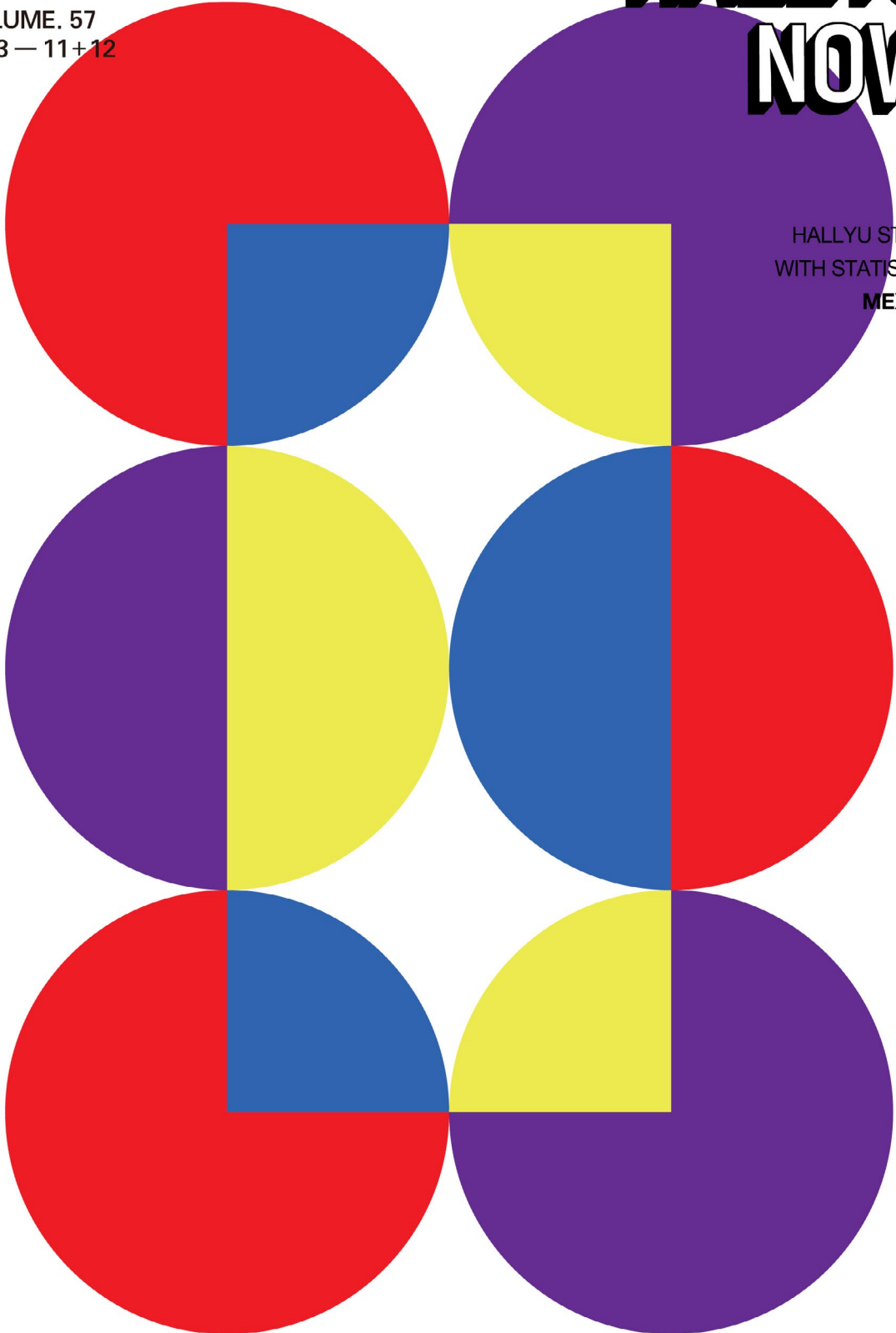


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HALLYU NOW

HALLYU STORY
WITH STATISTICS
MEXICO



KOFICE
한국국제문화교류진흥원

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GLOBAL HALLYU ISSUE MAGAZINE

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A Deep Dive Into Hallyu in Mexico



