned with the objectives of the study and avoids treating soft power as an abstract or overly broad concept. This targeted approach allows for a more precise examination of how culture operates as a strategic resource within South Korea's nation branding framework.

2.3. Political Context of the Creative Korea Strategy

The Creative Korea strategy emerged within a political context in which the South Korean government played a central and proactive role in shaping and promoting the country's international image. As Anholt (2007) argues, nation branding is closely connected to broader political and developmental objectives rather than functioning solely as a marketing exercise. Similarly, Dinnie (2010, pp.17-20) emphasises the importance of state coordination and strategic policy frameworks in the construction of coherent national brands. In the South Korean context, nation branding therefore developed not as an organic or purely market-driven process, but as a state-led strategy linked to wider political, economic and developmental goals. In this sense, Creative Korea reflected the government's recognition of culture and creativity as strategic resources for enhancing national competitiveness, global visibility, and international influence.

The role of the government has been particularly significant in providing institutional support and policy direction for the development of creative industries. Since the late 1990s, South Korean administrations have increasingly framed culture not only as a social or artistic domain, but also as a key sector within national development strategies, closely tied to innovation, employment, and international positioning (Jin, 2016). Within this framework, creativity has been promoted as a defining national value and incorporated into official discourse on modernisation and global engagement.

Public institutions have played a crucial role in the implementation and consolidation of the Creative Korea strategy. Government bodies such as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) have been central in designing and overseeing cultural policies aimed at supporting creative sectors and promoting Korean culture abroad (Jin, 2016). In addition, the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) was established by merging multiple cultural bodies under a national framework to better support creative industries and promote Korean content both domestically and internationally. The agency provides institutional support across a wide range of sectors such as music, broadcasting, games, and digital content, emphasising the content industry's role in driving economic growth and innovation, while actively fostering sustainable development and collaboration with industry stakeholders (KOCCA, 2025). These institutions have worked in coordination with other public agencies to facilitate cultural exchanges, provide funding and infrastructure for cultural production, and ensure the international circulation of Korean cultural content. The institutionalisation of Creative Korea thus reflects an effort to embed nation branding within the broader framework of public cultural governance, enhancing South Korea's global image and influence.

The institutionalisation of Creative Korea also reflected a more systematic and state-led approach to nation branding compared to earlier initiatives. Rather than functioning solely as a promotional slogan linked to a specific event, the campaign was embedded within governmental policies promoting cultural industries, the creative economy, and public diplomacy. This demonstrates how nation branding increasingly became integrated into wider state strategies aimed at enhancing South Korea's international visibility and competitiveness through culture and innovation (Jin, 2016).

Cultural policies associated with Creative Korea are closely connected to the concept of the creative economy. The South Korean government has increasingly emphasised the economic potential of cultural and creative industries, including music, film, television, digital content, design, and gaming, viewing them not only as engines of economic growth but also as effective tools for enhancing the country's international visibility and attractiveness (Jin, 2016). As a result, cultural exports such as K-pop, television dramas, and other forms of K-content have received sustained policy support and international promotion.

By linking cultural production with broader economic and international objectives, Creative Korea reflected governmental attempts to align soft power strategies with the promotion of creative industries. While Nye (2004) conceptualises soft power as the ability to shape international preferences through attraction rather than coercion, Creative Korea illustrates how the South Korean government attempted to incorporate culture and creativity

into broader state-led image-building policies. As Jin (2016) notes, the growing global influence of Korean cultural industries increasingly positioned culture as a strategic national resource within South Korea's international projection efforts.

2.4. Cultural Context of Creative Korea

The cultural dimension has been central to the Creative Korea strategy, reflecting the South Korean government's recognition of culture as both an economic and diplomatic asset. At the heart of this approach is Hallyu, which refers to the international popularity of Korean popular culture, including music, television dramas, films, fashion, and digital content. As Jin (2016, pp. 3-6) explains, the global expansion of Korean popular culture significantly increased South Korea's international visibility and cultural influence. Similarly, Kim (2013, pp. 1-5) argues that the growing appeal of Korean cultural products contributed to the construction of a more innovative and culturally attractive national image abroad. In this sense, Hallyu reinforced South Korea's nation-branding objectives while simultaneously enhancing the country's soft power. These dynamics remained visible throughout the development of Creative Korea.

The development of creative industries was actively supported through state-led cultural policies and institutional frameworks. As Jin (2016, pp. 4-6) notes, Korean cultural industries increasingly became strategic national resources within South Korea's international projection efforts. This support was further institutionalised through organisations such as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) and the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), which provide coordination and resources across sectors including music, broadcasting, gaming, film, and digital content (KOCCA, 2025). By emphasising the originality, innovation, and global appeal of K-content, Creative Korea links domestic cultural production with international visibility, fostering cultural pride at home while enhancing South Korea's attractiveness abroad. These policies demonstrate the dual role of culture as a driver of economic growth and as a strategic tool for nation branding.

