

Distinction and Cosmopolitanism: Latin American Middle-Class, Elite Audiences and Their Preferences for Transnational Television and Film

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This article explores three seemingly promising theories to explain the television preferences of upper-middle-class and elite audiences in Latin America. We discuss how ideas on cultural distinction, cosmopolitanism, and cultural omnivores aid the understanding of elite audiences, from their use of satellite and cable TV to their growing use of streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, or Disney+. This study is based on a secondary analysis of data from TGI Latina, a biannual marketing and media consumption survey conducted in eight Latin American countries by the marketing intelligence firm Kantar Media. Based on the data we analyzed, we argue that the concepts of distinction, cosmopolitanism, and cultural omnivores are related, and all help us understand the evolving national versus imported television preferences of Latin American audiences.

Keywords: television, streaming, cosmopolitanism, distinction, cultural omnivores, audiences, consumption

Netflix's first major area of international expansion in 2011 was Latin America. As it and other streaming services expand into Latin America and across the world, they seem to target the upper-middle class and elite. This is in part because of practical constraints, such as access to broadband Internet and the economic capital to afford it (Straubhaar, Castro, Duarte, & Spence, 2019). More than access, however, there is also a question of taste, and earlier work has shown that imported television from outside the region is often the most popular with upper-middle classes and elites (Straubhaar, 1991).

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This article explores three seemingly promising theories for interpreting some of the television preferences of upper-middle-class and elite audiences in Latin America. We discuss how cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), cosmopolitanism (Beck, 2004; Hannerz, 1990; Szerszynski & Urry, 2006), and cultural omnivores (Peterson, 1992) aid understanding of why elite audiences seek international programs on cable/satellite TV and, more recently, on streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime or Disney+.

Bourdieu's (1984) theories of capital explain how economic and social advantages provide access, and cultural capital provides sufficient cultural knowledge to consume and understand foreign cultural products, such as television and film. In his original work *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) discusses how the upper-middle or upper classes tend to use their greater store of cultural capital to draw social distinctions between themselves and the lower class with lesser cultural capital. Recently, sociologists have been drawing on Bourdieu (1984) to examine how cosmopolitanism is related to stratification on a global scale (Igarashi & Saito, 2014). We find distinction through cultural capital and its relation to global stratification to be highly useful in understanding why upper-middle and upper classes in Latin America pursue high-status forms of television and film from the United States and Europe, and other Latin Americans content themselves with nationally produced television.

We want to contrast those motives, dispositions, and dynamics with what some scholars have defined as the cosmopolitan disposition (Beck, 2006; Hannerz, 1990; Igarashi & Saito, 2014; Vertovec & Cohen, 2000; Woodward, Skrbis, & Bean, 2008) and the different types of cosmopolitanism, such as the concepts of multiple mobilities, cultural omnivores, aesthetic cosmopolitanism, peripheral cosmopolitanism, as well as outline how cosmopolitanism operates in Latin America. Using data from TGI Latina, a large syndicated survey of major metropolitan areas in eight Latin American countries by Kantar Media (the parent company of Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística, in Portuguese [IBOPE]) and other Latin American ratings and research companies) from 2004 to 2014, this article empirically analyzes the connections between elite media preferences and cultural distinction, cultural omnivorousness, and cosmopolitan dispositions, including an interest in other cultures and countries, love for travel, enjoyment of foreign foods, and interest in international events with a preference for U.S. and European media.

Research Question One

The theories we lay out here suggest that elites seeking cultural distinction in Latin America will tend to be less interested in local or national programs and will favor media from the United States and Europe.

RQ1: Will that pattern be evident in data on Latin American upper-middle-class and elite audience preferences?

Research Question Two

Conversely, the theories suggest that cosmopolitans and cultural omnivores will have interests in programming from a wide variety of sources: national, regional, United States, and Europe.

RQ2: Will that pattern be evident in data on Latin American upper-middle-class and elite audience preferences?

Geocultural Sources of Film and Television

We examine the impact of thinking patterns related to structural class positions among Latin American upper-middle classes and elites, as they express preferences for film and television from national and international sources. One way that both the academy and cultural industries have contemplated this is in terms of nations and regions. We define the latter as geocultural regions (Sinclair, 1999). This implies that cultural regions are defined by geographical proximity—as in the geographic ties that link Latin American and European countries within each region—and by culture and language (Sinclair & Straubhaar, 2013).

Television emerged in Latin America in the early 1950s, spurred by “popular policies and economic developmentalism” (Becerra, Mastrini, & Waisbord, 2014, p. 37). Some countries with the earliest developments were Mexico, Brazil, Cuba, Argentina, and Venezuela. Television in the region was characterized by its commercialism, strong U.S. influence, and strong government participation and guidance (Becerra et al., 2014). The decades following it were marked by the establishment of the industry in the region, alongside a large influx of a one-way flow of television programs, films, and news from the United States and a few European countries (Schiller, 1976). However, even as imported content dominated 1970s Latin American television, emerging giants, such as the Brazilian TV Globo, turned to local writers, actors, directors, and producers to create national shows and grow their audiences (Wallach, 2011). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, several of the wealthier countries in the region produced more of their programs, and some countries, such as Mexico and Brazil, exported them (Sinclair & Straubhaar, 2013).

By the 1990s, researchers had noticed a tendency for Latin American countries to trade and exchange television programs with each other based on common history, shared or similar languages, and cultural proximity among audiences (Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996; Straubhaar, 1991; Wilkinson, 1995). Furthermore, in the 1990s, optimistic discussions claimed a counter-flow movement, as telenovelas gained popularity in Europe. However, arguments of “reversed imperialism” were quickly dismissed, as telenovelas were mainly used to fill programming voids in developing national media systems (Biltreyst & Meers, 2000). In interregion exchanges, though, both cultural theorists and the television and advertising industries view Europe as a major source of cultural exports, including television and film, to Latin America (Guback, Varis, & Cantor, 1982; Nordenstreng & Varis, 1974). Additionally, the United States has been considered by the same studies as the major source of film and television exports to Latin America and the rest of the world (Beltran & Fox de Cardona, 1979; Miller et al., 2005; Schiller, 1969).

The fortunate congruence between industry and academic viewpoints in this area was reflected in the TGI Latina survey, wherein respondents were asked about the degree to which they preferred film and television programs from their nation, their region (Latin America), the United States, and Europe. This is a good operationalization of one of the key concepts we examine: The impact of different geocultural sources—driven by a cultural distinction that is based on social class positions (Bourdieu, 1984) and attitudes representative of a cosmopolitan approach (Beck, 2006; Hannerz, 1990)—on preferences for film and television (Beck, 2006; Hannerz, 1990).