In a broad sense, Hallyu originated with the language, folk songs, and cuisine of Korea, which were introduced to Mexico by 1,033 Korean immigrants following the end of the Korean Empire. Some parts of Mexico were also known to Korea as Ahn Chang-ho, a prominent Korean activist, visited Mexico as part of the independence movement, and there were a lot of Mexican-American soldiers stationed in Korea. Afterward, Korea was widely known to Mexico thanks to taekwondo and soccer, and mutual cultural exchanges began as the Mexican telenovela *Carrusel* became popular in Korea while the Korean drama series *Star in My Heart* and *Jewel in the Palace* garnered huge popularity in Mexico with 10 years apart. Following this movement, the number of Koreans residing in Mexico skyrocketed as Korean goods dominated the Mexican home appliance market and Korean auto factories were built in Mexico. With the increase in films and dramas portraying the cultures of both nations being exchanged, K-pop's appeal has grown dramatically. Both nations enjoy spicy food and use chili peppers in their cuisine, and the Hallyu has permeated many industries. Korean-related infrastructure in Mexico serves as the foundation for the spread of Hallyu, which dates back to the Korean Pavilion in Mexico's capital of Mexico City in 1968, Museo Conmemorativo de la inmigracion Coreana (2007), Korean streets and Greetingman (2021), a sculpture by a Korean artist, and the Seoul Park in the center of Mexico City (2022), serves as the foundation for the spread of the Hallyu. Hallyu in Mexico peaked in 2022 when Korea was chosen as the guest nation of honor at Mexico's global cultural festival, the Festival Internacional Cervantino in Guanajuato, which celebrated its 50th anniversary. While statistics by age and gender on Mexicans' perception about Koreans and Korean culture and their impact have been surveyed fairly well, a further analysis needs to consider the diversity of social classes in Mexico, which have a much wider gap in race, education attainment, household income, and local internet access than Korea. Future research should at the very least classify the respondents into the upper, middle, and lower classes based on how they consume Hallyu and offer recommendations to enhance Hallyu spread.

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1. History of Hallyu in Mexico and Perception about Korea

Hallyu in Mexico in a broad sense began in 1905 when 1,033 Koreans arrived at the Yucatan Peninsula after their long voyage from Incheon. These first-generation immigrants, who came from very different backgrounds and included children, endured an unimaginable ordeal after being tricked by Japanese merchants into working inhumane conditions on henequen plantations. Although they were in such difficult situations, they raised funds to help the Korean independence movement and invited Dosan Ahn Chang-ho, who was then residing in the United States. Ahn traveled across Mexico for 10 months. American soldiers with Mexican backgrounds came to Korea during the liberation of Korea. During the Korean War, more than 100,000 fought under the United States military as part of the United Nations forces. Until today, many Hispanic soldiers have been stationed in Korea, promoting the exchange of Mexican and Korean cultures.

