‘Imagine Your Korea’ or Imaginary Korea?
Negotiations of Korean Nation Brand and National Identity in Everyday Life

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Abstract

Since 2009, South Korea (hereafter, Korea) has committed to its nation branding project more seriously than perhaps any other country. This research investigates how efforts to reconfigure Korea’s nation brand are received and interpreted by Korean citizens. Using the 2017 nation branding tourism campaign, ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip,’ this thesis shows how Korean citizens relate to this branded image and perform their own national affiliation in relation to it.

Approaching national identity as a discursive formation (Calhoun, 1997), the empirical component of this thesis relied upon a mixed-methods approach to explore how conceptualizations of national identity are socially constructed and embedded within larger historical, political, and economic processes, and in particular, against the Korean state-led nation branding project. A visual content analysis was performed on the ‘8 faces of Korea’ campaign revealing four themes in the construction of the ‘real Korea’: cosmopolitanism, activeness, youthfulness, and history. Subsequently, discourse analysis was applied to in-depth interviews with 14 Korean citizens in order to uncover personal narratives in the interpretation of this campaign, but also in relation to what it means to be Korean in everyday life.

The findings show that through this government-led attempt to position the Korean nation in a global context, the representation of Korea runs counter to everyday Korean life, thereby demonstrating how Korean nation branding has been fundamentally conceived for the tourist gaze and the global audience. Thus, the nation branding of Korea offers evidence of Korea’s realization of becoming a fully globalized, competitive, and capitalist nation state. Yet, despite being critical of how this campaign misrepresents Korea, Korean citizens have also bought into this perceived need for nation branding in the global marketplace of nations.

KEYWORDS: Nation branding, nation-building, national identity, nationalism, South Korea.
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1. Introduction

1.1 How Do You Imagine your Korea?

“...The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear.” – Socrates


The campaign, which consisted of eight themed videos, was conceived under the umbrella of ‘Imagine Your Korea,’ the official tourism brand launched in 2014 to more effectually convey “the various charms” of Korea as a tourist destination by showcasing the country’s improved status on the global stage (Korean Tourism Organization, 2014, para. 2). The ‘Imagine Your Korea’ brand was introduced following a number of successive official tourism brand campaigns since the early 2000s that had collectively experienced tepid international reception (Williamson, 2012). The brand slogan, which was established based on the input from a three-week online public survey, was created with the intention of transferring the “ownership” of Korea “from the KTO to the people” (“A reimagined experience,” n.d.). Accordingly, the brand slogan allowed the KTO to “feed people’s imaginations with stories. Their stories about the real Korea.” (Wright, n.d., para. 3).

But under the banner of the branded Korea, what is the ‘real Korea’ and why does it matter? Within the span of only four decades, Korea managed to rise from the ashes of war, transforming itself from a destitute aid-recipient, to a vibrant, dynamic, and prosperous democracy with one of the world’s strongest economies (Tudor, 2012). While the establishment of a post-war climate of urgent national recovery facilitated a hyper-compressed modernization (Cho, 2000), the emergence of nation branding can be linked to the realization that Korea’s global image lagged behind a new domestic reality. Accordingly, despite its remarkable economic success story which saw Korea transform from “a basket case of developmental failure” to “a solid upper-middle income country,” achieving OECD membership in 1996 (Chang, 2008, p. 5), Korea’s international image has been obfuscated, most notably by decades of dictatorship, political and corporate corruption, violent protests, and a tenuous relationship with North Korea since the Korean War (Dinnie, 2009).

In May 2006, the Korea Image Development Committee hosted the ‘Nation Brands in the Global Market’ conference in Seoul. Simon Anholt, who is widely considered to be one of the ‘founding fathers’ of the notion of the ‘nation brand,’ delivered a keynote speech that became a crucial turning point for Korean nation branding efforts (Schwak, 2015a). During his concluding
remarks, Anholt suggested that Korea was suffering from a “major image problem” in the West, thereby recommending the need for an image overhaul (Schwak, 2016, p. 436). The justification for a national image ‘makeover’ was twofold. First, the general tendency to conflate North and South Korea resulted in skewed and largely negative perceptions of South Korea (Anholt, 2011). These negative connotations were further aggravated by the outdated, yet pervasive notion of the “Korea Discount” phenomenon, marked by a discrepancy between Korea’s developmental achievements and its lacklustre international reputation (Schwak, 2016, p. 436). Second, in spite of Korea’s extraordinary advances in economic prosperity, political stability, high-quality education, and flourishing national culture in the form of Hallyu – or the ‘Korean Wave’ – Korea remained a relative mystery to the rest of the world (Anholt, 2011).

Korea’s president at the time, Lee Myung Bak, took careful note of Anholt’s remarks on Korea’s allegedly problematic and deteriorating international image (Schwak, 2016). Cognizant of the long-term economic benefits Korea could reap from a strong and reinvigorated nation brand image, President Lee’s administration created the ‘Presidential Council on Nation Branding’ (PCNB) in January 2009 (Youn Kim & Yoon, 2013). Furthermore, a calculated undertaking was launched to refurbish Korea’s international reputation by establishing the ‘Brand Korea’ initiative, which would be operationalized in the form of a 10-point action plan (Cheng, 2008). Tourism, which features as one of the six dimensions on Anholt’s NBI, was identified as one of the five core emphases in order for Korea’s nation brand transformation to move forward (Youn Kim & Yoon, 2013), and further featured as one of the items on the PCNB’s 10-point action plan.

Since that pivotal moment in 2009, Korea has taken the charge to brand itself and leverage its national competitiveness more seriously than perhaps any other country, thereby responding to a perceived necessity to globalize itself or otherwise flounder in an era of high-stakes competitiveness among nation-states (Schwak, 2015a). However, there is a dearth of research on how this newly branded tourist image of Korea resonates with Korean citizens in their everyday meaning-making and performances of national identity. While the very notion of national identity is not a static concept existing in a void, but rather, “dynamic, contested, multiple and fluid,” (Edensor, 2002, p. vi), it can be argued that nation branding, as a process of nation-building, determines and defines the individual features that constitute a collective national identity, essentially synthesizing that identity into a filtered assemblage of choice features. This is problematic because the very process of branding a nation in the same manner that one would brand a tangible product suppresses, depoliticizes, and disregards the historical struggles, negotiations, and reconciliations through which
national identities are forged and understood (Kaneva, 2011). Thus, by evacuating the nuances of all that which has cumulatively shaped a nation’s identity over time, nation branding essentially performs an act of national homogenization. In effect, nation branding is arguably a reductionist and deterministic exercise in its capacity to synthesize the plurality of everyday life into a few individual features that are labelled as ‘Korean.’ Thus, promoting a branded image in which a select few features of a nation have been distilled from a greater whole is quite different from the inherently subjective and fluid nature of national identity. More crucially, nation branding is arguably a Western phenomenon designed for Western audiences which “seeks to reconstitute nations both at the levels of ideology, and of praxis, whereby the meaning and experiential reality of nationhood itself is transformed in ways that are yet to be fully understood” (Kaneva, 2011, p. 118).

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis first investigates how the Korean nation brand is portrayed in the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ promotional video campaign. Second, these results are complemented by an exploration of how Korean citizens receive and make sense of the branded image of Korea depicted within the campaign. Accordingly, the two guiding research questions for this thesis are formulated as follows:

**RQ1:** How does the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ tourism campaign construct the Korean nation brand?

**RQ2:** How do Korean citizens make sense of this branded image of Korea in relation to their everyday conceptions of national identity?

In considering nation branding through a critical lens, this thesis is guided by the preliminary conjecture that Korean nation branding does not necessarily function as a self-reflexive, domestic exercise for nation-building, but rather, has been conceived for the tourist gaze and the global audience, thus serving as evidence of a global, competitive, and capitalist Korea.

1.3 Social and Scientific Relevance

This thesis was written during a historic time in recent Korean history. Korea has recently undergone a profound process of social transformation, marked by mass public protests resulting in corruption charges against former presidents and influential conglomerate leaders (Chang, 2017),
increased media attention to systemic and widespread gender inequality (Bicker, 2018), and the beginnings of historic peace talks with North Korea (Fidler, 2018).

Accordingly, this thesis explores conceptions of nationalism and national identity during a time of social, cultural, political, and economic changes. More crucially, these changes are being negotiated alongside talks of possible reunification with North Korea, which is particularly significant given that North and South Koreans shared one identity for centuries, up until the country’s division in 1945. Social change poses a threat to cultural identity by provoking a nation’s people to question their national beliefs and values, which may become jeopardized, contested, or diminished (De La Sablonniere, 2017). Correspondingly, these current events beget an opportune social context to investigate Korean nationalism and nation branding during a period when citizens are more likely to dispute the motives and behaviours of individuals in positions of power, such as political elites and corporate leaders.

Furthermore, there are no known studies that have explicitly investigated the perspectives of Korean citizens on Korean nation branding via tourism. To this end, the data gleaned through this research offers new and valuable perspectives on Korean nation branding from a citizen’s perspective. This is worthwhile to future nation branding initiatives, given that in order for a nation branding campaign to be effective and sustainable in the long-term, ‘buy-in’ from citizens is cited as being a crucial ingredient for success and longevity (Dinnie, 2015).

Finally, this study contributes to current scholarship on nation branding as a nation-building practice. Nations worldwide must now find their footing among the “vast, loud souk that is the world’s economy,” wherein every country necessitates a bespoke image in order to be perceived as globally competitive (Subramanian, 2017, para. 21). This phenomenon is said to have triggered insecurities, various expressions of nationalism, and a trend – particularly in the political realm – of capitalizing off emerging uncertainties concerning nationhood: “if a country keeps defining how people belong, it also defines how people do not belong” (Subramanian, 2017, para. 47). Accordingly, branding a nation not only expounds this disciplined, tidied-up image for the global audience, but also reinterprets national identity narratives according to marketplace terms for the consumption, interpretation, and negotiation of domestic audiences (Jansen, 2008). However, these are argued to be ideas and images of a nation bereft of a soul, which citizens may relate to on some superficial level, but not fully identify with (Stålberg & Bolin, 2016). Hence, there are potentially significant sociocultural, economic, and political consequences to this reinterpretation (Kaneva, 2011), which necessitate further scientific exploration and understanding.
2. Theoretical Framework

This thesis investigates how Koreans receive the nation brand constructed by the Korea Tourism Organization, as well as how they relate this branded image to their own conceptions and performances of national identity. Accordingly, the central theoretical concepts here include notions of the nation, nationalism, national identity, nation-building, and nation branding. Given the vast body of literature on these concepts, the following sections identify and summarize the most salient central themes within scholarly research relevant to the course of study.

2.1 Nations, Nationalism, and National Identity

2.1.1 The Nation and Nationalism

Benedict Anderson’s (1983) preeminent definition describes the nation as an “imagined political community” (p. 6). This definition emphasizes the nation and its collective identity as having been shaped by unique historical circumstances wherein a group of people define themselves according to shared features that are shaped over time, such as character, values, history, language, and religion (Anderson, 1983). In this respect, nationalism – as a shared ideology that gives shape, texture, and a measure of cohesion to human social life – defines a nation. The nation is ‘imagined’ because it is not a tangible thing that is manufactured, but rather, it comes into existence when a significant number of individuals consider themselves to collectively form a national community, even if those individuals never cross paths (Anderson, 1983). Therefore, the idea of a nation, marked by the allegiance, communion, and cooperation of its members, is largely a symbolic notion residing in the psyche of its people, hence it is the product of ‘imagination.’ This notion is echoed by Ernest Gellner (1964), who suggested that nationalism “‘invents’ nations where they do not exist” (p. 169).

Nationalism has thus become the foremost discursive practice for legitimizing the formation of political communities, as well as a symbolic bastion of collective sovereignty. At its core, nationalism explains that ‘nations’ – or groups of people sharing similar features, traditions, and values – are entitled to political self-governance (Calhoun, 1993). Prominent theoretical discussions on the origins of nations and nationalism revolve around primordialist and modernist analyses; however, Anderson (1983) acknowledges that there is no widely accepted definition of the nation or nationalism, therefore the origins of these concepts remain contested. Accordingly, these notions can refer to a profoundly “imagined” and “horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 1983, pp. 6-7), a social invention of nations where they did not previously exist (Gellner, 1964), an “ideological movement (Smith, 1991, p. 51), an invented “doctrine” (Kedourie, 1993, p. 1), and a “discursive
formation” (Calhoun, 1997, p. 3). While these scholars share similar conceptualizations of nationalism in terms of regarding it as a recent phenomenon and a crucial underpinning of national identity in modern society, their theories differ when concerning how nations came into existence.

According to ‘ethnosymbolism,’ a primordialist theory of nationalism advanced by Anthony Smith (1991), the stronger and more pervasive pre-modern ethnic ties and sentiments of a community of people, the more likely that a coherent sense of nation and shared identity would emerge from those ethnic bonds or ethnies. Smith (1991) further contends that as a reasonably contemporary “spirit of the age,” the influence of nationalism on national identity cannot be fully understood without “exploring its social and cultural matrix,” which is reinforced by both pre-modern ethnies and the advent of nation-states in the West (p. 72). Smith (1999) thus emphasizes the pre-modern ‘roots’ of modern nation-states, arguing for the “myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages” as the formative factors that collectively determine and give shape to modern national identities (p. 9).

More modernist perspectives on the roots of nationalism, such as those of Anderson and Gellner, underscore the role of “social interactions, processes, and networks that arose only in the modern era and provided the basis for the construction of nations” (Campbell, 2016, p. 6). However, while Gellner’s (1964) stance on the nation is somewhat critical, suggesting that this ‘invention’ is, in fact, a “fabrication” or a “falsity,” Anderson’s description of the nation as a product of imagination and a “creation” is decidedly more enthusiastic (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm (1983) considers national commonalities gleaned from the invention of symbolic traditions. In suggesting that traditions are invented, Hobsbawm (1983) implies that something that previously existed in people’s practice – but not all people’s practice – has been elevated to the level of a nationally shared tradition, with the past serving as a gradual development of a nationally shared consciousness. Michael Billig (1995) thus suggests that these shared traditions have become essential threads in the fabric of a nation’s social imaginary, thereby facilitating the perception of a collective identity through ritualistic practices of social communion. In this respect, the present is not a facsimile of the past, but rather, a selection of the past.

This thesis will take a modernist approach towards the nation and nationalism in the sense that Korean nationalism is viewed as having been shaped by recent historical conditions, events, and processes. Therefore, this thesis is guided by Calhoun’s (1997) perspective on modern nationalism as a “discursive formation” (p. 3), informed by Foucault’s conceptualization of discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” – or a process through which discourse
and context influence one another in a cyclical manner (Foucault, 1972, p. 50). These perspectives will be useful to analyze and deconstruct the ostensibly essentialist notion of a Korean national identity. Calhoun (1997) is critical of what he sees as a somewhat naïve mainstream tendency to attempt to reify nations and nationalism; therefore, while he advances the idea that nationalism – as a “discursive formation” – is “a way of speaking that shapes our consciousness,” he also suggests that the notion is problematic enough to warrant ongoing questioning and deliberation over how to conceptualize it (p. 3). Similar to Gellner, Calhoun’s postmodern approach to nationalism perceives modernity as having paved the way for the emergence of nations and nationalism, a notion that will be useful in the analysis of the role of nation branding in Korean national identity formation. The concept of nation-building as a way in which nations are created is also crucial to modern nationalism, with nation branding serving as a recent phenomenon in a long line of nation-building practices. However, there is a certain distance between state-led nation-building and how citizens understand their national identity on a personal level. Therefore, the following sections will address these two notions: national identity and nation branding as a nation-building practice.

2.1.2 National Identity

National identity has commonly been defined through two theoretical dimensions: ascriptive (‘ethnic’) traits and achievable (‘civic’) traits (Brubaker, 1992). Ascriptive traits are grounded in characteristics that are seen as fixed, such as common bloodline, whereas achievable traits embody a more fluid sense of imagined kinship shaped by loyalties to political institutions and shared values (Brubaker, 1992). Similarly, from a cultural studies perspective, identity is shaped by reciprocated recognition among community members where an individual’s feelings of self-validation and belonging are cultivated through this mutual validation (Kellner, as cited in Kim, 2011). Accordingly, nationality has been defined as a powerful symbolic unifier and a self-identification category essential to our physical and social survival in the modern world, as well as a guiding rubric for defining selfhood, identifying with an ‘in-group,’ and cultivating a sense of belonging (Anderson, 2006; Brubaker, 2004; Smith, 2000). Therefore, while at once deeply personal and subjective, yet publicly shared, national identity can be imagined, created, and effected on an intimate ‘micro’ level, or it can be disseminated at the ‘macro’ level by media outlets and through nation state-led narratives in order to promote the integration of a nation’s citizens and galvanize solidarity (Zuev & Virchow, 2014). Against the intensification of globalization, the meaning and configuration of national identity has come under intense scrutiny. On one hand, nationality remains a steadfast identifier for
individuals, thereby serving as a foundation for collectivity, mutual autonomy, political sovereignty, and – perhaps most crucially – a sense of belonging (Lavi, 2013). On the other hand, increased global flows and interconnectivity seem to provide individuals with new ways of imagining the world, as well as their personal identifications to the people and places within it (Skey, 2009). Therefore, globalization and national identity should not be considered as binaries, given that with the intensification of global cultural flows and human mobility, national identities may expand to incorporate new cultural resources within the everyday experience of national culture (Edensor, 2002). Lavi (2013) asks whether national identities will eventually wane, usurped by “supra-national” or “sub-national” identities, and if this does indeed occur, then the resurgence of national identity in recent years – most notably in former Soviet Union nations, Northern Ireland, and the Middle East – warrants further explanation (p. 696). As Smith (2008) contends, “if anything, globalizing pressures have, through large-scale migration and mass communications, revitalized ethnic ties and sentiments across the globe” (p. 118). Therefore, in the face of globalizing dynamics, individuals still turn to national identity as a compass for orienting themselves among a national community, thereby legitimizing sovereignty (Lavi, 2013). In many ways, national identity is a powerful symbolic vestige of an imagined shared history, thus legitimizing collective self-determination. However, while globalization may intensify nationalism, it also has the power to undermine it. Therefore, while national identity remains salient to some who rely upon national identity markers to define who they are, for others, national identity is not a crucial point of reference.