Distinction

We argue that the upper-middle and elite classes are often drawn to foreign culture through processes of historical class formation (Dos Santos, 1973) and cultural capital accumulation (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). From a historical or political economic analysis, elites and the upper-middle classes in Latin America are drawn by conditions of cultural dependency to a focus on imported culture. Dependency theorists argue that the system of dependency tends to push elites toward engagement with the educational systems and cultures of the foreign powers on which they are dependent (Chilcote, 1974; Dos Santos, 1978). Dos Santos (1978) notes that a key mechanism of both dependency and imperialism is to draw Latin American elites into identifying their interests with those of imperial or dominant powers. He and others argue that there is a cultural dimension to national elites preferring cultural products from the United States and Europe to show their social and cultural distinction from others in society (Dagnino, 1973). Until independence, colonial subjects were encouraged to go to universities in Portugal or Spain to keep them tied to the colonial powers. With the growth of the United States, France, and Great Britain's postcolonial powers, many Latin Americans were drawn into economic relationships with them and also drawn toward their languages, ideas, and systems of higher education. By the 20th century, there was considerable competition between France and the United States to influence and guide university growth in Latin America (Ben-David, 2017).

Periods of economic expansion in Latin America, such as the 1950s–1960s or the late 1990s through mid-2010s, expanded the middle, upper-middle, and even to some degree elite classes, as education and job opportunities grew, allowing more people to work in international settings, travel, and learn other languages. During the strong economic growth from 2001 to 2013, the size of the middle and upper-middle classes grew substantially from 100 million people in the year 2000 to around 150 million by 2010 (Ferreira et al., 2012, p. xi). Members of what Ferreira et al. (2012) considered middle classes outnumbered the poor for the first time in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of cultural, economic, and linguistic capitals lay out a widely used theoretical structure for examining the economic or social advantages and gains that are perceived to be accessible through the use of foreign cultural production, such as foreign television, as well as the necessary social and economic conditions to access and enjoy such programming. Cultural capital essentially reflects a person's knowledge of things that society considers important, which helps one advance in society and distinguish oneself from others in social and cultural terms. It can be broad, like knowing a great deal about the history of nations and the world, or specific to fields, like knowing fine arts or mechanical engineering (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is primarily learned from parents and education. Early cultural capital studies observed "how the success of children in school depended on the level of education of their parents," related in part to educated parents' "intimate familiarity with highbrow culture" (Prieur & Savage, 2013, p. 247). It can also be developed from peers and work (Bourdieu, 1984) and, increasingly, from the media themselves. Lindell and Danielsson (2017) argued that "media may allow one to cultivate cosmopolitan capital" (p. 51).

Bourdieu (1984) indicates that there is a sort of competition for status during the consumption of legitimate cultural products and refined cultural practices. He argues that there is a visible difference in preference for certain types of music, food, sports, politics, literature, and even hairstyle among different classes. According to Bourdieu (1984), these preferences are based on cultural capital, knowledge, dispositions,

and preferences, acquired first from our families (do they listen to classical or pop music?), then from peers (what knowledge, cultural preferences, and cultural consumption do we learn from our friends?), school (which concentrates on teaching the cultural capital societies want us to know, or which is required to get ahead in the current economy), jobs, work colleagues, etc. In this way, through taste and cultural capital, which guides their cultural consumption choices, individuals confirm their belonging to upper socioeconomic classes, and these classes gain tools to reinforce their domination of society (Prieur & Savage, 2013) through prestige, access to better work, access to key positions of decision-making, and dominance in the economy. However, cultural capital is not fixed; it evolves in relationship with the fields it is related to (Prieur & Savage, 2013), such as education, cultural consumption of products, such as television and film, and the valuation of different cultural areas, such as the high arts, popular culture, and folk culture. Some cultural sociology research ties it to familiarity with and preference for the elite arts, such as ballet, opera, and classical music, but a key point for the argument of this article is that what is considered desired cultural capital evolves (Prieur & Savage, 2013):

All Bourdieu's concepts were relational. The concept of cultural capital needs to be placed in the wider context of Bourdieu's field analysis in which the very positioning of cultural tastes and propensities is always contested. Bourdieu and co-workers (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1996) insisted on that a capital is always linked to a field, which is always in motion. (Prieur & Savage, 2013, pp. 249–250)

A recent analysis notes that the fields that define cultural capital once defined it in national terms, but now, these definitions are being globalized (Lindell & Danielsson, 2017). These authors argue that cosmopolitanism can be seen as a form of capital: "When analyzed as a form of capital, cosmopolitanism becomes a set of socially recognized resources and skills used to navigate in a globalizing world, embodied and reproduced in privileged groups in society" (Lindell & Danielsson, 2017, p. 52).

A key debate for us is whether cultural capital is now more about the distinction in preference for elite culture, or whether elite cultural capital is itself being redefined to be more about omnivorous consumption of culture across the old distinctions of high, mass or pop, and folk culture (Martin-Barbero, 1987; Peterson, 1992). Canclini (1995) and Martin-Barbero (1987) both argued that part of the dynamic that constitutes Latin American hybridity is not only based on the interaction between local and foreign cultures but also the interaction between high, mass, and folk cultures in the cultural industries and among Latin Americans as participants in culture (Canclini, 1995).

Scholars outside Latin America have argued that what provides distinction to upper-middle and elite classes—those with education, travel, family experience with a range of cultures, etc.—is no longer whether they like opera, but whether they understand and enjoy a broad range of cultures, from high to low (Friedman, 2012; Peterson, 2005), and as we will argue, from local and regional to global. Bourdieu (1984) referred to this as the ongoing transformation of social (and cultural) space. Better educated people tend to like elite cultural arts, but research shows that they also like other forms of culture, which some have argued is a shift from cultural distinction closely related to fine arts to distinction related to preference for a wide range of cultural arts and products, or to being cultural omnivores (Peterson, 1992; Peterson & Kern, 1996), which we will discuss below.