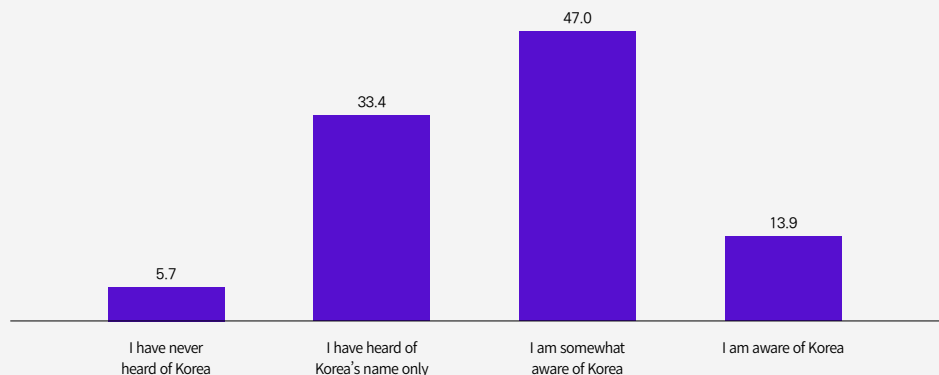
Master Moon Dai-won is a pioneer of Hallyu who came to Mexico in 1968 to spread taekwondo. He has had a profound impact on the community that goes beyond awareness. The Korean flag is hung and people shout in Korean inside hundreds of taekwondo gyms across the country. As a result, it is reported that nearly 2 million people practice Korean greetings. In 1968, Mexico was well known to Korea as a host of the Olympics. In the 1983 FIFA U-20 World Cup hosted by Mexico, the Korean team finished fourth, and it raised awareness about each other. In 1989, the Mexican telenovela *Carrusel*, which aired in Korea at that time, became very popular. With this positive recognition of Mexico, Korean drama series were also exported to Mexico. In 1998, the MBC drama series *Star in My Heart* was the first one exported to Mexico, followed by *All About Eve*, *Winter Sonata*, and *Stairway to Heaven*. In particular, *Jewel in the Palace*, which was introduced to Mexico in 2009, and *My Husband Got a Family*, which aired in Mexico in 2017, recorded extraordinary viewership numbers. The Korean animation *Pucca* aired for 10 years from 2003, and many children and adults became fans of the character. *Pucca's* unique design has become a popular brand across Mexico (Ha, 2023). Many idol groups, including 2NE1, a girl group that debuted in 2010, gained fame. When Psy's *Gangnam Style* became a global hit in 2012, Mexico was no exception to the K-pop craze. With the growing technology and scale of social media and online streaming services, BTS and Blackpink have been leading Hallyu in recent years.

In the 21st century, Kia Motors and numerous suppliers built their factories in Mexico, and Korean home appliances have overtaken American and Japanese products to become the dominant force in the Mexican market. This also led to the openings of a diverse range of Korean restaurants in Mexico. An introduction of a variety of Korean food based on chili peppers introduced to Mexico, the country of origin of chili peppers, has given rise to Korean food aficionados among Mexicans who are fond of spicy food. When Korea hosted the 2002 World Cup and advanced to the quarterfinals, soccer-loving Mexicans started to recognize Korea as a technology and sports powerhouse, beyond its cultural fame. As it was becoming popular to learn Korean across Mexico, the Autonomous University of Nayarit in Mexico became the first university among 33 Latin American countries to have a department of Korean studies. In the past decade, Busan National University, Seoul National University, and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies have conducted large-scale research projects on Latin America, and Daegu Catholic University was selected as a university specializing in Latin America and sent hundreds of young Korean people to Mexico for five years. Along with Pai Chai University and Busan University of Foreign Studies, Shinhan University offered K-Move, an overseas job training program by the Human Resources Development Service of Korea, for five years, and also contributed to spreading Hallyu by helping hundreds of its graduates to find jobs in Mexico. Additionally, Korea's victory over Germany in the round of 32 of the 2018 World Cup in Russia fortunately advanced Mexico to the round of 16. This led Mexicans to express gratitude to the Koreans for being a country of brothers and sparked the local spread of Hallyu.

Awareness of Korea

Base: All respondents, n=1,712, %

Q: Are you aware of Korea?



*Source: Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (2023). ¹2023 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status.

Awareness of Korea by respondent demographics

Base: All respondents, n=(), %

Q: Are you aware of Korea?

Category	Total	Gender		Age				
		Male	Female	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s
Number of cases	(1,712)	(913)	(799)	(518)	(399)	(344)	(270)	(181)
I have never heard of Korea(1)	5.7	8.0	3.0	11.8	5.0	1.2	3.0	2.2
I have heard of Korea's name only(2)	33.4	33.6	33.2	43.4	26.1	24.4	31.1	41.4
I am somewhat aware of Korea(3)	47.0	45.8	48.4	37.1	50.6	56.1	48.5	48.1
I am aware of Korea(4)	13.9	12.6	15.4	7.7	18.3	18.3	17.4	8.3
Awareness(2+3+4)	94.3	92.0	97.0	88.2	95.0	98.8	97.0	97.8

*Source: Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (2023). †2023 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status.

