HUEVOCARTOON: A TALE OF THE SYMBOLIC IMPLICATION

OF THE CHARACTERS

by

Samantha Lopez

Committee Members:

Vanessa Higgins Joyce, Chair

David Nolan

Judy Oskam

DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis work to my family and many friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents, Juan and Maria Lopez, whose words of encouragement will forever push me toward my goal. They came to the United States with nothing but the clothes on their back, but each day they encourage me to achieve all I can. They have been my inspiration throughout my studies. Thank you to my twin sister, Amanda, who has made me laugh when I needed it. Thank you to my little sister, Michelle, who encourages me every day.

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ABSTRACT

Huevocartoon is a transnational media product from Mexico, which illustrates eggs as the main characters, which contain diverse cultural characteristics. These cartoons examine the social, cultural, and linguistic difference of American and Mexican origin audiences. The purpose of the study was to examine the symbolic implications, representation, and messages contained in the Huevocartoon animated series. Three focus groups, with a combined total of 20 students, were conducted on three consecutive days, and examined participants' various interpretations of Huevocartoon. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the results showed that Huevocartoon utilized illustration to represent the cartoons' culture, utilized attitude and humor to assert social issues, and related its characters to the "unbreakable" stereotypes found media. Huevocartoons could be used as a tool to tackle social and stereotypical issues that are commonly found in society and help find solutions to overcome these barriers.

Keywords: Huevocartoon, transnational media products, stereotypes, Latino cartoons

I. INTRODUCTION

When audiences look at cartoon characters they think about how funny and innocent cartoon characters appear in media. However, when it comes to transnational media products, audiences often don't stop to think about the interpretations, messages, representation, or symbolic implications that cartoon characters have in them. According to Cohn (2016), cartoon characters convey meaning, and once those characters are illustrated and presented to the audience, they are understood based on social norms or social identity.

For many years, some media have illustrated cartoon characters as a way to expose social issues within different foreign identities. This type of illustration can also contain stereotypical beliefs and attitudes (Horton, Price & Brown, 1999). Included in those beliefs and attitudes are how media portray different racial groups in foreign countries.

When it comes to foreign cartoon media, it can be confusing, especially when the audience misinterprets the symbolic implication of cartoon characters. These international cartoons are known as transnational media products. Transnational media can be defined as media being produced and illustrated outside the country in which it is being transmitted or publicized (Vargas, 2006). In other words, transnational media is a product of one country but being presented to an audience in a different country.

Since the 1980s there has been an increase of transnational media products that are accessible with ease in the imports and exports of books, movies, music, etc. (McChesney, 2001). In recent years, with the help of digital media communication, transnational media have become a way for people to experience diverse cultural

practices, beliefs, values, and attitudes from multiple foreign countries (Shohat & Stam, 2003).

Digital media plays a huge role in the accessibility of transnational media products when it comes to foreign television. Some examples are: telenovelas (Spanish soap operas), Korean dramas (televised Korean language dramas, produced in South Korea), Asian dramas (dramas produced in China, Japan, etc.), Filipino dramas (melodramatic dramas televised in the Philippines). This collection of foreign television media extends beyond national borders to reach as many people as possible through multiple media platforms.

Transnational media can also be seen as developing and promoting global communication with individuals or groups with the same, or different, cultural background (Jenkins, 2007). Transnational media audiences can be defined as individuals or groups connecting in a space where the social and cultural characteristics of the media space are linked to the same or different cultural individuals (Jenkins, 2007).

This study focused on a transnational media product from Mexico, Huevocartoon. Huevocartoon is an animated cartoon program broadcast through multiple media platforms and it explores the social and cultural characteristics of Latinos. Huevocartoon is an increasingly popular show among Latino communities in Latin America and the United States. When viewed in the United States, Huevocartoon is a cultural import product from Mexico that confronts the problem of identity, symbolic implication, and representation of Latinos. This cultural media import product influences not only the culture but also the American perception of the Latino community (Ejupi, Siljanovska & Iseni, 2014).

Huevocartoon is a Mexican animated cartoon in which, the characters are depicted as eggs with different cultural characteristics. The Huevocartoon program began in Mexico in 2001 with the collaboration of Gabriel and Rodolf Riva Palacio-Alatriste, Rodolfo Riva Palacio Velasco, and Carlos Zepeda Chehaiba (Huevocartoon, n.d). The website, *Huevocartoon.com*, was one of the earliest projects of La Comunidad Huevo, an animated production studio that was founded by the same collaborators (Huevocartoon, n.d). The website opened in 2002 and in the first three months reached more than 3 million views in Mexico (Huevocartoon, n.d). By 2004, the Huevocartoon website had 230,000 visits per day. After gaining popularity in Mexico, Huevocartoon branched out to Latin America and became one of the most recognized animated cartoons in Latin America (Huevocartoon, n.d). In 2015, Huevocartoon became the first Mexican animated franchise to receive wide theatrical distribution in the United States (Huevocartoon, n.d). It was also the first successful worldwide Mexican animated cartoon and was presented transnationally across the world.

Huevocartoon is considered a comedy that expresses social issues, social and cultural characteristic by using language and humorous images, and overexaggerating issues of Latinos culture in media. From 2001-2004, the Huevocartoon website only featured short animated egg cartoons that addressed these issues. However, in 2006, the website launched its first feature film, *A Movie of Eggs,* and in 2009 a second film was distributed in Mexico, *Another Egg and a Chicken* (Cuadriello & Alatriste, 2009). In 2015, *Huevos: Little Rooster's Egg-cellent Adventure*, was launched in Mexico and, internationally.

Previous studies have examined Latino cartoon characters, but little is known about perceptions of Latino characters when the cartoon is produced in Mexico. This study was the first to examine the transnational media product Huevocartoon and the perceptions of international students from Mexico and college millennial students in the United States.

The purpose of this study was to examine the representations, messages, and symbolic implications of the animated Huevocartoon clips. This research focused on the perceptions of young adults between 18 and 24 years old. In addition, the research explored the different symbolic implications Huevocartoon has on both American and Mexican audiences by comparing and contrasting the perception and interpretation of transnational audience and national audiences from Mexico.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Each of the animated Huevocartoon clips has a narrative that surpasses the influences of children's cartoons and teaches people to identify the representations and stereotypes of Latinos in media. This literature review is divided into six sections and all of the topics and concepts used in this section are connected to the representation of Latinos in the United States and explores new concepts of transnational media.

Latino Cartoon Characters

According to Schroeder-Arce (2013), cartoon characters create a sense of identity that allows individuals to identify themselves in the groups of 'us' and 'them' through the representation and image of the characters. In this regard, Huevocartoon creates this group of 'us' and 'them' by using the language, beliefs, attitudes, and culture to connect with others.

In English language media, cartoon characters are perceived as innocent and reject "realistic representation" (Burton-Carbajal, 1994). Huevocartoon's characters construct a culture of Mexican societal norms. The characters reflect the shifting racial and social status of Mexicans and represent a characteristic and constructive narrative of Mexicans.

However, English language media continue to display the stereotypical Latinos who are seductive, illegal-immigrants, and a burden to American society. Animators represent race by creating a symbolic 'difference' rather than realistic forms, and "race and ethnicity are visually disguised but acoustically embellished" to create racial stereotypes (Brayton, 2013, p. 338). However, Huevocartoon produces a visual narrative

that is confusing for the audience to understand because the visual images of the characters are eggs.

Visual narrative plays a huge role in Huevocartoon because it structures a world the audience believes it to be, which includes the misrepresentation of Latinos. Yet, how are cartoons created while creating a visual narrative? According to Cohn (2013), animated cartoon characters are meant to manipulate the world around us by creating the fictional world they're set in. By creating this fictional world, audiences begin to believe in, and structure a world, in which stereotypes become a new reality. The visual narrative also creates confusion for the audiences by creating misrepresentations and stereotypes that audiences to believe are true. The visual narrative sends false messages to the audience that they believe are true. However, when the audience then interacts with the Latino community the narrative becomes confusing and false.

Representation of Latinos in Media

Latino representation in media demonstrates the impact of exposure to mainstream media as well as viewers' real-world perceptions of race and ethnic groups in the United States (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). La Comunidad Huevo studio utilizes the stereotypical characteristics found in mass media to create characters that represent the stereotypical attributes of Latinos. Klein and Shiffman concluded that Latinos in media are portrayed as a negative or stereotypical representation of ethnic groups.