The global reception of Korean cultural products provided an important context for the emergence of the Creative Korea campaign. International audiences increasingly engage with K-pop, Korean dramas, films, and other creative outputs, generating both cultural visibility and economic opportunities through tourism, merchandise, and media consumption (Kim, 2013, pp. 1-5). Social media and digital platforms further expanded the global circulation of Korean cultural content, strengthening South Korea's international cultural presence and soft power. This development demonstrates how cultural products can transcend national borders

and act as vehicles for both economic and symbolic influence, contributing to South Korea's broader soft power projection.

Beyond its role as a promotional slogan, Creative Korea reflected broader governmental efforts to incorporate South Korea's growing cultural influence into a more coherent nation branding framework. By the early 2010s, the growing international popularity of Korean popular culture had increasingly contributed to external perceptions associating South Korea with creativity, innovation, and cultural dynamism (Kim, 2013, pp. 1-5). In this context, the campaign sought to strategically coordinate these cultural resources within a broader framework that connected cultural industries with economic competitiveness and international visibility. The strategy also emerged within wider global discussions surrounding the "creative economy", which increasingly framed cultural industries as strategic resources for national competitiveness and global influence (UNCTAD, 2024, pp 21-23).

Essentially, the cultural context surrounding the Creative Korea campaign reflects broader governmental efforts to incorporate Hallyu and the creative industries into South Korea's nation-branding strategy in order to enhance international visibility and cultural influence. In this sense, the campaign illustrates attempts to align cultural policy, economic strategy, and soft power objectives within a broader framework of national image construction in the South Korean context. However, as later sections of this study demonstrate, the existence of strong global cultural visibility did not necessarily guarantee the effectiveness or legitimacy of the Creative Korea campaign itself.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design: Qualitative Approach

This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine the development and implementation of the Creative Korea nation-branding strategy. This approach is suitable because the research focuses on political narratives, policy discourses and representations of national identity rather than on measurable data.

Nation-branding strategies such as Creative Korea operate mainly through communication, image construction and the promotion of national values. Therefore, they are better analysed through interpretative methods that prioritise meaning, discourse and context rather than numerical data. This study does not aim to evaluate the campaign using quantitative indicators, but instead examines how it was conceptualised by policymakers, how it was communicated, and how it was perceived domestically.

In addition, Creative Korea emerged within a broader political and cultural context in South Korea. Examining these dynamics requires a qualitative approach that allows for the analysis of policy discourse, institutional priorities, and their relationship with the strategy's outcomes. This is particularly relevant in cases where political context and public perception play a decisive role in shaping policy effectiveness.

Through this qualitative analysis, this study aims to examine whether the Creative Korea campaign can be understood as a strategic response to these wider transformations and to investigate whether its relatively short duration can be explained by a discrepancy between governmental expectations and its actual reception.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Creative Korea nation-branding campaign, this study draws on a combination of both primary and secondary sources. Using different types of materials allows for a more balanced analysis of the strategy, including its official objectives, academic interpretation, and public reception.

First, academic literature constitutes the central component of the data collection process. The study relies on nine academic sources, including books and journal articles focusing on nation branding, soft power and the global expansion of South Korea's cultural industries. These sources were used to define key concepts such as nation branding and soft power, to provide theoretical background on South Korea's cultural policies, and to establish the context necessary to analyse the Creative Korea *c*ampaign within this broader framework.

Second, a selection of newspaper and online media articles was examined and compared. In total, five online news and magazine articles published between 2016 and 2017 were consulted. These sources are particularly useful for understanding how the campaign was presented to the public upon its release, as well as the reactions and criticisms that emerged during its implementation and eventual discontinuation. They also provide insight into how the campaign was interpreted within public discourse, which is central to assessing its domestic reception.

Third, one primary source was selected. It consists of an official government document, specifically a press briefing transcript issued by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2016. The document provides direct insight into the government's intentions, policy priorities and expected outcomes for the Creative Korea campaign. In addition, the official website of Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) was consulted to examine how government-affiliated institutions frame the development of the creative industries and their role in national branding.

Finally, one institutional report from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was included to provide an international perspective on the creative economy and the role of government support in fostering cultural industries. This source helps situate the Creative Korea campaign within broader international context, particularly in relation to global trends in the development of creative industries and government support for cultural policies.