To this end, national identity is argued to be “a conceptual chimera not worthy of serious analytical pursuit,” suggesting that the concept is “theoretically vapid” and fails to serve as a tool for teasing out the often complex and contradictory processes that collectively advocate for the construction, preservation, and reproduction of nationhood (Malesevic, 2011, pp. 272-273). In other words, the safeguarding of an ‘authentic national identity’ is argued to simply be an iteration of a particular top-down ideological discourse that considers only what individuals allegedly are, rather than who they actually are (Malesevic, 2011). This is important because when disseminated at the macro-level, identity narratives convey a “wider sense of who ‘we’ are (or at least, should be),” but identities can only fully take shape through “everyday language and practices” (Skey, 2009, p. 334). Furthermore, the question remains whether these arguably ‘Western’ models of nationalism and corresponding performance markers can account for all global cultures. This notion is especially relevant within the context of identity performance – especially when it is orchestrated at the macro-level – which will be discussed in the following section.
2.2 National Identity as a Performance

2.2.1 Performing National Identity

National identity can be enacted in multiple ways across various settings at both micro and macro levels (Zuev & Virchow, 2014). At the micro level, national identity can be performed by individuals through the use of identity markers, including words, signs, and symbolism that together contribute to coherent and mutually understood private conceptualizations of national identity between community members. At the macro level, national identity performances can include festivals, sporting events, protests, rallies, and national holidays that are often orchestrated by media outlets and nation-states, serving to foster the integration of citizens into a cohesive national community with the ultimate goal of producing a sense of “we-ness” (Zuev & Virchow, 2014, p. 192). However, there can be a dissonance between micro and macro level identities, which is discussed by Ruth Wodak (1999), who argues that “individuals as well as collective groups such as nations are in many respects hybrids of identity, and thus the idea of a homogeneous 'pure' identity on the individual or collective level is a deceptive fiction and illusion” (Wodak, 1999, p. 16). This argument can be extended to the notion of national identity as a performance. While individuals may feel connected to one another through a shared national community, there are many other layers and nuances to identity which suggest that identity can be performed in entirely different ways at the micro and macro levels, thus creating a tension that is worth questioning and exploring.

A micro-level example of national identity as a performance is documented by Fiona Gill (2005) who explores national identity performance in a Scottish Borders community that is “alien” to both England and Scotland, thereby interrupting “the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ dynamic of the border” (p. 91). Gill (2005) demonstrates how residents use identity markers — signs and symbols that we look for in others to establish a sense of identity, such as place of birth, upbringing, ancestral ties, and place of residence — in order to assert membership with a national community. However, in the case of Bordertown, these identity markers are used creatively by individuals to assert membership with a national community to which they feel the strongest sense of kinship in a given social situation. This suggests that the use of ‘identity markers’ can shift depending on context. The notion of ‘performances of national identity’ is salient here, given that identity can be considered as a public recital involving actors and an audience within which roles are reversed or played simultaneously throughout the interactions of individuals, taking place on more intimate levels (between individuals or small groups), or on a larger scale (between societies or national communities) (Gill, 2005). This suggests that a performance of national identity may stand apart from an individual’s personal identity,
which reinforces the notion of national identity as a myth or an imagined entity. Identity construction is also contingent upon the context within which it is received and interpreted by its audience. For example, sport can provide a social context where the performance of national identity is ‘played out’; however, this public performance of identity relies upon a coherent private sense of identity (Gill, 2005). In this respect, identity is dynamic and functions on multiple levels, therefore must be considered against multiple contexts and affiliations (Fraser, as cited in Gill, 2005).

While Gill’s (2005) study shows how individuals strategically and contextually use identity markers to perform national identity in relation to everyday life contexts and audiences, Lee and Cho (2009) consider the performance of national identity through festive event, wherein the performance has been choreographed by the state with an international audience in mind. In performing Korean “nation-ness” during the 2002 World Cup, Koreans took on the role of social performers and “containers of national images and values” before a global audience (p. 94). The sporting event is metaphoric for a world ‘stage’ upon which Korean nationalism was displayed as a coherent “set of cultural practices” conferred through the dovetailing of individual creativities, collective performances of nationalism, and a state-led desire for globalism (Lee & Cho, 2009, p. 95). The performance of national identity via sporting event provides a context for understanding the shifting nature of Korean national identity and social memory, hence the use of the term ‘nation-ness’ in lieu of ‘nationalism’ or ‘national identity’ (Lee & Cho, 2009). The notion of ‘nation-ness’ functions as a catch-all of sorts, capturing each and every dimension under the banner of the ‘nation,’ from tangible verification of citizenship, to shared social rituals, to myths and memories (Taylor, as cited in Lee & Cho, 2009).

Accordingly, Shin (2006) suggests that this social performance of ‘nation-ness’ illustrates how nationalism and globalism have become entwined. In the Korean context, this entwinement is enacted by leveraging the national stage as proof of having attained global success, albeit at the expense of modifying Korean traditions (Lee & Cho, 2009). In other words, the intersecting desires for globalism and nationalism indicate the conflation of personal or private aspirations with a national (state-led) desire for global visibility:

“Creating a Korean national stage for global spectators manifested society’s contradictory desires for both self-hate and self-love: while Koreans tried to reach global standards by altering their traditions and customs, they simultaneously advocated the national stage and the national frenzy enacted upon it as proofs of their global success” (p. 116).
Thus, while Korean citizens were embedded into the state-led ‘national dream’ of global visibility, which was depicted as a channel through which individual Koreans could fulfill their personal aspirations, this fulfillment was concurrently dependent upon Korea’s national success in a global context (Lee & Cho, 2009). This study suggests that the spectacle of the 2002 World Cup presented a changing Korean nationalism – one that is self-conscious of a global marketplace and in recognizing this competitive sphere, alters itself accordingly.

This notion of identity negotiation and reconciliation in relation to outsider perspectives is also explored by Gundolf Graml’s (2004) study on Sound of Music tourism and national identity in Austria, which provides an example of how national identity is performed via institutional actors at the macro level. Graml (2004) argues that tourist practices do not run counter to ‘real identity’ performances, but rather, “performative constructions of places” for the tourist gaze redefine what constitutes ‘authenticity’ and provide a “blueprint” for building static, fixed places – akin to the idea of a time capsule – despite the everchanging world beyond Austria’s borders (p. 137). Drawing attention to the distance between the images of ‘tourist Austria’ and ‘authentic Austria,’ tourism is presented as a site of contestation where performances of identity – both of locals and visitors – are confronted and rearranged by insiders who become outsiders looking in and vice versa. Hence, national identity and tourism do not exist in isolation from one another, but rather, in a “self-referential loop” with one another (Graml, 2004, p. 145). Therefore, those performances and images that are dismissed as fake or inauthentic are, in fact, identity-shaping devices which empower the “gradual adaptation of national self-images to global political and economic changes” (Graml, 2004, p. 154). Touristic images of a nation thus function as negotiating devices, reconciling citizens’ desires for unity and belonging with global fantasies.

The theories and notions discussed in this section are salient to understanding how Korean citizens interpret and relate to the tourist image of their country. This thesis is guided by the notion of national identity performance as something very personal that is understood and performed on a more intimate level with in-group members. However, the macro-level spectacles and rituals of national identity performance are also crucial to this project, given Korea’s modern history which has been coloured by mass political protests, major sporting events, and a state-led modernization project, of which nation branding – as a nation-building practice – is arguably an extension. Therefore, this thesis will consider how Koreans discuss their personal identity in relation to these state-led, macro-level performances. Graml’s (2005) discussion of the seemingly ‘fake’ aspects of identity that serve as a vanguard for the Austrian tourist image – yet are at once symbolic of global
and economic agency on the part of local citizens – will be useful in considering how Koreans relate to the tourism campaign in question.

2.2.2 Nation Branding

As an overarching goal of nation branding, the practice of nation-building generally entails three diverse yet interrelated national exercises: (1) Fostering a coherent sense of ethnic sentiment, (2) Enabling processes of democratization, and (3) Invigorating economic reconstruction (Etzioni, 2004). Nation-building is further defined as a process which “creates something that is lacking” and is intricately linked with the construction of a national identity (Kim, 2009, p. 123), albeit at the expense of locally-rooted pluralities. In this respect, the two primary components of nation-building are state-building and the construction of a homogenous national identity (Barr, 2011). In order to legitimize what Aronczyk (2008) calls a “social engineering practice” (p. 56), citizens must first accept these state-led processes in order to internalize a communal sense of identity, “for the process of identity building aims to link citizens to the state through the nation” (Barr, 2011, p. 84). Nation-building has thus been defined as a vehicle for unifying disparate dimension of a population by fostering allegiance to a collective identity at the state-level (Deutsch, Kolstø, as cited in Van de Walle, 2010). Nation-building is further cited as being “very much en vogue” as a fruitful development tactic for “failed states” (Fukuyama, as cited in Van de Walle, 2010, p. 28). Accordingly, nation-building can be understood as a deliberate state-led process aimed at integrating people within defined borders of place, community, identity, and ideology (Van de Walle, 2010). One of these nation-building processes that has emerged in recent years is the phenomenon of nation branding.

Nation branding applies various marketing practices to convey the “core idea” or essence of a nation both inwardly and to international audiences (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 114). According to some of nation branding’s most distinguished proponents, nation branding describes "the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences" (Dinnie, 2015, p. 15); or, in other words: “national identity made tangible, robust, communicable and – at its best – made useful.” (Anholt, n.d., p. 187).

The practice of advertising a nation’s merits is by no means a novel or contemporary concept. Over the course of history, nation-states have devised and employed various rhetorical practices and promotional tactics to positively influence public opinion and “advance political, economic, and cultural agendas” (Kaneva, 2011, p. 117). However, the crux of nation branding extends beyond merely manipulating the external reputation of a nation through finely-tuned public
relations. In 2005, British branding consultant, Simon Anholt, drew parallels between nation branding and the notion of ‘brand lifestyle,’ suggesting that a nation’s brand should not exist in a void, but rather, should be a lived practice accepted and adopted by citizens: “Just as companies have learned to “live the brand,” countries should consider their reputations carefully – because (...)
in the interconnected world, that’s what statecraft is all about” (Risen, 2005). Anholt (2008) further underscores the co-dependence of nation brand and citizen engagement by outlining how nation branding should ultimately be conceived as “a component of national policy, never as a ‘campaign’ that is separate from planning, governance or economic development” (p. 23). Thus, in the spirit of living the brand, Kaneva (2011) offers a “working definition” of nation branding described as a “compendium of discourses and practices aimed at reconstituting nationhood through marketing and branding paradigms” (p. 118). In this sense, the very premise of nation branding suggests a self-reflexive practice that penetrates beneath the surface image of a nation state and feeds into the collective national consciousness.

In terms of tangible, practical manifestations, nation branding activities can include more superficial, esthetic representations by way of creative branding logos and slogans. The nation-building, international image-shaping potential of nation branding has piqued the interest of formerly Soviet states hoping to “jettison a lot of historical baggage and redefine themselves in 21st century terms” (Schroter & Schwekendiek, 2015, p. 117). This sort of ‘public makeover’ often involves rhetorical practices in the form of a national slogan or catchphrase. Similarly, several Asian countries have attempted to shed their ‘developing country’ images by fostering memorable tourism nation brands, including Malaysia (‘Truly Asia’), the Philippines (‘It’s more fun in the Philippines’), Thailand (‘Amazing Thailand’), and Vietnam (‘Timeless Charm’). Some of the common indicators of success attributed to these nation branding initiatives include coherence, consistency, and connection with people, country, and culture (Trolan, 2017). However, in the case of Korea, attempts at tourism-led nation branding have been criticized for suffering from an identity crisis rooted in a failure to bridge a connection between national identity and the global audience through a branded image that resonates with both points of view (Stanhope, 2014; Trolan, 2017; Williamson, 2012). Korea’s international image has thus been summed up as “not unique, not familiar and not strong,” suggesting that Korea’s national identity “lacks in uniqueness, familiarity and strength — three core elements for building a good national brand and identity” (Park, 2008, para. 7). It is worth mentioning that since the 2002 World Cup, Korea’s tourism brand has undergone multiple...
makeovers, including ‘Dynamic Korea,’ ‘Korea Sparkling,’ ‘Korea, Be Inspired,’ the short-lived ‘Korea, A Loving Embrace,’ and the most recent ‘Imagine your Korea’ (2014 – present).

Catchy slogans aside, an important theme that emerges from these initiatives relates to the ways in which nation branding manipulates national identity narrative for the benefit of external (read, Western) audiences, which has been discussed at length by many scholars who have criticized nation branding for pandering to Western perspectives (Baker, 2009; Roy, 2007; Volcic, 2008). Furthermore, more recent studies on nation branding have been grounded in critical theories of culture, communication, and society, criticizing the repercussions of nation branding practices on issues of national identity politics, culture, public diplomacy, and governance (Aronczyk, 2008; Baker, 2009; Jansen, 2008; Volcic, 2008). These approaches view national identity as a ‘grey area’ of ongoing struggle, negotiation, and reconciliation over shared and individual meanings shaped by micro and macro-level agents, thereby seeking to unpack and understand the broader implications of nation branding on these meaning-making processes (Kaneva, 2011). These implications are particularly salient given that nation branding articulates national identity from the top-down through a specific and premeditated organization of power (Aronczyk, 2008). Thus, nation branding has been problematized for ignoring historical disparities among nations, privileging economic gain, obscuring or de-politicizing the political, and simultaneously misrepresenting and de-politicizing the material and symbolic dimensions of national identity through commodification (Kaneva, 2011). Furthermore, the mere existence of nation branding indexes and brand power measurement tools insinuates that an undercurrent of competitiveness belies the unifying effect of globalization.

This undercurrent colours the tensions between nation, identity, and a capitalist culture where seemingly anything can be commodified and peddled on the global market, thus providing the impetus to understand the nature of the relationship between a nation’s image and its national identity, as well as to what extent “these two logics compete or reinforce each other” (Bolin & Ståhlberg, as cited in Jordan, 2014, p. 45). This thesis is guided by the notion of nation branding as a “top-down” process initiated by elite forces at the state-level with the intention of orchestrating “bottom-up” nation-building exercises targeted at enrolling “public/ground-level” social actors in the marketing of a “more palatable version of nationalism” (Jordan, 2014, p. 44).

2.2.3. Grassroots Nation Branding

As a contemporary exercise in public diplomacy, nation branding has indisputably breathed new life into the discourses of nations and nationalism. In the pursuit of a favourable international
reputation and the corresponding potential for economic gain, nation branding has reinvigorated national hegemonic claims to power, authority, and legitimacy (Aronczyk, 2009). Thus, the “protections and provisions” offered by the nation-state have the potential to offer a salve to increasing cultural, economic, political, and moral fragility in a world that – while increasingly united in globalization – is also increasingly fraught with divisions and inequalities (Aronczyk, 2009, p. 291). To this end, the crux of the nation branding process is to bring together a variety of social actors with a stake in the final outcome to the nation branding planning table, including business owners, government parties, community actors, and citizens, thereby adopting a grassroots approach to “the creation of the new national identity” (Aronczyk, 2009, p. 293). The idea here is that a nation brand can only truly be successful when input from all stakeholders dovetails equally and fairly in the brand’s conceptualization process.

Several scholars have argued for grassroots movements and citizen-led communication in advancing public diplomacy (Copeland, 2009; Gudjonsson, 2005; Payne, 2009), as well as bottom-up, user-generated nation brands (Burmann, 2010; Zouganeli, Trihas, Antonaki & Kladou, 2012). In their discussion of ‘grassroots’ or ‘bottom-up’ approaches to nation branding in Finland, Hakala and Lemmetyinen (2011) advance the argument that place brands are better positioned to succeed if they are co-created in collaboration with a nation’s citizens. In other words, a nation brand should start by amassing the collective intelligence, personal stories, and creative input of a nation’s people.

Accordingly, since nation branding really and truly gained momentum as a toolkit for leveraging statesmanship, tourism scholars and destination managers have increasingly advocated for local residents’ input as an essential ingredient in the development of an effective nation brand (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, as cited in Zouganeli et al., 2012). In this respect, “buy-in” from residents or citizens is integral to realizing the nation branding aspiration of a ‘lived brand,’ given that if the projected image of a place does not align with the reality for tourists and foreign investors, “the gap between reality and induced image can create dissonance,” thereby compromising the success of the branding campaign in the long run (Zouganeli et al., 2012, p. 743). The positive influence of a grassroots approach has been documented in recent studies of nation branding success stories, such as Zemanek’s (2017) study of nation branding as an act of co-creation in Taiwan, Toronto’s collaborative grassroots approach to place branding (Warren & Dinnie, 2017), and the award-winning ‘Call a Swede’ campaign which relied upon 9.5 million Swedish citizens as voluntary brand ambassadors, which was described as a campaign that transcended tourism “to become a celebration of national pride” (Nudd, 2016, para. 5).
Yet, some scholars are critical of commissioning local citizens to do some of the ‘legwork’ in nation branding processes. Volcic and Andrejevic (2011) argue that relying on everyday citizens to help build and endorse a nation brand ultimately reveals the “ways in which nation branding serves as a technique of governance in the era of global capitalism” (p. 598). They argue that this logic of co-creation is a reflection of a neoliberal era of governmentality in which citizens must not only be architects of their own success, but they are also enlisted to ensure the success of the state. Sevin and Salcigil White (2011) advance three shortcomings to the approach of negotiating nation brand image amid both internal and external stakeholders, rather than promoting the pre-existing, ‘authentic’ image. First, branding through storytelling impedes the measurement process in its focus on changing attitudes versus galvanizing action. The intangible aspects of nation brand image are not easily quantifiable. Second, storytelling tactics cannot incorporate everyone’s voices. This draws attention to the political character of nation branding and the challenge of an all-encompassing approach. Third, locally-rooted “symbols and references” depicted in narratives of daily life do not necessarily translate to the global audience, ultimately facing the hurdle of being misunderstood or ignored altogether (Sevin & Salcigil White, 2011, p. 89).