Huevocartoon is a form of transnational media product that has become popular in the Latino community. Thus, the question of media representation should be considered from a comprehensive perspective. Representation of stereotypes in media illustrate the way audiences' look, think, and perceive people around the world. Consequently, the

notion of media representation is viewing and comprehending the symbolic information

(images, descriptions, and explanations) as a 'process of producing meaning' in reality

(Hall, 1997).

> We give things meaning by how we represent them-the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize the value we place on them (Hall, p. 3).

In order to produce meaning in Huevocartoon, the audience must create a reality

of the Latino community. Klein and Shiffman (2009) state that the portrayals of these

groups are categorized in what they refer to as "symbolic annihilation" (p. 56).

"Symbolic annihilation", first introduced by Tuchman (1978), is the idea that groups are

valued in different ways and audiences feel this cultural connection when they share the

same characteristics shown in media (Klein & Shiffman). These cultural characteristics

that audiences feel connected to is symbolic annihilation. Huevocartoon expresses

symbolic annihilation not only in its' language and culture but also in the characteristics

of the characters. These symbolic annihilation attributes in Huevocartoon show the values

it could have, not only on the Latino community, but also on the American society.

The reflectionist approach (Orgad, 2012) rejects the notion of stereotypes with the

notion that media functions as a mirror, and what we see in media reflects the true

meaning of reality (Hall, 1997). The reflectionist approach creates a sense that what we

see in media is what we expect in reality. Huevocartoon portrays multiple stereotypical

meanings throughout the clips, but it does not necessarily mean that what audiences vsee

in these characters are what individuals expect to see in Latinos.

If the reflectionist approach is used, audiences are led to believe that Latinos are

either *El Bandito*, the half-breed harlot, a male comedian, a clown, a Latin lover, or a

dark lady (Berg, 1990). These are some of the stereotypes that audiences may see in media created for Latinos, but they are nowhere close to a reflection of Latinos themselves. The disparity between media representations of Latinos and reality illustrates some media's lack of responsibility in showing a 'true' reflection of Latino culture.

When it comes to the true reflection of reality in the Latino community, the idiom of 'machismo,' directed toward males, creates a misrepresentation of how males are supposed to act in real life. Sequeira (2009) states that the machismo stereotype is designed to create masculinity in men, but what is machismo? Machismo can be defined as an "animal masculinity," which can be demonstrated as aggressive, dominating, and a leader (Pinos-Vélez, Pinos, Baitar, & Enzlin, 2016). Thus, 'machismo' emphasizes the idea of how males are meant to be perceived as a strong and dominate in Latino society.

So, how does Huevocartoon animation fit into media representations in the United States? Does the fact that Huevocartoon is illustrated and produced in Mexico exclude it from the harmful portrayal or stereotypes in many media representations? Typically, when racial minority groups are presented in a cartoon character, they are represented in a negative or stereotypical way, but Latino characters are often portrayed more negatively than other racial groups (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). For example, the U.S. cartoon *Family Guy* has a Latina character. She is portrayed with yellow gloves all of the time and is seen cleaning in some episodes. This visual stereotype informs the audience that she is the cleaning lady for the house. Huevocartoon attempts to make light of these types of stereotypes by approaching the stereotypical representations with a sense of humor to alleviate confusion and anxiety in the Latino community.

According to Orgad (2012) media have a way of manipulating representations to create false images within a constructionist approach. This approach states that media construct reality by using selective images, descriptions, and explanations to generate a specific meaning of the media representation.

Latino Identity in Media

Identity is a concept that changes in society because of the individual process of figuring out personal choices, values, languages, actions, and beliefs. According to Gee (1989) identity is a discourse that refers to an "identity kit" (p. 537). This identity kit helps formulate an individual identity by figuring out how to "act and talk to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (Gee, p. 537). This identity kit helps individuals decide on where they fit in the world. Related to that is discourse. Discourse is:

> socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of socially meaning a full group or "social network," (Gee, p. 537).

Gee (1989) argues that to participate in discourse we are obligated to learn and master "our native language" as well as "our home-based discourses" (p. 526). If we do not fit into a socially-accepted association, then we don't have the discourse that we seek and it is not valued.

According to Corlett (1999), identity is more than "possessing" the culture and ethnic background. There are conditions one needs to be considered a Latino: Spanish language, a Latino name, and Latino culture (Corlett). More than half of the Huevocartoon clips are in Spanish, and a tiny percentage use Spanglish, a combination of Spanish and English. However, Huevocartoon presents a Latino identity by not only the language but also the Latino culture.This identity is a collection of minority standing,

ethnicity, and culture that refers to Latino identity. Corlett concluded that "Latino" is more of a social construct to categorize the Latino community into a minority group. Huevocartoon creates a social construct for those who can understand or speak Spanish. With this social construct, Huevocartoon develops a minority group, or Latino identity, of people who can comprehend the language when transmitted internationally to the United States.

Even though Huevocartoon creates an identity that separates others based on language and culture, the cartoon still creates a sense of belonging through identity. Corlett (1999) stated that Latino identity creates a belief that if Latino audiences do not know the Spanish language, but still have the culture, then the audience will maintain a Latino identity. However, if viewers embrace their identity, can they still find humor or puns that use Latino identity in media? Huevocartoon animation is a comedy genre that ties identity and stereotypes together to create a comical narrative of Latino identity in each character. How viewers picture this media is different based on the audience member's background and the culture.

Martinez and Ramasubramanian (2014) state that racial and ethnic stereotypes in humor complicate the way audiences see stereotypes because some of them may not be considered part of the 'in-group,' which is to understand the cultural, ethical values, and beliefs that group.

> In-group identity membership often plays a role in the way that individual's
> process race/ethnicity-based comedy, especially when invoking degrading in-
> group stereotypes, (Martinez and Ramasubramanian, p. 210).

Thus, even though Huevocartoon animation is broadcast all around the world, the in-group identity of Latinos finds the comedy funny because of the 'inside joke,' where only

Latinos understands the meaning. Martinez and Ramasubramanian explain that humor is one of the most critical aspects to explore the effects of racial and ethnic stereotyping.

Others have argued that Latino comedy programming in the United States' has gone too far because it reveals intergroup social tensions (Martinez & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Huevocartoon is an example of how in-group identity in Latinos creates this humor, by over-exaggerating the things that are not true to a point where the Latino audience can understand that it is not true.

We can think about identity as a form of labeling, but there is more to labeling oneself. It is about the process of identifying that creates a role for a person. It is about seeing what Latinos see or value in life and how they want to express their identity.

Perceptions of Stereotypes

Is there a difference between Mexican audience and Latino audience in the United States?

A report presented by Negrón-Muntaner, Abbas, Figueroa, & Robson (2014), shows that Latinos in media are represented differently based on key features. For example, the skin, whether it might be a darker skin tone or the image of women's bodies in media. These features show how media, whether it may be for Mexican audiences or Latino audiences in the United States, it remains to be a stereotypical misrepresentation of Latinos. According to Mastro (2005), Latinos are represented based on how the real-world interacts with the Latinos. "Latino stereotypes persist because they fulfill important identity needs for the dominant culture" (Mastro, 2003, p. 113). Thus, these stereotypes are reinforcing what seems to be true in real life because people adapt to those stereotypes when they believe the stereotypes in media.

However, when Mexican audiences and Latino audiences see these stereotypes, the reaction remains the same because both audiences know that these stereotypes are not always true. According to Avila-Saavedra (2011), Latino stereotypes serve to dismiss intergroup social tensions.

This *in-group identity* plays a role of defining stereotypes of Latinos and uses humor in those stereotypes as a way to criticize social issues (Avila-Saavedra, 2011). For example, there are cases in where stereotypes become an image of Latino's attitudes and beliefs in real life because Latinos have that one uncle, relative, or someone who fits the image of the stereotypical representation of Latinos in media. Thus, stereotypes are part of society that identifies, justifies, and supports beliefs of what others might think of Latinos, which "reinforce the existing hegemony" (Mastro, 2003, p. 113).