By combining academic literature, media sources, official documents and institutional reports, this study ensures a multi-dimensional analysis of Creative Korea, addressing both its formulation as a policy and its reception at domestic and international levels.

3.3. Selection of Sources and Analytical Procedure

The sources used in this research were selected based on their relevance, reliability, and direct connexion to the Creative Korea campaign and its timeline. The main focus was given to materials that addressed nation branding, soft power and South Korea's cultural policies, as these topics are central to understanding the objectives and development of the Creative Korea initiative. In addition, newspaper articles published during the period in which the campaign was active (2016-2017) were of particular relevance, as they provide insight into contemporary interpretations and reflect public narratives, criticism, and the reception of the campaign.

Academic literature was prioritised due to its credibility and its role in establishing the theoretical framework of the study. Academic books and journal articles were selected because they offer well-established conceptual discussions on nation branding, public diplomacy, and the global expansion of South Korea's cultural industries. At the same time, official government materials were included as primary sources because they provide direct insight into the government's intentions, policy priorities, and intended objectives of the Creative Korea strategy. In addition, institutional materials from organisations such as the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) were selected to incorporate policy-oriented and international perspectives.

Despite the diversity of sources consulted, there were certain limitations. Since the Creative Korea campaign lasted less than one year, there is relatively limited academic attention, and official documents on the initiative are not widely available or easily accessible. As a result, the study relies on a combination of indirect sources, including media coverage and broader analyses of South Korea's nation-branding strategies. This limitation was addressed by triangulating different types of sources, which allows for a more balanced and comprehensive interpretation of the campaign.

This study does not include interviews, as the research focuses on policy discourse and publicly available materials, which are more appropriate for analysing official narratives and patterns of media representation rather than individual perspectives.

As previously mentioned, the collected materials were analysed using a qualitative analysis approach. This involved a close reading of texts to identify key themes, recurring narratives, and patterns on how Creative Korea was framed and interpreted. Particular attention was paid to comparing official government discourse with media coverage and academic interpretations. This comparative approach enables the identification of divergences between intended policy narratives and public reception, which is central to the study's hypothesis.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Political and Strategic Context of Creative Korea

The launch of the Creative Korea campaign in 2016 must be understood within the broader political and strategic context of South Korea at the time. During this period, the government increasingly emphasised the role of creativity and innovation as key drivers of national development. This shift was closely linked to the wider "creative economy" agenda, which framed cultural industries, technological innovation and knowledge-based production as essential to economic growth and global competitiveness. As a result, the introduction of a new nation-branding slogan reflected not only a communication strategy, but also a broader policy orientation aimed at redefining South Korea's global positioning.

The emergence of this strategy was closely connected to the policy priorities of the administration of Park Geun-Hye. Her government strongly promoted the concept of a "creative economy", presenting innovation and cultural production as central elements of national development. Within this framework, the adoption of a new nation-branding slogan can be interpreted as part of a wider effort to align South Korea's international image with domestic policy goals. In this sense, Creative Korea functioned as a symbolic extension of broader economic and political strategies rather than as an isolated branding initiative.

At the same time, the campaign emerged in a context where South Korea had already experienced significant success in promoting its global image through cultural exports. The rapid expansion of the Korean Wave, including popular music, television dramas, and digital content, had substantially increased the country's international visibility and reinforced the perception of culture as a key source of soft power. In this context, the Creative Korea campaign illustrates the limits of soft power when cultural attractiveness is not matched by domestic legitimacy (Nye, 2004), suggesting that international cultural appeal alone is insufficient to sustain a coherent national branding strategy.

In the South Korean case, the global popularity of cultural products provided conditions that encouraged the development of nation-branding strategies centred on innovation and creative industries. This shift also reflected a broader transformation in South Korea's national narrative. Earlier branding initiatives, such as Dynamic Korea, had largely emphasised rapid economic growth and industrial modernisation. However, by the mid-2010s, policymakers increasingly sought to project an image centred on innovation and cultural dynamism. In this sense, Creative Korea represented not only a continuation of previous

branding efforts, but also a strategic attempt to update the country's global identity in line with changing economic priorities and the growing importance of cultural industries.

Jin (2016, pp. 3-7) shows that the global expansion of the Korean Wave has been closely supported by state-led cultural policies aimed at strengthening the international competitiveness of Korean content industries, illustrating how cultural production is strategically mobilised as part of South Korea's broader nation-branding framework.

