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**HOW ARE KOREAN MEN SEEN? CONSTRUCTS AMONG MEXICAN WOMEN
BY MEANS OF *HALLYU***

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In contemporary Mexican society young people demonstrate strong consumption habits of entertainment products from Republic of Korea. The arrival of the first Korean cultural products dates back to 2002, however, it is impossible to pinpoint the specific date when the consumption of Korean entertainment products overgrew from the initial phase of Hallyu dissemination into the craze for K-pop and idol groups. During the last decade, the synergy between the potential of Korean companies and production houses, the social and the diplomatic networks of the Korean government and the digital transfer made it possible to transform this consumption into a global trend, with a telling effect on Mexican women.

This research analyzes how the impact of cultural products from the Republic of Korea framed the Mexican women's imaginaries of Korean men and how those imaginaries make them to consider those men as new ideal. The paper focuses on the ways in which Mexican women have come to regard the distinguishing masculinity features of present-day South Korean men as an aspiration object of an ideal man in the contemporary context.

The concepts from cultural studies such as cultural industries, consumption, symbolic use and gender as a symbolic construct are used to analyze the data obtained through open online surveys. The questions were proposed to focus groups which openly show consumption of Korean cultural products.

Keywords: Korean men, Mexican women, Korean cultural industry, consumption, *Hallyu*

Introduction

The entertainment industry of the Republic of Korea has been expanding abroad for about 30 years already. At first it was perceived as nothing more than another movement of isolated elements, yet very soon Korean entertainment products became the word-of-mouth, which went around the world. Thus, just like Hallyu¹ – the so-called *Korean Wave* – gradually permeated several societies on the planet and got settled in the thoughts of the younger generations.

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In current Mexican society, young people demonstrate outstanding levels of consumption of entertainment products from the Republic of Korea [López 2020], which predominantly stems from their distribution by an industry that has grown exponentially in recent years and by now penetrated the largest markets in the world, those of China, the United States and Latin America.

There is an evidence that first cultural products from Korea arrived in Mexico as early as 2002 [Lopez 2011] when they caught attention with the broadcasting of the first dramas, popularly named in Mexico “telenovelas”. The society, though, was already well prepared for their consumption by a habit already established thanks to the local soap operas from the almost monolithic Mexican entertainment industry concentrated in Televisa.

Broadcasting of these Korean products started through Mexican open television, on channel 34 Televisión Mexiquense [Lopez 2011], a channel of the State of Mexico, one of the 31 states in the country. Although at first K-dramas gained popularity among housewives and young people – which was characteristic of the consumption process in Mexico in the initial phase – but the real on-onslaught of consumption of Korean entertainment products in Mexico started with the pop music, currently identified as K-pop.

It is next to impossible to tell for sure the specific date when the consumption of Korean entertainment products switched over into the boom of K-pop bands, which is a constantly observable phenomenon in Mexico, proving it to the hilt that during the last decade well concerted efforts of the Korean companies and production houses, the social media and the diplomatic networks of the Korean government, have been able to bring this consumption up to a popular level and make it a world trend.

As concerns Mexico, the most vital points in the analysis of the consumption of Korean entertainment products relate to the characteristics which allowed so speedy growth by stimulating young people – from various social and cultural strata – to consume musical and audiovisual content. The paper seeks to discover how young women decode and abstract, from their own social and cultural framework, the images, sounds and narratives reflected by the bands, singers, actors and products, leading them to consume feverishly. The work also analyzes reinterpretation that consumers assign to those products locally and how they boost that industry with their consumption.

In case of Mexico, some of these characteristics have been highlighted in previous research [Lopez 2011; López Rocha 2012; López 2020; De Coss Henning 2019], but there are still important questions that need to be analyzed in order to explain – in a more complete way – the impact that consumption of Korean cultural products by young people has on local society, above all, understanding that the process is dynamic and in constant transformation.

Therefore, this paper questions why the consumption of Korean cultural and entertainment products has become an important research issue. It analyzes the impact that the cultural products of the Republic of Korea have on the configuration of the imaginaries of Mexican women based on the way in which they construct and represent what Korean men are. It finds out how these imaginaries, built from elements spread by the cultural industry, lead to designate Korean men as new ideal construct, projecting them as ideal partners, fulfilling, at the same time, particular physical, emotional and social elements for the girls. It investigates the ways in which Mexican women have constructed the masculinity of the modern South Korean males as an aspiration of an ideal man in the current context, consolidating their interest in establishing personal relationships with them and even setting relationships with Korean citizens as new aspirations.