Linguistics Change

As the Latino population increases in the United States, so does the use of the Spanish language media (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). According to Krogstad and Lopez (2017), Spanish language media has been on a downslope over the past decade. Data found that in 2006, 78% of Latino-Americans spoke Spanish at home, but in 2015, only 73% spoke the Spanish language (Krogstad & Lopez 2017). In part, Latino immigrants widely use the Spanish language, compared to the Latinos who were born in the United States. What has made this downslope occur over the years? Kristiansen (2001) suggests that this change has been due to people adapting to the culture at hand, and it "helps Latinos understand the social environment that Latinos have adapted to in the United States" (p. 136).

So, how does language fit into Latinos assimilating in the United States? Language is used to identify oneself, to show others who Latinos are by using the language. According to Lippi-Green (2012), language is part of a process that is necessary for Latinos to interact with each other, signal who they are, and then group with each other. This interaction of Spanish language is a way for Latinos to keep their identity.

Nonetheless, language is part of what makes a person, but how does it fit with media? Language and media are meant to mimic real-life interaction between the characters in the film or show, but media language is constructing characters that are built on perceived notions of stereotypical characters. Language not only constructs these notions but also provides clues on where people come from. Language provides clues on

> what social group they belong to, what kind of education they received, and so forth. This is something that authors and filmmakers make use of in various ways, not the least of which is to provide background information about characters and locations (Hodson, 2014, p. 3).

Media uses language to establish characters, signaling ethnicity, background, and origin. It does not only establish the characters but also creates a meaning to reference Latino community. Bell and Gibson (2011) state language is a form of the social meaning of interaction "through association with classes of typical speakers" (p. 560). As a result, media uses language to represent the Latino characters to persuade and inform the attitudes and beliefs of the Latino community. Furthermore, Huevocartoon uses language as a way to get Spanish language speakers to interact with their clips and observe the social issues.

Transnational Media Products

In today's society, transnational media products continue to increase due to access to a multitude of transnational TV channels, from telenovelas to transnational series. These transnational media products have become a phenomenon for people all over the world. As transnational media products continue to grow, so does the media impact on national identity and belonging.

Transnational media are a way for individuals to use media as a source of crucial cultural identity to connect and manage their identity. For example, Huevocartoon is a transnational media product and a Spanish-based media product that uses the culture, language, and beliefs of Mexico. Thus, the Huevocartoon is a source of cultural identity for Latinos to connect with their identity through the language, beliefs, and the customs of Latinos.

Transnational media have a way of breaking boundaries between cultures, languages, society, and norms. Transnational media products also construct an individual's sense of belonging in a way that builds cultural identity through media (Vargas, 2006).

Levy (2000) first identified transnational media product as "collective intelligence," but Jenkins (2007) went on further to identify the term as

> a new form of social structure that allows for knowledge to be produced and transmitted across a specific network of people…which allows audiences to engage and discuss issues with each other" (2007, para. 8).

Essentially, transnational media products have the ability to share all kinds of stories across the world with the use of different media platforms. Huevocartoon creates

multiple narratives in each clip because each character is trying to send a different message.

Shohat and Stam (2003) state:

transnational world, the media reflect, refract, and transform culture identity. The ethnically hybrid character of the most world metropolises meanwhile turns cinemagoing into a revealing multicultural experience: screening of "foreign" films for mixed audiences…can create a gap between culture insiders, who laugh at the jokes and recognize the references, and the outsiders, who experience an abrupt dislocation (p. 15).

When audiences view media, they are characterized not only by ideological meaning in mainstream media but also the cultural media. So, when viewers are not part of the culture or part of the in-group then the jokes, or puns, do not make sense to that audience. Huevocartoon broadcast clips with the hopes of sharing it with those with strong ties of Latino identity, which has the knowledge of the Spanish language to understand the jokes. Now, Huevocartoon has broadcasted media movies/clips that provide subtitles for others to follow along, but it is up to the non-Latino audience to find the humor in the jokes.

However, there have been some signs of transnational media products showing a new cultural space that is being discovered. According to Pinón and Rojas (2011),

the identity and programming strategies from cross-border and regional televisions networks have been rooted in the reproduction of the notions of home and homeland perceived as authentic. This gives them an initial differentiated edge of opportunities in an increasingly crowded Latino television industry" (p. 134).

Transnational media products create a separate culture in America and it has broadened the access to cultural media, produced abroad, within the United States. Huevocartoon has displayed this by not only the subtitles but as well as producing movies to be released in the United States. At the same time, Huevocartoon was created to

purposely offered a more extensive range of narratives that introduce the Mexican

traditions, beliefs, and attitudes. Huevocartoon builds a transnational media product to

bridge cultural boundaries in society.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Semiotic Theory

Charles Sanders Pierce, a philosopher in the United States, labeled the study of meanings of signs and *symbolic* as *semiotic*. Pierce designed a format to introduce three elements of *semiotic*: "a sign or representation, the object, and the interpretant" (Chandler, 2007). Pierce's theory of signs states that a sign or representation is "the form which the sign takes," the interpretant is "the sense made of the sign," and an object is "something beyond the sign to which it refers" (Chandler, 2007, p. 29). *Semiotics,* in a more straightforward term, is the study of signs or the meaning of the signs. It is the relationship between a sign, an object, and a meaning. Pierce (1931) states:

> A sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is created in the mind of that person, an equivalent sign or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, it objects. It stands for that object, not all respects, but about an idea, which I have sometimes called *the ground of representation* (p.228)

The term *semiotic* was used to cover all the signs of research, including Ferdinand de Saussure's *semiology* (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993). Thus, semiotics can be defined as the study of signs, which can take the form of words, images, sounds, and objects standing for something else. According to Candler (2007), "… anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as 'signifying' something-referring to or standing for something other than itself" (p. 13).

Leeds-Hurwitz (1993) defines semiotics as "the study of signs" or "the study of signs and sign systems" (p. 6). Wray (1981) provides a simpler way to understand semiotics,

the study of semiosis, or communication – that is, the way any sign, whether it is a traffic signal, a thermometer reading of 98.6F, poetic imagery, musical notation, a prose passage, or a wink of the eye, functions in the mind of an interpreter to convey a specific meaning in a given situation (p. 4).

Thus, if signs are something we interpret or develop a meaning, it can mean something different to different viewers/interpreters. According to Leeds-Hurwitz (1993), meanings can be multiple, but the sense of the 'correct meaning' comes from a unified or similar interpretation of a sign from various individuals. We all come from different backgrounds. Therefore, we can come up with different meanings of a sign. Thus,

> meaning can be discussed not only in its relationship to interpretation but also in its relationship to signs…signs and meaning are inextricable; to identify something as a sign is in the next breath to interrogate its meaning, for it is in the nature of signs (or so it would seem) to have meaning (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993, p. 40).

Since we all interpret different meanings from signs, how does this connect to semiotics? Semiotics is the relationship of the signs and the meaning that individuals conclude.

Yet, Leeds-Hurwitz (1993) links the concepts *culture* and *communication* as part of an essential understanding of semiotics. Culture shapes an individual's actions and beliefs. Schudson (1989) states, "Culture is not a set of ideas imposed but a set of ideas and symbols available for us..." (p. 155). Meaning

> The study of culture is the study of what meanings are available for use in a given society from a wider range of possible meanings; the study of culture is equally the study of what meanings people choose and use from available meanings" (Schudson, 1989, p. 156).

Therefore, signs are tools people use to interpret or create a meaning based on their culture.

Communication in semiotics "…is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (Carey, 1974, p. 30). Yet, Worth and Gross (1974) proposed that communication is "a social process within a context, in which signs are produced and transmitted, perceived, and treated as messages from which meaning can be inferred" (p. 10). Thus, communication involves signs and symbols to construct reality and connect humans socially. In other words, culture is a set of symbols and meanings of communication, which is part of creating a meaning of semiotic signs.

Huevocartoon characters may be perceived differently based on different cultural interpretation of the audiences' national and transnational identity.

Research Questions

This study explores the following research questions to gain an understanding of Huevocartoon and the symbolic implications on young audiences:

RQ1: What are the symbolic implications of the characters, settings, and dialogue of Huevocartoon, and do younger audiences perceive those symbolic signs?

RQ2: How is Huevocartoon humor and attitude used in the animation, and what impact does it have on young audiences' perception of Latinos in media?

