The concept and production of ‘Suicide Republic’

by

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1. Field of Study

In this research, I intend to deal with ‘suicide’, one of the serious social problems in South Korea. I specially became interested in this problem after I heard that a child in an elementary school in South Korea committed suicide over his school grade (Asian correspondent, 2008). According to the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, 24.3 out of every 100,000 Koreans committed suicide in 2008, up from 23.9 in 2007 and 21.5 in 2006. This is the highest rate among the 30 member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (The Korea Times, 2010). For this reason, some people say that South Korea is a ‘Suicide Republic’. Therefore, I think that this problem should be addressed with a priority and South Korean should try their best to find possible solutions.

2. The Project Focus

Some people named suicide incidents in South Korea ‘Social Murder’. This means that a rapid increase of suicide rates in South Korea results from social absurdity rather than private problems of a suicide. Thus, I focused on social aspects in the causes of a suicide and intended to criticize social system by proposing a moving image work.

3. Research Methods

At first, I collected news articles about recent suicide incidents and statistics as a secondary research, and then researched the cause of suicide. Based on the research, I made some ideas for an output. I thought that it is efficient to make a series of viral animations categorized by age. As for a target audience, I focused on thirty and forty years old adults because they are main generation that can make changes in a society.

4. Analysis

What makes people in South Korea commit suicide? I researched the cause of surge of suicide rate in South Korea by categorizing by age. Above all, the suicide of young generation is serious. According to the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs in South Korea, suicide is the second most cause of South Korean teenagers' deaths (The Korea Times, 2008). This is not a new phenomenon. The data from the Ministry of Education in 2002 reported that 27.6 percent of the elementary school student felt an urge of suicide (Go, 2002).

Many people regard that schoolchildren’s suicide in South Korea is resulted from its education system. For instance, the South Korean government drives schoolchildren to more competitive environment with education policies such as opening ‘Kukje middle school’ and national
assessment test ‘ILJE-GOSA’. Furthermore, under the social system that entering top
universities ensures a student better jobs and more money in his/her entire life, their parents
force them to study all day long. Schools also competitively foster more competition for
student’ school records. Moreover, this excessive competition is being expanded on younger
students. For instance, most elementary school students study at private academic institution
‘Hakwon’ after formal school. For this reason, a sizable number of South Korean students, even
elementary school students commit suicide over their test scores.

In addition, the increase of suicide in adults is related to the widening rich-poor gap and social
polarization since IMF in South Korea in 1998 (The Korea Times, 2010). Since then, the
middle class have fallen into the new poor class. Moreover, there is no sufficient support in
social welfare. Therefore, unemployment of a head of household means that survival of his/her
family is seriously threatened. Thus, many adults in South Korea feel there is no hope and
committed suicide.

After a research on the cause of suicide, I found that even though the reasons of suicide is
different by age and gender, these are connected with each other as a kind of deep-rooted
societal contradiction.

5. Proposition

As a result of the research, I propose four viral animations addressing suicide problem in South
Korea. However, I made just one of them and the others are presented as a storyboard.

I think it is essential how to get the target audience thinking about the subject for themselves
without boring them. During ideation, I was inspired by some of classic 8bit arcade games. I
saw ‘disciplined students and oppressive education system of South Korea’ in a array of the
‘Space Invaders’, ‘social polarization’ in the ‘Snakes and Ladders’, ‘social isolation’ in the ‘Battle
City’, and ‘no escape’ in the ‘Bubble Bubble’. Besides, such 8bit arcade games are accustomed
to the target audience because they were teenager in the 1980s when 8bit games were popular.

In addition, I thought that it would be interesting if the characters in games commit suicide.
Thus, I intended to induce audience’s interests with this way at the beginning of my animation,
and then connect the fact that South Korea has the highest rates of suicide in OECD to the
‘Best Record’ in arcade games. At the latter half, I substituted human characters for the
original game characters and sent the messages about suicide to the audience.

* Storyboard and other materials are described in visual summary.

7. Reference

[Accessed 16 April 2010]