We argue that cultural capital, in terms of the knowledge of other countries, is required to understand and enjoy the culture provided by foreign television programs. To understand a series about Danish social welfare systems (Jacobsen & Jensen, 2020) or lesbian culture as reflected in *The L Word* (Chaiken Lam, Golin, & Kennar, 2004–2009), which Brazilian participants once discussed knowledgeably in a binational U.S.-Brazilian communications seminar attended by a coauthor, a viewer needs to have sufficient knowledge of these cultures and these issues to understand what is going on in the dramas. This is both conceptually and empirically connected with the educational achievement of the participants of the study and/or his/her parents, who also pass on cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Education, as related to class, is not always the best predictor of cultural preferences and consumption; age, gender, and ethnicity have, however, been found to play strong roles as well (Prieur & Savage, 2013). As we will see below, cosmopolitan attitudes, in addition to capital per se, also play a strong role in predicting a certain broad-ranging, omnivorous cultural consumption.

Cosmopolitanism

Hannerz (1990) defines cosmopolitanism as a perspective of the state of mind. Szerszynski and Urry (2006) identify it as reflecting consumers of cultural products from different places. Others define it as competence in different cultural languages or knowledge of different tastes (Woodward et al., 2008). According to them, there are potentially three levels of cosmopolitanism: the macro, the political, and the cultural. At the macro level, "cosmopolitanism refers to an ambition or project of supra-national state building" (Woodward et al., 2008, p. 208). At the political level, cosmopolitanism embraces diversity, multiplicity, and hybridity.

Beck (2004) explains that cosmopolitanism is a multidimensional process that involves the creation of multiple loyalties and the spread of different transnational lifestyles, among others, of which Netflix's global programming would be a prime contemporary example since it includes programs from several countries around the world. He indicates that interdependence between people in various metropolises of the world is intensified by their production and consumption. In the same vein, Szerszynski and Urry (2006) claim that cosmopolitanism is a cultural condition that involves knowledge of places, people, and cultures distant from the people under consideration. They identified six predispositions and practices of cosmopolitan people: (1) extensive mobility, (2) the capacity to consume many places and environments, (3) curiosity about many places, peoples, and cultures, (4) willingness to take risks in encountering the "other," (5) skills to interpret images of others, and (6) openness to other peoples and cultures (Szerszynski & Urry, 2006). At the cultural level:

cosmopolitanism is defined by an openness to other cultures, values and experiences. Such a cultural outlook is identified as underpinned by new types of mobilities of capital, people and things; elaborated, flexible and heterogeneous outlooks and modes of corporeal engagement grounded in cultural-symbolic competencies founded in a type of "code-switching" capacity. (Woodward et al., 2008, p. 209)

Another approach to cosmopolitanism distinguishes between an idealistic approach to cosmopolitanism, in which people are genuinely concerned about other countries, seek more information

about them, want to help with crises, etc., and a consumerist approach, in which people consume foreign goods and food and travel abroad for pleasure (Woodward et al., 2008).

Szerszynski and Urry (2006) observe that cosmopolitanism is more common among people who engage imaginatively with other people, places, and events outside their local setting. This imaginative engagement can come from exposure to foreign television programs, films, or news. Szerszynski and Urry (2006) believe it is through representations of the world that cosmopolitan values surface. In this argument, actual physical travel or contact with foreign people is not required for one to become cosmopolitan.

However, opportunities to acquire such cultural practices are likely connected to existing wealth and education, since these enable people to acquire the knowledge and dispositions noted above. For example, with the arrival of the streaming platform Netflix in Latin America, this new form of access to international television and film in the region has been restricted to a minority of the population. A major barrier to streaming access is lagging Internet penetration in the region. However, since Netflix expanded its international reach to Latin America, Internet access has picked up speed, and the number of households connected to the Internet has grown by 103% between 2010 and 2016 (22% to 46%; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2018).

Households with broadband, which is important for media streaming, are still quite restricted (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2016). In 2010, the penetration levels of fixed broadband and mobile broadband were quite low in Latin America, close to 7%. Since then, mobile broadband has grown exponentially, reaching 64% in 2016 (ECLAC, 2018). While the mobile subscription increase is quite impressive, growing 9–17% between 2010 and 2016, mobile data traffic, a measure of consumption, has shown an even greater increase (37–50% within that period; ECLAC, 2018).

Cosmopolitanism and Bourdieu

Woodward et al. (2008) used Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus to explain cosmopolitan disposition. If we follow the idea that people who adhere to cosmopolitan values and attitudes need to be fluent in and knowledgeable of different cultures and tastes, then that is easily comparable to the idea of dispositions. Bourdieu (1984) explains habitus as a shared set of dispositions and principles that generate and organize practices. Dispositions are also understood as tendencies, propensities, or inclinations, either among groups or within an individual. Woodward et al. (2008) indicate that it is important to understand the concept of disposition, as it will help us understand how cosmopolitanism develops on an individual level:

The most important aspect of a disposition is its capacity to enable agents to view events, objects and things in culturally unique but nevertheless structurally grounded ways, bringing to bear a particular set of cultural understandings on the world. Thus, it is a disposition which can allow some agents to think, feel and act in ways that might be called "cosmopolitan." (p. 211)

In the same vein, Igarashi and Saito (2014) claim that the education system serves to legitimate cosmopolitanism as a desirable disposition at the global level. In that sense, education systems contribute

to institutionalizing cosmopolitanism as a cultural capital, to which access is structurally unequal. Vertovec and Cohen (2000) indicate that social practices are also part of the cosmopolitan disposition, in addition to values and attitudes. Thus, cosmopolitanism can be acted upon and performed. Similarly, Hannerz (1990) refers to the cultural skills necessary to operate around different systems of meaning. This is a particularly crucial aspect to us since we see a certain repertoire of knowledge as likely to let people engage with the globalized cultural offerings that a distribution service like Netflix has. It is also interesting to think that Netflix viewers who engage with the more globalized parts of Netflix's catalog may also become more cosmopolitan in the process. Poster (2008) argues:

If the figure of the cosmopolitan suggests an upper- or middle-class liberal persona, then the recent articulations of global culture are well beyond those relatively restricted limits, extending the imagined community of participants quite broadly across the planet and throughout all social strata. (p. 699)

Can people become more cosmopolitan by consuming media without the opportunities for education, travelling, learning other languages, and meeting people from other cultures, activities that are often associated with the idea of cosmopolitanism? As we shall see below, what our data suggest is that people self-select to engage with more international content on television, based, in part, on traditional predictors, such as education and language exposure but also on cosmopolitan attitudes, which perhaps can be acquired through multiple paths.