Thus, grassroots approaches to nation-branding are undermined in two significant ways (Aronczyk, 2009). First, diffusing the ownership of a nation brand in a manner that positions citizen constituents as ‘brand co-owners’ repositions responsibility, pinning the brand’s successes or failures on citizens who “are enjoined to ‘live the brand’,” effectively releasing the branding consultants and governmental factions from bearing the burden of potential failure (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 297). Second, and perhaps most crucially, grassroots-style nation branding “purports to be about what it means to call oneself a national citizen” by suggesting that the pre-branded version of national identity was deficient in some way – in other words, neither robust, nor useful – and simply needed to be uncovered and enhanced, thereby mobilizing a new and improved form of nationalism, or “a “2.0” version of nationalism” (Aronczyk, 2009, p. 294).

In light of the alleged intention to tell stories about the ‘real Korea’ by reassigning the ownership of Korea from the KTO to the people, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the grassroots discussion of nation branding is significant to investigating to what extent Korean citizens feel engaged in and represented by the current tourism brand. To this end, understanding how Korean people perceive the endeavor to ‘boost’ the Korean image through nation branding by way of a tourism campaign is largely underexplored in academic literature.
2.2.4. Study Abroad: Effects on Cultural Identity

In consideration of the sample population that this thesis draws upon (see next chapter), this section explores the study abroad phenomenon in Korean society. Given that performances of national identity are contextual, they are even more likely to be influenced when this identity is performed for a ‘foreign’ audience. Study abroad, which has been documented as a form of modern Korean nationalism (Collins, 2009; Jang, 2017), is both a timely example of national identity performance and an opportunity to explore how Korean study abroad students may begin to question their own nation, culture, and identity by virtue of being exposed to cultural relativism.

In Korea, studying abroad can be understood as a form of what Bourdieu coined as ‘cultural capital’ (Park & Bae, 2009). For Koreans, studying abroad is an exercise of both education consumption and cultural consumption (Jang, 2017). Historically, English proficiency has been associated with contemporary, progressive, and ‘Western’ ideas, serving as an indicator of cosmopolitanism, as well as a linguistic mechanism for constructing modernity, most notably among younger generations (Lee, 2006a). English proficiency – as well as the ability to mix English and Korean (“Konglish”) – is thus intimately linked to Korean identity formation, as well as to both the realities and fantasies of contemporary ‘Koreanness’ (Lee, 2006a). Therefore, the motivation for Koreans to study abroad in English-speaking countries is directly connected to the country’s dominant ideology, which considers English proficiency to be a marker of social class (Park & Abelmann, 2004; Shin, 2013) and thus a vital job market skill and facilitator of upward social mobility (Park, 2009).

While study abroad experiences can lead to intensified feelings of ethnic identity and nationalistic pride (Collins, 2009), they are also accompanied by ambivalence related to feelings of “Koreanness” (Jang, 2017). On one hand, a sense of “transnational fatigue” spurs Korean students to form friendships with other Koreans, as these co-ethnic relationships enable a higher level of intimacy which cannot always be achieved with friends from other cultural backgrounds (Jang, 2017, p. 46). This pattern is discussed as a “discourse of self-segregation,” which is a common stereotype of Korean students, given their tendency to form intensive attachments with their in-group and generally stick together when studying abroad (Jang, 2017, p. 242).

On the other hand, some Koreans studying abroad display a curious insistence on avoiding other Koreans at all costs. The reasoning behind this is grounded in a determination to ‘get ahead’ and – more crucially – a determination to become as fluent in English as possible, thereby enhancing potential for success upon return to Korea (Jang, 2017). Fellow Koreans are not viewed as being
advantageous to expediting this ambition. This presents a peculiar dissonance between leaning on one’s in-group, while at once viewing it with a certain air of antipathy or suspicion. Similarly, Abelmann (2012) introduces the term “intra-ethnic othering” as the behaviour of making a concerted effort to distance oneself from ethnic in-group members (p. 1). Abelmann’s (2012) research on Korean international students in the United States highlights a tendency for students to critically reflect upon the insular nature of the Korean international student community wherein a disproportionate focus is placed on individual behaviour and perceived indiscretions. Abelmann’s (2012) research also reveals a heightened criticism of homogeneity, hierarchy, and small-mindedness amongst Koreans. Correspondingly, Korean study abroad students may initially relate to their host culture more, perhaps even becoming critical of the way things are done ‘back home.’ In the next phase, students may become weary of a perceived superficial relation to their host culture. However, with time, they may gain a more calibrated perspective on both their host culture and their home culture, particularly in relation to one another (Denney and Eckert, 2010).

Studying abroad has thus become a ubiquitous and influential feature of globalization, connecting individuals from diverse backgrounds across new and novel contexts (Young, Natrajan-Tyagi & Platt, 2015). The positive outcomes of study abroad experiences include expanded worldview and increased tolerance (Carnine, 2015), improved intercultural competency (Williams, 2005), and heightened self-awareness, a greater sense of concern for the well-being of others, and a broadened, more nuanced understanding of multinational issues (Spiering & Erickson, 2006). These personal transformations are further complemented by a drive to better understand one’s own identity as a result of a new sociocultural context and often altered perspective on one’s own lifeworld (Falk & Kanach, 2000). Perhaps more crucially, study abroad can serve as the impetus to more deeply experience and understand one’s own cultural identity (Milstein, 2005). According to Edward Hall (1959), the true challenge is not to make sense of the foreign culture, but rather, to better understand one’s own culture to which we often become blind, or we take it for granted. Hence, the experience of living in a foreign culture can invoke deeper reflection on one’s own culture in considering the way things are done ‘back home’ against a new sociocultural context. Subsequently, one may perceive their own cultural identity through a new lens. Accordingly, individuals who study abroad may find themselves in positions of identity negotiation as they engage in an ongoing exercise of perceiving, unpacking, negotiating, and reconciling the experience of multiple cultures with their personal conceptions of cultural identity, which is said to lead to a feeling of “living-in-between cultures” (Bhatia & Ram, 2004, p. 237).
2.3 The Korean Context: Nationalism, National Identity, and Modern Nationalism

2.3.1 Korean Nationalism and National Identity

The emergence of Korean nationalism and national identity has been documented by several scholars who have drawn upon certain pre-modern (ascriptive) conditions that have essentially ‘set the stage’ for their development, including a common bloodline and shared ancestry arising from the mythological story of Dangun, who was believed to have been the founder of the Korean people (Shin, 2006). While much of contemporary scholarship on the modern Korean nation and nationalism remains grounded in primordial orientations (Duncan 1998; Haboush, 2016; Lankov, 2006; Shin, 2006), some scholars challenge the primordial theory. Yi (2012) suggests that national identity formation is a “constructive process,” thus arguing that Korean ethnic identity is not a fixed notion or necessarily born of ancient times (p. 9). More crucially, in an era of globalization, identity is said to be “more mobile, free-floating, multiple and personal, increasingly mediated by cultural globalization in a contemporary world of movement and mobility, according to the (Western) discourse of identity and (post)modernity” (Kim, 2011, p. 64). Consequently, national identity is not grounded in a static sociocultural or political reality, but rather, as international and domestic politics intersect, national identity is subject to continuous reconfiguration (Greenfeld, as cited in Yi, 2012).

According to Carter Eckert, prior to the late 19th century, there was likely “little, if any, feeling of loyalty toward the abstract concept of ‘Korea’ as a nation-state, or toward fellow inhabitants of the peninsula as ‘Koreans’” (Eckert, as cited in Shin, 2006, p. 3). Korean national identity – while underpinned by a shared bloodline and ethnic homogeneity – must thus be considered against the confluence of certain historical events: “Indeed, a sense of ethnic unity has served Koreans in a variety of ways from being an ideology of anti-colonialism to that of national unification” (Shin, 2006, p. 3). The growth of Korean nationalism was formed in response to Japanese colonialism, suggesting that “until 1910, most [Korean] adults did not even know what a nation was” (Wells, as cited in Campbell, 2016, p. 16). In this respect, Bruce Cumings (2005) likens Korea’s pre-modern Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) to Gellner’s pre-nationalist agrarian society, suggesting that Joseon era peasants lived insular lives that were largely overwhelmed by an enduring sense of economic ‘survival mode’ and would therefore have been apathetic – if not entirely oblivious – to any notion of collective ethnic sentiment. Similarly, Henry Em cites the turbulent period of Japanese colonialism as a critical moment in the birth of the Korean nation via minjok (Em, as cited in Campbell, 2016). Minjok is a concept that “references and conflates Koreans as a race, nation and ethnic group” and is most commonly treated by contemporary Koreans as a shared
identity rooted in primordial, pre-national origins (Lee, 2012, p. 9). However, in spite of the empowering dimensions of *minjok*, some scholars suggest that Korea’s sense of national identity has been adversely and perhaps irreparably damaged by its colonial history (Kim, 2009; Yim; 2002).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that modern Korean nationalism, which emerged following Japanese colonization (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953), was rooted in a state-led development project towards economic stability (Lie, 1998). The growth of nationalism was intensified by *minjok* and nurturing Korean nationalistic sentiment thus facilitated a collective national ‘recuperation’ from the distresses of Japanese colonialism and the Korean War. The dictatorial era of Park Chung-Hee’s administration (1963-1979) relied upon the establishment and constant advancement of a collective pro-growth nationalism rooted in Western, capitalist ideologies, with the ultimate goal of opening Korea up to the world, earning global respect and recognition, and strategically reconfiguring Korea’s position within an increasingly competitive, neoliberal global infrastructure (Lie, 1998). Park’s modernization project, *Jokuk Kundaewha*, “envisioned a world of nation-states that were in fierce competition with one another and were ranked hierarchically” (Kim, as cited in Schwak, 2015b, para. 10). Successive presidential administrations have followed suit with President Kim Young-Sam’s *Segyehwa* (‘globalization policy’) in the nineties, and President Lee Myung-Bak’s Global Korea policy (2008-2013), which ultimately led to the realization of his nation branding strategy (Schwak, 2015a).

Modern Korean nationalism thus finds its roots in an urgent impetus for competitiveness ushered in by the state, with the government’s recent nation branding efforts effectively serving as an extension, or perhaps a culmination, of what has gradually become an embedded ideology since the end of the Korean War (Schwak, 2015a). Today, the Korean “economic miracle” is proudly credited to the steadfast ethnic solidarity of the Korean people, which is believed to have been made possible by the inherent solidarity of *minjok* (Seow, 2013, p. 4).

However, this study’s theoretical stance does not view Korean nationalism as an unwavering ideology fed into the Korean psyche by the political powers that be. Therefore, being cognizant of the limitations of the modernist approach, the intention is not to dismiss the pre-modern myths of the Korean nation as simply ‘false consciousness.’ Calhoun (1993) posits that modern nationalism is deeply rooted in “a rhetoric of pre-existing ethnicity” (p. 214), which is especially salient in consideration of *minjok*. Therefore, it is important to attempt to understand how national identity – as a discursive site – is constantly questioned, challenged, undermined, negotiated, and reaffirmed. While nations are to a considerable extent spoken, thought, and acted into existence by their citizens
in pursuit of fostering a sense of collective identity and civic loyalty, these discourses also provide an opportunity for identity to be questioned, deliberated, and negotiated. Therefore, this thesis will draw upon a more flexible framework that seeks to bridge pre-modern and modern elements of Korean nationalism by embedding modern Korean conceptions of nationalism within a pre-modern ethnic context grounded in Yi’s (2012) notion that modern Korean nationalism “did not “create” a nation,” but rather, “constructed and reconstructed a nationhood out of existing ethnic elements into a “modern” framework” (Yi, 2012, pp. 9-10).

The research design of this thesis thus pays due diligence to the limitations of the modernist approach by considering the specific experiences and everyday practices of Korean people in their conceptualizations and performances of national identity, as well as how these primordial ‘myths’ or Smith’s (1991) *ethnies* might be reproduced in discussions of the routine, lived experiences of Korean identity. The analysis of this study thus aims to understand to what extent their discourses may be socially constructed and rooted in larger historical, political, and economic processes, and in particular, the Korean state-led national branding project.

2.3.2 Modern Korean Nationalism

Over the course of history, Korea has been plagued by numerous invasions and occupations due in large part to its vulnerable geopolitical position. In spite of this difficult history, one of the most striking features of the Korean nation has been its continuous existence as one unified, ethnically homogenous state (Yim, 2002). Furthermore, despite the country’s division into North and South in 1945, a national consciousness of a nation unified by *minjok* (i.e. ethnicity) has persisted (Yim, 2002). During the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), Confucianism was a ruling ideology that governed everyday life. Due to its influence, Korea’s cultural ‘nationalism’ was grounded in virtues of compassion, ethical morality, self-improvement, and – perhaps most importantly – the prioritization of spirituality and scholarship over material life, commerce, and technology (Yim, 2002). Most notably, the legacy of Confucianism in Korea is evident in the enduring influence of harmony, propriety, morality, kinship, and loyalty, all of which have carried over into modern Korean life in one form or another. However, these features of traditional culture have also declined somewhat over time, with modern Korean nationalism adapting itself into a new, contemporary form due to the influence of three primary factors: (1) The residues of Japanese colonialism which sought to “eradicate and distort” Korean cultural identity, (2) An increasing heterogeneity between North and South Korea since the Korean War, and (3) The influence of Western culture, capitalism,
commercialism – mutually subsumed under the banner of modernization – that swept the nation for much of the second half of the 20th century, cumulatively producing a sense of “confusion and crisis” associated with Korean nationalism and cultural identity as a result of the upsurge in individualism and pleasure-seeking (Yim, 2002, p. 39).

This new and emerging form of specifically South Korean nationalism is documented at length by Emma Campbell (2015, 2016) who suggests that Korea’s modern nationalism is marked by “globalized cultural characteristics” (p. 483). This notion is echoed by Park and Abelmann (2004), who describe how the meaning of (South) Korean identity is in flux: “Increasingly, to be South Korean means to be South Korean in the world” (p. 650). Moreover, due to a growing population of non-Koreans in Korea – most notably English teachers, expatriates, migrant workers, and, increasingly, international students – multicultural dynamics have diversified a previously ethnically homogenous society. However, some scholars are unconvinced of this new “rhetoric of multiculturalism” in Korean society, arguing that it is “no more than surface deep and that a strong ethnic nationalism remains” (Campbell, 2015, p. 485). Nevertheless, where questions of an ethnically homogenous history are concerned, Campbell (2015) argues that younger generations are becoming increasingly uncertain, apathetic, or explicitly opposed to the idea of unification with their co-ethnics in the North, believing that the two Koreans have evolved into entirely different countries with completely incompatible values. Therefore, while some older Koreans with memories of pre-war Korea hope that the two countries may one day reunite, younger generations have mixed feelings and consider the prospect of reunification to be a burden: “We actually have no interest in reunification because we’re just too busy trying to earn money… build our status in the social system” (BBC, 2018). Consequently, younger generations of Koreans are actively adopting and performing a new globalized version of Korean nationalism shaped by increased global flows over the past few decades (Campbell, 2016):

“They [young Koreans] have grown up knowing only a democratic, economically prosperous and stable South Korea. These young people have no memory of relatives and family in the North, and no experience of the authoritarian era or the democracy movement. They are highly educated, well-travelled, technologically savvy, and fashion conscious, and their life experiences are different in almost every way to that of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations.” (p. 3).

Accordingly, Campbell (2016) contends that these younger generations of Koreans are the first generations of South Koreans who define uri nara (or ‘our nation’) as the Republic of Korea, or South
Korea, specifically. This new form of modern Korean nationalism is expressed through pride in recent measures of achievement, such as Korean modernity, world-class technological advancement, cosmopolitanism, and status, both tangible and symbolic.

As a result, ethnic ties or the concept of a common bloodline no longer appear to be defining factors in Korean nationalistic sentiments (Campbell, 2015; Lee, 2006b; Shin, 2006). Some scholars suggest a growing tendency for younger generations of Koreans to engage in a more passive form of ethnic nationalism that is marked by a pride in sports (Shin, 2006) or the ‘Korean Wave’ of popular culture (or Hallyu) that has transcended international borders and has been referred to as a form of “pop nationalism” (Joo, 2011, p. 489). Similarly, Chung and Choe (2008) contend that in recent times, national achievements related to history, culture, science, and technology have emerged as much greater sources of national pride, suggesting that this new form of Korean nationalism has manifested by a collective sense of accomplishment according to ‘global standards.’

There exists, however, an uneasy tension between traditional Confucian values and modern Korean sensibilities, particularly in light of the emphasis on cosmopolitanism and the “success at any cost” dogma that permeates modern Korean life (Hakimey & Yazdanifard, 2015, p. 445). Foucault’s work on neoliberal governmentality is salient here, given that a spirit of competitiveness and self-actualization initiated by Korea’s numerous globalization policies has, in turn, become central to Korean everyday life (Schwak, 2015a). Following liberation from Japanese colonialism in 1945, the notion of ‘competition’ primarily referred to inter-state competition, serving as an impetus for Korean development at a national level. However, following the 1997 Asian financial crisis, a fundamental shift to a new neoliberal age witnessed the emergence of a competition-driven society, which ultimately became the core ideology of the Korean mainstream agenda (Tikhonov, 2016). Accordingly, Foucault’s approach enables us to comprehend how competition can diffuse beyond political realms and infiltrate all aspects of social life in Korea (Schwak, 2015a).