RQ3: Are there any differences in the cultural interpretation between American and Mexican audiences in Huevocartoon's representation, specifically in terms of stereotypes?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this study is to examine the representation, messages, different symbolic implication changes between English language media (media illustrated and produced in the United States), Spanish language media, (media illustrated and produced in Mexico), and the impact it has on millennials age ranging from 18-24. To accomplish these goals, the researcher conducted a series of three focus group sessions.

Focus Group

The purpose of the focus groups is to analyze the verbal responses from millennials about their perceptions of Huevocartoon. The study aims to understand the millennial's thoughts about the symbolic implications in Huevocartoon. "Focus groups are a fundamental way of listening to people and learning from them. Focus groups create a line of communication," (Morgan, 1997, p. 9).

According to Edmunds (1999), focus groups are best utilized when the subject is new and has never been studied. Many studies have explored the idea of signs and cultural interpretations in non-transnational cartoons but not those created for transnational consumption. As such, this is a novel subject, where the perceptions of focus group participants would aid in the understanding of such phenomenon and the meaning surrounding it.

The advantages of using the focus group method are to generate ideas, concepts, behaviors, attitudes, and provide insight into understanding an objective. According to Zhou & Sloan (2015), focus groups are an interactive discussion, and it's helpful to "evaluating creative concepts and acquiring a depth of understanding…" (p.295).

Utilizing the focus group method allows participants to respond to each other's comments which enhances the discussion further, whether the participants agree or disagree with each other. Another excellent quality about focus group is that it can gather perception and attitude, which is the aim of this study.

Yet, there is some limitation for using a focus group method. Ravitch & Carl (2016) state that using a focus group method could create an environment for some participants to feel intimidated to speak, or one participant may dominate the entire session. Also, a small sample size for the sessions might not be a good representation of the larger population of students.

Recruiting

This research sought the approval of the Institutional Review Board, which ensures the ethical treatment of all human subjects. In order to begin recruiting, the researcher had to explain the process of conducting the three focus group sessions. After receiving IRB approval, the researcher took two separate approaches to recruit. First, the researcher was granted permission to talk to students to ask them to participate in the study, in three classes in a public university in the Southwest. These classes were randomly chosen based on the amount of student registered for the class, all over 150 students.

For recruiting international students from Mexico, the researcher emailed the requirements for participating in the study to the International Office. The International Office then contacted students who fit the requirements. The only requirements were for students to be from Mexico. The students emailed the researcher if they wanted to participate in the study.

Participants

Millennials today are consumed by digital media (movies, dramas, etc.) and their perception of media is different from older generations (Nickell, 2012). Their view on today's stereotypes in media are different, and they are often engaged in a conversation about today's perception of media's stereotypes.

According to Nickell (2012), millennials are individuals who are born between 1980 and 2000. Millennials behave and act differently than other generations (Soundarapandiyan & Ganesh, 2017). Millennials are a more ethnically diverse audience (Howe & Strauss, 2000), and their views of a cartoon which embraces ethnic representation is relevant. According to Maier, Tavanti, Bombard, Gentile and Bradford (2015), millennials tend to question the status quo, because millennials want to break norms and challenge the things that mean something to them.

This is one of the reasons this research wanted to target millennials as part of the focus group, because they tend to be more diverse individuals who are willing to express their thoughts.

As for the Mexican International Students, the researcher wanted to explore the perception of different stereotypes (if any) between a transnational audience and a Mexican (national) audience.

Sample

The researcher conducted a total of three focus groups on three consecutive days, Monday, February 12, through Wednesday, February 14, 2018. In total, there were 20 participants who attended the focus group sessions. There were three Mexican-origin (international) students and 17 United States-origin students. There were 12 females and

eight males, and the age ranged between 18-24 years old. About seven identified African Americans, four identified as Caucasians, and nine as Latinos (this count includes the three international students). About 18 reported that they had not seen Huevocartoon and two reported that they had seen Huevocartoon.

In the first focus group session, there were two international students from Mexico, two identified as Latinos but not international students, one identified as Caucasian, and one identified as African-American.

In the second focus group session, there was one international student from Mexico, five who identify as African American, two who identify as Latinos but not International students, and one who identifies as Caucasian.

In the third focus group session, there was one student who identified as African American, two who identify as Latinos, and two identify as Caucasian.

The purpose of combining, not separating, each ethnicity of individuals in the focus group sessions is because the researcher wanted to contrast the different experiences and group dynamics tied to their ethnic identity. The researcher wanted to explore any new thoughts that arose with a diverse group of millennials.

Procedures

Before the focus group was conducted, the researcher hired a transcriber to transcribe the conversation of all three sessions of the focus group.

All three focus groups were held in a controlled environment on the university campus. The first focus group session lasted about 55 minutes, the second focus group session lasted about 45 minutes, and the third focus group session lasted about 45 minutes.

As participants were walking in, they were offered pizza and given a $25 gift card as compensation for participating in the focus group. Then, consent forms were passed out to all participants to read. Attached to the consent form was a demographic questionnaire for the participants to complete before the start of the sessions. Participants were asked to look at Huevocartoon images of eggs (Appendix B) and express their thoughts and what it could mean to them. Images of the eggs are part of the symbolic implication of semiotics in the Huevocartoon. In other words, what do the eggs mean to participants and what are their initial thoughts on the eggs? By establishing the visual of these eggs, it is the researcher's hope to a better understanding of the participant's symbolic interpretation of the characters.

After analyzing the image, participants watched five clips from Huevocartoon on a YouTube channel. These clips were chosen based on the availability of English subtitles and selected randomly. The clips were *Huevocartoon-Huevos Rancheros 4, Poet Eggs 4: Como preparar la cena de Navidad, El Huevassensino 3: Saw, and Huevocartoon - Huevos al Cine: Tetonic.*

After all the clips were shown, the moderator used a moderator guide (see Appendix A) to ask key questions. It should be noted that the moderator guide was a guide to hit the key points that were not discussed organically in all three focus group sessions. While the questions were being asked, the researcher wrote down major themes and key findings in the discussions. The conversation was recorded on an audio recorder and transcribed after the study was completed. The researcher acted as the moderator and a transcriber was hired to transcribe all three focus group sessions from the audio recordings.

The researcher conducted a thematic analysis and only analyzed the verbal cues and themes of the perception of participants, using transcription of the sessions' audio-recordings.

A summary of the key findings will follow with direct quotes made during the focus group sessions to explain the key findings.

Ethics

All three focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. The researcher explained the ethical standards with the participants, which served to gain trust, fairness, and kindness throughout the focus group sessions. The research had IRB approval to conduct the focus group sessions with the condition of upholding ethical standards and withheld the participant's names to protect their privacy. The participants are labeled with numbered letters throughout the key findings. The transcriptions contained no personal information that could reveal a name, age, gender, etc.

V. KEY FINDINGS

In this study, the characters in Huevocartoon are applied to examine the participant's interpretation of the symbolic implications within those clips.

The analysis of all three focus groups participants reveal several findings and themes among international students from Mexico and college millennial students in the United States. These findings include (1) how Huevocartoon emphasized the characters, the setting, dialogue, and symbolic signs as a way to define the perception of Huevocartoon; (2) how Huevocartoon utilizes humor and attitude as a way to express social issues; and (3) how Huevocartoon is a transnational media product, but stereotypes in media are hard to break. These findings are further explained in detail in the content below. Each key finding is discussed with themes that were highlighted in the focus groups discussions. Moreover, a summary of each of the key findings will be followed by direct comments that were made during all three focus group sessions to explain the key findings in detail.

It should be noted that direct quotes are participants' opinions and the quotes are used purposefully throughout the key findings section. Thus, the direct quotes are utilized to benefit the expansion of the key findings and to be used to support the key findings and themes.

Key Finding 1: Define the perception of Huevocartoon

This section of the key finding addresses the analysis of the first research question:

RQ1: What are the symbolic implications of the characters, settings, and dialogue and do younger audiences perceive those symbolic signs?

To fully answer this question, an understanding of the participants' general perceptions of Huevocartoon characters are analyzed. Then, participants explored the symbolic implications (setting and dialogue) that play a role in the perception of Huevocartoon. The following are topics that address the question:

- Overall perception of Huevocartoon

- Symbolic signs

- Role of setting and dialogue in the perception of Huevocartoon

Overall Perception of Huevocartoon

All three of the focus group sessions participants expressed that Huevocartoon is a parody that creates themes within Mexican culture. They addressed that Huevocartoon uses eggs in a way to represent Latinos by the way they are dressed and their accent. However, it is not only the clothing and accent that distinguish them as Latinos but rather the 'macho' idiom that surrounds the Latino culture.