Despite these achievements, policymakers perceived the need for a more coherent and unified narrative capable of integrating economic progress, cultural dynamism and global competitiveness. The success of cultural exports alone did not automatically translate into a more coherent and internationally recognisable national narrative, and previous branding initiatives had lacked continuity and long-term strategic coordination. As a result, policymakers recognised the need for a more coherent and forward-looking national identity framework capable of effectively reflecting South Korea's transition towards an innovation-driven economy. This reflects a broader shift in which nation branding becomes embedded within economic policy, rather than functioning as a purely communicative tool.

This strategic intention is clearly reflected in official government discourse surrounding the launch of Creative Korea. According to the press briefing issued by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2016, the campaign aimed to present creativity as a defining characteristic of South Korean society and to promote a unified national image that combined cultural dynamism, technological innovation and economic competitiveness (MCST, 2016). The government framed the slogan as a tool for strengthening national reputation abroad while simultaneously fostering domestic confidence in the country's creative potential.

In this context, Creative Korea can be understood as a strategic response to both domestic policy priorities and wider international trends in nation branding. Rather than being just a symbolic slogan, the campaign aimed to build a coherent narrative that connected innovation, cultural industries, and economic development. More specifically, it sought to reduce the gap between South Korea's growing global cultural influence and the absence of a clear and unified national identity narrative capable of supporting its long-term global positioning.

4.2. Objectives and Narrative of the Creative Korea Campaign

The Creative Korea campaign was designed as an official nation-branding campaign aimed at redefining South Korea's international image through the concept of creativity. According to government communications at the time of its launch, the slogan was intended to present creativity not merely as an economic resource but as a defining national characteristic embedded in South Korean society, culture, and technological development (MCST, 2016).

One of the primary objectives of the campaign was to strengthen South Korea's international reputation by promoting a positive and distinctive national image. Government discourse emphasised that the slogan would serve as a unified communication tool across diplomatic, cultural and promotional activities (MCST, 2016). Rather than targeting a single sector, the branding strategy aimed to integrate multiple dimensions of national development, including technological advancement, cultural production, and creative industries. This approach reflects a broader understanding of nation branding as a long-term strategy for shaping international perceptions rather than a short-term promotional campaign.

The values projected through the Creative Korea narrative were strongly associated with innovation, imagination and cultural vitality, particularly in digital content, entertainment and design industries. This framing emphasised the role of innovation in transforming limited cultural resources into economic and cultural success. In this context, creativity was portrayed not only as an economic driver, but also as a symbolic element that represented resilience, adaptability, and forward-looking development. By highlighting these values, the campaign attempted to construct an image of South Korea as a dynamic, future-oriented, and culturally influential nation.

A central element of the narrative was the emphasis on the role of cultural and creative industries. Government discourse consistently linked the slogan to sectors such as digital content, entertainment, design, and technological innovation (KOCCA, 2025). These industries were presented as key components of South Korea's global competitiveness and as important sources of soft power. The strategy therefore aimed to reinforce the perception that cultural production and technological creativity were interconnected and mutually reinforcing aspects of national strength.

By promoting this concept at the centre of its narrative, the government sought to enhance South Korea's international appeal and to consolidate the global visibility already generated by the expansion of its cultural industries. In this sense, Creative Korea functioned

as a narrative tool intended to translate existing cultural success into a more structured and recognisable national brand. However, the campaign struggled to clearly define how this transformation would be achieved in practise.

The slogan itself played a central role in articulating this narrative. Its simplicity and broad semantic scope allowed it to be applied to various policy areas and communication platforms. However, this flexibility also meant that the concept of "creativity" remained relatively abstract and open to interpretation. Official discourse tended to frame the term in inspirational and symbolic terms, focusing on its positive connotations rather than providing a precise or operational definition. As a result, the campaign's messaging emphasised emotional appeal and symbolic identity-building rather than concrete policy content. This highlights a key limitation of the strategy, as the reliance on broad and aspirational narratives may enhance symbolic appeal, but can also reduce clarity and weaken its effectiveness as a coherent nation-branding framework.

In addition to its international objectives, the narrative of Creative Korea also sought to influence domestic perceptions. Government communications highlighted the importance of fostering national pride and confidence in South Korea's creative potential (MCST, 2016). By presenting creativity as a shared societal characteristic, the campaign attempted to strengthen internal cohesion and to reinforce public support for policies related to innovation and cultural industries. This dual orientation towards both external reputation and internal identity-building is a common feature of nation-branding strategies, which often operate simultaneously at domestic and international levels.

Overall, the official narrative of Creative Korea was characterised by its emphasis on a unifying concept capable of connecting economic development, cultural production, and national identity. Through this discourse, the government aimed to build a modern and forward-looking image of South Korea that aligned with global trends in innovation and cultural influence. However, as the following section demonstrates, the abstract nature of the slogan and the ambiguity of its messaging also contributed to significant challenges in public interpretation and reception.

