Shaping Perceptions Through Media: The Role of Popular Culture in Korean Views of Jews

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Abstract

This study examines the role of media in shaping perceptions of Jews in South Korea, a society with limited direct interaction with this group. In an effort to understand how media influences such perceptions, a survey was conducted on May 15, 2024, involving 390 South Korean adults aged 20 to 49. The survey, the first of its kind in Korea, asked participants the open-ended question: "What words first come to your mind when you hear the word 'Jew'?" Responses were categorized into nine thematic groups: Characteristics, Economics, Education / Intelligence / Wisdom, Geography / Ethnicity, Holocaust, Israel / Hamas War, None, Other, and Religion. Major findings revealed that the Holocaust was the most prominent association, comprising 31% of responses, followed by geographic and ethnic references to Israel and the Middle East, and religious connotations. The study also highlighted that popular culture, particularly films such as *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist,* and books such as *Anne Frank's Diary* and Talmudic anthologies, played a pivotal role in shaping these associations. Many participants cited these films, books, and historical narratives as key influences, highlighting a widespread reliance on media representations rather than direct experiences. This study underscores the significant role of media in the construction of national identities and perceptions of unfamiliar peoples, particularly in contexts where physical encounters are rare. The findings offer valuable insights for scholars in cultural studies, media, and interdisciplinary fields, demonstrating how media serves as a primary vehicle for cultural transfer and perception in societies with limited direct exposure to other cultures.

Keywords

Media, Perception, Jews, South Korea, Cultural Transfer, Popular Culture, Holocaust, Survey Methodology, Israel, Media Influence, Stereotypes.