It is extremely important to analyze these assumptions rooted among Mexican women, young mostly, in regard of Korean men, because merely two decades ago Korean men did not possess the status of ideal match, which they have obtained since then. These new trends prompting to find not simply an Asian, but specifically Korean as a

couple, according to our hypotheses, are strongly shaped by the imaginaries propagated by Korean entertainment products and cultural industry. Additionally, we also point out that assuming Korean men for ideal partners, is based on new ideas of masculinity, represented for the most part in those same cultural products, strongly contrasting with what in the Korean society is held as “masculine” or proper characteristics of man or male.

This paper employs mixed research method based on qualitative analysis. It is based on theoretical and bibliographic analysis and reinforced with quantitative analysis underpinned by surveys carried out online among focus groups. The bibliographic review will help to explain the guiding standpoints in this research, the reasons for the consumption of Korean entertainment products and the main characteristics in representation of Korean men which make them so attractive to young Mexican women. Based on the online ethnography and open-response questionnaires distributed to more than 500 Mexican women the paper tries to clarify what makes them consider Korean men so desirable. The results obtained will show whether or not that taste originated in entertainment products influencing them through the imaginaries spread by Korean cultural products, to affirm or deny our hypothesis.

The data obtained in this study will be analyzed using key concepts from cultural studies, dealing with the symbolic aspect of cultural consumption. The paper also analyzes the role of contemporary media – mainly digital – used to distribute cultural products in other societies, promoting the cultural consumption of products conveying them a value and a use, and how in this process, symbolic values are built up and assigned to the cultural products that transit from the Korean cultural industry to Mexican society. Finally, and as a goal of this research, it will be shown how Mexican women have reconfigured the male prototypes, placing Korean men within new masculine ideals. Constructions have a strong impact on personal level, but also impact the social space where people interact daily reconfiguring individual and collective identities.

Background of Hallyu in Mexico

As mentioned, the arrival of the so-called Korean wave or *Hallyu* to Mexico dates back to 2002. Since then innumerable groups of young people, mainly women, have been showing interests in Korean cultural industry. Over the years, not only the consumption of these products from the Asian country has changed, but also the attitude to them as well as to the society they come from.

The arrival and diffusion of Korean cultural products in Mexico

The cultural consumption of entertainment products from the Republic of Korea in Mexico is almost two decades old. It was exactly in the year 2002 when the arrival of Korean cultural products to Mexico started [Lopez 2011, López Rocha 2012]. By broadcasting of soap operas via public channels such as channel 34 and channel 11, the first Korean melodramas reached mainly female audiences that have been used to the consumption of soap operas, but at the same time were tired with the boredom of the local monotone stories and dull screenplays.

Thus, starting from 2002 and putting to use the infrastructure of Mexican public channels, Korean soap operas reached various parts of the country. Korean dramas were broadcast from Mexico City² to the conurbation of the State of Mexico, and further to the states of Puebla, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Yucatán, Campeche, Tabasco, Jalisco and Nuevo León, where they managed to catch attention and gain popularity among Mexican audience.

Such dramas as “Star in my Heart” – which was the first to be broadcast on Channel 34 (Televisión Mexiquense) – “A Jewel in the Palace”, or “Kim Sam Soon” enjoyed great success [Lopez 2011]. Other cultural products, such as films, were also promoted by the Korean embassy in Mexico. Movies, though with less impact than dramas, took

advantage of the spaces for cultural dissemination related with Mexican government agencies mainly during the called “weeks of Korean cinema”, such as La Cineteca Nacional, or broadcasts through Channel 11 of the National Polytechnic Institute, thus reaching the general audiences.

From the popularity of soap operas that audiences found fresh and attractive [Lopez 2011], sprung the consumption of Korean music, which was strongly related to dramas, since the melodies of their soundtracks began also to win popularity. As noted in the aforementioned studies, the arrival of Korean pop music to Mexico was strongly reinforced by the “Pump it up” machines, which had Korean software to play pop music while young people danced over them [Lopez 2011].

This way, during the first decade of the new century, Korean cultural products, though consumed by mostly females, managed to capture attention of males as well. A couple of years ago after the shift from the consumption of Korean soap operas to K-pop, youngsters became stable consumers of Korean cultural products, predominantly focused on pop music and melodrama serials on digital platforms. Yet lately other Korean products have also benefited from the country’s image and renown in the consumers’ mind, such as beauty products, electronics, cars and food, etc. All those clearly facilitated by cultural promotion, are not categorized as entertainment products.

Transition to current consumption and representations of Korean cultural products

If we observe the stages of the consumption of Korean entertainment products in Mexico from its beginning to the present, we can notice motivation patterns common to the consumers that gave them particular reasons to use cultural products, matching some symbolic value or use value to them.