4.3. Domestic Reception and Criticism

While the Creative Korea campaign was presented by the government as a coherent and forward-looking nation-branding strategy aimed at improving South Korea's international image, its domestic reception quickly revealed significant structural limitations. Initial media coverage following the launch in July 2016 was largely descriptive, focusing on introducing

the slogan and outlining its objectives. However, this relatively neutral tone quickly shifted as criticism emerged shortly after its introduction and intensified in response to concerns regarding the slogan's originality and conceptual clarity. As a result, media discourse evolved into a predominantly critical assessment of the campaign's effectiveness, revealing a growing gap between the government's intended narrative and its domestic reception.

Although some press coverage initially focused on explaining the emphasis on creativity and innovation, early media discussions also began to raise questions about the originality and effectiveness of the slogan. For instance, Kwon Mee-Yoo (2016) reports on the introduction of the campaign and its objectives, while Yim Seung-Hye (2016) highlights the government's emphasis on creativity as a national value. However, the subsequent commentary increasingly criticised the slogan for lacking distinctiveness and failing to clearly differentiate South Korea from other nations promoting similar innovation-oriented narratives.

One of the most significant controversies surrounding the campaign was the accusation of plagiarism. Shortly after its introduction, critics pointed out similarities between *"*Creative Korea*"* and slogans previously used by other countries and organisations. Media discussions frequently compared the slogan to previously existing branding campaigns such as "Creative France", reinforcing perceptions that the initiative lacked originality and failed to project a distinctive national identity. Media coverage framed the slogan as general and interchangeable with broader global branding trends centred on creativity and innovation. As reported by Simeon L. (2016), this issue quickly gained visibility in media coverage and contributed to undermining the credibility of the campaign from its early stages. In a similar vein, Jeff Liebsch (2017) highlights how the controversy reinforced perceptions of the slogan as unoriginal and weakened its legitimacy as a representation of national identity.

Beyond the plagiarism controversy, the campaign also faced broader criticism regarding its conceptual clarity. Korean media outlets increasingly pointed out that the notion of "creativity" was too vague and abstract to function as an effective nation-branding tool. Media coverage also questioned whether the slogan reflected the everyday experiences of the South Korean population, arguing that its abstract language lacked clear social or cultural resonance in the domestic context. Without a clearly defined meaning or concrete policy framework, the slogan was frequently portrayed as disconnected from everyday realities and was difficult for the public to relate to. This perceived lack of substance contributed to the impression that the campaign was more symbolic than practical, reinforcing doubts about its overall effectiveness. In this regard, Dinnie (2010) warns that nation-branding strategies may

become “relatively meaningless and thus inspire nobody” (p.52) when they rely on bland and non-distinctive positioning platforms. This limitation became particularly visible in the case of Creative Korea, whose broad and ambiguous messaging reinforced perceptions of the campaign as lacking substance and practical effectiveness.

In addition, media discourse frequently highlighted concerns about the use of public resources and the broader political context in which the campaign was introduced. At a time of increasing political tension and declining public trust in government institutions, the promotion of a new national slogan was seen by some as poorly timed or disconnected from more urgent domestic issues. This perception became particularly visible as public criticism surrounding the Park administration intensified during the corruption scandal of late 2016, contributing to broader scepticism towards government-led symbolic initiatives. These criticisms were further intensified by the political crisis surrounding the administration of Park Geun-Hye. As the corruption scandal unfolded in late 2016, media coverage reflected declining public trust in government-led initiatives. In this context, the promotion of a new nation-branding slogan was often perceived as disconnected from more urgent political and social concerns, further weakening the campaign’s credibility.

Several commentators also pointed to limitations in the practical implementation of the Creative Korea campaign. While the slogan was presented as a comprehensive nation-branding strategy, there was little clarity regarding how it could be translated into concrete policies or measurable outcomes. Media discussions suggested that the initiative lacked clear guidelines, coordination mechanisms, and long-term planning, which made it difficult to assess its effectiveness or impact. As a result, the campaign was often perceived as disconnected from tangible policy actions, reinforcing the idea that it functioned primarily at a symbolic level rather than as an operational strategy.

This perception was further strengthened by the absence of visible results in the short period during which the campaign was active. Unlike other nation-branding initiatives that are supported by sustained institutional efforts, Creative Korea did not appear to generate significant new programmes or clearly identifiable outcomes. Consequently, public and media discourse increasingly framed the campaign as lacking substance, which contributed to its declining credibility over time. This highlights an important limitation in the design of the strategy, as the gap between its ambitious narrative and its limited implementation undermined its overall effectiveness.