To this end, competition between peers has become part and parcel of individual ambitions and aspirations in everyday Korean life. The motivation to study and achieve are not necessarily driven by a desire for personal fulfilment, but rather, by a profound yearning to achieve social recognition and in turn, economic advantage (Sleziak, 2013). This desire to attain increased status and recognition on the global stage is described as “typically Korean” (Schwak, 2014, p. 4). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this drive for competition to ‘make it’ is, in some ways, a modern articulation of the pre-modern Confucian doctrine emphasizing ongoing personal development and growth as virtues and means of gaining social recognition (Sleziak, 2013). Thus,
Campbell (2015) contends that a transformation in the essence, nuances, and contours of modern Korean nationalism are particularly evident amongst those individuals most acutely exposed to the forces of neoliberalism and globalization, namely, Korea’s younger generations. For them, identity is said to be defined against a model of “South Korean globalized cultural nationalism,” with Korean social identity being contingent upon internalizing the Korean state-led nation-building doctrine, also described as “demonstrating one’s market value” (Campbell, 2016, p. 498).

This theoretical framework has provided an overview of key scholarly debates and theories regarding the definitions and origins of the nation, national identity, nationalism, as well as how these concepts dovetail in the performance of national identity at micro and macro levels. Scholarly discussions concerning the functions of nation branding practices as a medium for nation-building were also reviewed, with a special emphasis on grassroots approaches to nation branding and the performance of Korean national identity through study abroad. Finally, a discussion of nationalism and national identity grounded specifically in the Korean context ensued, which revealed a new, modern discourse of Korean national identity anchored in a quotidian spirit of competition, cosmopolitanism, and technological advancement, as opposed to ethnic ties and pre-modern history. The concepts discussed in this section collectively form a comprehensive framework for identifying and interpreting themes that are revealed through both the visual analysis of the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ campaign videos and the discourse analysis of the in-depth interviews.
3. Research Design

This thesis draws on the results of a visual content analysis of a 2017 Korean tourism campaign, in tandem with the results of a discourse analysis of 14 in-depth interviews with Korean citizens. These two methods allowed the researcher to first identify and interpret the images of Korea being constructed by the tourism campaign, then to deconstruct the stories and observations expressed by participants in relation to their own experiences and understandings of Korean identity. The researcher was thus able to identify how Korean identity was negotiated in relation to the images of Korea presented within the videos and to what extent the results of the analyses reinforced and/or contradicted one another.

3.1 A Qualitative Approach

To reveal the implicit meaning behind the branded image of Korea and reveal how Koreans relate to this constructed image, this study opted for a qualitative approach rooted in phenomenology. Phenomenological research is a discipline that "aims to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4). This approach investigates the meaning of a concept or phenomenon as a lived experience of a specific group of people, thereby expounding how meaning arises from their life world stories (Creswell, 2013; Langdridge, 2007). Thus, given that the focus of hermeneutic phenomenological research endeavors to uncover the deeper meaning behind seemingly trivial or mundane details of human experience that may go unnoticed in our day-to-day lives (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991), this approach was appropriate to the overarching goal of the proposed course of study.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Visual Analysis

In order to answer RQ1, an initial Visual Discourse Analysis was conducted on the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip,’ the KTO’s official 2017 tourism video campaign. The videos were released on 25 July, 2017 in six different languages (English, Russian, Thai, Mandarin, Japanese, and Vietnamese) and are available for viewing on the official ‘Imagine Your Korea’ website (www.imagineyourkorea.com). Each video is 30 seconds long, for a total duration of four minutes. The ‘8 faces’ include ‘Adventure,’ ‘Documentary,’ ‘Fantasy,’ ‘Mystery,’ ‘Romance,’ ‘Signature,’ ‘Thriller,’ and ‘Trend.’ The video analysis was carried out prior to the in-depth interviews as the
insights gleaned from the visual data analysis were integral to leading an informed discussion of the campaign videos with each research participant as they reflected on what they had observed.

3.2.2 In-depth Interviews

To answer RQ2, data was collected through semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews that incorporated viewing of the campaign videos for context and points of reference. The strength of in-depth interviews lies in their potential to “understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1). Interviews were thus guided by a pre-determined interview topic list, albeit allowing for modifications during the interviews as required. This structured yet flexible approach allowed discussion to unfold in a coordinated yet organic manner (Hermanowicz, 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In keeping with the hermeneutical phenomenological approach, questions were focused on the lived experiences of interviewees, as well as on the ways in which they presented and discussed their personal narratives.

In the first part of the interview, participants discussed their experiences as Korean international students in Canada, as well as their personal conceptions of national identity, ‘Koreanness,’ and nationhood. Subsequently, participants viewed a selection of videos from the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ campaign. This served as the midway point of the interviews. Participants were asked to select and watch four of the eight campaign videos, although in almost all cases, participants elected to watch all eight videos out of personal curiosity. The second half of the interview asked participants to reflect on the images they had observed in the videos and how these images related to their own conceptions of ‘being Korean.’ During this phase of the interviews, the results of the visual analysis were used as a point of reference for the researcher, allowing the researcher to draw connections between how participants discussed their own conceptions of everyday Korean life and identity in relation to specific objects, locations, and activities within the videos, as well as how their discourses converged or diverged with conceptions of Korean identity and modern nationalism discussed in the theoretical framework.

3.2.3 Sample

Given that the goal of the ‘Imagine Your Korea’ brand is to capture the ‘real’ Korea and give ownership of the Korean image back to the people, this study was concerned with the opinions of ‘real’ Koreans in relation to the images in the campaign. The participant sample was thus composed
of 14 Korean citizens, of which 13 were temporarily residing in Canada and one had previously resided in Canada. In all cases, participants’ original purpose for moving to Canada was to study. All participants were Korean citizens and highly educated.

Participants who were currently studying or had previously studied in Canada were selected for a number of reasons. First, it must be acknowledged that given the researcher’s own limitations as a non-speaker of the Korean language, the sample had to draw upon Koreans with a solid command of the English language so that respondents would be able to comfortably and coherently express answers, thoughts, and opinions in relation to the interview questions.

Second, Koreans who had previously or were currently studying abroad were selected as a relevant population given that studying abroad has become a crucial component of modern Korean nationalism, which includes pride in increased transnational mobility and proficiency in English (Collins, 2009; Jang, 2017). Accordingly, studying abroad acts as a sort of ‘coming of age’ experience for younger generations of Koreans. Interviewing Korean citizens who had made the decision to study abroad in Canada thus offered the potential to gain more nuanced insights into conceptions of Korean national identity, especially in light of the influential role of study abroad as a form of cultural capital under the new notion of modern Korean nationalism among younger generations of Koreans. The participant sample thus offered perspectives of those Koreans who fall under the umbrella of what Campbell (2015, 2016) describes as the first generation of South Koreans who are ambitious, highly educated, and well-travelled, as previously discussed in the theoretical framework of this thesis. In consideration of the fact that participants were highly educated and had travelled abroad at least once, it was anticipated that participants would have a more nuanced perspective on Korean identity and everyday life as a result of the new perspectives gained from living in Canada.

Third, given the researcher’s existing connections to Koreans temporarily living in Canada, drawing upon an existing network facilitated the recruitment process (discussed in the following section). A detailed overview of participant details can be reviewed in Appendix A.

3.2.4 Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling. Three participants were recruited through the researcher’s social network (given her experience living in Korea). An additional three participants were recruited through connections made while studying Korean at the University of Victoria (UVIC). Another three participants were recruited through the UVIC Korean Language Club and the UVIC Global Community Facebook page.
Snowball sampling was then used to recruit five additional participants from beyond the researcher's own network that might otherwise be difficult to locate, which was ultimately beneficial to the breadth, depth, and quality of data (Babbie, 2008). In these cases, participants would recommend friends with whom the researcher could connect over KakaoTalk.¹

In phenomenological research, it is recommended that between 5 and 25 participants be interviewed in order to reach saturation, depending on the purpose of inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1989). According to Lewis and Ritchie (2003), 12 is considered to be a satisfactory sample size for in-depth interviews as it ensures the most potential to achieve a sufficient measure of diversity and richness of data from the sample. Therefore, to ensure adequate breadth of information to answer RQ1 and RQ2, 14 individuals were deemed a sufficient number of interviewees for the purpose of this thesis.

3.2.5 Interview Process

Interviews were conducted in English via KakaoTalk Video Call, Skype, and in-person. Although in-person interviews have traditionally been favoured in qualitative research for their ability to reveal the physical nuances of a conversation (Hermanowicz, 2002), video calling platforms are an increasingly accepted alternative when geographic dispersion poses an obstacle to data collection (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Janghorban, Latifnejad Roudsari & Taghipour, 2014). Participants whose geographic location did not allow in-person interviews were offered the options of Skype or KakaoTalk. One of the observed benefits to the interviews carried out via video call was that participants were in the comfort of their own homes, therefore in a seemingly more relaxed state, facilitated by a quiet and familiar environment, which may have encouraged a deeper sense of reflection. Interviews conducted in person, on the other hand, enabled a more palpable sense of

¹ KakaoTalk is a Korean social media app equivalent to WhatsApp or Facebook, albeit described as a localized approach to social technology developed specifically for the Korean context ("What is Kakao and why should you care?", 2017). Statistics show that virtually every smartphone user in Korea is actively using KakaoTalk, in addition to its overseas use proliferating among Korean communities worldwide (Yoon, 2016). Creating a KakaoTalk account was thus essential to the recruitment process, given the ubiquitous role of the KakaoTalk app in Korean daily life. Communication with participants prior to interviews took place entirely via KakaoTalk instant messaging.
rapport, which was facilitated by physical proximity and body language. In-person interviews were carried out in coffee shops in downtown Victoria and on the University of Victoria campus, with the exception of one interview that was carried out in a library study room. The interviews took place over the course of six weeks, with the first interview taking place on 15 March, 2018 and the final interviews taking place on 27 April, 2018. On average, the interviews lasted one hour, with the shortest interview lasting 50 minutes and the longest interview lasting 72 minutes.

Prior to each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the research and reviewed the contents of the participant consent form in detail prior to proceeding (Appendix B). Being mindful of the significance of ethical considerations and transparency required of qualitative interviews in academic research (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014), participants were made aware of their rights, as well as the fact that the interview was being audio recorded. An interview topic list was developed in order to reveal national identity negotiation in relation to Korean nation branding (see Appendix C). The topic list served as a rough guide, allowing for probing, follow-up questions, and discussion of emergent themes. This added flexibility to the trajectory of the conversations (Opdenakker, 2006; Thomas, 2011). This flexibility was also important in working together with participants to clarify and contextualize questions in the interview guide. This was a crucial step in establishing culturally-appropriate rapport with the participants (Hermanowicz, 2002), which proved especially significant given the role of jeong in Korean relationships. Jeong is characterized as a feeling of warmth, compassion, and kinship towards another, regardless of personal opinion, and is expected in all relationships (Yang, 2006). The researcher’s experience living in Korea, as well as her rudimentary knowledge of Korean language and cultural canons also helped in facilitating rapport.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Visual Discourse Analysis

Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA) is an approach for systematically analyzing a visual text as a language. It is grounded in traditions of semiotics, discourse analysis, and the grammar of visual design (Albers, 2007). A visual text is defined as “a structure of messages within which are embedded social conventions and/or perceptions, and which also present the discourse communities to which visual text maker identifies” (Albers, 2007, p 84). In other words, visual texts are informed by wider discourses – or a language for talking about or representing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic (Hall, as cited in Tonkiss, 2017, p. 478). More crucially, discourse cannot be reduced to simple language or speech acts, whether visual or verbal. Discourse is powerful in that
it establishes and controls systems of knowledge, authority, and practice in manners that are not immediately apparent and must be uncovered by the researcher.

Visual texts and contexts are dialectical: meaning is a result of an interaction between the signs composing the text and the context within which they are used (Albers, 2007; Machin and Mayr, 2012). As a method for studying structures within visual texts, how conventions are communicated, and “how certain social activities and social identities get played out in their production” (Albers, 2007, p. 83), VDA acknowledges that visual communication, together with spoken language, shapes and is shaped by society.

However, a great deal of the meaning contained within visual imagery lies at the implicit level, thereby serving existing power relations (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The study of meaning in images is thus grounded in the notion that words and images are containers of symbolism and meaning that extend beyond their surface manifestations, thereby producing and reproducing certain philosophies that collectively form wider systems of belief (Macnamara, 2005). Therefore, given that visual language is not immediately transparent and universally understood, but rather, a social practice that is open to a variety of possible meanings and interpretations dependent on sociocultural context, VDA enables an analytical approach to reading images that attempts to distill the multiple meanings produced by an overarching structural organization of images functioning as a language system (Saussure, as cited in Albers, 2007). VDA also aims to understand the social contexts within which these meanings are produced, as well as the possible influence of those contexts on meaning (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Accordingly, VDA most adequately allowed the researcher to carry out a thorough analysis of the interplay between the various visual resources used to create meaning within the campaign videos, as well as to analyze the meanings that arose from the combined use of particular communicative resources or artifacts.

3.3.2 Performing Visual Discourse Analysis

The media data in this project featured actors, landscapes, locales, and musical audio, but nearly no dialogue. The initial content analysis relied upon Machin and Mayr’s (2012) framework for conducting VDA, systematically applying its four steps to the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ campaign videos as follows:
A table consisting of four categories – images, sequence, music, narration/text – was created to record visual imagery for each of the eight videos. This analysis led to four major themes being identified, which were later compared and contrasted with the results of the interview data analysis in order to answer the research questions.

### 3.3.3 Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis (DA) is concerned with identifying the meanings produced through verbal and textual discourse (Tonkiss, 2017), thereby facilitating the empirical documentation of “the complex discursive activities through which respondents produce meaning” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 80). Therefore, DA places emphasis on revealing underlying systems of meaning, as well the crucial role of language in constructing and conveying those systems of meaning.
Hall (1997) describes discourse as a way of constructing knowledge about a topic, or a way of referring to that topic: “Discourse produces certain ways of talking about a topic or restricts other ways of talking about that topic. In that sense, discourse constructs the topic, defines and produces it” (p. 44). DA was thus a suitable method of analysis given the theoretical approach of this thesis, which is grounded in the notion of national identity as a discursive formation (Calhoun, 1997).

Given the phenomenological approach informing this project, DA allowed the researcher to reveal how a limited number of individuals experience the same phenomena (Creswell, 2013), as well as consider the mediating role that discourses play in this process. DA recommends a shift in focus from what is said at ‘face value’ to “exploring and explaining what is ‘underlying’ or to ‘distil’ essence, meaning, norms, orders, patterns, rules, [and] structures (…)” (Rapley, as cited in Silverman, 2011, p. 60). In other words, DA offers the potential to uncover the relationship between an individual’s discourse and their reality in a particular context. Accordingly, DA facilitated a richer, more nuanced interpretation of the lifeworld stories shared by respondents. Furthermore, the potential for gleaning broader meanings through DA by sifting carefully through the data, constantly comparing, and gradually identifying key themes was beneficial to “mapping out the construction of identities,” as necessitated by RQ2 (Bergström, Ekström & Boreus, 2017, p. 238).

### 3.3.4 Performing Discourse Analysis

In performing DA, the researcher attempts to unveil the dynamics of discourse that can generate contradictory or divergent meanings, albeit each “conditionally valid” (Widdowson, 1995, p. 159). DA was thus useful to make sense of participants’ discursive activities by considering not only their explicit meanings and meaning linkages, but also the ways in which participants contradicted themselves, the context in which specific articulations occurred, and what was alluded to, but not explicitly spoken. Furthermore, it was crucial to bear in mind the sociocultural and political climate in Korea and related events transpiring in and around the time that these interviews took place, as discussed in the introductory chapter. Therefore, in considering that discourse performances by respondents took place in a specific context, during a particularly historic snapshot in time throughout which momentous changes were taking place within Korean society, the mutable, inconsistent, and often subjective nature of national identity narratives had to be taken into account (Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2010).

Interview data was transcribed verbatim within a day or two of the interview having been conducted. All interviews were then read and re-read, and additional notes were taken during this
stage. Then, the analysis was performed by reading each transcript line-by-line with an eye to the five DA devices for opening up text, as suggested by Tonkiss (2017). These devices include: “(1) Identifying key themes and arguments, (2) Looking for association and variation, (3) Examining characteristics and agency, (4) Paying attention to emphasis and silences” (Tonkiss, 2017, p. 486).

Data was analyzed by paying careful attention to how participants used words – including figures of speech – and how they constructed arguments, as it is the use of language that creates linkages between past and present, thereby articulating lifeworlds into words by accusing, questioning, justifying, challenging, and expressing (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 169). An emphasis was placed on capturing and mapping out the dialectical nature of discourse, recognizing that spoken narrative is not straightforward, but has multiple – and potentially conflicting – perspectives. To this end, the strength of DA is grounded in its potential to bring these tensions to the forefront and probe the intricacies of discourse, which are very much symbolic of the complexities of social life. Most crucially, the tactics adopted in the analysis emerged organically based on close engagement with the data, as well as on the researcher’s previous personal experiences being immersed in Korean culture, rather than from a “textbook approach” (Tonkiss, 2017, p. 486).

Thus, when reading through the interviews, text was first selected based on its relevance to the research questions. The selected text was then organized into categories according to themes that had emerged from the conversations, which included modern Korean nationalism, ambivalence towards national identity, negotiating the images of Korea within the campaign, and legitimizing nation branding. The selected text was then analyzed through the lens of the theoretical framework, which guided the researcher’s attention to particular elements of the performance of national identity, such as invented traditions and shared history, ethnicity, characteristics, and values.