Considering the historical background of Hallyu in Mexico as described above, it seems significant that 94.3% of Mexicans said they were aware of Korea and nearly 50% were somewhat aware, and in particular, 54% to 85% of all age groups, whether they were men or women, provided positive responses to all survey items across economy, culture, favorability, and contributions. Their perception about Korea as a cultural power (60.4%) and a partner country (58.5%), however, was relatively lower than other questions. This is partly due to the large number of lower-class Mexicans who have limited access to economic and trade information, low Internet penetration rates, and low purchasing power for Korean-made IT products. As TV has a high penetration rate in Mexico across all regions, the overall awareness about Korea was high. More specifically, however, the level of awareness about Korean culture would be proportional to the internet penetration rate and social media usage, which may explain the low positive response rate among lower-class people.

Perception of Korea by Respondent demographics

BASE: Total, n=(), unit: agree(4+5)%

Q. What are your general thoughts on Korea? (1. Strongly disagree / 2. Disagree / 3. Neutral / 4. Agree / 5. Strongly agree)

Category	Total	Gender		Age				
		Male	Female	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s
Number of cases	(1,100)	(550)	(550)	(275)	(275)	(275)	(195)	(80)
Overall perception	74.1	76.4	71.8	67.3	72.0	79.3	74.9	85.0
Economically developed	75.9	73.1	78.7	68.4	73.1	78.5	83.1	85.0
Favorable country	69.4	70.7	68.0	67.6	66.9	73.1	69.2	71.3
Friendly country to us	67.5	69.6	65.5	60.7	62.2	71.3	74.9	78.8
International contribution	62.2	59.3	65.1	54.9	58.5	67.6	66.2	71.3
A cultural powerhouse	60.4	55.1	65.6	50.9	59.6	68.0	65.1	57.5
A partner rather than a competitor	58.5	62.9	54.0	51.6	55.6	61.1	64.6	67.5

*Source: Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (2023). †2023 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status.

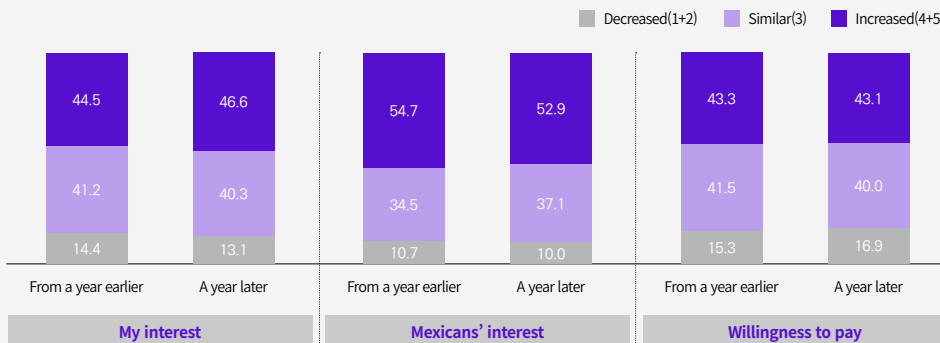
2. Interest in and Favorability for Korean Cultural Content

Foreigners who have lived in Korea and Japan, particularly the majority of Mexicans, frequently remark that Koreans are similar to Mexicans and Japanese people are like Germans. Mexican and Korean cultures are similar in that while Koreans can be noisy and chaotic, they are also friendly and nice to foreigners. Germans and Japanese, on the other hand, are neat, rule-abiding, and reserved in interpersonal relationships. There are some emotional ties between Koreans and Mexicans, as they are generous about punctuality and have some sort of internal grief. Aside from these emotional ties, Mexican interest in Korea has grown recently as Koreans are thought to be more accurate, hygienic, and compliant than even Germans, which are qualities that Mexicans are perceived to lack in some cases. Such interest has grown with increasing favorability for cultural content that reflects our lives and thoughts. The Mexican telenovela *Carrusel*, which was introduced to Korea three decades ago and became immensely popular, addresses issues of racial discrimination, the wealth gap between rich and poor, and religion. Although its genre is different, *Parasite*, the first Korean film to win the Best Picture for Academy Award, has drawn over 10 million viewers since it explores the theme of poverty and the divisions and tensions that exist between social classes. In Mexico, where there is a significant income disparity between the rich and the poor as well as between different regions, such content may be highly acceptable and have a wide range of implications.

