

Accessibility of Korean Cultural Values at Screens: Decoding Patterns of North American Audiences

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Abstract

This research investigates the accessibility of Korean modern values at screens from the perspectives of North American audiences while consuming Korean films and TV dramas. In order to decode Korean cultural values at screens, this study collects the data of 266 Korean films and TV dramas distributed in North America from IMDb platform, unlocking that the success of box office for Korean projects in North America is positively correlated with the characteristics of Violence & Gore and Profanity. Meanwhile, the audiences' positive responses to the violent project mainly depends on the degree of "Sex and Nudity", the plots of "social groups". The current success of Korean cultural and creative industry as well as the future global markets strengths are analyzed in this research. Stuart Hall's cultural studies approach and cultural psychological account theory are applied to discuss the success of Korean entertainment industry in the transnational cultural communication.

Keywords: Cultural psychological account, History and countries, Sex and Nudity, Social, Stuart Hall's, Violence & Gore and Profanity

1. INTRODUCTION

Hall's theoretical efforts on both evolving cultural extrinsic and connotative existence on the TV screen facilitated to form and improve the change of emerging Black distinctiveness in Britain since his work on social justice supports to develop the comprehensive empathies of historical conjunctures, emergent sub-cultures and depictive methods resistant to cultural supremacy in commercial media societies [1]. This article investigate several key characteristics of Korean film and drama distributed in North America since 1960s while stressing the accessibility of Korean film and drama art at screens by North American audiences in the constructing and delivering the cultural values and empathies through Hall's theoretical lens.

Based on Hall's theory, this research emphasizes the success of delivering Korean cultural values and constructing the cultural identities through film and television works at screens from the two main processes

Manuscript received: October 31, 2022 / revised: November 25, 2022 / accepted: December 3, 2022

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of encoding and decoding. In terms of encoding, both directly spreading the thoughts of creators and the encoding process of creators through visual, sound as well as narrative expressions are stressed [2]. However, the role of media is not only reflected as a tool of information transmission, but also in its infinite potential as an information carrier [3]. It offers more freedom for people to express themselves, not only in the encoded processes but also in the decoded periods of recreation by audiences while they are watching at screens, where popular culture develops through. As a mass media, it is important to successfully encode the value and improve the recognition of the entertainment works so that the audiences can develop the empathies and sympathies while decoding the values at screens.

With the rapid development of globalization, popular Asian cultures e.g. Indian Bollywood, Korean wave, Japanese cultural trends as well as Moslem culture have gone out of their own countries in various forms to all over the world. In such an environment, cross-border flow of goods and culture is necessary and inevitable, and cultural transmission will naturally produce all different decoding processes [4] among diverse communities. There is no simple and direct certainty between encoding and decoding due to the cultural distances among each nation [5] and individual natures [6]. It is sometime problematic for people to completely understand transnational cultures through the languages; however, the audiences might decode the connotations through the expressions or actions less challenging since the degree of cultural distance gets lower.

Stuart Hall's "Coding/decoding" theory enhances a particular system beyond the traditional perception of "coding subject", where the audiences may implement three decoding situations such as dominance, compromise and even confrontation [7]. This has changed the understanding of the relationship between information transmitters and audiences in positivist research, shifting to the research on audience initiative with attention to the research on the decoding methods of audiences in information and cultural transmission [8]. Korean cultural industry has developed a good sense of balancing the processes of encoding and decoding, not only conducive to the audience's understanding and demand satisfaction, but also for creators and media to create good economic benefits, as well as social benefits [9].

Due to collaborative efforts by the Korean government and private cultural industries by utilizing Korea's pop entertainment products as an effective tool for global public diplomacy, the remarkable success of the Korean film industry over the last two decades can be a good bench marker for countries that want to enhance their film industry and to promote their culture in terms of avoiding quotas, less relying on the tax relief and focusing on consistent goals [10]. In Asia, Korean TV dramas and K-pop demonstrate a balanced growth between Asian traditional values and modernism, which strengthens the cultural identity of Asians as Asians [11]. However, it is necessary to demonstrate a picture of audiences' cultural consumption behaviors beyond Asian region, especially in North America.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Active cultural consumption comes from judging, recognizing and selecting the consumer subjects, such as movies which are full of social, entertainment and aesthetic values. Besides analysis on encoding and decoding the films and dramas through Sturt Hall's theory, this research integrating cultural consumption psychological accounts to the theoretic framework for the future study, which refer to the psychological accounts set up by people in anticipation of cultural consumptions. It includes various social behavior processes for people to achieve diverse spiritual satisfactions such as travel consumption account, movie consumption account, book purchase account, game consumption account, and so on [12]. Identifying the main motives of people consuming various cultural goods, six motives including entertainment, escapism, cultural exploration, learning/curiosity, family togetherness, and socialization describe individuals' needs which are catalogized into three higher order types of motivations e.g. emotional, cognitive, and social ones, appropriately [13]. In this