The process of DA facilitated a close engagement with the transcripts, thereby revealing both consistent and conflicting meanings, tensions, and variations in the data. In consideration of issues of credibility in qualitative research, the analysis moved back and forth between general conclusions and the text itself, being careful not to draw conclusions prematurely without taking all viewpoints into consideration (Silverman, 2011). As necessitated by DA, the analysis paid attention to “the variation that is found within a certain phenomenon,” therefore, in keeping with the two principles of analytic induction (Boeije, 2010), the researcher (1) Constantly compared the results of each new interview to previous interviews, and thus to discourses on the topic identified within previous academic literature; (2) Paid attention to deviant cases where data diverged from previous findings and/or did not fit the expectations based on previous theory.
3.3.5 Synthesis of Data in Mixed Methods

In mixed methods research, the integration of data can be accomplished by comparing, contrasting, building on, and/or embedding outcomes within one another, thereby enabling the researcher to make meaningful inferences and reach a balanced, informed conclusion (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). Data derived from the visual analysis and interviews was integrated and compared in order to formulate conclusions based on the interplay between Korea’s branded image and respondents’ conceptions of national identity and everyday Korean life in relation to this image. Since “discourses are studied in relation to various kinds of situation, such as interactional, social, communicative, political, historical and cultural frameworks, interpreted by the participants as relevant contexts” (Van Dijk, 2009, p. 192), the integration of the data was informed by the literature (and the researcher’s own experience) of the Korean sociocultural context. Thus, the most salient concepts were extracted from the data. Second, recurrent motifs across the data were identified, following which data was categorized according to reoccurring themes. Finally, findings were compared, contrasted, and integrated in order to answer RQ1 and RQ2.
4. Findings

4.1 Visual Analysis

Cosmopolitan, active, and youthful, yet steeped in history and flush with natural beauty – this is the Korea of the 21st century. The '8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip' official Korea tourism video campaign for 2017 (see Figure 1) presents a Korea that is vibrant, awash in neon lights, and pulsing with urban energy, yet at once tempered by bucolic vistas and pristine nature. Korea is presented as a dynamic and multi-dimensional nation, offering a unique blend of tradition and modernity, with ancient palaces flanked by modern skyscrapers. It is at once an exciting, pulsing, futuristic urban hub, and a serene getaway, offering sweeping panoramas of mountains and seas, ancient temples, and stately palaces. It is ‘different,’ yet familiar. In this respect – and perhaps most crucially – it is foreigner friendly and open to world, and thus appears to have accomplished the ultimate goal of the modernization project set forth following the end of the Korean War.

Figure 1 The ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ video campaign posters
An analysis of the eight videos was carried out frame-by-frame, paying attention to activities, music, sequence, colours, people, and locations. Particular focus was placed on discerning the features of ‘Koreanness’ highlighted within the ‘eight faces,’ and whether these features were indeed uniquely or ‘authentically’ Korean. Of the 34 locales featured from across all nine Korean provinces, nine are historic Korean locations unique to Korea, 11 are located in the capital city of Seoul, and eight are located on Jeju Island, commonly referred to as the “Hawaii of South Korea” (Gamel, 2017, para. 1). Evidence of a ‘Westernized’ Korea could be observed in seven of the eight videos, which included adventure sports and leisure activities, café culture, European pastries and desserts, modern architecture, designer shopping malls, and haute cuisine. While all the videos presented ‘authentic’ Korean locales, only four of the eight videos included pre-modern traditions, such as food sharing and Korean script writing, and historic landmarks, such as Buddhist temples and Joseon-era palaces.

4.1.1 Cosmopolitan Korea

The campaign presents a modern, trendy Korea – a Korea that is cosmopolitan, fashionable, cutting-edge, and has evidently outgrown its once ‘discounted’ image. For example, ‘Trend Korea’ features attractive, fashionably-dressed young Korean women enjoying Seoul’s European-influenced café and pastry culture in Yeonnam-dong. The latter is described by the Visit Korea website as a neighbourhood that was originally ‘normal,’ but has recently become a chic destination as artists and designers have moved into the area. Café culture is further highlighted in ‘Romance Korea,’ which is noteworthy, considering that café culture only began to flourish in Korea in the past couple of decades. In fact, the number of coffee shops in Korea tripled between 2011 and 2015, with Seoul currently boasting more than 17,000 coffee shops in a city of 10 million – arguably a testament to Korea’s penchant for following trends (Lee & Kim, 2016), as exemplified by the trend-themed video (see Figure 2.1). It is worth noting that the history of tea in Korea dates back thousands of years, although tea does not feature in any of the videos. However, where matters of authenticity are concerned, while coffee culture may have its roots in ‘trendiness,’ it has arguably metamorphosed into an ‘authentic’ component of modern Korean life.
Further emphasis is placed on Korea as an attractive shopping destination, highlighting the sleek, modern architecture of the Hanam Starfield mall, as well as Common Ground, Korea’s first pop-up shopping area constructed of old shipping containers, both of which were completed the year before the campaign was released. While these features offer a shopping experience like any other that is not necessarily unique to Korea, they also speak to a unique feature of modern Korean nationalism, which is pride in cosmopolitanism and meeting globally competitive standards (Campbell, 2016). This theme of cosmopolitanism is further showcased in the ‘Signature Korea’ video, which presents carefully curated plates of ‘Korean’ haute cuisine, albeit presented in a ‘Western’ fashion. Herein, one can observe a tension between the ‘authentic’ and the ‘generic,’ with what is captioned as “Korean table d’hote” being presented in a distinctly un-Korean fashion. In
fact, typical, everyday Korean food – arguably the ceremonial heart of Korean culture, given the distinctly Korean emphasis on eating and drinking together from one pot or sharing several dishes – features very briefly in only one video (‘Documentary Korea’) when a young, Caucasian, female tourist and her Korean dining companions enjoy Korean food cooked on a hotplate in the middle of the table in a pojangmacha, or ‘cart bar.’ Pojangmacha is a small, tented street stall and a common sight on Korean city streets, selling a variety of typical homecooked Korean dishes. Conversely, trendy Western and European-style food and drink – in this case under the guise of “Korean table d’hote” – are prominently featured in both ‘Trend Korea’ and ‘Signature Korea’ (See Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2 Western influences on Korean dining culture**

A selection of beverages and dishes featured in ‘Trend Korea’ and ‘Signature Korea’

Additionally, emphasis on modern architecture provides further evidence of a cosmopolitan, contemporary, and globally competitive Korea (see Figure 2.3). Architecture has been on the Korean government’s place and identity-shaping agenda since 2014, when Seoul mayor Park Won-Soon commissioned Seoul’s first “city architect” who vowed to “find Seoul’s identity” as a result of the uniformity and standardization that had overtaken Seoul’s cityscape (Jackson, 2017, para. 22). Some of this bespoke architecture is featured in the campaign, including Dongdaemun Design Plaza, a neo-futuristic landmark designed by world-renowned architect, Zaha Hadid, and nestled in the heart of a historic market area. It is worth noting that there is no evidence of Dongdaemun Market itself, a
large, bustling traditional market which dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and is a treasured Seoul landmark that is frequented by locals. The recently completed Lotte World Tower is featured in ‘Romance Korea’ as a date night location. It is the only locale featured in the eight videos to provide an additional emphasis in its caption wherein the fact that it is the 5th tallest tower in the world is highlighted below the location details. Sebitseom, a cluster of futuristic buildings along the banks of the Han River dubbed as ‘the world’s first water culture complex’ (“Sebitseom,” n.d.) is also featured lit up under a night sky. Aqua Planet, a recently completed, state-of-the-art aquarium facility is also showcased as evidence of Korea as a modern, cosmopolitan destination. Most notably, the inclusion of recently built Dongdaemun Design Plaza in ‘Signature Korea’ alongside pre-modern, Joseon-era Gwanghwamun Gate and Changdeokgung Palace in Seoul – all under the label of ‘Signature Korea’ – suggests an ambition to portray Korea as a country that is characterized by its unique position of straddling history and modernity.

**Figure 2.3 Contemporary architecture of cosmopolitan Korea**

Modern architecture featured in ‘Trend Korea,’ ‘Romance Korea,’ and ‘Signature Korea’

4.1.2 Active Korea

One of the most remarkable features of the eight videos is the use of vibrant colours and rapid transitions from one locale or activity to another, seemingly metaphoric for the infinite ways in which one can imagine Korea. The videos thus create a nuanced portrayal of all that Korea has to
offer as a destination by shuffling between urban and rural, activity and tranquility, and old and new. Therefore, beyond being active in the physical sense, Korea is also presented as a dynamic place – a place that rapidly changes while balancing tradition with modernity. This dynamism is echoed by an emphasis on physical activities, which appear in five of the eight videos (see Figure 2.4). Against the backdrop of a variety of beautiful Korean locations spanning both urban and rural settings, featured activities include surfing, flyboarding, ziplining, roller coaster riding, cycling, buggy car riding, cave exploring, moped riding, and urban cycling. These ‘Western’-style activities provide an interesting juxtaposition against more ‘traditional’ Korean activities presented in the videos, such as meditation and hangeul (Korean) script writing, which are invariably depicted as more slow-paced and tranquil, underscoring a distinct boundary between a passive, pre-modern Korea and the active present.

There are also comparatively less ‘authentic’ Korean traditions presented within the videos relative to the number of generic physical activities featured, which are not unique to Korea. Herein, one can observe a clear distinction between the ‘generic’ and the ‘authentic’ – or the new, more ‘Westernized’ Korea and the old, traditional Korea – with a clear emphasis placed upon connoting youthfulness, activeness, and potential for adventure.

**Figure 2.4 Active Korea**

A selection of activities featured in ‘Adventure Korea’ and ‘Thriller Korea’
4.1.3 Youthful Korea

A clear emphasis on the youthfulness of Korea was observed within the campaign videos, which is denoted by the use of young actors and the incorporation of physical activities typically popular with younger demographics, as discussed in the previous section. Of the approximately 40 actors featured in the videos, only three appeared to be over the age of 40 – a Korean monk and Caucasian couple posing as tourists with their young son – with the majority of the actors appearing to be in their twenties and thirties (see Figure 2.5). In addition, each video features prominent Korean drama actor, Lee Jong Suk, 28, who was the 2017 Korea Tourism Honorary Ambassador. Using a famous Korean drama actor further displays evidence of an ambition on the part of the videos to appeal to a younger audience, given the average Korean drama audience is in their teens and twenties. This also speaks to a key component of modern Korean nationalism, which is pride in Korean cultural exports, such as K-pop and K-dramas (Joo, 2011).

Figure 2.5 Youthful Korea

Similarly, Romance Korea is dedicated to young couples in love – a notion that is often exemplified by typical Korean drama storylines. Against the backdrop of Jumunjin Beach, Cape Seopjikoji, Aqua Planet, Aewol Café, and Lotte World Tower, young couples are shown enjoying romantic outings together (see Figure 2.6). Whether this romance is a reality is heavily debatable, given Korea’s current gender inequality woes and plummeting marriage rate, which hit a historic low
in 2017 (Keating & Kwon, 2018). Nevertheless, Korea has been documented as a country that is in love with the idea of fairy-tale romance, with entire holidays dedicated to couples in love (Lowry, 2013), which is aptly represented in ‘Romance Korea.’ It is worth mentioning that Aewol Café is owned by one of Korea’s most famous K-pop exports, G-Dragon of Big Bang – one of the original K-pop groups to gain widespread international success. The ultramodern café that incorporates Jeju Island-sourced volcanic rock and reflective glass – a tangible example of tradition meeting modernity – has been recognized in the media for attracting K-pop tourism, as well as architecture aficionados.

Figure 2.6 Romantic Korea
Young couples and romantic outings featured in ‘Romance Korea’

Additional evidence of a youthful take on the eight faces of Korea can be discerned from the campaign’s use of hashtags alongside each location caption. The use of hashtags alludes to ‘Instagrammable moments,’ with Instagram being a social media network with a user base that is generally favoured with teenagers and young adults. This echoes the selfie culture of Korea, which can be linked to modern Korean nationalism as a public display of cultural capital and further suggests that the campaign videos are targeted at a younger demographic that actively uses Instagram. Given this emphasis on youth throughout the videos, the silence regarding older generations must be acknowledged. Of course, the campaign is geared towards foreigners, but it is a specific type of foreigner – a foreigner that is young, cosmopolitan, and active. Moreover, appealing
to younger generations by incorporating young Korean actors also implies what Campbell (2016) referred to as the first generation of South Koreans. Whereas previous tourism campaigns that focused much more on the pre-modern ‘traditional’ aspects of Korean culture failed, this campaign is veering off the traditional course and focusing instead on what the ‘new Korea’ is all about. This could be a reflection of the way that Korea wants foreigners to see it, but also how Korea wants to see itself: as South Korea, a young, modern, competitive nation in the world that meets Western standards and is worth visiting. In this respect, it can be argued that the videos offer a glimpse of a new Korean reality, but also of a Korean aspiration.

4.1.4 Historic Korea

In spite of the more generic elements presented within the campaign videos, there is evidence of a more ‘traditional’ Korea (see Figure 2.7), most notably in ‘Mystery Korea’ and ‘Signature Korea,’ as well as in the musical soundtrack to ‘Signature Korea,’ which features the Gayageum, a traditional Korean stringed instrument and time-honoured art form that pre-dates modernity. These videos highlight Korea’s Buddhist history, presenting the Maisan Pagodas, a Korean Buddhist temple complex built in the late 1800s, as well as Haeinsa Temple, which dates back to 802 and houses the Tripitaka Koreana, a complete collection of Buddhist scriptures carved onto over 80,000 wooden printing blocks in the 13th century (“Haeinsa,” n.d.). Donggung Palace and Cheomseongdae, the oldest existing astrological observatory in Asia dating back to the 7th century (“Cheomseongdae,” n.d.), are also featured. According to UNESCO, Gyeongju is considered a key site of ancient Korean history as the city served as the capital during the immensely prosperous Silla dynasty from 57 BC to 935 AD (“Gyeongju Historic Area,” n.d.). It is worth noting, however, that while Buddhism – which was introduced to Korea by the Chinese – flourished during the Goryo dynasty from 918 to 1392, it was later replaced by a neo-Confucian ideology and Buddhists became a persecuted faction of society for 500 years (“History of Buddhism in Korea,” n.d.). Interestingly, while Buddhism has a contentious history in Korea, Buddhist temple stays, as captured within the campaign video, have been promoted to tourists since 2001 as part of a special tourism initiative to promote Korea’s Buddhist heritage to tourists (Warren, 2017). Therefore, while the contentious history of Buddhism in Korea is obscured for foreign consumption, in keeping with criticisms of nation branding (Kaneva, 2011), this feature also suggests Korea’s pre-modern Buddhist history to be a source of modern national pride, despite its divisive history.
Figure 2.7 Historic Korea

Historic sites featured in ‘Mystery Korea’ and ‘Signature Korea’

In another scene, a Caucasian couple and their young son learn how to paint Korean hangeul script with an elderly monk. This ‘traditional’ aspect of Korea has historically served as a tremendous source of national pride and patriotism, even having its own national holiday. In 1443, during the golden age of Korea’s last and longest imperial era, known as the Joseon Dynasty, King Sejong – nowadays widely regarded as a Korean hero – commissioned the invention of hangeul, a bespoke language system (Babe, 2017). Previously, the Korean kingdom lacked a script of its own and borrowed extensively from the Chinese character system. Hangeul is thus considered to be a scientific and cultural legacy of the Joseon Dynasty, a symbol of independence, and a powerful unifier of the Korean people (Babe, 2017). Therefore, despite the English-fever that has dominated Korean society in recent years with an extraordinarily high premium placed on English proficiency, the image presented in the campaign suggests that the Korean language is also worth learning.

Hanok, which are traditional Korean homes dating back to the 14th century that served as the heart of Korean social life for 600 years (Kilburn, 2016), are also featured in the videos. However, the reality is that there are hardly any hanok remaining due to Korea’s compressed modernization process during which a national obsession with meeting ‘global standards’ led to hanok being demolished and replaced with nondescript high-rise buildings in order to accommodate mushrooming urban populations and economic growth following the Korean War (McDonald,
Today, some ask if the “apart-ization” is costing Korea its “authentic Koreanness,” with hanok continuously being demolished in favour of glitzy apartment buildings (Jackson, 2017, para. 6), whereas the hanok that do remain – such as the hanok featured in Ikseon-dong and Gyeongju Hanok Village within the campaign videos – have become tourist attractions branded as ‘historic districts,’ rather than living, breathing communities. Like many tourist attractions, these historic districts are “caricatures” of ‘authentic’ neighbourhoods conceived for the tourist imaginary, albeit not actually representative of how ‘real Koreans’ live (Jackson, 2017, para. 11).

In summary, four themes emerged from the visual analysis – cosmopolitan, active, youthful, and historic – constructing a Korea that is indeed a modern, ‘Westernized’ nation where foreigners can engage in familiar activities. At the same time, the clips also recovered Korea’s long history, featuring historical sites and traditions that date back to antiquity. In consideration of past branding campaigns which were criticized for being ill-conceived and lacking clear vision to remedy Korea’s lack of (coherent) international image (Williamson, 2012), the results of the visual analysis suggest that through the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ videos, the ‘Imagine Your Korea’ brand has made an attempt to provide foreign audiences with a varied palette to conjure many ideas of what Korea might be all about, albeit with a contemporary, Western-friendly veneer. This deliberate tendency to pander to the ‘West’ is indeed a common criticism of nation branding (Aronczyk, 2009; Baker, 2009; Roy, 2007; Volcic, 2008), which will be discussed in further detail in the following sections.

4.2 Interview Results

The 14 Korean respondents who had come to Canada to study English and/or complete higher education had difficulty in defining Korean identity. Yet, they were comfortable articulating Korea and ‘Koreanness’ when asked to identify the biggest differences between life in Canada and in Korea, as well as how they would present Korea to a foreigner. In this case, their answers were quite homogeneous, suggesting they drew from a common discourse of Korean identity. Subsequently, when they discussed the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ video campaign, participants reflected upon the videos vis-à-vis their own experiences of living in Korea, with their discourses revealing how the image of Korea in the videos and their lived experiences of everyday Korean life converged to a limited degree, but largely diverged from one another.

Finally, the integration of the results of the visual analysis and the interview discourse analysis reveals that in spite of a general tendency to disagree with or challenge the content of the videos, participants discussed their experiences in similar ways to each other. This suggests that there
is a common perception of the experience of being Korean, as well as a shared perception that Korea needs nation branding that is grounded in a post-colonial Korean identity.