Cultural Omnivores

Another term to arise from the literature on consumption, cosmopolitanism, and distinction is that of the cultural omnivore. The term was first coined by Richard Peterson (1992). According to Maguire (2015), cultural omnivores are people who have diverse consumption tastes, which range from elite to popular, and they differ from "univores," or people who only consume highbrow, middlebrow, or lowbrow cultural products. Although Maguire indicates that cultural omnivores are not necessarily only those with a high socioeconomic status, cultural omnivores are usually among this demographic. Today, it is hard to find cultural snobs or people who only consume highbrow cultural items, although research indicates that this is more common in some countries than in others (Priour & Savage, 2013).

The concept of cultural omnivore guides sociologists and cultural researchers to reconsider the relationship between class, taste, and cultural capital. Maguire (2015) notes that methodological research on the subject relies heavily on survey data to account for the volume and composition of cultural products:

The research broadly confirms that individuals with higher levels of education and income, and in higher-status social positions, are more likely to have a greater diversity and volume of tastes than others. Omnivorous tastes are also more common in urban and younger consumers. (p. 214)

Qualitative research additionally indicates that the omnivore consumer discriminates toward taste, limiting their openness to legitimate culture (Warde, Wright, & Gayo-Cal, 2008). Furthermore, Maguire

(2015) argues that there is more to learn about cultural omnivores and their rise as a dominant group that defines and establishes what is considered good taste. She indicates that the factors that led to this new consumer group include the following:

The expansion of higher education, the commercialization of highbrow cultural forms, and the aestheticization of everyday life, which have increased the accessibility of elite culture; and globalization, liberalism, and identity politics, which have increased the accessibility and legitimacy of diverse cultural forms and practices. (p. 215)

Cosmopolitans and Omnivores in Latin America

Hedegard (2015), who studied the implications of the presence of global culture within elite consumers, indicated that global culture represents an important component of high-status taste around the world. However, consumption of global culture or international products "have become elite status symbols in semi-peripheral societies, where they are deployed to demonstrate cosmopolitanism" (Hedegard, 2015, p. 53). In Latin America, where societies are highly stratified by socioeconomic status, cosmopolitan dispositions, practices, and consumption must be understood differently from the European or North American context.

Hedegard (2015) explains how elite valorizations of global culture work in the context of Brazil and certain international cultural objects are framed as high culture. She indicates that Brazil has a long history of its own cultural practices and products. Nonetheless, Brazil's position in the semiperiphery (Wallerstein, 1976), or as a middle-income developing country (World Bank, 2016), implies that elite culture will inevitably be formed around international culture and products. This ties into one of the original aspects of dependency theory in Latin America, which is that elite's desires to consume foreign culture and products at the same levels as people in the United States or Europe would lead to a dualistic development in which they draw national resources to themselves (and away from those in poorer classes), worsening income inequality (Dos Santos, 1973).

Cosmopolitanism and Globalized Media Preferences

While Bourdieu offers a useful framework for understanding audience media preferences that pursue cultural distinction related to cultural capital, cosmopolitanism also provides another useful perspective for examining audience behaviors according to socialization. Cosmopolitanism considers people's relationships toward cultural others, where cognitions, practices, and affinities are manifested in favor of cultural diversity beyond one's locality and community, an orientation, a commitment, or an attachment to a global culture where attitudes and interests transcend those of their current countries (Hannerz, 2006). Several interconnected spheres embody the cosmopolitan spirit (for example, moral, political, and cultural orientations), but cultural openness stands as the dominant domain in cosmopolitanism (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2009). In this regard, learning, interests, and/or the willingness to explore various nations and cultures are key to understanding cosmopolitanism. Interest in consuming things from other cultures is sometimes referred to as banal cosmopolitanism (Igarashi & Saito, 2014) since it is more about material and less about ideas.

In a media environment that is globalized in part because of the import of cultural products like television programs and films, people can achieve a sense of banal cosmopolitanism where the exposure to or consumption of mediated cultures makes up for the lack of economic, cultural, linguistic, or social resources in developing a meaningful or thick globalized identity (Igarashi & Saito, 2014). That is, people who are presented with limited opportunities to travel abroad and/or reside in a country, city, or neighborhood with little ethnocultural heterogeneity may depend on the affordability of visual media to experience narratives that allow them to indulge in cultural others throughout their everyday lives.

In theory, Latin American cosmopolitans should be more interested in U.S. or European television than in national or regional programs, since they might demonstrate a connection to a larger global culture, rather than a more culturally or geographically circumscribed culture historically linked to Latin American commonalities. Because of this limitation and our focus on media preferences, we treat cosmopolitanism primarily as a cultural disposition and link it to the preference for the consumption of foreign media.

Methodology

This study is based on a secondary analysis of data from TGI Latina, a biannual marketing and media consumption survey conducted in eight Latin American countries by Kantar Media. The fieldwork was conducted by IBOPE and its subsidiaries in Latin America. Kantar Media is a global research and marketing firm that has acquired several well-known national and regional firms in Latin America, such as IBOPE, which conduct ratings, media preferences, and public opinion studies.

Access to these data came from several Latin American market research professionals, including some at Kantar Media, and having someone look at some of the bigger-picture and longer-term issues represented in their data. Kantar Media agreed to provide access to 10 years of TGI Latina data. Although these data no longer had immediate market research value, they still had long-term trend value that would interest academic researchers and some of Kantar's own clients. They contacted one of the coauthors, who agreed to undertake a reanalysis of their data.

The analysis presented in this article focuses on data from 2004 to 2014 and covers Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. For each country, a probability sample was projected to represent the total households and individual populations in the potential markets of interest. Except for Mexico, where the sample represented 20 cities across Mexico, most of the samples were limited to a few major metropolitan areas—eight in Brazil and fewer in most other countries. This is important because people in major metro areas are richer, better educated, and more connected to various communication technologies than the general national population. The wealthy farmers in rural areas, a peculiar group in the region, were not included in the surveys. This is because in 2012, 64% of the Kantar metro sample in Brazil had access to the Internet, while the number in the general population was 44%. Therefore, although the total number of respondents for all eight countries was 61,400, which represented a universe of more than 176 million people in the region covered, we had to remember that we could only generalize to major metropolitan areas but not to general national populations.

TGI Latina surveys are conducted door to door, and they combine personal interviews with paper surveys filled out by interviewees at a later date. Interviewers followed a skip pattern for sampling based on the physical location of the respondents' homes. Since response rates were low among some important demographic groups—notably households at the bottom, at the top of the SES scales, and in remote areas—TGI Latina weighted the responses to better represent the overall population.