Moreover, a comparative reading of media sources reveals a consistent pattern in the framing of the campaign. Across different reports, criticism tended to converge around similar

themes, including the lack of originality, the ambiguity of the concept, and the broader political context. This convergence suggests that the negative reception was not merely the result of isolated reactions, but reflected a broader structural mismatch between the government's intended narrative and public expectations.

As political developments unfolded, the legitimacy of the Creative Korea campaign became increasingly fragile. Rather than fostering national unity or pride, the slogan became associated with broader dissatisfaction towards the government and its policies. This dynamic illustrated how nation-branding efforts are not only shaped by strategic communication, but also by their political context and levels of public trust. In this sense, Keith Dinnie (2010, pp. 169-170) highlights the importance of legitimacy and stakeholder acceptance in nation-branding strategies. Building on this perspective, the campaign's inability to gain domestic support significantly contributed to its limited duration and eventual discontinuation, reinforcing the central argument of this study.

4.4. Discontinuation and Political Change

Following the growing criticism and declining domestic legitimacy discussed in the previous section, the Creative Korea campaign was officially discontinued in June 2017. Analysing the reasons behind this decision is essential to understand how political change and legitimacy constraints shaped the trajectory of the initiative. Rather than being a purely technical adjustment, the discontinuation of Creative Korea reflects the interaction between official policy decisions, political transition, and the erosion of public support.

According to the official statement issued by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST, 2017), the government decided to stop using the slogan in order to develop a new nation branding approach that would better reflect South Korea's evolving identity and future direction. The statement emphasised the need for a more coherent and effective communication strategy, suggesting that the existing slogan had not fully achieved its intended goals. However, this explanation remains relatively general and does not fully address the broader context in which the decision was made, particularly the political and social factors that had affected the campaign's reception.

To fully understand the discontinuation of Creative Korea, it is necessary to situate it within the context of significant political transformation in South Korea. The removal of Park Geun-Hye from office in early 2017 marked a major turning point in the country's political landscape, leading to the election of Moon Jae-In and the formation of a new administration with different priorities. In this context, the abandonment of the Creative Korea slogan can be

interpreted not only as a change in communication strategy, but also as part of a broader effort to signal political renewal and distance the new government from the previous administration.

This interpretation is reinforced by the close relationship between nation-branding initiatives and the political context in which they are developed. As discussed in Section 4.1, the Creative Korea campaign was closely linked to the policy agenda of the Park administration, particularly its emphasis on the "creative economy" as a central driver of national development. As a result, the slogan became associated with a specific governmental narrative rather than functioning as a politically neutral representation of national identity. When political leadership changed, the symbolic value of the campaign also shifted, making it less suitable for a new administration seeking to redefine both its policy direction and its public image.

At the same time, the decision to discontinue the campaign cannot be separated from the broader legitimacy challenges surrounding the initiative. As public criticism accumulated and controversy surrounding the initiative intensified, its credibility as a tool of national representation was significantly weakened. In this context, continuing to promote the slogan would have risked reinforcing negative perceptions rather than improving the country's global image. This suggests that the discontinuation of the campaign was not only a response to its limited effectiveness, but also a politically strategic decision shaped by its declining domestic support.

The importance of domestic legitimacy is particularly evident in this case. Nation-branding strategies do not rely solely on effective communication, but also on domestic support. Without sufficient domestic support, such initiatives are unlikely to be sustainable or credible over time. In the case of Creative Korea, declining domestic support significantly constrained the campaign's viability and reduced its potential for long-term implementation.

In addition to these legitimacy concerns, practical limitations also contributed to the decision to abandon the campaign. As noted in the previous section, implementation limitations further weakened the campaign's strategic value and made its effectiveness difficult to assess. From this perspective, the discontinuation of Creative Korea can also be interpreted as an implicit recognition of its limited practical impact.

The relatively short duration of the campaign further supports this interpretation. Unlike more established nation-branding strategies, which are typically characterised by long-term planning and institutional continuity, Creative Korea appears to have functioned as a short-term initiative closely tied to a specific political agenda. This dependence on a particular

administration limited the campaign's institutional continuity and reduced its capacity to survive political transition.

Taken together, these factors indicate that the discontinuation of Creative Korea was the result of a combination of interrelated dynamics. While the official explanation emphasised strategic renewal, a more comprehensive analysis suggests that political transition acted as a decisive trigger that accelerated the abandonment of an already weakened branding strategy. This suggests that nation-branding initiatives are not only strategic tools, but also politically contingent processes shaped by shifts in leadership and public trust. The campaign's declining legitimacy, combined with its limited practical effectiveness and strong association with the previous administration, made its continuation increasingly unsustainable.