research more attention is paid to the entertainment, aesthetic and social accounts from the cultural consumption psychological perspective while investigating the accessibility of Korean cultural values at the screens for North American audiences.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to decode Korean cultural values at screens, this study collects the data of 266 Korean films and TV dramas distributed in North America since 1960s from IMDb platform, unlocking the success of box office for Korean films in North America. After a basic cleaning of the data, 23 independent variables (8 movie genres, 10 movie plots and 5 characteristics) and two dependent variables (vote and score) associated with the process and the patterns of "decoding" cultural values are collated.

- Eight genres: comedy, crime, drama, horror and thriller, historical/autobiography, anime, science fiction and fantasy, and others;
- Ten plot synopses: social events in movies, people/daily life in movies, spirit/psychology in movies, sex in movies, social groups in movies, characters in movies, history and countries in movies, the concepts in movies, and nature in movies;
- Five characteristics: 'Sex & Nudity,' 'Violence & Gore,' 'Profanity,' 'Alcohol, Drugs & Smoking,' and 'Frightening Scenes.'

In order to reduce the absolute value of the data and avoid the influence of individual extreme values, we used the logarithm of the vote ($\log V$) to replace the original data for analysis. When analyzing the two dependent variables of "Rating Scores" and "Votes" (decoding results) respectively, regression analysis is conducted on three groups of independent variables, namely movie genres, movie plot synopsis and movies characteristics in order to discover the success levels of encoding Korean cultural values at screens, which also means to evaluate the accessibility of Korean cultural values by North American audiences. The patterns of decoding will be summarized by conducting k-means cluster analysis on vote, score and 23 groups of independent variables.

4. RESULTS

After cluster analysis of rating scores and votes of projects, the low votes projects (total 43) are picked up for further analysis, which mainly involve two types of film: drama and others. The average of clustering low vote group (total 43) is only 1.7315 (see Table 1), which is lower than 3.3318, the average $\log V$ (logarithm of votes) of total samples by excel calculation. It is found that the projects of drama and others are as high as 32 and 22, while the other films are less than 10. Therefore, in the case of overall data, the votes of film have a certain negative correlation with drama and other project types.

Table 1. LogV - Genres Clustering Low Vote Group (total 43 projects)

logV	Comedy	Crime and Drama	Musical	Horror and Thriller	Historical/ Autobiography	Anime	Science fiction and Fantasy	Others
1.792391689	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
1.146128036	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	
.....								
1.731526241	7	2	32	9	9	2	5	22

At the same time, correlation analysis is conducted between logV and musical or others (see Table 2). It is found that when the vote was low, musical has a direct proportional relationship with logV (P value was 0.081, which less than 0.1), which verified the result of "certain negative correlation" obtained through clustering.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis between logV and Musical or Others

	logV	Musical	other
logV	1.000(0.000***)	0.269(0.081*)	0.001(0.993)
Musical	0.269(0.081*)	1.000(0.000***)	0.051(0.747)
other	0.001(0.993)	0.051(0.747)	1.000(0.000***)

There are two main features that score high: Violence & Gore and Profanity. In the clustering results (see Table 3), there exists a class of high-scoring groupings (7.8925). The scores of Violence & Gore and Profanity are as high as 8.44 and 7.44, respectively. To be noticed, the factors of Violence & Intense Scenes are also secondary to 7.29 in this analysis, while the scores of all other types are less than 7. Therefore, as a conclusion, the box office of projects is positively correlated with the characteristics of Violence & Gore and Profanity in the case of overall data.

Table 3. Rating Scores - Genres Clustering High Rating Scores Group

Rating Scores	Sex & Nudity	Violence & Gore	Profanity	Alcohol, Drugs & Smoking	Frightening & Intense Scenes
8.5	0.3060	0.6554	0.3809	0.2443	0.3618
8.1	0.3127	0.3860	0.3619	0.2319	0.2857
...
7.8925	6.4013	8.4365	7.4400	5.3521	7.2898

By conducting the correlation analysis (see table 4) between votes and three characteristics of Profanity, Frightening & Intense, Violence & Gore, it is found that Violence and Gore is indeed directly proportional to votes when rated high (P value was 0.056, less than 0.1). And the correlation with the Profanity, financial & Intense Scenes is not significant. However, it is unexpected to find that there is a significant correlation between Profanity, Frightening & Intense, Violence & Gore (coefficients of 0.680, 0.698, 0.852, all P values are less than 0.01).