Measurements

This study uses TGI Latina data to study changes over time in respondents' self-reported interest in television programs from their nation, region, the United States, and Europe. The theory of cultural proximity predicts that respondents would first prefer their national programs and channels, then regional ones, and then those from the United States or Europe. This was represented by a specific variable on *viewing preference for national, Latin American regional, U.S., and European television programs and films*. The respondents were asked four questions: to state their interest in TV programs and films from (nation, region, etc.) on a scale from "very uninterested" to "very interested." We used the combined values "interested" and "very interested" to indicate interest in TV programs from each of the four origins (national, regional, United States, and European). We then examined the relationships between these scales of interest in programs and education, which we used as a proxy for cultural capital; an index of socioeconomic status, which we adopted as a practical measurement of economic capital; and an index of forms of foreign language learning, which we conceptually defined as linguistic capital. In our study with TGI survey data, four TGI variables particularly tapped into cosmopolitanism as cultural openness—its dominant form (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2009). This was measured through a combined additive index of four Likert scale questions in the TGI Latina data: (1) I am interested in other cultures and countries; (2) I like to travel and learn about exotic places; (3) I enjoy eating foreign foods; and (4) I am interested in international events. Latin Americans who strongly agreed or agreed with all four opinions and attitudes were considered cosmopolitan, while those who strongly disagreed or disagreed with the same items were considered noncosmopolitans.

Data Analysis

The TGI Latina 2004–2014 data were run through Choices 3, a specially designed analysis software by Kantar Media. The team ran crosstabs of the designated indicators for viewing interest in U.S. programs, the different capitals, and an index of cosmopolitan attitudes, then used the significance option in Choice 3 to calculate chi-square statistics and flag those significant at the .01 level. (Crosstabs were the highest level of analysis available within their software.) We used a more demanding level of significance, $p = .01$ versus $p = .05$, to limit the risk of Type I error. The sample was large, approximately 60,000 across the eight countries each year, which is excellent but lends itself to Type 1 error, where everything is significant because the sample is large.

Analysis of Preferences for Programs From Different Geocultural Origins

First, it is important to get a sense of how popular or preferred the major geocultural sources of programming are overall. How much do people prefer domestic or national television and film to regional Latin American programs, those from the United States, or those from Europe? The data average from all

countries from 2004 to 2014 shows a consistent preference for national programs (Figure 1), which is predicted by the theory of cultural proximity. That preference rises slightly from 2004 to 2007, then declines to the 2004 level by 2014. However, the consistent second choice is not regional programs, as predicted by cultural proximity, but U.S. programs, which challenge some ideas that have developed since the 1990s about the preference in Latin America for regional programs (Sinclair et al., 1996; Straubhaar & Viscasillas, 1991; Wilkinson, 1995). When we consider the television and film preferences of upper-middle and elite classes, the preference for U.S. programs, as opposed to European programs, starts at a higher level than we might have anticipated across an average of social classes and countries.

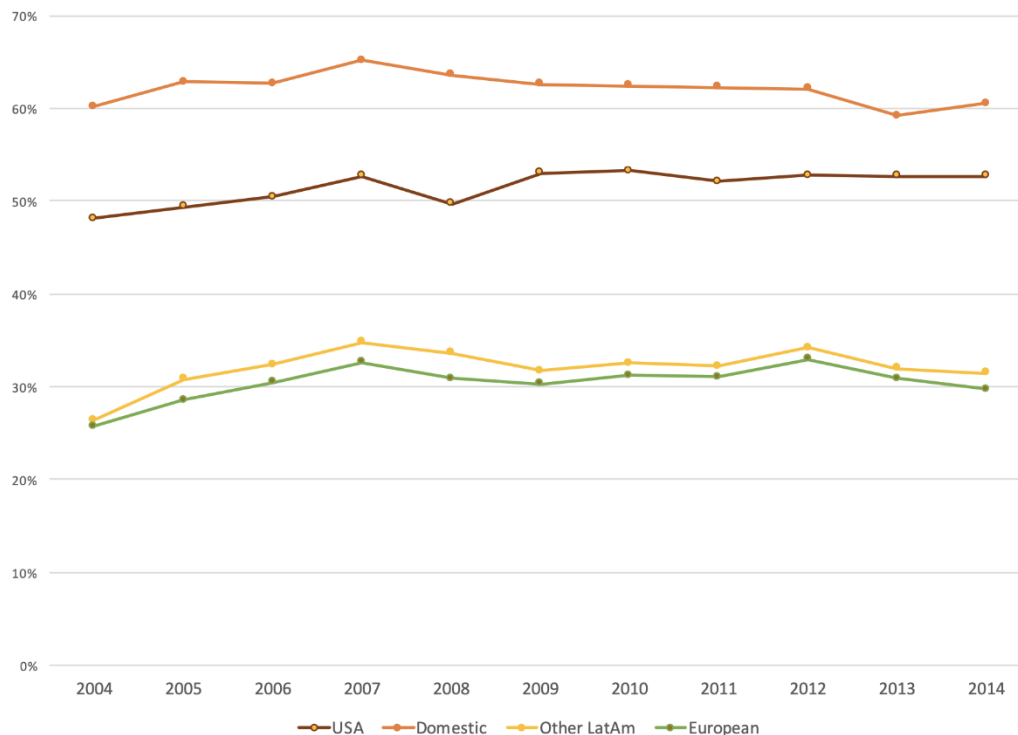


Figure 1. Overall programming origin preferences, eight countries' average 2004–2014 (source: TGI Latina, 2016).

The TGI survey data show that class differences are significant in discerning who favors national, regional, U.S., or European television and film (see Figure 2). In 2004 and 2014, the richest 10%¹ of all eight countries strongly and significantly preferred U.S. programs compared to the poorest 40% of those societies. Preference for U.S. programs grew over the 10 years, except among the poorest 40%, where the

¹ The measure of social class tends to vary somewhat between ratings and survey companies across Latin America, so TGI created its own comparative measure based on commonly measured elements across countries, including household income, education of the head of household, ownership of cars and a range of appliances, and whether the household had domestic help.

change was insignificant. All other class segments had a roughly equal preference for national programs, except for the richest 10% who had a slightly lower national preference, which accentuated in 2014. One of the most striking results, which has implications for the next theory that we will consider, is that the preference for programs from all sources or origins grew slightly in almost all classes. This raises an interesting question as to whether, despite visible class differences in these national versus international preferences, all classes in this study across Latin America are becoming more culturally omnivorous (Peterson, 1992) and showing more interest in regional and European programs in 2014 than in 2004. In the theorization of cultural sociology, cultural omnivorousness is usually seen as being associated with a certain level of class privilege more likely to occur among upper-middle classes and elites (Peterson & Kern, 1996). This trend may also reflect the increased availability of pay TV over the decade, expanding the number of hours of international programming in the marketplace.