"So, they are definitely Mexicans… At least when I grew up, they had to be ranchers, and very manly and manual, where you can't be too emotional. You can't be, you know, you have to be strong and macho. Overall, the thinking and like what they had on, it's like what my family would wear," stated a Latina woman.

Just like other stereotypes, the 'macho' idiom creates a perception of what Latinos are, and Huevocartoon uses the stereotypes.

"I think it really perpetuates stereotypes because the more you see that stereotype, and then see a Mexican cartoon see that stereotype, then you just think maybe it is true. Or just a real thing that exists," stated a Caucasian woman.

The focus group participants stated that their thoughts about the eggs as an image. What stood out to them were not the eggs themselves, but rather the color of the eggs. The colors of the eggs perceived a different thought on Huevocartooon identity. The color white gave a symbolic sign of unity of people in society. The color white is a common color of all the eggs which

is why one Latina participant thought about unity of the color all the eggs being the same.

"That's why the white egg was used, because it's just a neutral color. White is just a neutral egg like somebody different, and the custom just adds to the person and what their identity is, and the egg is just the same throughout the entire span. Because you can say that it was the same, because the egg was still white, and Mexican is the same role and white. We can't assume the role of the egg," stated a Latina woman.

Along with identity in Latino culture, Huevocartoon tries to address the underlying struggles of social issues in the Latino community. The focus groups perceived the clips as addressing those social issues. According to participants, the cartoon had a message of acceptance.

"It aims towards society. Breaking the norm's in society, to accept everybody," stated a Latina woman.

Others perceive it as a way of overcoming the 'machismo' idiom.

"Translated to society, it's like some people may be offended by the overall homosexuality, but others are more accepting of it. So, as you said, acceptance. And, it's OK to be kind of, touchy. Not touchy-feely, but like guys can show emotions," stated a Latina woman.

Yet, the perception of Huevocartoon that the focus group agreed on was that it was trying to send messages of social issues in a way that audiences could understand or comprehend.

"It seemed like it was trying to be humorous for Spanish cultures. I guess like how we have *Boondocks* or *Family Guy* or something. Like this is their version," stated a Caucasian male.

In overall, the perception of Huevocartoon are not just the eggs but rather the issues within the society.

Symbolic signs

In all three focus group sessions, the participants' perception of Huevocartoon concluded there were multiple symbolic signs that were important. Those symbolic signs provided an overall understanding of each message in Huevocartoon. Participants said the images of the egg itself is a symbolic sign of being "unbreakable," meaning that eggs are unable to shatter the misrepresentation of Latinos in media. The stereotypes of Latinos in media are unable to break those social norms, which brings an ironic notion that eggs are easy to crack but when it comes to stereotypes, it is not easy to break those norms.

"Nah, I was thinking maybe they were going to use (the symbol of the eggs) to show despite these stereotypes, or despite these things, they're not easily broken because the eggs never broke. So, it's ironic," stated a Latina woman.

"The eggs are their delicate in nature. But they never cracked," stated a Caucasian male.

Addressing stereotypes as 'unbreakable' was the starting point for participants to see eggs as a symbolic sign and use it to see a more significant message in the clips. For

example, some participants began to see the eggs as a social contrast of the Latino males having to be a "Machismo" man or a masculine man.

"Masculinity, you know for a guy, the testosterone, that is like the biggest part. You know you are supposed to be productive, you're supposed to be (as a guy). You're supposed to do that," stated an international male student.

Others thought the eggs themselves represented people, and how people were different from each other, but in the sense that everyone is the same because we all use eggs to cook and eat with.

"I said that the eggs were like, people. Because I don't know. It just ... It was a broad sense of like, one egg. And, all the eggs are different. Cause, they're white, and they're eggs. They're what you use to cook. And, this could represent people, in a way. And I feel like that's what the author was doing," stated a Latina woman.

"An egg is just a white egg that you can pick it up at the grocery. It's very common and it's probably what the cartoonist wanted to do," stated an international woman.

Looking at the symbolism of the egg, the focus group participants considered the eggs themselves representing society. One participant began to place the eggs in where they would fit into society, based on the clothing and the color of the egg. It's what we see on the outside that creates the person's identity whether they are a Latino, Caucasian, African American or other ethnical background.

"It kind of shows you what really happens in society (because of the eggs are dressed differently). So, I feel like, (the creator is) trying to bring about the

problem, and say, 'this is the situation (with race/color).' And even though we say that we're the same, we really aren't. And this is how we treat each other. And, we shouldn't be," stated a Latina woman.

On the other hand, participants wanted to offer suggestions on additional symbolism that could be included in the cartoon. Some said the color white is meant for unity and communality of the eggs, but two participants stated that Huevocartoon should include a variety of colors to create more symbolic signs within Huevocartoon.

"I would like to see him add some brown eggs," stated an African American woman.

"I was thinking like, maybe some quail eggs. Yeah, like, I don't know. Because if you think about it, there are different eggs, and we're all different people. So, I was like, do quail eggs, ostrich eggs, robin eggs," stated an African American woman.

Yet, the underlying symbolic signs that were commonly addressed or agreed upon was the 'unbreakable' part of stereotypes in media. A majority of participants also believed that the eggs were part of the Latino culture and represented the culture.

"I think that how they represent like the culture. The Mexican culture I don't think that would apply to any other race cause if you just listen because the clips was just specifically representing of the Mexican culture," stated an African American woman.

Role of setting and dialogue in the perception of Huevocartoon

While discussing symbolic signs, participants commented on how setting and dialogue had a purpose throughout Huevocartoons. The setting creates an atmosphere by

where it sets the scene, mood, and dialogue to create a message that addressed issues. Huevocartoon uses the characteristics to create a perception of Huevocartoon in a way to underline issues humorously. One participant addressed that dialogue was important to the perception because if the audience understood the Spanish language, then they got the message, but if the audience is non-Latino, then they received a different perceptive.

"(You understand the) joke, and when you come from a Hispanic background, you get (the Spanish) language…if you just read the subtitles, as I was like watching and listening to it was not as funny," stated a Latina woman.

However, there was a difference in perception of dialogue when it came to the language. Participants who understood the Spanish language, found the show to be more appealing to them rather than those who did not understand the Spanish language.

"Someone who doesn't speak Spanish would not quite understand what I took out of it. Which was funny, but then also to see what it was trying to say, like the messages they were trying to send," stated an international male student.

There was a huge difference in the perception of Huevocartoon's humor because of the language; the setting created a different perception for the participants. The setting created a mood for the participants to understand what the cartoon was trying to address in the clips. The first clip of *HuevosRanchero* is set at a bar, creating a perception that all participants could agree on.

"Old school and macho," stated a Latina woman.

"It was very accurate that they were at a bar. I thought it felt natural to me I guess," stated a Latina woman.

"If you think about a Mexican bar, specifically a Mexican bar, you think a woman

really shouldn't be there because men go drink there, men go they probably fight there, you know they are saying stuff that is not quite right for a woman to be around. So, if you notice that when the situation was getting heated, there were eggs that got up and left the bar," stated a Latina woman.

Others perceived the setting as symbolized sign of others not being acceptable for being different. In the clip of *Huevocarton-HuevoRancheros 4*, the setting was at a bar and right behind them were a few eggs. However, there were two eggs that left during the time the two main cartoon character eggs were kissing and touching each other. This part is where two participants perceived the setting to be significant because of other eggs maybe not accepting various identities.

"I thought it was funny how the eggs in the background walked off when they started seeing them acting gay. Like, they were watching them for a while, with big eyes. Like, one bigger than the other, and then at the end, they walked out," stated an African American woman.

"When they were getting cozy with each other…an egg in the back got up and left. It kind of symbolizes that, whenever they were gay, it's a man's bar that's how I pictured it. Like when they were gay, he kind of just left, so it was kind of like that environment. Some people that are in that environment are not quite as accepting to the eggs," stated an African American woman.

Yet, others added that having the conversation about being gay at a bar was part of being unacceptable in the social norms of Latinos. It also goes against the stereotypes of Latino men being the strong man in the family.