Table 4. The Correlation Analysis between Votes and Profanity, Frightening & Intense and Violence & Gore

	Rating Scores	Profanity	Violence & Gore	Frightening & Intense Scenes
Rating Scores	1.000(0.000***)	0.196(0.158)	0.264(0.056*)	0.186(0.183)
Profanity	0.196(0.158)	1.000(0.000***)	0.680(0.000***)	0.698(0.000***)
Violence & Gore	0.264(0.056*)	0.680(0.000***)	1.000(0.000***)	0.852(0.000***)
Frightening & Intense Scenes	0.186(0.183)	0.698(0.000***)	0.852(0.000***)	1.000(0.000***)

In order to understand the repercussions and characteristics of projects with high levels of violence, two sets of data were analyzed in order to obtain the average level of projects with key ones. It is found that 23 projects with a 100 % violence rating has a lower average score and vote than average despite the high levels of violence (see table 5). However, when 90 to 100 percent of the projects with violence are added in the analysis, both score and vote are significantly higher than average (see table 5). It is hypothesized that there are "key projects" worthy of analyzing in this range.

Table 5. 90 %, 100 % Violence Index - vote, score relationship

	Rating Scores	Votes
Mean	6.8975	16935.3941
mean-100 %	6.8304	7470.5217
mean-90 %	6.9733	35744.4667
difference	0.142898551	28273.94493

From the perspectives of the projects genres, it is found that projects with high levels of violence are more likely to be Crime and Drama, Science Fiction and Fantasy, as well as Horror and Thriller (see Table 6). In addition, with the increase of 90 % -100 % of violent movies, "crime and drama" has the most obvious increase (9.26 %). Therefore, "crime and drama" with high levels of violence is more likely to occur in Korean films and dramas. Obviously, "Horror and thriller" has a good occurrence rate, however, it has a negative impact on the vote.

Table 6. 90 %, 100 % Violence Index - vote, score relationship- Genres

	comedy	Crime and Drama	Musical	horror and thriller	historical/auto biography	anime	science fiction and fantasy	others
total number	43	54	186	125	42	4	19	141
100 %	4	14	16	12	4	2	4	14
90-100 %	4	19	23	21	4	2	5	19
difference	0	5	7	9	0	0	1	5
occurrence rate -100 %	9.30 %	25.93 %	8.60 %	9.60 %	9.52 %	50.00 %	21.05 %	9.93 %
occurrence rate -90 %	9.30 %	35.19 %	12.37 %	16.80 %	9.52 %	50.00 %	26.32 %	13.48 %
difference	0.00 %	9.26 %	3.76 %	7.20 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	5.26 %	3.55 %

As a summary, people will pay more attention to "social events" in violent films reflecting the reality of society, which are the key to resonate with audiences. Projects with high levels of violence may not get a good response, but it is necessary to maintain a certain level of violence. Therefore, it can be inferred that in projects

with high levels of violence, due to the lack of mapping of social events, they are not easy to resonate with the audience to have a good response. At the same time, it is recognized that the visual conflict enhanced by "violence" can attract the audience.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Film and drama are the carriers and reflectors of culture including beliefs, attitudes, values and patterns of behaviors. From the perspective of consumer psychology, watching movies and dramas are a kind of social activity for people with a "vicarious need" hoping to stay in the movie for a short time experiencing other different lives while relaxing physically and mentally [14]. Meanwhile, people's understanding on "beauty" reflects the culture and this aesthetic tendency is also the result of the jointed effect of social culture and economic environment [15]. It is confirmed that the initiative of imagination and cultural re-creation need to be handed over to the audiences, respecting their differences in decoding [16]. People's accounts of cultural needs have expectations for the sense, whether it is to receive sensory stimuli or to meet their aesthetic needs. Korean movies are often associated with violence, which has captured audiences' psychological accounts. On the other hand, Korean movies that have received good reviews are those that combine real and relatable social events rather than pure violence, which makes Korean cultural values more accessible by audiences through screens. As said by Hye Jean Chung in 2019, the aesthetics of violence in Korean movies is a real expression of the real physical violence and social unrest in Korean society, which is an important factor that can resonate with the common audience.

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