4.2.1 The Chimera of Korean Identity

When asked to define Korean identity, ‘Koreanness,’ or the personal meaning of being Korean, three themes emerged from participants’ discourse: (1) Difficulty in articulating ‘being Korean,’ (2) Community belonging, and (3) The influence of pre-modern and modern history on modern identity.

Most participants struggled to answer the question of defining ‘Korean identity’ directly, with participants remarking on the question’s difficulty or abstractness. David, 29, could not answer altogether, admitting that he had never thought about Korean identity before because being Korean was just normal to him, therefore not something that necessitates contemplation. What these reactions seem to suggest is that we can become blind to our own ethnic identity or take it for granted (Hall, 1959). It is worth noting that several participants were initially reticent to participate in the interview, admitting that the subject of Korean identity seemed very complex. Some respondents suggested that an ‘expert’s opinion’ should be sought out instead, such as that of a professor. These reactions recall Wodak’s (1999) argument that a collectively “homogenous 'pure' identity” is a façade (p. 16). Individuals are hybrids whose identities are layered and idiosyncratic. Therefore, attempting to discuss national identity in broad strokes neglects the sociocultural resources, networks, and identification categories that individuals draw upon in divergent ways, depending on the context in which the discourse takes place (Wodak, 1999). This reinforces the idea that the boundaries of a nation and its perceived ‘national identity’ are poorly defined and do not exist in a vacuum.

For some, the experience of studying in Canada, however, had provoked reflection on cultural identity in relation to their experiences in a new sociocultural context. For example, Joong-Ki, 24, identified ‘being Korean’ as a sense of “belonging-ness” or “one-ness” as a result of Koreans helping other Koreans while abroad, whereas Noah, 36, suggested that being Korean meant feeling like a stranger in Canada for lack of ethnic community. This was echoed by Hyolin, 24, who initially cited “mom” as what makes a Korean ‘Korean,’ but later in her discourse changed her mind and declared that “Korean people” make her Korean, therefore belonging to a group with shared culture, ethnicity, and traditions (Lavi, 2013; Smith, 1999).

Some participants drew upon the role of modern Korean history in national identity-shaping. Kate, 34, conceded that ‘being Korean’ is a complicated matter based on Korea’s modern history,
alluding to a muddled, contested sense of identity as a result of Japanese colonization and war. The same sentiment was shared by Mia, 32, who described being Korean as “a sacrifice” – especially for females – based on “many bad things from history or from family,” admitting that she has often wished she could change her “nationality or sometimes blood.” Grace, 44, who described her Korean identity as language, being a “people person” who cares deeply about the welfare of others, and complaining a lot, was able to provide further insight on why Korean identity seemed to be such an elusive concept to define, also drawing upon recent history and political power relations. Grace explained that previous post-war governments “brainwashed” Korean citizens with an ideology of one homogenous nation with one language and one political systems (in opposition to North Korea) where deviating from the mainstream was seen as a form of evil and that this ideology has been internalized by even the youngest Korean generations because the mindset has been passed down from their parents:

“That’s why, oh, what is your Korean identity? Yeah. Huh? What is that? Korea is just Korea. Well, we use the same language and, you know, similar food. Although, Korea – although it’s a small country – it’s full of diversity.”

What some of these identity struggles reveal is that some Koreans do indeed relate their identity to shared ethnicity and common bloodline; however, they also reinforce the notion of national identity as a “chimera” that fails to tease out the complex and contradictory processes that give shape to nationhood (Malesevic, 2011, p. 272), with modern Korean identity being fraught with residual fractures and insecurities as a result of Japanese colonization, which attempted to expunge Korean identity from the peninsula. This echoes previous literature which has deliberated whether Japanese colonialism may have adversely affected modern Korean identity in irreversible ways (Kim, 2009; Yim; 2002). Moreover, acknowledging the identity-shaping functions of political regimes in modern history also reinforces the postmodern approach to nationalism, which sees modernity as a catalyst for the invention of nations and nationalism (Gellner, 1964; Calhoun 1997).

This modernist influence on identity was exemplified by some participants who drew upon elements of modern Korean nationalism in defining ‘being Korean.’ Yuna, 28, answered the question of defining Korean identity without hesitation, suggesting that being Korean meant taking a lot of selfies, which offers evidence of a connection between Korean identity and modern Korean nationalism, of which public displays of cultural capital are part and parcel, given the focus on tangible and symbolic status (Campbell, 2016). Similarly, Autumn, 23, identified the use of ‘Konglish’ which only Koreans can understand as an indicator of Korean identity – arguably a result
of a hybrid ‘Westernized’ Korean identity – which links back to previous research which has revealed English proficiency and the mixing of Korean with English as modern Korean identity markers (Lee, 2006a). However, a few questions later, Yuna asked to return to the definition of Korean identity and asked what others had responded – seemingly questioning her own answer – alluding at once to the group-think mentality of the Korean people, as well as the illusory nature of defining Korean identity. She subsequently admitted that she had never thought about her Korean identity before.

This seemingly collective sense of difficulty in defining Korean identity can be better understood against Calhoun’s (1997) notion of national identity as a ‘discursive formation’ – a highly personal way of talking about identity that does not necessarily conform to any universally understood, finite definition. Notably, when asked what all Koreans have in common, participants readily drew upon more homogenous discourses of ‘Koreanness,’ describing Korean commonalities as being polite, social, and outspoken, with the most frequently cited ‘shared characteristic’ being diligence or work ethic, with Korean identity more easily expressed on a micro versus a macro level. However, while participants readily drew upon a universal discourse, they also occasionally pulled away from that discourse by questioning both the discourse and their own conceptualizations of Korean identity, thereby reinforcing Calhoun’s (1997) argument that the discursive formation of national identity is mutable, fraught with tensions and contradictions, and highly contextual. Significantly, context and discourse rely upon one another: while context influences discourse, discourse also influences context. Therefore, the identity-shaping components of a perceived ‘nationalism’ cannot be defined in a uniform, one-dimensional way.

The results suggest that while official discourses have not discounted sociocultural aspects that pre-date the modern Korean state, including use of honorifics (i.e. politeness) and collectivism, they have, to a considerable extent, established an ideological identity of the ‘hard-working Korean,’ which Korean people have internalized. Consistent with the modernist stance on nationalism, these findings suggest that the modern state has selected a few of these pre-modern dynamics and traditions to be rearticulated for a modern framework and claimed as uniquely ‘Korean.’

4.2.2 Reflecting on Korea through the Lens of Study Abroad

Although many participants struggled to articulate ‘Korean identity,’ they could more readily reflect upon and define the quintessential components of modern Korean life in relation to their experiences in Canada. The experience of studying abroad helped them crystallize a definition of
Korean life by drawing comparisons with Canadian life. Many respondents drew upon elements of modern Korean nationalism (Campbell, 2015, 2016; Shin, 2006), highlighting Korea as a country with world-famous technology and automotive companies, K-pop, extremely fast Internet, unique cosmetics and fashions that even other Asian countries are following, sporting achievements, modern conveniences, and amazing shopping that you cannot find in Canada. Grace summarized these elements of modern Korean nationalism by presenting Korea as a dynamic country where everything changes quickly and people value “new this, new that.” Only three participants mentioned historical aspects of Korea: David mentioned its long history, Yuna drew pride from Korea’s traditional clothing (hanibok) and traditional buildings (hanok), and Mia described Korea as a place where the past and present coexist – a dynamic detected in the visual analysis. The most common thread connecting all of their discourses was a distinctive pride in all that Korea has managed to achieve over such a short period as a result of *palli palli* culture and their collective diligence.

*palli palli*, which is described as a Korean “cultural phenomenon” and translates literally as ‘quickly, quickly,’ is a cultural script of speed and efficiency that is woven into the fabric of Korean daily life, serving as one of the most frequently used words to describe both personal and professional life (Vegdahl & Hur, as cited in Ramesh, Cao, Kim, Mohan & James, 2017). The concept of *palli palli* emerged from Korea’s complicated history of multiple invasions, colonization, difficult geopolitical circumstances, and post-war pro-growth economic development policies (Rowley & Bae, 2004). In recent history, *palli palli* gained momentum alongside government globalization policies which set a high precedent for Korean citizens to band together and work diligently in order to salvage and restore the Korean nation according to ‘Western’ standards (Choi, 2016). However, the ramifications of this hyper-compressed modernity and the diligence that it necessitated also proved to be points of conflict in participants’ discourse, underscoring the dialectical nature of discourse in which spoken narrative is not straightforward, but has multiple and often conflicting perspectives.

### 4.2.3 *Palli Palli* as the Contentious Script of Modern Korean Life

An interesting tension arose when respondents portrayed Korea in a positive light, describing it as an awesome, busy place with incredible nightlife where you can do many things, or a great place to live due to the sheer ubiquity of modern, efficient services and amenities, but at once seemed ambivalent about their country’s worth as a destination for foreigners. Theo, 25, presented
Korea as an interesting country to visit, but to think of it as a stopover on the way to your final destination of China or Japan “because I’ve been to many places in Korea and I don’t really feel like it's worthy.” Taemin, 44, who admitted to liking Canada “too much,” echoed this sentiment, presenting Korea as not a very good place to live, but “you can visit Korea… if you want.” These remarks are consistent with previous studies which have spoken to a certain degree of inferiority complex, or a tendency for Koreans to undervalue their own worth (Lee, 2011; Schwak, 2014), but also suggests that respondents were using their experiences in Canada (or the ‘West’) as a point of reference, as well as a standard against which to compare Korea. This ambivalence towards Korea as both a place to live and visit is consistent with previous studies suggesting that study abroad provokes individuals to assume a more critical stance on their home country and culture, when filtered through a new sociocultural context (Denney and Eckert, 2010; Falk & Kanach, 2000).

All participants unequivocally emphasized that life in Canada was extremely different from life in Korea, with the number one difference being cited as the pace of life and the lack of *palli palli* mentality that permeates modern Korean life. However, while some participants cited an appreciation for the *palli palli* mentality due to the modern conveniences that it has afforded day-to-day Korean life, all participants were ultimately critical of *palli palli* for contributing to a climate of fierce competition among Koreans, further aggravated by the current issue with widespread youth unemployment facing highly educated young Koreans. Despite the 20-year age gap between the oldest and youngest participants, sentiments pertaining to the competitiveness of everyday Korean life did not vary. Theo described Korea as capitalistic, materialistic, and competitive, conditions that are aided and abetted by the *palli palli* approach to daily life. Taemin described Korea as a country that does not give second chances and discards people who cannot keep up. This was echoed by Ryan, 24, who expressed his initial shock at Canadians going to college or university in their 30s, which compelled him to re-evaluate the high premium placed on living so “aggressively” and “competitively” in Korean society, seeing this more flexible life path as a good thing:

“Yeah, I think it’s really good! We can like focus on ourselves. And then, what we want to do. We can just like… breathe. We can just live like a human. That’s the good thing, I guess. Yeah. Yeah, like a human… like a real human. When I was in Korea, I felt like… I’m kind of [a] machine sometimes.”

The unanimous agreement regarding *palli palli* life and the overwhelming emphasis on working hard suggests that there is indeed a dominant discourse that is common to Koreans grounded in the state-led modernization project and its hardworking doctrine (Schwak, 2015a; Tikhonov, 2016). However,
for many participants, their everyday experiences – especially measured against their experiences abroad – have prompted them to question, challenge, and pull away from that official discourse. Although this does not necessarily imply that their experiences have the power to undermine the official discourse, their experiences are certainly filtered through the official discourse, with their experiences in Canada confirming that an official discourse exists and must be questioned.

### 4.2.4 The Collective, Hard-working Korean as a Performance of National Identity

This spirit of competitiveness further contributed to how participants described in-group relations and Korean identity. Although participants had struggled to articulate Korean identity, per-se, when asked what all Koreans have in common or how living in Canada had changed their perceptions of Korea or Korean identity, many participants cited Koreans as being polite, collectively-inclined, and hard-working. This indicates how defining identity can become more meaningful when discussed in relation to a perceived ‘other’ (Wodak, 1999). Politeness and collectivity are indeed examples of ‘invented traditions’ that extend back to the influence of Confucianism from Korea’s pre-modern history. The emphasis on Koreans being hard-working, on the other hand, is very much representative of a new, contemporary discourse enforced by the state, despite the country no longer being in ‘developing mode.’ Taemin explained that despite Korea’s great successes and world-class companies, the mindset of society is still in the past or in “the first stage of development,” placing precedence on working hard together over personal life. This perceived ‘lagging’ mindset is likely a symptom of Korea’s hyper-compressed development.

Group work ethic is closely related to the Korean collectivist mentality, which many participants cited as being fostered by jeong. Deeply entrenched in Korean culture, jeong refers to a feeling of deep affection, compassion, and empathy towards others, or in other words, an unspoken emotional and psychological bond that arises from shared experiences (Ramesh et al., 2017). Accordingly, jeong forms the root of all relationships in Korea and can be viewed as a form of social capital that facilitates and preserves cohesion and harmony amongst in-group members. More crucially, Koreans believe that by nurturing jeong, common goals can be achieved and adversities can be overcome through their collective efforts (Chung, n.d.). Jeong can be linked to Billig’s (1995) modernist notion of a ritualistic practice of social cohesion as an indicator of nationalism.

As an example, several participants expressed pride in recent mass peaceful protests which saw millions of Koreans take to the streets, ultimately leading to the impeachment of former president Park Geun Hye, which were facilitated by jeong and the collectivist spirit of the Korean
people. Arguably, this protest – as a public performance of national identity at the macro level – is contingent upon a coherent private sense of identity (Gill, 2005), as well as a mutual understanding of an imagined political community (Anderson, 1983) that is worth fighting for. According to Kate and Connor (26), Koreans know how to fight for their democracy, even though they have never met. In reflecting on his experiences with Canadians, Ryan described Koreans as being “warm people” and really good at “doing [things] together” and always “moving together.” As James, 39, explained, Koreans believe that the social system is prioritized over and above each individual person: “Koreans think that if our social system dies, every individual person must die.” This notion of collectivism reinforced by jeong is indeed an example of an imagined community wherein a tradition of social cohesion ties ethnic Koreans together as one invented community.

However, while every participant cited the Korean spirit of sharing, warm-heartedness, and being good at doing things together as distinctly Korean features, their discourse revealed a tension between this pre-modern collectivism and more recent capitalist influences. As Kate explained, Korea was once a very poor country and bereft of resources to sell:

“So, we just start from the crunch and make this [modernization] happen and it makes me proud. It’s kind of sad [though], because on the contrary, we have to work really, really hard to keep up our economy with this, but that makes me really proud.”

This perspective was echoed by many respondents, who expressed pride in Korea’s rapid development, its global reputation for its soft culture, and for being a technological powerhouse. Yet, participants were at once critical of how hard Koreans believe they must push themselves to keep up this momentum, which has also somehow pitted Koreans against one another in the everyday scramble for achievement and social status. This idea was aptly summarized by Theo:

“Korea is one of the most capitalistic, or one of the most materialistic countries. And then we compete. We are so much jammed in that small country and we really are kinda like harsh to each other somehow. Even though, it doesn't mean that all Koreans are bad to each other, but basically, in the very root of our mind, we are basically having some kind of mind that we can't trust other people. We can't trust other Koreans. We have that, kinda like, deep consciousness inside. And I really kinda don't like it. (...) I think [that] kind of mentality is basically rooting from those economic, social situations. Because obviously, [for] Korean younger generations, unemployment is super high.”

Accordingly, an uneasy tension emerges between those qualities deemed cherished, uniquely Korean, such as jeong and collectivism – which, in fact, played a role in facilitating the ‘hard-working’ doctrine
– and the pressure to be a diligent Korean, compete with one another, and care about what other people think of you. As Taemin explained, Korean in-group relations are characterized by an unspoken “subline” marked by public displays of camaraderie, yet private ambitions of realizing success beyond your in-group. Theo echoed this notion suggesting that jeong has somehow become threatened by capitalism, conceding that being Korean means becoming “distorted somehow” and having to “pretend a lot” and “really care about other people, other people's psyche, other people's thinking about yourself. You get to care about your own status. Your own way of talking. And also, you become quite competitive, too.” This opinion was reiterated by Kate, who disclosed that learning to care about what other people think about you is “kind of our [Korean] identity.” This ambivalence towards Korean identity was further emphasized by Taemin who laughed sardonically in response to the question, subsequently stressing that Koreans are taught in school to be proud of their identity, but the daily reality is quite different, so when asked what makes a Korean, “I don't know anything.” He went on to explain that although Koreans are taught to be proud of their identity and their “great country,” any sense of pride in Korea or in being Korean is obfuscated by being conditioned to believe that you should always be the best in your group: “So, you are very confused. (...) We believe that the world is always competitive. It’s like a jungle. And we should be the fittest in the survival – so then you forget everything about the greatness of Korea.”

Participants’ discourses provide an example of the uneasy tension between Korea’s historically collective roots and the push towards globalization by way of capitalism, endorsed by successive governments since the first wave of economic nationalism (Schwak, 2015a). In turn, this brings some critical attention to the anxieties of modern Korean society that is underpinned by intense competition and unease about survival among citizens. This demonstrates how the dynamics of global aspirations and capitalist ideologies at the institutional level can filter down to local actors, as well as how local actors become assimilated into global institutions, as well as state-level practices and imaginaries, despite a degree of ambivalence towards these processes on a personal level.