"You wouldn't have gay people at a cowboy bar. Or like, if you saw the buildings

outside, they were Mexican homes. So, it was a Mexican bar, and in Mexican families, you typically don't find gays," stated a Latina woman.

"It's all like, opposite of where they should've been. Like, you won't talk about gay culture in a cowboy bar," stated a Latina woman.

Even though, *Huevocartoon-HuevosRancheros 4* created a setting that contradicted the stereotypes and the social norms, one clip of Huevocartoon created a setting that was perceived by the focus group as a place of unity for all. The clip called *Poet Eggs 4: Como prepara la cena de Navidad*, illustrated three eggs cooking together, but also getting drunk while cooking.

"It kind of brings different cultures together because on the cooking one they were talking about, 'I wish we had spaghetti' or 'I wish we had barbecue.' In our culture, we eat that at like every event. I was like, OK I got you. So, it brings everybody together in a way," stated an African American woman.

The key findings address how symbolic signs within Huevocartoon creates meaning for the millennial audience to perceive it. Overall, the symbolic signs of the characters, settings, and dialogue all have an impact on the young audiences because it creates a perception of Huevocartoon and the reason of why these clips were created.

Key Finding 2: Humor and attitude used to express social issues

This section of the key finding addresses the second research question:

RQ2: How is Huevocartoon humor and attitude used in the animation and what impact does it have on young audiences' perception of Latinos in media?

Participants addressed the impact humor and attitude in Huevocartoon had on their perception of Latinos in media and how humor addressed social issues. The

following are topics that address the question:

- Perception of humor from characters

- Humor and attitude utilized

- Humor impact

Perception of humor from characters

Themes of humor and attitude were demonstrated throughout the focus group analysis. Huevocartoon established a way to address social norms and social issues. However, it was evident that the participants were focused on the humor and the perception of the characters. Participants mentioned that the characters created a sense of unity. One participants mentioned how *Huevocartoon-Huevos Rancheros 4* was addressing sexuality in the Latino community because they were breaking social norms or breaking the idea of "Machismo." One participant stated that the humor played a huge role in Huevocartoon because it brings light to the issues in a way that may not be offensive to others.

"(*Huevocartoon- Huevo Rancheros is)* targeted toward society. The people in society and how they do things," stated a Latina woman.

Yet, as some participants begin to think about humor and social norms, one participant addressed the question:

"Why wouldn't you choose eggs? I think he used them as a sense of irony," stated a Latina woman.

Everyone agreed that the cartoonist created the characters as eggs, to address the meaning of unity. They also addressed the fact that eggs cannot be discriminated against.

"It was something that was universal. I mean, everyone eats eggs, everyone eats,"

stated a Caucasian woman.

"There is no difference between an egg. I mean, an egg is an egg. Can't discriminate. Like it can be different colors or whatever but at the end of the day it's still an egg and it's still food," stated a Caucasian male.

However, three participants said that maybe the eggs are not a representation of people, but rather, addressing a bigger issue of society and how the eggs could use humor as a way to represent society as a whole. Meaning that each egg in the clip could mean different ethnical background.

"Because they're eggs, and they're all one, because they're all unified. They all look the same. But, if they were all different colors, or different things, representing everyone else, I kind of ... I would think of stereotypes more," stated a Latina woman.

"Maybe he was using eggs because they're not like people. I mean, you know that they're Hispanic, but you're not making fun of the way they look," stated a Latina woman.

"If he wants to open up to say more about things in society, I feel like the eggs (shouldn't be) just one type of egg. Because some people might perceive it as, 'Oh, they're just white eggs.' You need to add some brown ones. So, I think different shapes and sizes of the eggs can also help defeat somebody not getting offended when watching it. Because some people don't think the same. And, some people think like, 'Oh, that's cool how he just did one egg.' Because, it's the general egg. It has no color; it's just an egg," stated an international male student.

A consensus of all three focus group sessions participants concluded that the

humor was based on society in general.

> "(It) entertains us based on off what (Latinos) see, or what they are like in society,
> so what we are like that is our everyday life. Making something funny out of that
> kind of in a way to get the audience's attention," stated a Caucasian male.
>
> "Maybe it's just like (making the characters eggs) adds more humor. Like if you
> were to see real Hispanic people and they're portrayed as just drinkers and
> everything else with the stereotypes, it might be more offensive. But because
> they're eggs, it's not as offensive," stated a Latina woman.

Humor and attitude utilized

The perception of humor in the characters contributed to how the participants
witness the humor and attitude being played out in Huevocartoon. Participants agreed
that humor and attitude in each clip had different characters that had their own
characteristics to them that contributed to their perception of Huevocartoon. For example,
Huevocartoon-Huevos Rancheros 4 was about how two eggs were talking about being a
'macho' man but finding out that they spent a night together, and they both enjoyed their
night together. Two participants stated that these two cartoon characters eggs created
humor in the clips by stating they focused more on the 'Machismo' idea of Latino males.

> "They were trying to really emphasize the word, 'Macho,' when really they were
> … attracted to each other, and when they were trying to like describe what the girl
> did to him, but he wanted the other egg to do it to him," stated an international
> male student.
>
> "It's just things you wouldn't think to put in a cartoon. It's like: Tequila, why?
> Gayness, why? All that kind of stuff, it's in a cartoon. It's just random, funny

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things. And then the eggs ... They look so innocent at first, and then they're

cussing, and all this. And, it's so funny," stated a Latina woman.

Yet, two participants disputed the idea of 'Machismo' in *Huevocartoon- Huevos*

Rancheros 4 and stated that the humor played more with addressing issues in society as a

whole in terms of sexuality rather than the idea of 'Machismo.'

"(The) cartoons tackle an issue in a way that is not serious. Because they don't

make fun of it, they put it on a lighter note. They make it where they are going

through the same issue (where) they can relate," stated Latina woman.

Yet, other participants agreed that humor and attitude were utilized to create an

environment that was understandable. Huevocartoon created an environment that was

humorous toward others who were socially acceptable.

"I kind of feel how like we're sometimes trying to think about things that we judge

on. So, we don't think about it. But … we're quick to judge. And then society

comes back around ... It gets your back because you never know when your

family member could be the one that's gay," stated an African American woman.

" (Huevocartoon addresses) acceptance. And all that kind of stuff," stated a Latina

woman.

Humor Impact

Humor, attitude, and the perception of humor were addressed, but the participants

began to make a connection of how humor could impact the perception of Latinos in

media.

Three participants concluded that humor addressed the perception of stereotypes

in media, and it allowed a way for humor to bring out the misrepresentation of Latinos in

media.

"(Huevocartoons) enforce that gay is wrong in the Mexican culture," stated an
international male student.

"They play on what we see in society and media," stated a Caucasian male.

"You could see (the Latino representation) as still being stereotypical. But you
could just laugh at it and know that's not how it really is," stated a Latina woman.

Two participants agreed that their perception of Latinos in media, and watching
the clips, brought up issues that other media don't want to show because it goes against
what is seen in Latino stereotypes.

"He used humor to bring about the topic. Kind of like eased into the topic. To
bring up the gay (egg), and not make it seem so offensive. He used humor to
water it down a bit," stated a Latina woman.

"(Huevocartoon) allows you to talk among each other about an issue and not
have it where, you know, it uncomfortable. It grabs the attention, and the humor
allows others to talk about it in a way where it's appropriate as well as to bring up
the issue with," stated an international male student.

The participants felt that it generated a sense of contradicting the norms that are
shown in media of Latinos. We continue to see those stereotypes or norms in media
because these issues are struggles that society continues to show in the media.

"And it's all, culture struggle with a certain thing. And Huevocartoon took it
away. Like, if we took it away, would we still have these issues? Obviously, yes,"
stated an African American woman.

However, three participants thought humor impacted the perception of Latinos in

media by shining light on a huge issue, but making it seem like it is a normal issue in today's society.

"I think they're just trying to make light of it, like just for humor," stated a Latina woman.

"They could have been trying to bring light to the down-low people," stated an African American woman.

"It's humor, but it's something else. ... Some issues are serious, but they make into humor," stated a Latina woman.

Another participant said the impact humor has in Latino media created a comfortable feeling for others to watch and feel normal.