Overall, the end of the Creative Korea campaign illustrated the extent to which nation-branding initiatives are shaped by political context and domestic reception. Rather than representing a stable or purely strategic policy tool, such initiatives are highly sensitive to changes in political leadership and public perception. In this case, the convergence of political transformation and legitimacy challenges ultimately led to the early discontinuation of the campaign.

The Creative Korea case demonstrates that nation-branding strategies are highly dependent on political legitimacy, institutional continuity, and domestic support, rather than functioning as neutral or purely strategic instruments. Even when supported by clear strategic intentions, their effectiveness depends heavily on political legitimacy and sustained domestic acceptance. The case of Creative Korea demonstrates how the absence of these conditions can significantly limit the effectiveness and durability of such initiatives.

4.5. Theoretical implications of the Creative Korea case

The Creative Korea case challenges the assumption that nation-branding strategies are primarily communication-driven. Instead, it demonstrates that symbolic branding efforts require sustained institutional support and domestic legitimacy to be effective. The campaign was introduced as a strategic nation-branding initiative aimed at redefining South Korea's international image through a coherent and forward-looking narrative centred on creativity. As outlined in previous sections, the government sought to construct a unified representation of the country that could integrate innovation, cultural industries, and economic competitiveness. However, the trajectory of the campaign reveals a clear gap between these intended objectives and its actual outcomes. Evaluating this discrepancy is essential for

addressing the research question of this study and assessing the extent to which the campaign fulfilled its strategic goals.

From the outset, government expectations for the Creative Korea campaign were notably ambitious. Official discourse framed the slogan as a long-term branding strategy designed to enhance South Korea's international reputation while also fostering domestic cohesion (MCST, 2016). The campaign was intended to operate across multiple domains, including diplomacy, cultural promotion, and economic positioning, and to function as a unifying communication tool for both external and internal audiences. In this sense, it was conceived not as a short-term promotional effort, but as a sustained strategy aimed at consolidating a stable national image over time.

In practise, however, the campaign struggled to meet these expectations. A key limitation lies in the mismatch between its broad strategic ambitions and its limited implementation, which reduced its effectiveness as a nation-branding strategy. Rather than developing into a structured and operational framework, the initiative remained largely at a symbolic level, limiting its capacity to generate a clear or lasting impact. This highlights that the success of nation branding depends not only on the articulation of compelling narratives, but also on their translation into consistent and actionable strategies.

Domestic support played a decisive role in shaping these outcomes. As discussed in Section 4.3, sustained criticism and controversy significantly weakened the campaign's legitimacy, constraining its ability to function as an effective tool of national representation. Instead of fostering cohesion, the initiative became associated with scepticism and public dissatisfaction, which undermined its credibility. This dynamic highlights a fundamental limitation: nation-branding strategies are not only externally oriented but also dependent on internal acceptance. Without broad internal support, their capacity to project a credible and consistent image is significantly reduced.

The conceptual framing of the campaign further contributed to its limited effectiveness. While the emphasis on creativity provided flexibility and broad appeal, it also introduced a degree of ambiguity that weakened the clarity of the message. In the absence of a clearly defined and distinctive framework, the campaign struggled to differentiate South Korea from other countries promoting similar narratives. This lack of specificity reduced its effectiveness as a communication tool and limited its ability to establish a strong and recognisable national image.

At the same time, the campaign can be understood as a response to a broader structural challenge. As outlined in Section 4.1, South Korea had already achieved considerable global visibility through its cultural industries, yet this success had not been fully translated into a coherent national brand. In this context, Creative Korea sought to bridge the gap between international recognition and the absence of a unified identity framework. However, its trajectory suggests that such a gap cannot be addressed solely through the introduction of a new slogan, but requires sustained institutional support and a more clearly articulated strategic foundation.

The decision to discontinue the campaign further illustrates the disparity between its intended goals and actual outcomes. As outlined in Section 4.4, the abandonment of the slogan reflected not only strategic reconsideration, but also the broader political context in which it was embedded. Political transition acted as a decisive trigger that accelerated the discontinuation of an already weakened initiative. This suggests that nation-branding strategies are not only strategic tools, but also politically contingent processes shaped by shifts in leadership and public trust.

While Anholt (2007) emphasises reputation management as a long-term strategic process, the Creative Korea case demonstrates how nation-branding initiatives remain vulnerable to political discontinuity. Similarly, Dinnie (2010, pp.50-52) highlights the importance of clarity, strategic coherence, and distinctiveness in sustaining nation-branding efforts over time, warning that weakly differentiated positioning platforms may ultimately become ineffective. The failure of Creative Korea to maintain domestic legitimacy across political transitions therefore illustrates the limitations of branding strategies that become too closely associated with a particular administration.