4.2.5 Imaginary Korea: Apart from Everyday Life

When engaging with the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ campaign videos, respondents struggled to reconcile the images in the videos with their own experiences of Korean life. On one hand, many participants expressed that they liked the videos, confirming that there was indeed some relevance to their own experiences of Korean life and expressing pride or delight in how Korea was portrayed as a modern, exciting, cosmopolitan place.
However, in relating their own lives to the images of Korea in the videos, participants by and large questioned the campaign’s portrayal of Korea. Yuna suggested that some of the contents were “fake,” whereas Hyolin’s initial reaction was to incredulously ask, “Really? Is it Korea?” This was reiterated by Mia, who conceded that while she really liked the videos – as most respondents did – she felt a degree of separation from the overly “shiny” and “pretty” version of Korea presented within the images, insisting that real Korean life was nothing like this “because we are working until night.” Yuna and Mia shared the opinion that ‘Romance Korea’ was not an appropriate theme, with Mia laughing wryly and stating flatly that it was “not real,” which echoed her earlier comments on Korean identity as a “sacrifice,” especially for women. Indeed, gender politics have plagued Korea in recent years, therefore, these comments do speak to scholarly criticism of nation branding’s depoliticizing functions (Aronczyk, 2008).

Mia thus referred to the construction of Korea within the campaign as “too bright,” “too made up,” and “manmade,” admitting that she did not see her home country represented by those videos: “Yeah, when I'm watching that, I feel like, oh, I really want to go to Korea! But I don't feel like, oh, wow, that's my home.” Several participants shared her sentiments, referring to the videos as contrived, including Taemin, who argued that maybe Samsung vice-chairman Lee Jae-Yong’s life was like this, but not his, insisting that “it’s not the life of a Korean.” Grace and Noah offered similar arguments, suggesting that not many Koreans actually enjoy these kinds of activities because of the cost, as well as due to lack of time for personal leisure. Similarly, Grace contended that spending time for one’s own pleasure is not something common in Korea, echoing the ‘hard-working Korean’ narrative voiced by all participants:

“So, focus is work. Work, work, work. You have to work to pay your bill. You have to work to pay your study loan back. You have to work to support your family. And… okay, it’s like we say naturally we are hard-working Koreans. So, enjoying yourself is still seen as, oh, you are not a good person, or you’re not dedicated to yourself, so that might be the reason I don’t see this [as] my Korea.”

This general consensus on the pervasive role of work culture in everyday Korean life is indeed a reflection of a collective internalization of the pro-growth mentality associated with the first wave of economic nationalism, which evidently continues to serve as a pervasive undercurrent in modern Korean society (Schwak, 2014).

Almost all participants admitted that they were in no rush to return to Korea where competition, long working hours, and high youth unemployment awaited them. These discourses
concerning sociocultural and political issues plaguing modern Korean society in relation to the
discussion of the campaign videos reinforces previous critiques of nation branding for silencing
tensions and dynamics within the social body (Aronczyk, 2009; Kaneva, 2011). Joong-Ki, who
pointed out that the videos “only show good stuff,” at once felt both proud of and sympathetic
towards Korea’s hard-working doctrine, suggesting that the videos, in fact, should show off the palli
palli nature of Korean life, as well as just how diligent Koreans are.

These reactions collectively reveal a difficulty in reconciling the image of Korea constructed
for foreigners with their own experiences of everyday Korean life and identity. Although the
locations and artefacts are ‘real’ and participants like that Korea is presented in a picturesque,
positive light, the way in which Korean life is presented is dismissed as ‘fake.’ This supports Graml’s
(2004) argument that touristic images function as negotiating devices, reconciling desire for
belonging and unity with aspirations for recognition and competitiveness in a globalizing world.
Therefore, while participants denounced the images as ‘fake,’ their discourse also revealed a desire
for Korea to be defined by these themes of cosmopolitanism, modernity, and good life.

The results also resonate with previous studies that demonstrate how Korean identity has, in
fact, become conflated with the pro-growth cultural canon established and propagated by the
government, suggesting that Korean citizens have internalized a social identity of the cooperatively
hard-working Korean, as designed by the state (Campbell, 2015). Participants’ discourse of an
imagined kinship shaped by a commitment (albeit, contested) to the modernization project and a
shared value placed on work ethic is indeed an example of how Brubaker (2004) described the
achievable (or, ‘civic’) traits of national identity, which are defined as being more fluid than
ascriptive (or, ‘ethnic’) traits. These traits are also easily manipulated by the state, as demonstrated by
the imposition of state-led ideologies onto micro-level identities.

4.2.6 Obscuring the Historical

Although the visual analysis revealed that a historic or ‘authentic’ side of Korea was indeed
presented in the videos, participants generally felt that it was an afterthought and that the Korea
constructed within the campaign was overwhelmingly modern. Some participants thought older
generations would be proud to see how far Korea has come. Mia mused that older generations
would probably love the videos and cry from happiness, whereas others felt that a lack of historical
nuance would make them question if this was really Korea. Joong-Ki suggested that other young
Koreans would love these videos – a sentiment shared by most participants – but not older
generations due to an enduring pre-modern seonbi mentality, which valued hard work and dedicating one’s life to scholarship. The seonbi mentality speaks to a historical premium placed on the value of education, which in fact preceded the modern obsession with education. This suggests that higher education, as a key source of modern Korean nationalism, is actually a crucial component of Korean identity that has carried over from pre-modernity, albeit adjusted for modern, capitalist conditions.

Autumn pointed out that “[In these videos] there is no point of explanation about the ancestors or the ancient history or culture [of Korea].” Grace joked that ancestors would think it was the end of the world if they watched these videos for lack of any evidence of people working hard. This discourse concerning the absence of certain historical elements of ‘Koreanness’ and the silencing of older generations suggests that there are indeed ties to invented traditions that bind the Korean people together and provide a source of national pride, which is consistent with Yi’s (2012) flexible framework of modern Korean nationalism that acknowledges elements of ethnic pride that pre-date the modern state and have carried over into modernity, becoming incorporated into a modern framework of ‘Koreanness.’ Thus, pre-modern aspects of ‘Koreanness’ are indeed preserved in the videos, albeit less emphasized and rearticulated in a selective manner, consistent with Hobsbawm’s (1983) notion of modern national identity being born of a selective view of the past.

4.2.7 Synthesizing Plurality and ‘Westernizing’ Dissimilarity

In general, participants’ discourse concerning the discrepancies between nation brand and real-life Korea revealed that the Korean nation brand, as constructed by the campaign videos, fell short of the idea that (successful) nation branding entails subsuming citizens under the ‘lived brand’ (Anholt, 2008; Risen, 2005). When asked to identify features of everyday Korean life that were missing from the campaign, participants cited the preparation and sharing of food, traditional markets (Namdaemun, Dongdaemun), Korean people, palli palli culture, and vibrant nightlife as ‘authentic’ aspects of Korean life. This presents a notable blend of invented traditions and ethnic solidarity with components of modern Korean nationalism that bestrides pre-modern and modern elements of Korean nationalism.

However, participants felt these crucial elements of ‘Koreanness’ received scant attention in the videos. Several participants pointed out that the food featured in the videos was presented in a ‘Western’ fashion and not representative of Korea at all, which is consistent with the findings of the visual analysis. Nevertheless, some participants acknowledged that ‘Westernizing’ the videos was indeed necessary in order to appeal to foreigners. Kate pointed out that previous campaigns had
focused on “traditional culture” and “it didn’t work.” This speaks to a perceived need for Korea to adjust itself for the Western audience, which is consistent with criticism of nation branding for pandering to Western perspectives (Baker, 2009; Roy, 2007; Volicic, 2008), as well as broadcasting “a more palatable version of nationalism” (Jordan, 2014, p. 44). It is worth mentioning that while Kate criticized previous campaigns’ focus on ‘traditional culture,’ her discourse later revealed how despite what she had said, she appreciates Korea’s history and “how amazing it is” that Korea survived for 5,000 years flanked by powerful nations.

Such sentiments are consistent with criticism of nation branding for synthesizing the plurality of everyday life into a few choice features labelled as ‘Korean’ (Kaneva, 2011). However, every time a feature is emphasized as being a marker of national identity, a concept that is by definition heterogenous and fluid becomes homogenized. Moreover, this notion of the videos as being a generic, sanitized, palatable version of Korea was echoed by several participants who suggested that the videos presented an image of Korea that was not only metaphorically sanitized of traditional Korean culture, but also physically, pointing out that several of the locations featured in the videos were not as clean, aesthetically striking, and devoid of people in real life.

In general, participants felt that the videos were not unique to Korea as the general focus of the videos was placed on featuring generic activities, albeit against a Korean backdrop. While some participants pointed out that Koreans do love shopping and taking selfies, some insisted that this was not entirely representative of ‘real Korean life.’ Mia suggested that the videos failed to recognize traditional games and drinking culture, “because actually we are living like that.” In the same breath, Mia pointed out that she was “100 percent sure” that foreigners would not enjoy this kind of traditional play “because it’s all related to our culture.” Mia’s reproduction of ethnic nationalism recalls the essentialist nature of shared identity, suggesting that the understanding of ‘being Korean’ across the flawed and poorly defined boundaries of a nation is never a straightforward process.

The general consensus that the videos depicted a more generic, filtered image of Korea emphasizes the perceived need to present Korea in more Western-friendly, sanitized terms, with only a select few aspects of ‘Koreanness’ present, which is consistent with criticism of nation branding, wherein a disciplined image of a nation is eviscerated of adversity for the consumption of the global audience (Jansen, 2008; Kaneva 2011). As a few participants pointed out, the campaign seemed to highlight specific aspects and ‘faces’ of Korea, which Yuna suggested they had deemed “safe” or “not risky” for foreign consumption. This is indeed where nation branding attempts to
subsume certain select features of ‘Koreanness’ under the banner of Korean identity, at the expense of other salient elements of the everyday life of the nation’s citizens.

4.2.8 Buying into Branding: The Intersection of Fantasy and Reality

The results of the interviews revealed a palpable dissatisfaction with the capitalism-influenced conditions of modern Korean life – conditions which the state played a crucial role in creating. Nevertheless, the influence of globalization and mobility on participants revealed a collective feeling that Korea has no choice but to join the nation branding table. Despite the generally mixed reactions to the ‘authenticity’ of the image of Korea portrayed by the campaign videos, when asked whether they felt Korea needed this sort of nation branding campaign, almost all participants unanimously agreed that it was necessary to leverage Korea’s ability to compete, attract foreign investment, and become more familiar to foreigners.

These results indicate that to a large extent, Koreans have bought into the notion that nations must brand themselves in order to be globally competitive, even though the results do not align with reality, or as Autumn described: “[The videos] add some salt” – a Korean idiom in reference to exaggerating something. Autumn suggested that countries have no choice but to exaggerate their worth in the global nation branding contest because “They have to do [it].” This general consensus in support of Korean nation branding draws parallels to the fact that by sheer virtue of studying abroad, participants have bought into this official discourse on the value of English proficiency or a degree obtained from a ‘Western’ country (Collins, 2009; Jang, 2017); therefore, it makes sense that participants would see the economic value in participating in the global marketplace of nations. This suggests that the performance of nation branding reveals a Korean nationalism that is self-conscious of a global marketplace and alters itself accordingly, which is indeed consistent with previous research on Korean ‘nation-ness’ and the intersecting desires for globalism and nationalism, albeit at the expense of modifying Korean traditions and customs (Lee & Cho, 2009). Thus, participants exemplify how a perceived framework of a ‘standard’ global national identity has been fostered by the state and projected onto its citizens to “match the standards of normalcy of global capitalism” (Schwak, 2016, p. 428). In turn, citizens have internalized this ‘standard,’ thereby accepting that complying with this ‘normal global standard’ is vital to success. This insinuates that the original identity of Korea was backwards or deficient in some way, therefore undesired, further perpetuating the superiority of Western models of civilization.
4.2.9 Imaginary Korea: Branding Without Buy-in

While participants liked the videos to varying degrees and many agreed that the campaign did a good job of painting Korea in an attractive light, participants were simultaneously dubious of the final result. In general, the results suggest that the image of Korea portrayed by the videos is an aspiration – participants liked what they saw, but they knew it was not entirely true. Most participants felt that in one way or another, the representation of Korea in the videos was conjured in a way that Korea would like to see itself. As Hyolin explained, the videos took what Koreans liked and repackaged those ideals for foreign consumption with English subtitles, implying that it was an aspiration: “It’s not for foreigners. It is what Korea wants.” Grace felt the videos were one-dimensional and failed to take into account the voices of the Korean people, suggesting that if they did solicit feedback from Korean citizens, as is dictated by grassroots nation branding (Hakala & Lemmettyinen, 2011; Zouganeli et al., 2012), it was from a very limited demographic. This general feeling reiterates previous studies criticizing top-down nation branding for misrepresenting or commodifying national identity for the benefit of external, ‘Western’ audiences (Aronczyk, 2008; Jordan, 2014; Kaneva, 2011).

Accordingly, although participants almost unanimously felt that Korea needs nation branding in the form of tourism videos or otherwise, participants also challenged this official discourse by expressing reservations on the strategies and tactics used. Theo was in favour of a more virtuous approach to nation branding, such as the existing government scholarship program for international students, which was set in place with the goal of internationalizing higher education in Korea. Critical of what he saw as the Korean government’s overly bureaucratic and simplistic approach to tourism, Theo derided the videos for their superficiality: “Korea’s all about shine, right? (…) But anyway, I don't really like this kind of campaign, honestly saying. I mean, it's just too... materialistic, too commercial, too... cheap. Too cheap. There's no elegance in that. There's no... deepness or like, you know, there's nothing fascinating about that. It's literally for ‘Korea boos’ who like this actor.”

Criticism aside, the mere fact that Theo supports the internationalization of higher education in Korea in itself offers evidence that he has internalized the state’s globalization discourse. On a similar note, Taemin argued that while branding is important, the brand must have buy-in from the nation’s citizens in order to be successful, citing Korea’s high suicide rate and youth unemployment as pervasive and detrimental social issues thwarting Koreans’ pride and optimism in their own country: “People must believe that their country is very good to live in. That is the first thing. (…)
Korean people should be proud of Korea. But… many Koreans have no pride.” These sentiments speak to previous literature which has argued that in order for nation branding to have longevity, it must first have ‘buy-in’ from the nation’s citizens (Dinnie, 2015; Zouganeli et al., 2012).

Joong-Ki was the sole participant who felt there was no need for such tourism campaigns whatsoever, arguing that a country should recognize its own worth:

“I think it's a really good effort, but personally I don't feel like that's necessary. 'Cause what I feel is if Korea is good enough or curious enough for foreigner people, I'm pretty sure they will come to Korea. (…) We don't really have to show only positive stuff to foreigners, we just have to be who we are, and if we are good enough, I'm pretty sure tourists will come.”

Joong-Ki’s poignant comment recalls the second guiding question of this thesis, which seeks to understand how Koreans make sense of the campaign’s branded image of Korea in relation to their own experiences of Korean identity and everyday life. One cannot help but wonder if this nation branding campaign is born of an enduring feeling that “who we are” is not good enough, thus leaving the elusive concept of the Korean essence up to the imagination of those whose validation it ultimately seeks to attain. To this end, while all participants save one had never even heard of the ‘Imagine Your Korea’ brand, some participants ultimately felt that the brand name was too vague, abstract, or generic. As Connor explained:

“Even for Korean people, it's really abstract and we don't know the answer about Imagine Your Korea, so… yeah. Imagine what? Because even we don't know about our concept – Korean concept – then how do the foreign people know about that?”

This comment seems to speak to a general feeling that Korea is trying to find its footing in this global bazaar without any coherent message concerning what exactly Korea is all about, suggesting that countries must be about something in order to ‘measure up.’ As Subramanian (2017) argued, a bespoke image of a nation is a prerequisite for admission to the global competition of nations and as citizens of a nation-state that has unequivocally engaged in this era of competitiveness ideology for several decades, Koreans appear to have internalized this official discourse accordingly.

This internalization reveals that in spite of objection and censure in whatever shape or form, Koreans are indeed bound by invented and imagined loyalties to the Korean nation-state, or in other words, their imagined community. The findings of the interviews – when considered against the results of the visual analysis – clearly demonstrate that modern Korean nationalism is alive and well, born of a state-led commitment to achievement and recognition. This complex negotiation between discontent with daily life, national loyalty, and a personal fulfillment of the official ideology was most
poignantly captured by Taemin’s discourse, in which he revealed how humiliated he was by Korea national psyche being rooted in unforgiving competitiveness, admitting at one point that talking about it made him realize how much he “really, really hates Korea!” However, towards the end of the interview, as he discussed his family and friends back home, he seemed to feel the need to reposition himself as a patriot, at once acknowledging the tension between “self-hate and self-love” (Lee & Cho, 2009, p. 116) that so many participants had struggled to reconcile in their discourse:

“Even though, during my interview, I criticized many things about Korea, I love Korea. I want to love Korea. Really. Because, that is my own country and I have to live there and... it made me a success.”

In summary, while Koreans may criticize the contrived aspects of the cosmopolitan, active, young, and historic portrayal of Korea, as revealed by a visual analysis of the ‘8 faces of Korea’ campaign, they also embody this portrayal on some level by engaging in discourses and practices of global competitiveness, as propagated by the state, which exemplify the tensions and power relations underlying modern Korean nationalism and nation branding. The aspects of the videos dismissed as ‘fake’ are actually the very cultural canons upon which their modern nationalism is contingent (Graml, 2004). Thus, the adoption of these discourses and practices suggests that Korean citizens have accepted that a perceived globally standardized framework exists and must be adhered to, thereby reproducing and perpetuating – albeit, perhaps unwillingly – the very power relations that cultivated this framework in the first place. While their dissatisfaction with the effects of neoliberal capitalism on their everyday lives causes them to pull away from the contrived aspects of Korea presented in the campaign, the emergence of a new discourse of modern nationalism reinforces a neoliberal vision of a marketplace of nations within which technology, diversity, dynamism, and creativity must be performed by both macro-level institutions and micro-level social actors. In this respect, whether willingly or not, Koreans really and truly are ‘living the brand.’
5. Conclusion

This thesis has considered how efforts to reconfigure nations as brands affect the meaning-making of Korean citizens in everyday life, as well as whether or not they reinforce Korean nationalist ideologies, and to what extent. These performances of nation branding within the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ campaign and their relation to performances of Korean national identity offer new scholarly perspectives on how nation brand and national identity politics are articulated, negotiated, and reconciled within the context of an increasingly competitive, globalized world.