At the beginning of this process, besides the support of the Korean Embassy in Mexico to distribution and promotion of cultural products bringing about proliferation of Korean artists’ fan clubs [Lopez Rocha 2013], there were also additional incentives to boost consumption process by positive response of consumers to those products.

Since its inception, and as emphasized in previously mentioned research [Lopez 2011; López Rocha 2012; López 2020], Mexican consumers were attracted by the plots in the stories of the first dramas circulated in Mexico. Those soap operas promoted family and relationship values, depicting, for example, the respect of the younger towards older generations, and the way in which those melodramas represented love stories was very beautiful. Although similar topics were present in Mexican soap operas, the Korean love stories were whiter, referring to innocence, they were less sexualized and more romantic, pointing out that it was a beautiful and an innocent way of projecting love.

On the other hand, Mexican women, very much attracted by screenplays different from the local “telenovela” plots, paid due attention to the men starring in those stories as main characters. Admiration with Korean male actors was so big that it generated the tendency of idolizing them among female consumers. That became the moment for Mexican women to get infatuated with the Korean males present in the cultural products.

Although at first the attention was focused on soap operas, later it also shifted to male musical groups or solo singers like “Bi” or “G-Dragon” who gave their first live concerts to Mexican fans back in 2007 making a big splash among female and young audiences. Such combined impression from the cultural products from Korea, little by little widened the initial audiences of soap operas, adding to housewives and younger women, since the characteristics of musical and visual products were appealing to new consumers of that age and social background in their social group.

The shift in the consumption of Korean cultural products mainly to Mexican young followers gave rise to an extremely interesting phenomenon. This specifically concerns the way in which Mexican women started to form certain ideas of Korean men based on

cultural products. These ideas strongly influenced by cultural products served the springboard for the constructions of followers in regard of Korean men. Those ideas obviously sprung from the content created for entertainment consist of exclusively positive characteristics prompted by the images and figures of young Korean males filling the dreams, imagination and desires of Mexican women who visualize this new masculine prototype.

***Perception of the Republic of Korea
fostered by consumption of its cultural products***

The image of Korean men perceived by Mexican female consumers was formed neither casually nor instantly. The cultural industry of the Republic of Korea itself helped to generate the images of a renewed, modern, technologically and economically strong and politically influential country on the international scene which consequently created images of Koreans, immediately associating them with a model of desirable developed and advanced society. Those perceptions, which strongly project Korea abroad, were reaffirmed through its representation in cultural products.

The image of Korean men in Mexico prior to the arrival of the first melodramas was totally different. Frequently associated with merchants established in the center of the capital, the idea of Korean men was not overly appealing to Mexican women and, consequently, this sort of profile did not embraced much popularity within Mexican society. Practically it is only after Korean soap operas became popular in Mexico that consumers started to associate dramas with the “Korean-ness” in general, initiating the shift in usual ideas about Korean man.

As the obvious result of the Korean soap operas’ popularity, images of Korean males started to undergo reinterpretation by female consumers, falling into diverse categories. The elderly males became the embodiment of a family patriarch, respected and obeyed, but on the other hand, charged with the responsibilities of protector and provider for everyone because he belongs to the generation of self-sacrificing sufferers.

Another category embraces mature men, representing authority in the family, but at the same time, belonging to those age groups in Korean society who were already born in the independent Korea in its transition from the traditional life style to the realities of the modern world, who build the country to achieve prosperity, yet still remain men accepting the mandates established by culture without option to questioning them.

Still another is the category of kids growing up with a perspective of successful future, yet obliged to obey the strict demands of discipline as expected from the youngest in the contemporary Korean society. At the same time, they are socially protected enjoying the sort of childhood that the elders could not have in terms of clothing, food, education, peace, infrastructure, etc.

Finally, the fourth category includes young men dealing with the demands of parents and grandparents, but also facing the expectations of the whole country that had just recently turned an example of success based on its economic development and its great advances in technology, epitomized by such renown international companies as Samsung or LG. All the brunt of being a modern ideal Korean man is practically their burden as a sort of fusion between the traditionally exalted pride of being a Korean keeping the traditions that gave them identity as bearers of a unique and powerful culture, but at the same time with the admixture of being a new social type ready to interact with the globalized world.

However, there are much more constituting elements in the imaginaries of Mexican women as regards young Korean men who are bestowed certain specific qualities representing a new line in masculinity. Now being a man at some points coincide with usual stereotypes – circulating globally – but also different. It is the difference that catches attention of Mexican female followers. Questioned about their interest in Korean cultural products, they stated that one of the reasons to consume was men and their way presenting their masculinity [Lopez 2011].