Taken together, these factors demonstrate that the campaign did not fully achieve its intended objectives. While it succeeded in articulating an aspirational narrative aligned with broader policy priorities, it failed to consolidate into a coherent, credible, and sustainable branding strategy. The gap between its ambitious goals and its limited implementation, combined with declining domestic support and political change, ultimately constrained its effectiveness and longevity.

This analysis directly addresses the research question of this study by identifying the key factors that explain the limited success of the campaign. More specifically, it supports the central hypothesis that nation-branding strategies require not only clear narratives, but also

strong domestic support, institutional continuity and practical implementation in order to be effective. The case of Creative Korea demonstrates that nation-branding strategies cannot rely solely on symbolic communication, but require sustained political legitimacy, institutional continuity, and domestic support in order to remain effective over time.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the political and cultural factors that shaped the *Creative Korea* nation-branding campaign and analysed how its domestic reception contributed to its discontinuation between 2016 and 2017. The findings demonstrate that the campaign emerged within a broader context of political, economic, and cultural transformation in South Korea. This included the growing importance of the creative economy and the global expansion of Korean cultural industries. It also reflected the government's increasing interest in strengthening South Korea's international image through culture and innovation. In this context, Creative Korea represented an attempt to construct a more coherent and future-oriented national narrative. The campaign sought to integrate cultural visibility, economic competitiveness, and soft power within a unified branding strategy.

At the same time, the analysis has shown that the campaign struggled to achieve these objectives in practise. Although the government presented Creative Korea as a long-term nation-branding initiative, its domestic reception quickly revealed significant limitations related to the originality, clarity, and credibility of the slogan. Media criticism, public scepticism and the broader political crisis surrounding the Park Geun-Hye administration weakened the legitimacy of the campaign. As a result, the slogan struggled to function as an effective representation of national identity, and the campaign failed to consolidate into a stable and sustainable branding strategy. Consequently, it was officially discontinued less than a year after its launch.

The findings of this study therefore support the central hypothesis proposed in the introduction. The Creative Korea campaign was not simply a superficial rebranding exercise, but rather a strategy shaped by broader political and cultural transformations taking place in South Korea during the mid-2010s. However, its discontinuation can largely be explained by the growing mismatch between governmental objectives and domestic reception. The campaign attempted to project an image centred on creativity, innovation and cultural dynamism. However, it struggled to gain sufficient domestic legitimacy. Over time, the initiative became increasingly associated with political controversy and declining public trust.

More broadly, this paper demonstrates that nation-branding strategies cannot rely solely on symbolic communication or international cultural visibility to be effective. The case of Creative Korea highlights the importance of political legitimacy, institutional continuity, and domestic support in sustaining national branding initiatives over time. South Korea had

already achieved considerable global visibility through the Korean Wave and the expansion of its cultural industries. However, this alone was insufficient to guarantee the success of a state-led branding campaign. In this sense, the study reinforces theoretical perspectives that emphasise the long-term and politically contingent nature of nation branding rather than understanding it as a purely promotional or marketing-oriented process.

This research also contributes to existing literature by focusing specifically on Creative Korea, a campaign that has received relatively limited academic attention compared to broader discussions of South Korea's soft power and cultural diplomacy. By examining the campaign through the perspectives of nation branding, political legitimacy, and cultural policy, the paper provides a clearer understanding of how branding strategies operate within specific domestic and political contexts. It also highlights the importance of analysing not only the formulation of nation-branding initiatives, but also their reception and implementation.

Nevertheless, this study also presents several limitations. Due to the short duration of the campaign and the limited availability of academic and official sources, the analysis relied heavily on media sources and publicly available materials. In addition, the study focused primarily on domestic reception and political context rather than on international perceptions of the campaign. Future research could expand this analysis by examining the campaign's international reception or by comparing it with other South Korean nation-branding initiatives such as Dynamic Korea or Imagine Your Korea. Comparative studies of similar branding strategies in other countries could provide further insight into the relationship between political legitimacy, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding.

To conclude, the Creative Korea case illustrates the challenges faced by nation-branding strategies that lack sufficient domestic legitimacy, institutional continuity, and clearly operationalised policy frameworks. While the campaign reflected South Korea's broader ambition to position itself as a creative and globally influential nation, its trajectory also revealed the weaknesses of relying heavily on symbolic branding strategies. Ultimately, successful nation branding depends not only on attractive narratives, but also on the political and social conditions necessary for those narratives to remain credible and sustainable over time.

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