Guided by the modernist approach to nationalism which sees the nation as shaped by recent historical conditions, events, and processes, this thesis drew upon in-depth interviews with 14 Korean citizens studying abroad in Canada. The results show that Korea’s nation branding project is not necessarily a self-reflexive, domestic exercise that galvanizes nationalistic sentiment, but rather, serves as an extension of a state-led modernization project, with the ultimate goal of making Korea globally competitive, albeit in 21st century terms, as defined by ‘Western’ standards.

The results of the campaign visual analysis revealed a Korea constructed of cosmopolitan, active, youthful, historic, and ‘Westernized’ dimensions. However, this image of Korea falls shy of how Koreans imagine their own identity, national affiliation, and everyday life. While the videos reinforce Korean modern nationalist ideologies to the extent that they place Korea among the ranks of ‘advanced’ nation-states, when considered in relation to their personal, lived experiences of Korea, participants could not fully identify with the branded image. The results thus confirm that the campaign does indeed depict a disciplined, tidied-up version of Korea for the global audience, as indicated by respondents’ dubious reactions to the accuracy and authenticity of the videos. But what are the sociocultural and political consequences to this dissonance?

Interview data revealed that beneath the perceived need for nation branding, an unmistakable ambivalence exists towards the dark side of Korea’s transformation into a capitalist nation-state where competitiveness permeates everyday life. This ambivalence was interpreted through the ways in which participants articulated their negative perceptions of contemporary Korean identity and life, thereby demonstrating how macro-level policies and ideologies can trickle down to micro-level actors and modify the narratives through which these social actors define themselves and their livelihoods. On one hand, Korean identity is shaped by shared characteristics and values that pre-date the modern state, such as collectivism, politeness, and most commonly, diligence. On the other hand, these cherished aspects of ‘Koreanness’ become threatened by the identity-shaping influence of modern, state-led, nation-building doctrines endorsing a different kind
of diligence – one that functions less as a mutually supportive, collective behaviour and more as a personal survival mechanism in an increasingly competitive, neoliberal-orientated Korean society. Participants’ expressed pride in the Korean hard-working identity is thus fraught with ambivalence, with a triangular tension emerging between: (1) Pride in remarkable Korean accomplishments (modern nationalism), (2) Pride in a difficult colonial history that Koreans were collectively able to overcome through hard work and jeong, and (3) Resentment of the negative consequences of feeling as though Koreans have no choice but to be globally competitive. Together, these three conditions create a friction between the comfort and security of a collectively-inclined, imagined community and the entrepreneurial individualism symbolic of modern capitalist life.

Accordingly, these results demonstrate how capitalist ideologies and the pursuit of globalization at the institutional level have indeed filtered down to Korean citizens, as well as how Korean citizens have become embedded in these ideologies and quests for global recognition, despite substantial ambivalence towards these processes on a personal level. Therefore, although there are indeed homogenous ways of articulating the same discourse of the Korean nation, there is at once an ongoing challenge. The question is: when do citizens rally behind official discourses and when do they challenge them? The results indicate that when discussing the trademark warm-heartedness and togetherness of Korean in-group relations (i.e. jeong), participants rally behind the official discourse. One can speculate that this pre-modern aspect of Korean identity has, in fact, been rearticulated for modern nationalism, given that a coherent sense of private identity is arguably what has not only facilitated the mobilization of the state’s hard-working rhetoric, but also driven recent mass peaceful protests against corruption and social inequality in pursuit of ‘Western-style’ democracy. However, when discussing the sociocultural and economic repercussions of Korea’s compressed modernity and pro-growth doctrine, participants challenge the official discourses. This was made especially clear when participants considered their day-to-day realities in Korea against Canadian everyday life, which they perceived to be simpler, freer, and more relaxed.

To this end, while the branded image of Korea was certainly part of their Korea, it was also a sanitized version of Korea stripped of nuance, and in many ways, it was not their Korea – a Korea that they reflected upon as challenging, imperfect, and suffering from social insecurities as a result of the ruling ideology that ultimately led to this branding project. This is significant because it reveals how state leaders have the power to manipulate national identity by emphasizing or reconfiguring certain features that become elevated to the level of national ritual, while selectively discounting that which does not serve their agenda. These findings further support the notion of a nation as
invented, with a selection of traditions and ideologies conceived by powerful, macro-level social actors and internalized by everyday citizens, who become vessels for macro-level ideologies, thereby conflating ground-level identities with hegemonic imaginaries. However, this stifling competitiveness of everyday Korean life obscures identity at both micro and macro levels to varying degrees, which was made clear by how participants pulled away, challenged, and contradicted these ideologies by drawing upon ‘discourses of national identity’ in different ways throughout the interviews. We can also see how national identity becomes even more imbued with meaning when compared to an ‘other’ (Wodak, 1999), or against a new point of view.

These tensions and negotiations reinforce Calhoun’s (1997) argument that nationalism, as a discursive formation, is problematic, contextual, and cannot be singularly defined, therefore warrants ongoing questioning and debate. Indeed, just as Malesevic (2011) argued that national identity is a chimera, it seems that the concept of ‘national identity’ fails to serve as a tool for teasing out the complex and often contradictory processes that have collectively given shape to the construction, preservation, and reproduction of Korean nationhood. To this end, this research suggests that modern Korean identity is grounded in a culture of insecurity shaped by many competing dimensions of a hyper-compressed modernity which are at once embraced and rejected.

Accordingly, participants’ perceived need for nation branding has thus been shaped by both pragmatism and by the Korean capitalist fantasy. On one hand, the desire for cosmopolitanism and push for modernity facilitated by the establishment of an enduring hard-working, pro-growth doctrine in post-war Korea has become internalized by local actors, indicating a conflation of globalism and nationalism enforced by the state and internalized by the Korean people, which is consistent with previous studies documenting Korea’s breakout moment on the world stage at the 2002 World Cup (Lee & Cho, 2009). This conflation is evidenced by respondents’ common discourse in describing Koreans as hard-working, everyday life as busy and competitive, and nation branding as a necessary, legitimizing practice, thereby indicating that they have – to varying degrees – bought into the state-led modernization doctrine. Accordingly, Korean nation branding can be viewed as a practical extension of a neoliberal logic that promotes an unquestioned global competitiveness and relies upon the mobilization of local citizens in the process of meeting perceived global, ‘Western,’ ‘civilized’ standards. This can help us to understand how state-level aspirations are impinged upon citizens, albeit without citizens necessarily being aware of the ideologies that they have gradually internalized over time. This is the very interface at which citizens become embedded in a somewhat undemocratic process of national identity construction.
Therefore, whether or not they were consciously aware, the participants of this research confirmed that local actors are powerfully connected to global processes, constantly negotiating both the advantages and consequences of that encounter in ways that are both meaningful and mundane.

This thesis has ultimately shown that Koreans continue to measure their own worth vis-à-vis the ‘West.’ Perceptions towards nation branding are powerfully shaped by Korean citizens’ anxiety towards a perception that Korea must have a brand in order to survive in the world marketplace. In the Korean context, nation branding serves as a site at which the forces of globalization and post-colonial hegemonic imaginaries of cosmopolitanism converge, with Koreans caught in the middle of two conflicting narratives, one of celebration and one of insecurity. Thus, Koreans who have internalized this modern nationalism – in particular, the respondents of this study who exemplified global cosmopolitan aspirations by pursuing studies abroad – are caught between these competing tensions and contradictions. We have already seen some of the ramifications of these insecurities in mass citizen-led protests, grassroots campaigns against social inequality, and Korea’s rising suicide rate, which is currently the highest among OECD member states and perhaps more notably, the only OECD nation whose suicide rate has actually increased since the nineties (Singh, 2017).

Therefore, what this study has made clear is that this ‘celebration’ of modernity and cosmopolitanism has come at a price for Korean citizens. By vesting the fulfilment of a collectively hard-working, competitive national identity upon its own people, the Korean nation-state has relied upon fostering a fundamental shift in national consciousness. As a result, Korean national identity has, to a considerable extent, been reoriented according to an impetus for competitiveness. This reiteration of national identity runs the risk of compromising Koreans’ sense of collective solidarity as a result of the neoliberal ideals that have driven nation branding in the first place. Thus, while respondents’ discourse confirmed that modern Korean nationalism is alive and well, the social and identity-related insecurities seem to pose a threat to this modern nationalism, which was made abundantly clear vis-à-vis criticisms of the campaign. Economic gain has come at a social price for Koreans, but a country needs both in equal measure in order to be sustainable. This suggests that the state-led process of subsuming all Korean citizens under the banner of a competitive, global citizenship is not a seamless process. As the participants of this study have clearly confirmed, there is always room for questioning and resistance. However, the question remains whether participants’ discourses of dissatisfaction alone hold the power to undermine the dominant ideology while their actions continue to reproduce and reinforce the status quo.
5.1 Strengths and Limitations

The primary strength of this research is grounded in the researcher’s familiarity with Korean culture as a result of her experience living in Korea, her rudimentary knowledge of Korean language, and her in-depth understanding of cultural concepts, such as jeong and palli palli. It is believed that the researcher was able to quickly establish a sense of warmth and familiarity with participants, who were especially curious that a ‘foreigner’ was interested in researching the Korean experience. Furthermore, given the researcher’s status as a member of the ‘out-group,’ participants may have felt more at ease to be candid, critical, and objective in their discussions of Korean everyday life, Korean identity, and Korean nation branding than they might have been with a researcher who was a fellow Korean. Furthermore, although a language barrier might normally be considered a limitation, in this case, the language barrier is believed to have offered some concealed benefits. Given that the interviews were carried out in participants’ second language, participants’ limited vocabulary could have required them to be more direct, concise, and logical.

The first limitation of this study is related to the sample population, which represented a very specific, homogenous subset of young, highly educated, urban Koreans who would therefore be most affected by perceived competition in Korean society, as evidenced by their motivations to study abroad in Canada. Data drawn from a highly educated population that had experienced living and studying outside Korea may also have resulted in more critical, biased, and/or generally negative discourse shaped by the experience of a new sociocultural environment. Therefore, their opinions and perspectives are not necessarily representative of the opinions and perspectives of Koreans living in Korea – especially those Koreans who have not experienced living abroad. In addition, language barrier did indeed prove to be a barrier in a few cases where participants with very rudimentary English proficiency struggled to answer some more complex or abstract questions. Where possible, the researcher always attempted to reword questions without compromising the essence of the subject at hand, although it is possible that some participants could have provided richer data had interviews been conducted in their native Korean.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Given the homogenous sample population that contributed to this study, respondents’ opinions and perspectives cannot account for the opinions and perspectives of all Korean citizens. It would be worthwhile for future research to explore the experiences of Koreans actually living in Korea – especially those who do not have the experience of studying abroad as a point of reference.
– as well as other socio-economic demographics of Koreans, such as less urban, upwardly mobile Koreans. Similarly, it would be worthwhile to conduct a comparative study on national identity among young Korean generations in relation to older Koreans in order to better understand how national identity narratives have been shaped by recent history and to what extent they have diverged in terms of a generational divide in light of Korea’s compressed modernity. This could provide an interesting snapshot of identity politics and their evolution over the past 50 years.

For a more nuanced perspective on nation branding practices, it may be worth completing a comparative study with another country that is engaged in top-down nation branding processes. Alternatively, it would also be interesting to explore Korean nation branding in relation to another country with a similar recent history that is also employing nation branding as a globalization tactic. Finally, it may be worth exploring tourism campaigns and the perceptions of tourists before and after travelling to Korea in order to understand how this image of Korea that is largely perceived to be inaccurate or inauthentic by Koreans is made sense of by non-Koreans. This would be relevant given the potential impact on the success of current nation branding practices, as well as on the trajectory of future nation branding initiatives. This would also shed light on whether the image of Korea constructed by government agencies influences place perception. This is significant given that the perceived global credibility wrested from a successful nation brand is dependent on authenticity, coherence, consistency, and connection with people, country, and culture (Trolan, 2017), which are the very components that the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ campaign appears to lack.
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youths-we-re-too-busy-for-reunification


Cultural Studies, 1, 49-69.


# Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant/Pseudonym</th>
<th>Academic Background</th>
<th>Current City</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Age/Gender</th>
<th>Time Spent in Canada</th>
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<td>Participant 1 Kate</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Dongtan</td>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>34, female</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2 Yuna</td>
<td>College diploma (in progress)</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Bundang</td>
<td>28, female</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3 Mia</td>
<td>College diploma (in progress)</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Ulsan</td>
<td>32, female</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4 Theo</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree (in progress)</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Busan</td>
<td>25, male</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5 David</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Busan</td>
<td>29, male</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6 Joong-Ki</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree (in progress)</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>24, male</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7 Noah</td>
<td>College diploma (in progress)</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>36, male</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8 Hyolin</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Busan</td>
<td>24, female</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9 Grace</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Daegu</td>
<td>44, female</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10 Taemin</td>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Masan</td>
<td>44, male</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11 Ryan</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree (in progress)</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Daejeon</td>
<td>24, male</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12 Connor</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>26, male</td>
<td>1 year, 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13 Autumn</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree (in progress)</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Changwon</td>
<td>23, female</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14 James</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>39, male</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:
Researcher: Paulina Jarmula, Master of Arts student, Media, Culture & Society, Erasmus School of History, Culture & Communication, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Address: Willem Ruyslaan 225 (#332), Rotterdam, 3063 ER
Email: 477379pj@student.eur.nl
Phone: +31 6 8229 9882

DESCRIPTION
You are invited to participate in a research study about Korean national identity. The purpose of the study is to understand the relationship between Korean national identity and the image of Korea in tourism nation branding.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the interview questions will be related to Korean identity and how you understand being Korean, as well as your thoughts, opinions, and insights on the particular tourism campaign under analysis.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a voice recorder for the interview.

You are always free not to answer any particular question and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. However, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information, such as your age, where you live, your ethnic or educational background, in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified by using a pseudonym or only providing general identification.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings, and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT
Your participation in this study will take approximately one hour of time (+/−). You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS
There will be no monetary compensation for your participation in this study.

PARTICIPANTS’ RIGHTS
If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.
CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS
If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact (anonymously, if you wish):

Dr. Delia Dumitrica
Assistant Professor in Political Communication
Department of Media & Communication
Erasmus School of History, Culture & Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Telephone | +31 10 408 8607
Email | dumitrica@eshcc.eur.nl

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM
If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

__________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Name                          Signature                          Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study.

__________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Name                          Signature                          Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.
APPENDIX C

Interview Topic Guide

Informed consent: upon going over the informed consent, participants are asked for the following demographic information:

- Age, hometown (place of residence in Korea, if different), education level, and occupation.

Part I: Being a Korean Abroad

This section will capture the interviewee’s experiences as a Korean temporarily studying abroad, as well as how they perceive day-to-day ‘Canadian life’ in relation to Korean day-to-day life. This section also aims to reveal how the interviewee conceptualizes Korea in relation to other Asian countries, thereby making it unique and worthy of visiting.

- How long have you been in Canada?
- How was your experience of moving to Canada?
- Is living here different from living in Korea? How?
- What questions about Korea do you get from Canadians (if any)?
- How do you present Korea to a Canadian who has never been there and has very little background knowledge on the country?
- What would you say is unique about Korea?
  - Do you think that these elements make Korea different from other Asian countries?

Part III: National Self-identification

This section seeks to understand how participants understand being Korean and how much of this ‘Korean-ness’ is reproduced without questioning. What does being Korean mean to them personally?

- I want us to talk a bit about national identity – which is a focus of my study. First, I want to ask what think is/are the best thing(s) about Korea?
- How would you describe ‘being Korean’?
  - Follow-up: And is this who you are? Does it represent you?
  - Possibility: How would you describe “Korean-ness”?
  - Possibility: What are some characteristics/qualities that you think Korean people have in common with one another?
• Is living and studying in Canada influencing in any way what makes you feel most ‘Korean’?

Part V: The Campaign
In this section, the ‘8 faces of Korea, 8 types of trip’ campaign will be presented to the interviewee, subsequently seeking to understand whether and to what extent the interviewee relates to the images presented in the campaign. The questions in this section seek to reveal whether and to what extent interviewees are critical of the campaign, as well as how they perceive the need to engage in competitive, capitalistic nation branding in the face of globalization.

• Have you heard of the ‘Imagine Your Korea’ campaign? If so, can you tell me what you know about it?

[Presentation of the campaign slogan and brief context.]

• What do you think about this slogan?
  ○ Possible follow-ups: do you think it describes/captures Korea well?

[Presentation of campaign videos.] mystery fantasy trend docu thriller signature

• What image(s) of Korea did you see in these videos? And what do you think about it?
  ○ Follow-up: During the design phase of this campaign, Korea’s unique characteristics were described as diversity, vibrancy, creativity, and intrigue, but based on my own experiences living in Korea, these descriptions seem very generic. Similarly, these ‘8 faces’ could be applied to a lot of places. What do you think these 8 faces have to do with Korea?

• Do you think these images present a realistic/authentic image of Korea? Please explain.
  ○ Follow-up: Do you see yourself in this campaign? Why or why not?

• Do you see your family or fellow Korean citizens represented here? Please explain.

• Do you think there are things missing from these images? If so, what is missing?
  ○ Earlier, when I asked you about presenting Korea to a foreigner, you mentioned (...). Do you see these things within this campaign?
  ○ Follow-up: Do you disagree with anything presented within this campaign? If so, please explain.

• You are currently experiencing living abroad as a Korean – how do you relate to these images now that you have spent some time outside Korea?
• This campaign is part of a nation branding project started in 2009 by President Lee Myung
Bach’s government. Do you think Korea really needs this kind of campaign? Please explain.

Part VII: Closing Remarks
This concluding section will provide the interviewee with an opportunity to raise any topics that
have not been covered within the scope of the interview, as well as pose questions to the researcher.
• Is there anything that we have discussed here that you would like to add on? Do you have
any final comments or experiences that you would like to share?