The way of receiving the cultural products from the Republic of Korea in Mexico was undoubtedly a process emphasizing new ties between both cultures. It was called forth by the globalizing dynamics, yet reflected the approach of women in the process of consumption. Probably at the beginning of this process, the consumers did not yet have a symbolic and cultural framework that would allow them to decode the representations of Korean culture imbued in corresponding cultural products, however, the message delivered by the male protagonists of visual and entertainment products, allowed to establish ties with the specific group of Mexican society, thus giving way to a dialogue between both societies.

Cultural consumption and its relationship with constructions of meaning

By the year 2020, there were at least 52 different Korean artists, whether soloists or groups, followed by Mexican audiences that consume Korean cultural products [López 2020], real proof that the Korean cultural industry managed to gain sympathy of Mexican society. Given that the key-words “K-pop” and “technology” are predominantly associated with Korea [López 2020, 161], the process that started since 2002 in Mexico was not missed out by Korean entertainment industries, clearly showing their ability to generate favorable perception and create popular stereotypes as needed.

The Korean entertainment business undoubtedly did a good job and now their country is present in the mind of young Mexicans who show a strong inclination for Korean products because they are anchored in that mind by the means of presenting those products to the young.

Together with the cultural industries, the diffusion, dispersion, distribution and access channels are also essential for consumers to access the products. They are basically concentrated in the Internet via platforms and social networks, reaffirming the way the consumption of Korean products and the access to cultural representations take place in Mexico [López 2020, 161].

Because of the potential present in entertainment business combined with the digital media distribution, their products have acquired much importance for those who study them and have presented a yummy profit to those who produce them.

Phenomena or processes of consumption have been thoroughly studied in the field of cultural studies, since they show the importance to understand the constructions of meaning generated by these cultural products. Cultural studies have contributed, above all, to the understanding of the symbolic dimension of consumption. In simple words, it is from this analytical field that we can deconstruct consumption to understand it in different dimensions – economic, political, practical and also cultural – which allows us observe both the material and the symbolic part, that is, their meanings. Although Geertz [Geertz 1983] approached the symbolic aspect of culture from anthropological standpoint, the cultural studies scheme namely describes the form of mass distribution of culture and how it builds the symbolic forms, the way in which symbolism moves from society to society and how they build meaning for the receivers is strongly related to political and economic interests.

This process of production and reproduction of culture has been defined as cultural production, which emanates mainly from an industrialized way of producing and reproducing culture but also, according to Willis [Willis 1999, 644], determined by the feedback from receivers. In this paper, we make use of concepts related to cultural production and consumption to discover how consumers and receivers of so-called cultural products, particularly in case of Mexico, generate meaning.

The theoreticians of Critical Theory initially defined the cultural industries. According to the first definitions made by Horkheimer and Adorno [Horkheimer and Adorno 1998], the notion refers to the commodification of cultural forms produced by the emergence of entertainment industries in the West, basically in Europe and the United States at the end

of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The use made of these industries' products marked a strong difference between what until then had been divided between elite culture and popular culture. In a very critical way, both authors pointed out that under this new system of cultural production, the consumer or recipient was practically defenseless, unable to question the products emanating from this growing industry. The authors declare that "for the consumer there is nothing to classify that has not already been anticipated in the schematism of production" [Horkheimer and Adorno 1998, 169–170], a statement that leaves the consumer in a passive mode emphasizing the power of cultural or creative industries as generators of thoughts and specific ideologies.

Publishing of the cultural studies by Hoggart and Stuart Hall brought about a new approach to the forms of production or creation of meanings and their spread in societies, a different perspective of the role of cultural industries arises, above all, in the correlation between the media and the recipients. Hall ties the concept of culture to the structure, marking an inseparable relationship between the culture of resistance and the mass media, but it takes David Morley to demonstrate and affirm Hall's approach, experimenting with his viewpoints about the role of the media in the production of different identity records [Matterlat and Neveu 2011, 81]. This approach makes it possible to show the receiver as an active and not a passive entity, as presupposed by the critical theory of Adorno and Horkheimer.

In Latin America, the field of Cultural Studies has been developed and represented by Néstor García Canclini, who has shown the importance of cultural production and its appropriation processes through a variety of works [García 1989; 1999; 2000].

García has defined cultural industries as

"the set of activities of production, commercialization, national and international, of information and entertainment, and the growing access of the majority. In recent years, the emphasis on one or another of these activities and functions has led to naming them as 'communication industries', 'creative industries' or 'content industries' which refers to the fact that they are means that carry meanings that give sense to behaviors, unite or divide societies" [García without date, 1–2].