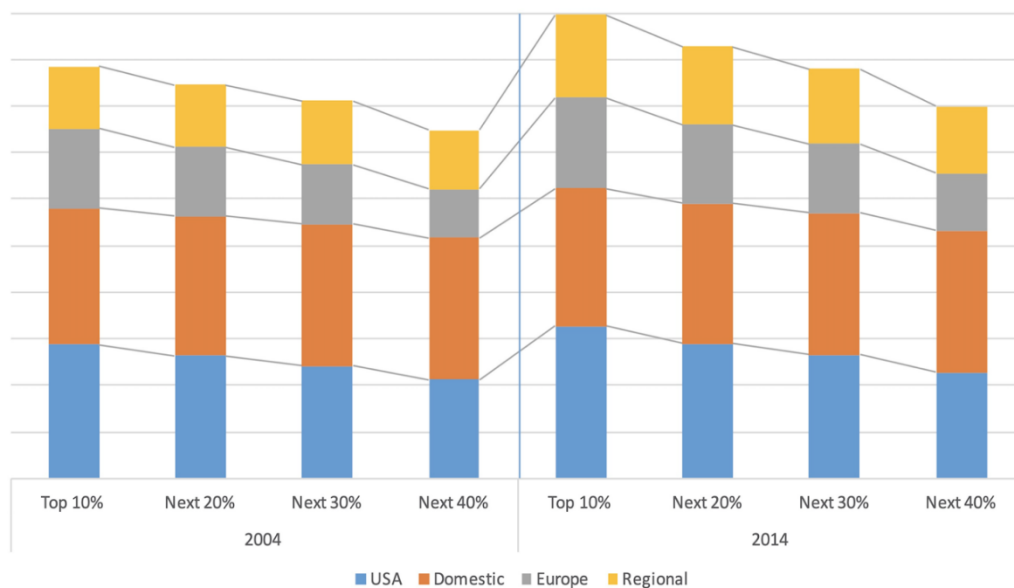


Figure 2. Latin American regional viewing interest × SES. Average across all countries (source: TGI Latina, 2016).

Likewise, data from TGI studies showed how education, which can be considered a fairly direct measure of cultural capital, was empirically connected to a preference for U.S. film and television. In 2004, as indicated in Figure 3, 54% of Latin Americans with higher educational achievement responded that they were interested or very interested in U.S. programs, while 41% of those with lower educational achievement indicated they were interested or very interested in U.S. programs (the average was 48%). The preference for film and television from the United States increased over time among the best educated (university level), at almost 5%. However, it increased at a lower rate among those with average or medium education (high school or less) and did not increase at all among those with less education. This pattern held up in every country when examined individually.

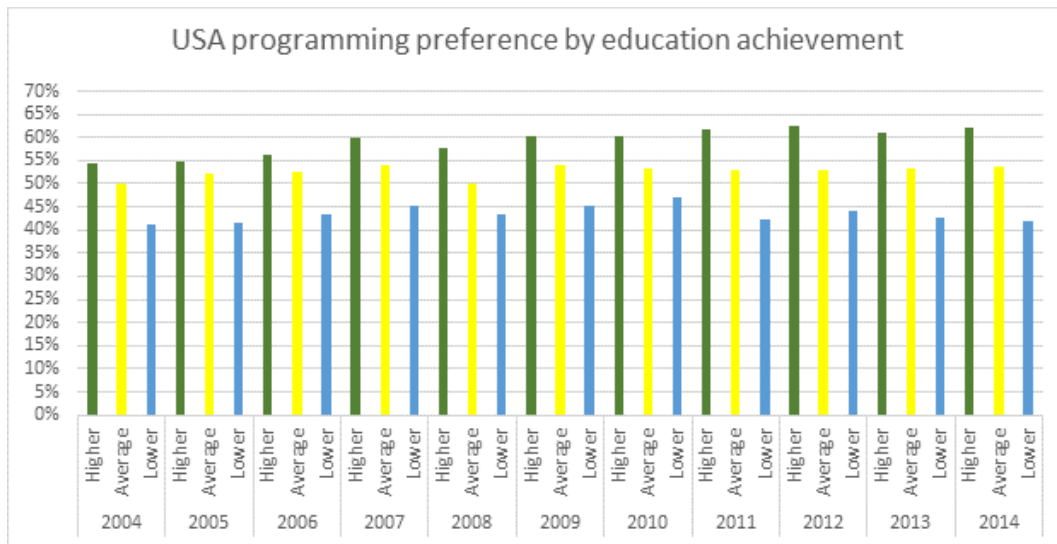


Figure 3. Interest in programs and films from the United States by cultural capital 2004–2014.

Cultural capital is also a predictor of interest in European programs and films. As with the U.S. programs and films, Figure 4 shows that from 2004 to 2014, Latin Americans with higher educational achievement were significantly more interested in European foreign television programming, while those with lower educational achievement showed significantly less interest in the TV programming's origin. However, preferences by all groups for European programs were notably and significantly less than for U.S. programs.

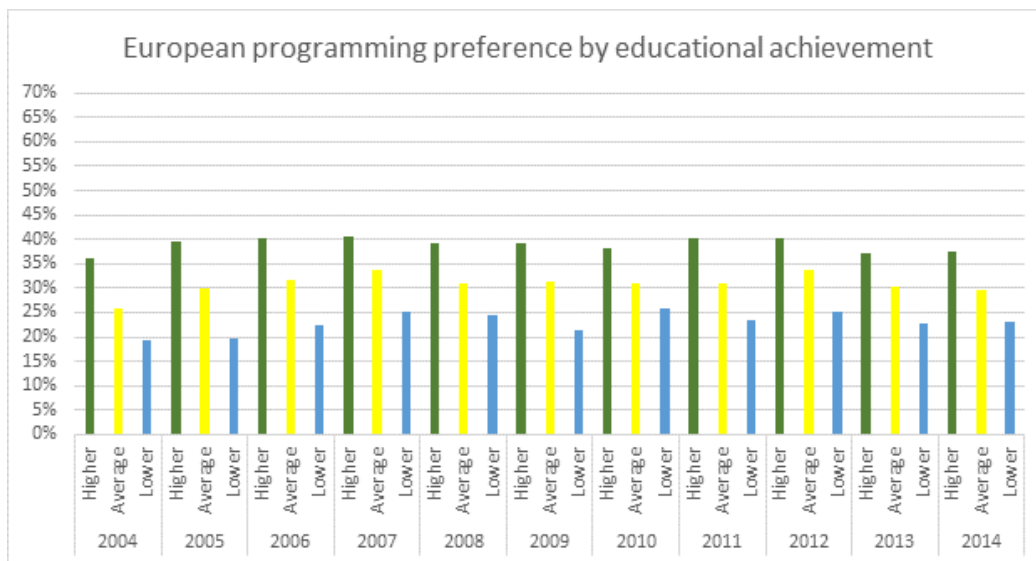


Figure 4. Interest in programs and films from Europe by cultural capital 2004–2014.