"Usually you don't see guys hug each other. It's kind of like that gay kind of thing. So, I feel like some guys ... I don't know, some guys that I know it's like they're OK being around gay guys, but it's like they're not really. So, I feel like, in that episode, it's like he wasn't comfortable with it at first, but then he kept saying more stuff and doing, so he's like, 'Oh. That was you!' Type of thing. It's like, he's OK, in a sense," stated a Latino male.

The key findings in the second section concludes how the humor and attitudes in Hueuvocartoon made social issues approachable and feel for acceptable.

Key Finding 3: Stereotypes in Media are hard to break

This section of the key findings addresses the analysis of the third research question:

RQ3: Are there any difference in the cultural interpretation between American and Mexican audience, in Huevocartoon's representation, specifically regarding stereotypes?

Participants agreed that stereotypes in media are interpreted the same by those of different cultures.

- The difference in cultural interpretation

- Differences in stereotypes in media

The difference in cultural interpretation

Cultural interpretation is more than the language; it includes the perception of understanding different cultural interpretation from the participants. As stated before, the participants came from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. This section addresses the difference of perception of Huevocartoon and the thoughts of participants by ethnicity.

In a consensus of both the international students and the participants who identified as Latinos in United States, participants agreed that some of the eggs characteristics reminded them of their family members in some way. The participants stated they could relate to some of the characteristics of their family members, though they were exaggerated in nature.

> "I think that if it were to watch with one of my cousins, I can laugh 'Oh, that's funny, whatever,' but if someone else were to watch it and they see race they would assume that, yeah, everybody does this. All Mexicans do this. I think that in this case, they do think, 'But no, we are not all like that.' I would get offended. That's how I think," stated a Latina woman.

For African American cultural backgrounds, the perception was similar to Latinos. They connected the representations to those of the *Madea* films, which addressed stereotypes of African Americans.

"My roommate would watch the *Madea* movies and she would crack up laughing, because she knows its exaggerated. Because she knows that they are doing it to be funny. So, maybe they try to aim it at (viewers of the same culture) … because it's meant it as a joke," stated an African American woman.

"I guess it's like black people; we like to eat chicken. We get to eat it, and we like it. So, that's what I'm saying though, if a Hispanic person sees it maybe, he'll be like, 'Hehe,'" stated an African American woman.

Yet, the Caucasian participants perceived Huevocartoon differently than other interpretation of the clips. All of the participants that labeled themselves as Caucasian agreed that if they watch Huevocartoon then they would believe in all the stereotypes in Huevocartoon. However, it does not exclude them from not knowing the Latino stereotypes in media.

"If you're someone who hasn't interacted with many Hispanic people, and then you hear this in the media. Then this show would just perceive it, and you'll think that's how they really are. But if you're someone who knows better and knows more people that are not just you, then you could see it differently," stated a Caucasian woman.

Differences in stereotypes in media

Although they can agree the representation of Latinos in media continues to be stereotypical, is there any difference between United States focus group audience and

international students from Mexico? As stated above, there is hardly any difference of

cultural interpretation from the participants. Yet, as the focus group addressed the

interpretation of cultural differences, participants begin to contemplate the difference

between stereotypes in the United States versus other countries' stereotypes. Does it

remain the same or does it differ from country to country?

Participants who identify as an international student from Mexico stated that the

stereotypes are the same everywhere, whether we live in the United States or Mexico.

Hollywood contributes the similarities because it is a huge industry of filmmaking that is

distributed around the world.

"It makes you think that Mexicans wear big mustaches and big hats and they are

at a bar drinking tequila…but if you were to think of somebody else doing that, it

really doesn't fit the description of any other race, you know, like the black

community and how they fit their description. So that's where I think stereotyping

comes in. Because if you read the Spanish subtitles, you think it's probably a

Spanish cartoon," stated an international male student.

The international student who is from Mexico had stated below that stereotypes in

Mexico media and the United States media are the same because of certain characteristics

that hint toward a Latino background.

"He reminded me so much of my uncle…within the Mexican culture; you have to

be macho, go to drink tequila, of course," he said.

"Well, obviously, the mustache and the hat and the setting was very stereotypical

because of the mustache and the tequila," stated an international male student.

"The author, in particular, the media portrays (Latinos) like they are trying to

portray … the reality. So, one can think like 'This is sometimes the case, but media tries to portray something different,'" stated an international male student.

Other participants who are from the United States stated that these stereotypes are accurate to what Hollywood media is portrayed.

"…very stereotypical, you're supposed to be able to you know make a girl happy sexually as well as, you know, in marriage. Very machismo," stated a Latina woman.

"So, I guess in a way they were trying to specifically (relate) to Mexicans and the fact that they do drink tequila and when they do get drunk they do speak the truth," stated an African American woman.

"I mean, definitely, the drinking tequila and the machismo and the way that they talk in the first one kept perpetuating stereotypes. That's how they see everyone in South America, specifically Mexico," stated a Latina woman.

Yet, two participants referenced the movie, Titanic. In the movie, characters Rose and Jack are dying in freezing water, and Jack and Rose climb on top of the floating door to survive. Jack dies because he didn't climb onto the door. *Huevocartoon- Huevos al Cine: Tetonic* reenacted the movie but the clip ended with Jack pushing Rose off the door for him to climb on. Stereotypes of Latinos are seen differently in this clip because it reverses the ending, like reversing stereotypes in media, by using irony.

"When we watched *Titanic*, it was just like, how come Rose didn't put him on the little thing with her? It was kind of big, you know? And so, in doing that, (Huevocartoon) flipped it. Just like, everyone was saying, 'Why didn't she put him on the thing with her? There was enough room for two people.' He pushed

her off, because he was mad. It was like retaliation for Jack. I want that," stated an

African American woman.

Another stereotype in *Huevocartoon- Huevos al Cine: Tetonic* clip shows how

Jack speaks to Rose in a dominating voice over hers. However, in the movie, Titanic.

Jack speaks to Rose softly and kindly, but not in a dominating voice.

"How (Jack) was talking to the (Rose) in *(Huevocartoon_ Huevos al Cine:*

Tetonic) clip … you kind of hear the men are really angry and controlling over the

women," stated an African American woman.

Overall, the cultural interpretation between American and Mexican audiences

differ because of the language, but there is some interpretation that remains the same. On

the other hand, three international students from Mexico addressed that there is no

difference between stereotypes in Mexican media and the United States media.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the representation, messages, and symbolic implications of the animated Huevocartoon series, focusing on the perception of the transnational audience from the U.S. and national audience from Mexico. The study employed a thematic analysis of the verbal cues from the participants. Thus, to generate an overall meaning and representation, the semiotic theory was used to produce an understanding of Huevocartoon.

The semiotic theory's main theme is the study of signs and how it works within society. Pierce (1931) states that signs are an interpretation of a connection of a sign or a reference of a sign. This includes Ferdinand de Saussure semiotic theory which is a sign that symbolizes the works within society (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993). The theory addresses the representation, interpretation, and the meaning in select signs in media. Furthermore, semiotic theory intends to define the meaning of a sign.

When it comes to Huevocartoon, audiences select media signs as a part of their cultural background or society. Thus, the focus group participants emphasized that the eggs are a representation of stereotypes, the eggs' interpretation is ironic, and the eggs are an object or reference to the 'unbreakable' theme. In other words, participants stated that eggs are breakable or easy to break. However, the eggs in Huevocartoon remained 'unbreakable' because the stereotypes are not easy to crack, and the eggs are a sense of irony because like stereotypes common eggs are not easily broken.

Furthermore, how does this interpretation fit into society? This interpretation indicates how Huevocartoon socially constructs a reality of stereotypes of Latinos in media and how it is unable to break the misrepresentation or stereotypes of Latinos.

The first research question was to identify the symbolic implication of the characters, settings, and dialogue. Results from the participants' responses indicated that the symbolic implication of the characters, settings, and dialogue addresses the visual narrative of a 'realistic representation.' The 'realistic representation' of Huevocartoon's characters, setting, and dialogue expresses the exaggeration of the stereotypes in media, and it becomes real.