García mentions that specifically in Latin America, since the end of the last and the beginning of this century, there has been a global trend with regard to cultural industries with three main characteristics: 1) the latter becoming the predominant actors in social communication and in the construction of the public sphere, 2) culture has been located in a prominent and strategic place in socioeconomic development and 3) when cultural industries started to claim a central place in the world, endogenous production capacity was gradually being lost in Latin American countries [García 2000, 92–94], a fundamental factor for understanding Korean cultural consumption in Mexico in recent years.

Also UNESCO describes Cultural industries as

"those sectors that combine creation, production and marketing of goods and services based on intangible content of a cultural nature, generally protected by copyright. Also called in some countries 'creative industries' and known in economic fields as 'sunrise industries' or, in technological circles, as 'content industries', cultural industries include print and multimedia publishing, film and audiovisual production, the phonographic industry, crafts and design. Certain countries extend this concept to architecture, plastic arts, performing arts, sports, the manufacture of musical instruments, advertising and cultural tourism. Cultural industries provide added value to content while building and disseminating cultural values of individual and collective interest" [UNESCO 2000, 11–12].

Nevertheless, as Bustamante points out, the concept of cultural industries "designates a whole series of symbolic creations that, multiplied in numerous copies in material or immaterial media, go to meet their recipients" [Bustamante 2003, 3]. The author also admits, citing Martín Barbero, that these cultural and communicative industries were

formed “not as simple ‘diffusers’” of culture or mere intermediaries between creators and consumers, but as structuring and constitutive of the major and most influential culture, of the culture in an industrial society [Bustamante 2003, 3].

Although it has been pointed out the importance of cultural industries in the framework of cultural studies, it was also previously stated that they acquire their importance due to the consumption processes that they entail since, unlike other items, the so-called cultural products, have a symbolic significance that gives meaning to the very process of consumption carried out by the receivers or consumers, that is, they give them meaning.

Although there are authors like Sunkel who have pointed out that there is no clear difference between the consumption of any product and the specific consumption of cultural goods, since consumption is a cultural act itself, García Canclini describes consumption as “the set of processes of appropriation and use of products in which the symbolic value prevails over the values of use and exchange, or where at least the latter are configured subordinate to the symbolic dimension” [García 1993, 34–37].

Guillermo Sunkel mentions that cultural consumption is characterized by the intertwining between the fields of economy and culture, “which would make it necessary to return to the notion of consumption” as a cultural practice that manifests itself both in the appropriation and uses of every type of goods and not only in the so-called ‘cultural goods’” [cited in: Ortega 2009, 10].

Tomás Peters points out that “cultural consumption has been unraveled as a framework of analysis that allows us to understand how symbolic forms circulate and make sense in the complex plots of everyday life” [Peters 2019, 271]. He mentions that

“Unlike traditional or utilitarian goods – such as appliances, tools, decorations, etc. – cultural goods – such as books, paintings, plays, contemporary music concerts, etc. – are produced in the field of restricted cultural production or the artistic-cultural field. Due to their status as significant creations, they have a very different quality from ordinary objects: however, in addition to having an economic and symbolic value, they are also generators of logic of distinction and social hierarchy” [Peters 2019, 277].

It is very important to understand this distinction since when we come to analyzing Korean cultural products; the extensive symbolic value is configured in relation to other products of Korean origin, even though the latter are missing in the concept of cultural products such as electrical appliances or technological products such as cell phones, cosmetics, etc.

Ortega defines cultural goods as

“a particular type of symbolic forms whose specificity is that they are produced in a social field that Bourdieu [Bourdieu 1993] identifies as the ‘field of cultural production’, and which includes the legitimized and legitimizing institutions of the ‘cultured art’, groups and artists who aspire to be recognized or those who present themselves as protesters, as well as the mass media, which Thompson considers to be the main producers and disseminators of symbolic goods in contemporary culture” [Ortega 2009, 16]. The symbolic as Giménez mentions is “the world of materialized social representations in sensitive forms, also called symbolic forms and which can be expressions, artifacts, actions, events and some quality or relationship” [Giménez 2005, 5].

From the framework of analysis of cultural studies there can be shown how cultural industries can generate particular and specific ideas about their products. Those perceptions circulate through current media represented not only by traditional TV or radio, but also by other means, such as networks or platforms powered by the Internet. This analytical framework allow us to understand not only the strength of cultural products and their industries – in this case the Korean – but also to understand how followers and consumers make sense of them mainly focusing on the construction of ideas related to Korean men.

Gender, as well as other cultural elements, has a symbolic construction that – as De Martino Bermúdez points quoting Yanagisako – must be understood as a system of structuring and structured symbols and meanings of and by sociocultural practices and experiences [De Martino Bermúdez 2013, 284]. Although the construction of the genre based on a particular sociocultural system is not discussed in this paper, and neither are the cultural assignments to gender roles, it is necessary to emphasize the way in which the characteristics of masculine are symbolically built and assigned in the minds of Mexican women through the influence of cultural products constructing an idea about Korean men as bearers of a specific masculinity.

