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## **ABSTRACT**

### **BORDER CULTURE, MEXICAN IDENTITY, CLASS, AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION: A LOOK INTO "FRESA" HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

(May 2017)

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The border strip between the south of the United States and the north of Mexico provide an excellent opportunity to study the effects of the flow of media productions from the United States to Mexico. Many communication theories have attempted to explain the reception of transnational media flows to Latin American countries. Scholars from the cultural imperialism camp argue that the flow of culture is unidirectional from capitalist or First World countries (mainly the United States) to developing countries (also know as the Global South); other theories claim there is an asymmetrical dependence between developed and underdeveloped countries (Fejes, 1981). However, recent arguments claim audiences tend to prefer content closely related to their own cultural values (Straubhaar, 1991). Audience research has concluded there is no evidence to support the loss of cultural identity in some Latin American countries and regions according to their media preference (Straubhaar, 1991 Lozano, 1992). Nonetheless, those studies have also found that regardless of the geographical or cultural proximity to the United States or Europe, upper and middle class audiences tend to prefer to a certain degree US media content or international programming over domestic programming.

Combining those two theoretical propositions, the purpose of this study is to look at the media consumption preferences of high school students in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas and find a relation between the cultural products they consume, their sense of Mexican identity, and nationalism. Using both methodological approaches, quantitative and qualitative, a survey was conducted with students from three different private high schools in Nuevo Laredo and a total of 22 participants were interviewed in separate focus groups. One of the most important findings of this study is that upper-middle and upper class students from Nuevo Laredo are *not worried* about losing their Mexican identity as a consequence of continuous exposure to American media. It could be argued that they are more afraid of not being able to attain the best from what their privileged geographical location has to offer in terms of cultural capital. They recognize that one of the biggest advantages of living in the border with the United States is the ability to practice while learning English and to have access to American products.