When we created an index of the four questionnaire items related to cosmopolitanism and related it to preferences for national, regional, U.S., or European television and film, what we found was a striking pattern of cultural omnivorousness. In 2004, those who exhibited cosmopolitan attitudes showed an almost equal likeness for television and film from all of these sources; they were omnivores, as reflected in Figure 5. If anything, in both 2004 and 2014, they liked everything but liked nonnational material slightly better, as indicated in the left-hand bars representing an average of the eight countries in the survey. However, the difference is slight and not statistically significant. What is strikingly significant is how much they liked everything almost equally, with minor variations between 2004 and 2014 and between countries.

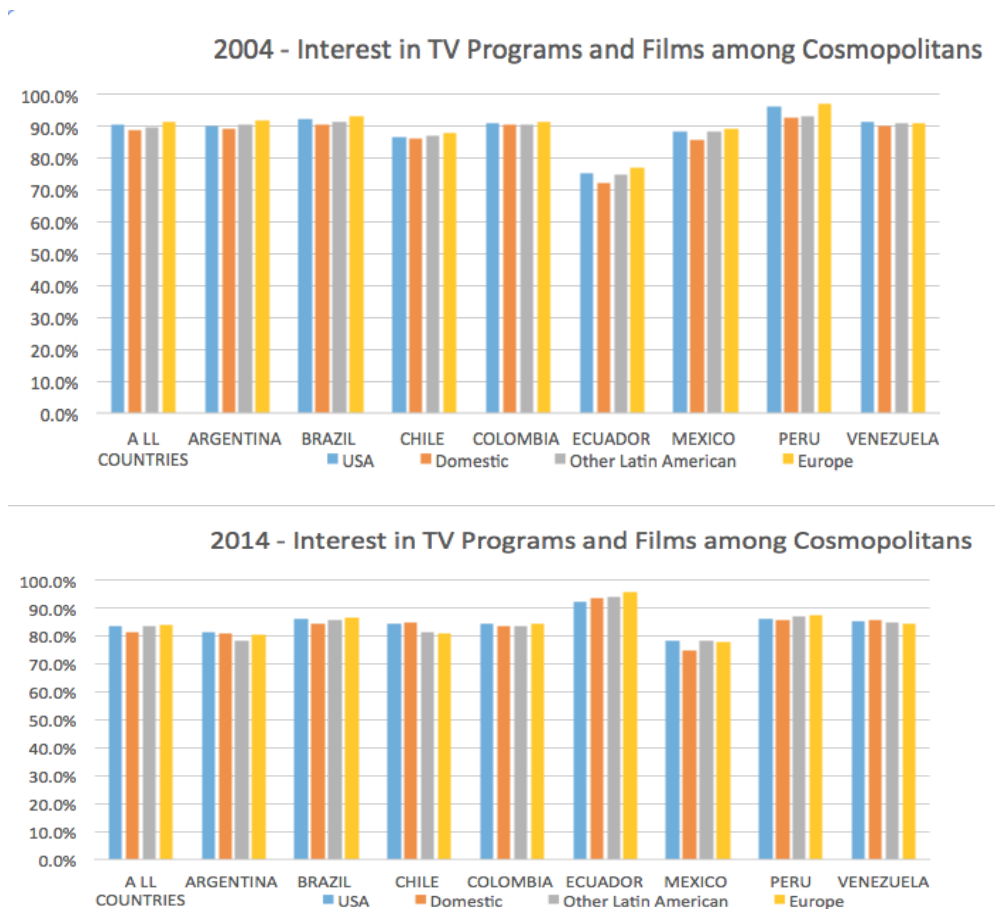


Figure 5. Interest in TV programs from different origins among cosmopolitans in various Latin American countries.

On the other hand, the media preferences of Latin American noncosmopolitans were more varied between national, regional, U.S., and European programs. As part of the larger culture that tends to prefer national culture, probably from a sense of cultural proximity, Latin American noncosmopolitans generally

preferred domestic media to international media. This affinity for television programs and films from one’s own country was again more evident in 2004 than in 2014.

The increased choice provided by multichannel television for increasing numbers of people between 2007 and 2011 may have had some impact. Unlike the similarity between cosmopolitans across countries in their media preferences for programs from varied origins, there were substantial differences between countries and notable changes within countries over the past 10 years. For example, noncosmopolitan Brazilians and Mexicans were more interested in programs from most regions compared to other countries’ noncosmopolitan audiences in 2004. Audiences in Argentina, Chile, and Peru became more like them in 2014, as reflected in the second part of Figure 5. In contrast, interest in programs from all origins dropped even further in Venezuela from 2004 to 2014, following the political and cultural conflicts in the country.