***Mexican women and the construction of “Korean man” as
a new ideal of masculinity***

Previous research on consumption of Korean cultural products in Mexico [López 2020] points out specific characteristics that lead consumers, mainly women, to identify particular characteristics of products. Frequently products are associated with high quality, visual attractiveness, personality and representation of the artists, high technology, among others. But what specifically attracts Mexican women to Korean men represented by cultural products?

In order to obtain this information, 500 open questionnaires were distributed in focus groups where particular interest in *Hallyu* and Korean pop music groups is clearly expressed. Out of these 500, 484 were completed. Respondents were directly asked if they liked *Hallyu*, K-pop and other Korean cultural industry products. The answers were predominantly positive with only 25 negative out of 484. If we compare it to the responses to the question whether they like Korea as a country that was even higher because of the total, only 4 answered “no”. These four responses do not coincide with a refusal of entertainment products, since those who answered that they did not like Korea, also clarified that they had already known the culture more closely and experienced its real dynamics, beyond the entertainment and that did not make them feel happy. However, they like entertainment.

Among all the respondents, the youngest was 13 and the oldest was 55 years old. The group with the age ranging from 20 to 29 constituted the majority of respondents totaling 273 persons. The youngest participants ranging from 13 to 19 years of age, formed a group of 98 people. The range from 30 to 39 years old encompassed 82 participants, and less representative are the respondents of 40 to 49 (only 23 persons) as well as women between 50 to 55 years old (only 4 answers). Only 4 people missed out specifying their age. All were asked if they were interested in Korean men and only 37 answered “no”, three of them did not give a reason for their opinion while 444 women were interested in Korean men.

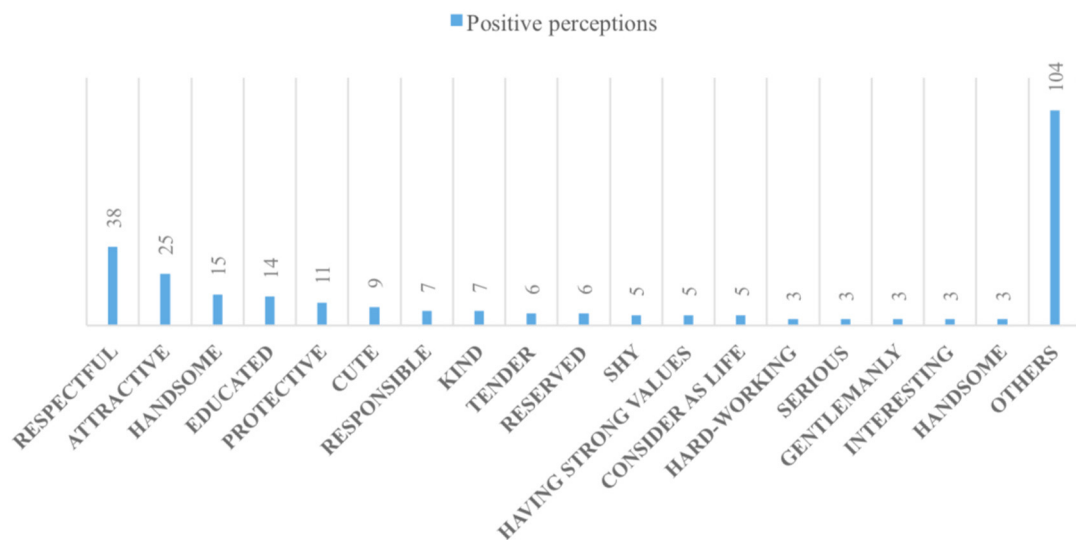
In this context which not only measures the attraction to entertainment products, but also the sympathy for Korea, we can contextualize the framework for the central question of our research: how do Mexican women – mostly young – perceive Korean men projected through Korean audio visual products? Most of the answers indicated that the image of Korean men is perceived through entertainment products, whether they are K-pop singers or actors, and reflected in serials and soap operas, since most of the interviewees also revealed that they have not traveled or lived in Korea.

The responses, collected from open questions, yield a fairly diverse number of qualifiers used by Mexican women to describe Korean men. However, there were three descriptive words used with the highest frequency. It is important to point out that, as far as analysis of data is concerned; collecting open answers projects the real perceptions of the social subjects in a more objective and clear way.