Interest in Korean cultural content

Base: All respondents, n=1,100, %

Q: Please, read the following question about interest in Korean cultural content, and select the response that reflects how you think about it. (1. Greatly decreased; 2. Decreased; 3. Similar; 4. Increased; 5 Greatly increased)



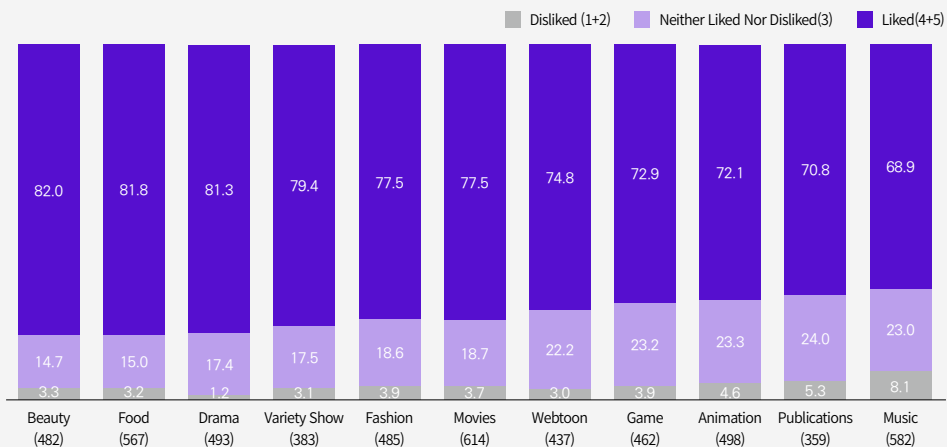
*Source: Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (2023). †2023 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status.

In terms of interest in Korean cultural content, when the responses for “interest from a year ago” and “interest in a year later” are compared, there is a consistent increase in personal interest, willingness to spend, and average interest among Mexicans. This result is quite promising in that Mexicans’ growing interest in Korean culture overall could increase the favorability and sustainability of each specific Korean cultural content. However, rather than lumping everything into a single category of “culture,” it would be more beneficial if a future survey examined “interest” by type of content, such as survey items for “favorability,” in order to predict this synergistic effect more accurately. Dividing and surveying three or four categories, like “fiction,” “music,” “clothing/food/housing,” and “others,” would be beneficial enough instead of breaking it up into more than ten categories like “favorability” survey items.

favorability of Korean Cultural Content

BASE People who have experienced Korean cultural content by category, n=(), unit: %

Q. How much did you enjoy the Hallyu content that you have recently used overall? (5-point scale: 1. I did not like it at all; 2. I did not like it; 3. I neither liked nor disliked it; 4. I liked it; 5. I liked it very much)



*Source: Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (2023). †2023 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status.

Since survey items for the favorability of cultural content are more specific than survey items for interest, they can predict future trends based on the response rates, and enhance strategies to spread Hallyu more efficiently. Beauty (82%), food (81.8%), and drama (81.3%) ranked first to third in terms of favorability, mainly due to their interaction. As Mexicans have emotional connections with Korea, their favorability for Korean drama series, which

depict what it is like to live as Koreans (even if it is somewhat exaggerated and fictionalized), influences their favorability for Korean cultural content. After watching Korean drama series, Mexicans are likely to identify or assimilate with Korean cultural values and adopt the characters' ways of thinking and living. Mexicans are drawn to Korean drama series not only because of the dialogues of the scenes, but also because they prefer or imitate the food, fashion, furniture, and customs that are portrayed in the series. It eventually develops into a fandom phenomenon, in which they like Korea, Koreans, and anything Korean. Eating scenes in Korean drama series stimulate their taste and increase their favorability for Korean food. Given the prominence and frequency with which characters' appearances and styles are emphasized on screen, the Mexican respondents gave higher ratings for food and beauty products than for drama in general. The proverbs "the devil is in the details" and "strong attention to detail is important" come to mind when we look at these favorability rates.