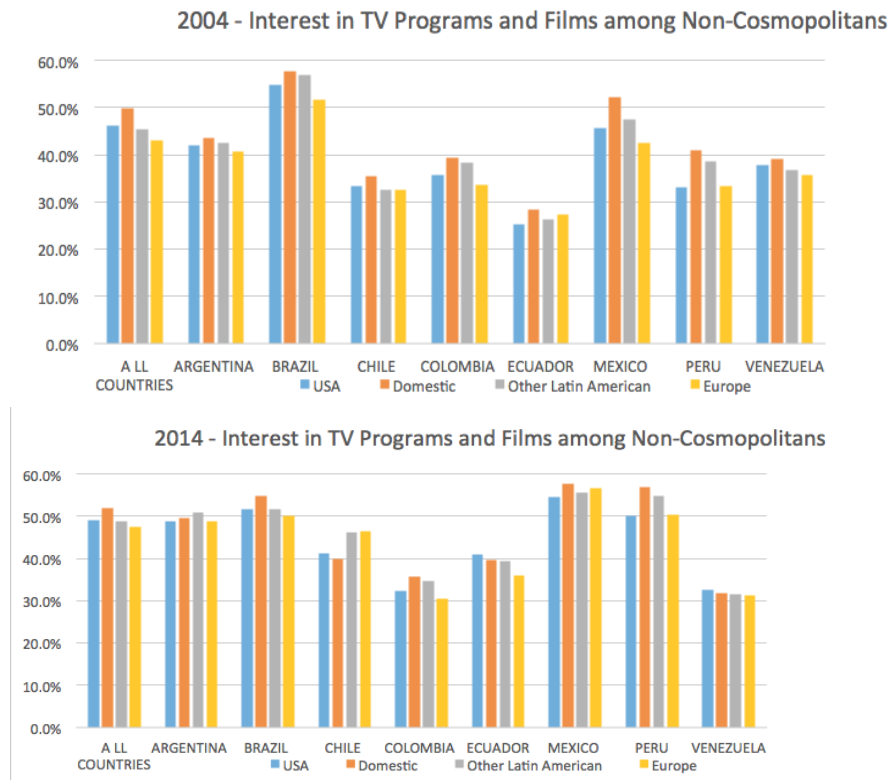


Figure 6. Interest in TV programs from different origins among noncosmopolitans in various Latin American countries.

The media preferences of Latin American noncosmopolitans across the sampled decade partially reflect the cultural proximity hypothesis. To recap, while cosmopolitans are more likely to consume foreign products (Riefler & Diamantopoulous, 2009)—in this case, television and film—Latin Americans who are less culturally open to foreign cultures tend to prefer television programs and films belonging to their countries. On the other hand, Latin American cosmopolitans had an avid interest in media originating from Europe or the United States

rather than regional Latin American media. If the basic premise of cultural proximity is that people tend to gravitate toward media that resembles their own, that proposition holds for Latin American noncosmopolitans who remain grounded in the familiarity of their countries' cultures and are less interested in foreign cultures.

In contrast, television interest for Latin American cosmopolitans lies in cultural heterogeneity and in the diverse geocultural sources of the programs (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Sinclair & Straubhaar, 2013). They opt for television programs and films that reflect the cultural other, away from but also including their Latin American roots. Latin American cosmopolitans are thus interested in pluralistic domestic and foreign media consumption that supplements their disposition toward a global culture, away from the homogeneity of domestic media.

Conclusion

We seem to have clear evidence that Latin American upper-middle-class and elite audiences have been less engaged with national television and more interested in programs and films from the United States. This is examined in terms of their historical structural class position and their preferences expressed in the TGI Latina surveys we examined here. This seems to have been reinforced by the expansion of the middle classes, upper-middle, and even elite classes during the economic growth spurt that occurred in many Latin American countries from the late 1990s through the mid-2010s. The larger structural explanations of cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1991) and platform imperialism (Jin, 2017) apply very well to the economics and structures of these television and film flows, but audiences do not necessarily prefer foreign television and film because of the structures that bring them in, such as pay TV and streaming television, just because they are there. There must be cultural or other attractions at play as well to draw them in.

We thought that some of the theoretical debates in cultural sociology were relevant. We extensively used Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural, economic, and linguistic capital to explain why upper-middle and elite classes seem to prefer imported culture, as opposed to the more nationally oriented preferences of middle, lower middle, working, and working poor classes. Bourdieu's (1984) original argument was that the upper-middle and elite classes built on their access to greater cultural capital to show their distinction from the rest of society by preferring classical or erudite music to more popular music. According to our evidence about the preferences of Latin American audiences for imported versus national television and film, this explanation still seems quite plausible, given the evidence in Figures 1–4. This probably accounts for a good deal of what the cultural elites in the upper-middle and elite classes are doing. Furthermore, it connects these elite cultural preferences to their structural places in society, where dependency theorists like dos Santos predicted that Latin American elites would be connected by ties of education, language abilities, work, and travel to neocolonial powers like the United States (Dos Santos, 1978).

However, our analysis of the data not only supports those theories but also supports two competing or, in our thinking, complementary approaches: the concepts of cosmopolitanism and cultural omnivores. Cosmopolitanism is approached in several ways in the literature, but we worked with two basic definitions: cosmopolitanism as a high-minded interest in other countries and cultures (Beck, 2006; Hannerz, 1990; Skrbis, Kendall, & Woodward, 2004) and, more mundanely, as an interest in consuming other cultures through food, purchases, and travel (Germann Molz, 2011; Skrbis & Woodward, 2007; Szerszynski & Urry,

2002). Although these two versions of cosmopolitanism are prominent in the literature, we pragmatically selected them, as they corresponded with the four questions (on interest in foreign countries, foreign news, foreign food, and travel) in the TGI Latina surveys that we had been using to examine audience preferences in Latin America. Interestingly, when we looked at them statistically, the four questions scaled together strongly into a single index of cosmopolitanism, suggesting that, while two questions each represented the two trends in the literature, they were all closely related.

This index of cosmopolitan attitudes was significantly related to television preferences, but it seemed to reveal cosmopolitanism as cultural omnivorousness. Those in the sample who held all four cosmopolitan attitudes not only preferred U.S. and European culture on television but also national culture and regional culture on TV and film. When applied to television preferences, this seems to be a fairly operational definition of cultural omnivorousness. The literature on cultural omnivores counterposed omnivorousness to the classic distinction based on the preference for high culture that Bourdieu found in 1984 (Peterson, 1992, 2005).

Our argument, based on the data we analyzed, is that all three concepts are related and all help us understand the evolving national versus imported television preferences of Latin American audiences. People in the upper-middle or elite classes still want to show their cultural distinction. One of the coauthors observed in practice how Brazilian graduate students in several seminars he taught in the mid to late 2010s discussed how much they enjoyed *Orange Is the New Black* (Kohan et al., 2013–2019) or *House of Cards* (Fincher et al., 2013–2018) on Netflix, to show how culturally sophisticated they were.

However, as the evolving literature argues, cosmopolitanism and omnivorousness can also function together to demonstrate social distinctions (Lindell, 2014). In fact, recent research has shown that cosmopolitanism may evolve as a new form of cultural capital and vice versa to be used precisely to display social distinction (Lindell & Danielsson, 2017).

If we wanted to be a little provocative in our conclusions, we could argue that this combination of social status (upper-middle and elite classes), cosmopolitan attitudes, omnivorous preference for television from a wide variety of geographic and cultural sources, and an ongoing desire by social elites to display their distinction may be what is currently driving subscriptions to streaming media, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime.

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