In this scope, Mexican women indicated more frequently that Korean men are more respectful than Latinos with a total of 38 opinions. The second most frequent qualifier

was that Koreans are attractive with a total of 25 accumulated answers. The third most frequent qualifier was that Koreans are handsome with a total of 15 responds, followed by 14 opinions that regarded them “educated”. Other characteristics such as being a “protective man” had 11 answers, being “cute” accumulated 9 answers, “responsible” – 7, “kind” – 7, “tender” – 6, “reserved” – 6, “shy” – 5, “having strong values” – 5, “to be considered as a life partner” – 5, “hard-working” – 3, “serious” – 3, “gentlemanly” – 3, “interesting” – 3, “handsome” – 3. There were also other responses qualified as positive; however, since their value was less than 3, they were reflected in the “other”, as shown in the table 1:

TABLE 1



Own elaboration table with data obtained from the survey

The findings revealed certain negative perceptions too. Those free responses allow us to note that the images generated through cultural products are not entirely positive. Women responded with 5 negative qualifiers as well, whereas 174 of them gave a neutral answers, that is, neither positive nor negative: stating that Korean men are only people belonging to other culture – 41 responses, that they are like any other men – 89 responses, “a person like any other” is represented in 33 responses, and 5 persons mentioned they had no particular expectations of Korean males. Only one person just defined them as “Asian”.

Among the few negative qualifiers, three particular ones were repeated most frequently: the characteristic “chauvinistic” had 4 responses; Korean males were recognized as “superficial” by 3 persons; the image of men was defined as “stereotyped by *Hallyu*” by 3 respondents. Other qualifiers were “arrogant”, “self-centered”, “feminine”, “unfaithful” and “easily manipulated” by their parents. Only 13 women did not give any response.

Considering the answers, we can see that more than half of the participating women expressed their perception of Korean men using positive qualifiers. Regardless of the accumulation of responses by frequency of use with the same qualifier, the 272 responses associated with positive characteristics represent 56 %, which allows us to conclude that the current attitude of Mexicans toward Korean men is positive.

Although it is true that the responses with neutral qualifiers were also illustrative, with 174 responses making 34 % of the opinions, still we can observe that negative responses are actually insignificant in comparison to the positive ones, since they add up to only 5 %. Those who chose not to respond were only 2 %.

So far, as outlined in the hypothesis of this work, it can be admitted that the Mexican women questioned for this study, mostly held positive attitude towards Korean men as they are represented by the cultural products created in the Republic of Korea and indeed, some of the answers demonstrate that it is mainly due to soap operas or serials and singers that the respondents have built their idea and image of Korean men upon. In addition to exalting characteristics directly related to physical appearance and the attractiveness of these Korean men provoke in them, they made important for this research assertions, such as: the males still maintain traditional values needed for a reliable spouse and family man, they are men who will compromise to have a family after the age of 35, they are considered to protect their loved woman, and they are less sexist than Mexican males.

We can thus observe how Korean cultural products allowed Mexican women to build a particular idea or image of the Korean men in the process of cultural consumption, giving it meaning from Mexican sociocultural context.

The Korean cultural industry has proven to be a system of production, national and international marketing, information and entertainment that has sought communication channels through various traditional and digital media to reach its consumers in various societies of the world through various ways of dissemination.

Conclusion

Although the initial approach of Horkheimer and Adorno mentioned a manipulative cultural industry where the receiver had a passive and almost defenseless role against the influence of the industry itself, yet from the viewpoint of Hoggart, Stuart Hall and Morley presented in their cultural studies, the power of these industries in the construction of particular ideas toward the industry products is not absolute, the researchers categorize cultural products and emphasize a certain cooperation with the recipients in the construction of meaning among the target consumers.

As for the Korean entertainment industry, Horkheimer and Adorno's definition fits the data collected for this paper that Mexican recipients, involved in the consumption of Korean cultural products, which conceive their idea and build a particular model of Korean men under the influence by cultural products. Consumers practically do not question those specific ideas and images that are produced by the industry, and consequently the industry itself fosters a cycle of consumption. We can also point out that the production and creation of the meanings by the Korean cultural industry are spread by means of the media, which is essential for the production of specific ideas and images, both about the country and about the males brought forth in the media products. On the other hand, the symbolic loads contained in Korean cultural products, manage to guide their recipients by hand – in this case Mexican women – to build particular and specific imaginaries and stereotypes that place them in a hyper-reality where Korean men are deified as a new or alternative form of the masculine, mainly contrasted to the idea of the Latino or Mexican males with their strong macho characteristics. The notion of hyper-reality is brought about because most of the respondent women have never been to Korea, nor have they interacted with a Korean man in reality, they never experienced Korean social dynamics, that is, they basically construct ideas generated by the consumption of cultural products such as soap operas, serials, movies or pop music groups, the absence of personal experience though does not thwart their building an own idea about those males putting them in a monolithic category called “Korean men”.