3. Sustainability of the Hallyu in Mexico

According to Ha (2023), the number of Hallyu fan clubs in Latin America is more than 700 with 6.3 million members, and it is more than twice the number of Hallyu fan clubs in Asia. The extent of Hallyu is imaginable in Mexico, a large country that takes the lead in Latin America along with Brazil. As Kim (2022) states, "The Hallyu in Mexico is a typical pop culture content formed from the bottom up, not from the top down. It is likely to continue in the future because it is voluntary adoption by ordinary people, in which people find the Korean music and drama series they like, share them on social media, and form fandoms." Thanks to streaming platforms available around the world, such as Netflix, Disney+, and Amazon, the current rise and fandom phenomenon of Korean cultural content are likely to continue for years to come.

Favorite Country for Each Cultural Content

Base: Those who experienced Korean cultural content, n=0, unit: %

Q. For each content type, which foreign cultural content is popular in your country? Please select the top three, in order.



*Source: Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (2023). "2023 Survey on Overseas Hallyu Status."

As seen from the survey statistics above, the United States overwhelmingly ranks first in every genre except drama as the most popular “cultural producer” for Mexicans. It is not only because the United States is a global superpower with a strong qualitative and quantitative impact across economic, military, and cultural fields, but also because it shares a land border with Mexico for more than 3,000 km, and more than 300 million people travel annually between the two countries. There are also more than 30 million Americans of Mexican descent in the United

States, and the influence of cultural exchanges through these Mexican Americans is also substantial. Korea ranks second in all cultural content except for animation (third) and food (fourth) and remains ahead of Japan and China, which have much larger populations, areas, and economies than Korea. In entertainment, movies, music, publications, and beauty, Korea is twice as popular as Japan and three to four times more popular than China. The most noticeable content is drama (37.7%), which is the only one ahead of the United States, and is three times more popular than Japan (10.1%) and six times more popular than China (5.7%). While European culture was introduced to Mexico more than 500 years ago and the country considers itself part of Western culture, the so-called global cultural powerhouses, such as Spain, which was once Mexico's colonizer, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, lag far behind Korea. With the exception of the United States, which is an exceptional country, if the popularity of Korean cultural content is this high in Mexico, where orientalism is strong, Hallyu in Mexico has great potential for sustained growth among the three major Eastern Asian countries.

4. Conclusions

The Mayan culture of Mexico flourished for thousands of years, and since the Spanish conquistadors arrived, the country has experienced less racial discrimination than the US. Of its 120 million people, more than 90% are mestizos, who are the mixed-race born between European descendants and indigenous ancestors. They are open to outsiders and even identify themselves as mestizos, or people of mixed races. They readily embrace not just similar but also different cultural elements of other countries without hesitation. Drama is a cultural product that deserves more investment and attention because it can deeply penetrate homes with the growing number of streaming platforms. Drama also acts as a catalyst for consumers to discover other content, like beauty, music, fashion, and food.

Furthermore, lower- or middle-class mestizos are the ones who are forming a fandom for Korean drama and K-pop. Although they are in the low-income group, they have grown up under the country's modern education policy of free education, and are relatively well-educated with the exception of some

indigenous people. Hence, their influence cannot be ignored. In this context, it is important to think about how to spread Korean culture to them. While online performances and visits may be necessary, these are something that should be led by entertainment agencies. From the perspective of cultural exchanges, it is necessary to expand support for the means of exchanges, such as social media platforms and channels that consider the language framework. Netflix has a higher contact rate than other online platforms, especially for drama series and movies where the influence of dialogues are high. As such, it would be important to pay attention to its language framework. This is because some platforms or channels which use strange Korean Spanish may have a negative effect.

Another recommendation would be to include social classes in a future survey on Hallyu overseas. Regarding the awareness of Koreans and Korean culture, its influence, consumption patterns of Hallyu, and platform usage, statistics have been surveyed well with response rates broken down by gender and age. However, there isn't a survey that breaks down response rates by social class or income level. Given that Mexico's land area is twenty times larger than Korea, the disparities in household income, education, and local internet access are much greater in Mexico. Therefore, it would be more reasonable and reliable for future surveys to divide survey respondents into at least the upper, middle, and lower classes, considering the variety of social classes in the nation. Further, sports categories, such as Taekwondo should be added to the survey items about content awareness, experience percentage, popularity, ease of use, and contact path. 📍

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