The cartoon characters in Huevocartoon allow the audience to perceive ethnicity differently in media. Brayton (2013) concluded that race and ethnicity create a visual form of symbolic signs that audience believes to be realistic. Thus, the visual narrative of the characters creates the symbolic implication. They structure meaning based on what they are wearing, the accent they have, and even the color of the eggs. Participants believed that the characters should have been different colors to make them different from the common egg. The purpose of changing the colors of the characters of the eggs would open new issues in society. The participants also analyzed the eggs and stated that the eggs are a symbol of how 'unbreakable' the stereotypes of Latinos in media can be.

Visual narrative setting and dialogue plays a role in structuring the message. The setting structures culture identity by producing the ethnical background of stereotypical images. Participants spotted some symbolic implications in the settings of Huevocartoon clips. Participants addressed that the setting made it seem like the eggs must be a very stereotypical 'machismo' man. Sequeira (2009) concluded that a 'macho' man had to include a heavy alcohol endurance. This research supports how the visual narrative of the setting express the stereotypes of a 'macho' man.

Yet, it when it comes to dialogue in Huevocartoon, the visual narrative changes.

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The dialogue in Huevocartoon takes on the symbolic meaning of social belonging. The dialogue structures the way the audience looks at language and identity. Participants addressed that the dialogue established signals of ethnicity and cultural background. Bell and Gibson (2011) established the supporting idea that language is a way to create social meaning, through the interaction between characters in media. They concluded that language is one of the features currently persuading and informing attitudes and beliefs of the Latino community. Consequently, dialogue between the characters in Huevocartoon expresses their identity in a way that signifies their social belonging. While data contradicts how the Spanish language media has been on the downslope, Huevocartoon's popularity shows the Spanish language is needed in the United States to sustain the Latino identity.

The second research question was to find out how humor and attitude of Huevocartoon impacts the audience perception of Latinos in media. Results found that humor and attitude did, in fact, affect the audience's perception, because it addressed social issues by playing with stereotypes. Huevocartoon's humor and attitude of the characters indicated to the audience that stereotypes of Latinos in media are a misrepresentation of Latinos, and it illustrates how humor and attitude can address issues in a way that is understandable and relatable.

Participants found that humor and attitude of the characters in Huevocartoon battled the social issues in a way that represented the irony of stereotypes. This finding supports research by Klein and Shiffman (2009), in which they concluded that stereotypes represent ethnic groups based on characteristics found in mainstream media. Those characteristics are part of the misrepresentation of stereotypes in media and how

the audience perceives Latinos in reality.

Hall (1997) stated that the audience interprets the representation of what they see as a value or connection in what they look, think, and perceive in a way to produce meaning. The participants classify the humor and attitude of Huevocartoon as media produced to provide insight to social issues. Humor and attitude in Huevocartoon contributed to the audiences' perceptions of Latino stereotypes in media.

The third research question explored the cultural interpretation difference of transnational and national audiences regarding stereotypes. Results from the participants' responses show how the audience's perception of stereotypes is all about the cultural background. Our cultural background helps the audiences' perception to make a judgment about what is stereotypical or what are true real-life attitudes and beliefs. Participants concluded that the cultural interpretation is based on the diverse cultural background that allows transnational and national audiences. When it comes to Huevocartoon, the participants agreed was that the characters were part of a stereotypical interpretation of Latinos. Yet, about half of the participants agreed that the stereotypes seen in Huevocartoon is reality, or resembles part of Latinos' real attitude and beliefs, because they, or someone know holds the same attitudes or beliefs as the media stereotypes.

According to Avila-Saavedra (2011), there are times where stereotypes serve as a way to address 'in-group' issues. This 'in-group' addresses how some stereotypes are meant to be (somewhat) true because many Latinos know at least one person who embodies that characteristic stereotype.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study was the limited number of participants in the focus group. The small number of participants might not be a good representation the larger population. If there was a greater number of participants who attended the focus group, then, it would allow for a better understanding of the perception of Huevocartoon.

Also, there were very few national participants from Mexico. This small number of participants also may not be a good representation of a larger population of national audiences from Mexico. If there were a greater number of participants that were from Mexico, it would allow a better understanding of how stereotypes in the United States and Mexico differ from the stereotypical media.

Although the study falls short of developing a fully formed analysis of the message through a visual content medium, such dimension of conducting a content analysis could address the messages within the characters themselves, rather than the audiences' perspective.

Reflection

While reflecting on the research of writing this thesis, I should note that some of my personal perspectives may be present in this study. I am passionate about Latinos in media and how Latinos are represented in media, which is why I came into this topic of my choice.

Though it was difficult to not include some of my biased thoughts within the research because of my background, I tried to separate my own initial thoughts of this research topic and write about the relevant topic and information from the focus group participants' thoughts.

It was difficult because I grew up in small town called Llano, Texas, and growing up in small town and having a Hispanic background was hard because I experienced first-hand how representation of Latinos in media had an impact in my life. This small town did not have much diversity of Latinos nor African Americans; it was made up of mostly Caucasians. Thus, the reason I experienced how representation in media has an impact on what others expect to see in reality.

Being a first-generation student here in the United States was difficult because my parents, being from Bejucos, Mexico, had to assimilate themselves in the United States and understand a language and culture that was new to them. While they were learning the language and the culture, so where we (my other sisters and I). However, that did not stop us from learning a new culture and language. We grew together as a family as we assimilated in the United States.

Although I had a connecting experience, I have been able to separate my bias thoughts within the thesis research. The purpose of the research was to look at the perception of the participants' initial thoughts of Huevocartoon and the symbolic implication, representation, and messages within this product of transnational media. I never once included my thoughts within the research. I can now look back and realize that this research only included the participants' thoughts of Huevocartoon.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should conduct a larger number of participants of national millennials from Mexico. While a larger number of transnational millennials participant attended the focus group, a larger number of millennials of national students from Mexico may bring more perceptive of Huevocartoon.

Another recommendation of future research of the study is conducting a content analysis of Huevocartoon rather than a focus group. The study findings pointed out the perception of Huevocartoon and the symbolic implications, but it did not study the content itself and what message Huevocartoon was trying to convey with visual content.

Perhaps the most interesting perceptive of Huevocartoon, was that the audience perceived the symbolic implication of the eggs as 'unbreakable' and connecting the cartoon to the stereotypes in media. This result could impact our way of looking at cartoons by analyzing various representations within the cartoons in media.

Overall, the findings of the study discussed how important visual narrative is to the perception of stereotypes in media and messages. It also addresses how the audiences, whether transnational or national millennials, of Huevocartoon can develop a different understanding of social issues in the Latino community. Strategic communicators should understand that perceiving the cartoons means something different for everyone, and to generate the same message for all cultural backgrounds. In order for everyone to understand the same message, the message needs to be comprehendible and relatable for all individuals.

Appendix A: Moderator Guide

Warm-Up Exercise

1. What are some of your fondest memories of watching cartoons?

Focus Group Questions

1. Show the images of the egg cartoon characters.

2. Describe how you feel when you see these egg cartoon characters.

    These are the cartoon characters from a cartoon I'm researching. It is called

    Huevocartoon.

Show five of the Huevocartoon clips

3. What are your perceptions of Huevocartoon?

    a.   Describe to me your feelings/impression of these clips.

4. Describe to me the egg cartoon's characteristics. Were they positive or negative?

5. Why do you think these were the cartoonist's choices?

6. How does the humor make you feel about the characters, and who you think they

    represent?

7. Who do you think the target audience is?

8. Suppose you were telling your friend about this cartoon. How would you describe

    Huevocartoon to them?

    a.   What would you tell them about the cartoon?

9. Who do you think these characters want to represent?

    a.   Are they successful in their representation?

10. Which characters would you say have the most positive and most negative

representation of the group?

11. Describe to me the moments that was humorous to you.

12. What do you think the cartoonist is trying to do with humor and the characters?

13. What do you think the role of humor plays in Huevocartoon?

14. Describe to me how the cartoonist created the environment in the clips.

15. What stood out to you in the environment that the characters were in?

16. Describe to me the interaction between the characters.

17. What were some of the type of conversations the characters had with each other?

18. How would you describe stereotypes in media?

    a.   How would this relate to Huevocartoon?

19. How does the cartoonist portray the characters?

20. How do you think stereotypes in this media affect the way people view or

    perceive others?

21. Do you feel like this cartoon can influence our perception?

22. What suggestions do you have to improve (if any) the messages or the

    representation in Huevocartoon?

Appendix B: Huevocarton Pictures

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4

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