Witnessing this process we can point out that, in effect, the Korean cultural industry has managed to convey a particular image of Korean men by means of cultural production to Mexican consumers, which certainly implies creation of symbolic charge, as precisely mentioned by Bustamante [Bustamante 2003]. It is true that in contemporary Korean society there is an important diversity of constructions and representations of the masculinity that can vary generationally, but it is also true that the Confucian influence in

the construction of the Korean masculinity, since the last dynasty, remains predominant up to present day.

For this reason, it is particularly important to highlight that these symbolic constructions are the ones that pass through the cultural products into the imaginaries of the recipients – as mentioned by Barbero, Sfez and Bustamante – as structuring agents of certain culture, managing to build, through multiple symbols and images, a positive and attractive characteristics that captivate those who consume them.

The meaning that aforementioned symbolic constructs have among the receivers is markedly contrasting to the masculine models in their own social environment. Platforms and social networks have brought about access to other male models attainable through the cultural products offered in corresponding digital spaces, which present the possibility of experiencing relationships on a personal level in a different way.

The obtained answers testify the way in which the recipient female consumers abstract these symbolic ideas of the masculine by means of the consumption of Korean cultural products, since they characterize men as attractive based on the care they show on personal level. The way the males dress and take care of themselves and woo women makes men to seem respectful, polite and protective, that is why respondents are attracted to male figures that do not represent aggression or violence but demonstrate affection and care. It is important to point out that the word “cute”, as a qualifier, inside Mexican context indicates a softer, less aggressive masculinity that contrasts sharply with Mexican male stereotypes where tenderness is not a significant trait.

These new ways of showing interest in or attraction to other representations of the masculine reveal two elements important for this work. Firstly, the Mexican recipients do not have a “cultural field” to decode and understand Korean men and their masculinity within the Korean cultural context, but that a process of symbolic construction is carried out on the premises of the cultural industry and its products. For this reason, the vision of Korean men is partial. We can also observe that inside the sociocultural context of the female respondents, there appeared new ideals of the masculine that do not correspond to neither the spring from American creative industry which has historically flooded Mexican entertainment market, nor to the Mexican creative industry itself, the most influential in Spanish-speaking world and in Latin America. Secondly, it can be stated that female consumers show interest in models of different reference framework that responds to personal expectations that each one may choose from the global context for reconfiguration of gender parameters.

By way of a more up-to-date observation of the present Korean cultural consumption in Mexico, it has also been possible to explain that the high level of consumption of Korean products in Mexico is strongly related to the search for alternative realities for young people who consume them, realities where the violence and machismo are practically non-existent and where personal efforts and achievements are socially recognized and interpreted as success in life.

¹ *Hallyu* refers to the craziness of young people – initially from China and Japan – for the Korean Entertainment products.

² At that time it was called Federal District.

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Якими вбачаються корейські чоловіки?

Перцепції серед мексиканських жінок, навіяні “корейською хвилею”

Дослідження останніх років вказують на те, що чимало молодих представниць сучасного мексиканського суспільства схильні до споживання продуктів індустрії розваг, що походять з Республіки Корея. Поява перших корейських продуктів креативної індустрії в країні ацтеків датується 2002 роком, однак неможливо визначити точно, коли саме споживацтво сягнуло майже беззаперечного захоплення піснями жанру *K-pop* та групами “ідолів”. Протягом останнього десятиліття підсилена цифровізацією синергія між зусиллями корейських компаній і продюсерських центрів, різними верствами корейського суспільства та дипломатичними колами уряду азійської країни дала змогу перетворити явище споживання корейського розважального медіа- і телепродукту на глобальну тенденцію, що також мало відповідний вплив і на мексиканських представниць прекрасної статі.

Стаття зосереджується на тому, у який спосіб вплив продуктів креативної індустрії Республіки Корея сформував уявлення мексиканок про корейських чоловіків і як ці нові уявлення спонукають жіноцтво країни ацтеків вважати цих представників протилежної статі новим ідеалом. У результаті проведеного дослідження продемонстровано, як мексиканські жінки стали розглядати відмітні риси маскуліності сучасних південнокорейських чоловіків у контексті сприйняття ідеального чоловіка.

З метою аналізу та опрацювання даних, отриманих за допомогою відкритих онлайн-опитувань, використовуються такі концепції культурологічних досліджень, як культурна (креативна) індустрія, споживання, символічне використання, гендер як символічний конструкт тощо. Питання були адресовані відповідним фокус-групам, які є споживачами корейської продукції креативної індустрії.

Ключові слова: корейські чоловіки, мексиканські жінки, корейська креативна індустрія, споживання, “корейська хвиля”

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