

# Kazakhstani Adolescent Preferences for US and UK Media: Implications for Cultural Identity and Education

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The globalization of audiovisual media raises longstanding questions about cultural influence and identity formation, especially in transitional societies. This pilot study explores how youth in Kazakhstan perceive U.S. and U.K. films and television, and how these perceptions compare with attitudes toward local media. Using a cross-sectional online survey ( $N = 64$ ; ages 13–18) conducted in an urban school, we assessed preferred media origins, self-reported personal effects, perceived societal influence, and genre preferences for U.S. and U.K. content. Although the observed proportions favored Kazakh content (about 49%) over U.S. content (around 44%), the small sample size limits definitive conclusions about broader population preferences. U.S. media were reported to produce more positive personal effects than Kazakh media. An exploratory analysis suggested that watching action films might be linked to positive effects ( $\chi^2$  test,  $p = .038$ ), which warrants further research. The results tentatively support hybridity theories, indicating that local preferences may remain strong while global content still benefits personal development. I conclude with evidence-based recommendations for media literacy and education in Kazakhstani schools and view this pilot as a foundation for larger studies.

**Keywords:** *Media globalization, Kazakhstan youth identity, media literacy, pedagogy*

Global flows of audiovisual media have intensified in recent decades, reshaping cultural landscapes and everyday practices across regions (Schiller, 1976; Straubhaar, 2007). In Kazakhstan, adolescents routinely access local films and television programs alongside international streaming content from the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Russia, South Korea, Turkey, and other markets. Adolescence is a formative period for identity construction and language development (Arnett, 2002), so understanding how media exposure influences young people's attitudes, values, and cultural orientations is crucial for both scholars and educators.

This study examines these dynamics in the under-researched context of Central Asia. Competing theoretical lenses, such as cultural imperialism, cultural proximity, and hybridity, offer different predictions about whether global media displace, mirror, or blend with local culture. As a pilot project, the study maps preliminary patterns in media preferences and perceived effects for Kazakhstani, American, British, and Russian audiovisual content, with the primary aim of generating hypotheses and practical implications for subsequent, larger-scale research. A salient contextual factor is the prevalence of Russian-language Western content, which frequently mediates linguistic and cultural exposure and therefore shapes the media environment experienced by many Kazakhstani youth.

Because media consumption during adolescence intersects directly with identity formation, language learning, and classroom engagement, the forthcoming literature review treats each theoretical perspective with attention to its educational implications, for example, how a given framework informs media literacy, curriculum design, or pedagogical practice in Kazakhstan. By linking theory to pedagogy, the review foregrounds why educational stakeholders should be part of conversations about global-local media dynamics.

## Literature Review

The globalization of audiovisual media has been widely theorized as a process of cultural domination. Schiller (1976) and Boyd-Barrett (1977) introduced the concept of media imperialism, arguing that the dominance of US media exports constituted cultural colonization. According to this perspective, American films and television programs transmit values of consumerism, individualism, and liberal democracy, gradually displacing or marginalizing local traditions. Tomlinson (1991) further elaborated on cultural imperialism, noting that it is not simply about cultural products but also about the symbolic meanings and ideologies embedded within them. These works emphasize the structural inequalities in global media flows, where countries with large production capacities (such as the US and UK) saturate global markets, while smaller nations struggle to sustain their own industries.

For Kazakhstan, this perspective suggests a vulnerability to Western media influence, particularly given the popularity of Hollywood films and American television shows. Under cultural imperialism theory, heavy consumption of US or UK media might result in the erosion of Kazakh cultural identity and values, particularly among younger generations. In educational contexts, this underscores the need for curricula that counteract potential ideological biases through critical media analysis.

In response to imperialism critiques, alternative frameworks stress audience choice and local preference. Straubhaar (2007) proposed the theory of cultural proximity, which argues that viewers gravitate toward content that is culturally, linguistically, and socially closer to their own lives. Even in a globalized media market, local and regional productions can successfully compete if they resonate with shared cultural experiences. This framework helps explain why Kazakh films and television productions have maintained strong domestic audiences despite the pervasive presence of Western media.

Research across different regions supports the idea of cultural proximity. For instance, Latin American audiences still prefer telenovelas over US dramas, and Asian viewers favor regional productions (Straubhaar, 2007). In Kazakhstan, cultural proximity indicates that while US and UK media might be popular for entertainment, Kazakh content often creates stronger emotional connections and is seen as more positive, reflecting recent trends in the local film industry (Satubaldina, 2025). However, studies of border regions show that linguistic proximity to Russian media can weaken this effect, with young people showing “confused identity” and foreign ties (Laruelle, 2020). Pedagogically, this suggests that educators can use locally relevant media to foster cultural confidence in classrooms.

Kraidy (2002) and Pieterse (2004) proposed hybridity as a key concept for understanding media globalization. Rather than viewing media influence as one-directional, hybridity theory highlights the blending of global and local cultural forms. Imported formats are often adapted, localized, and reinterpreted by audiences, resulting in hybrid cultural products. For instance, American film genres might be recreated within Kazakh contexts, or Kazakh youth might reinterpret Western narratives through local traditions.

Hybridity acknowledges that media consumers are active agents, negotiating meaning rather than passively absorbing foreign ideologies. This dynamic is evident in Central Asia, where, as Yessenova (2005) explores in the context of national identity, Kazakhstani youth navigate global exposure while maintaining and reworking local cultural references, constructing hybrid identities. Recent research confirms that urban Kazakhstani youth actively blend traditional values, such as family, with globally influenced individualism, a synthesis facilitated by their consumption of diverse media (Buribayev et al., 2025). For education, hybridity supports curricula that encourage students to create mixed-media projects, fostering creative identity synthesis.

The role of the American and British media can also be framed through the concept of soft power. Nye (2004) describes soft power as the ability of a nation to shape the preferences of others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. Hollywood blockbusters, British historical dramas, and globally popular television series serve as cultural exports that enhance national prestige and influence. For example, shows like *Downton Abbey* and *The Crown* project British heritage and social values to global audiences (Chapman, 2019), while American productions often embody ideals of freedom, resilience, and individualism (Kellner, 1995). Applied to Kazakhstan, soft power theory suggests that Western media’s appeal may extend beyond entertainment, subtly promoting the cultural and ideological values of the producing countries. In pedagogical terms, this highlights the value of using soft power media in lessons on global politics and cultural diplomacy.

Adolescence is a crucial stage for exploring globalization’s cultural impact. Arnett (2002) argues that youth are especially exposed to global media influences, which can shape identity, aspirations, and cultural attitudes. Boyd (2014) further shows that digital-native youth are at the forefront of negotiating online and offline cultural flows. In transitional societies such as Kazakhstan, youth media preferences provide important insights into broader cultural dynamics: whether Western media penetrates deeply into cultural consciousness, or whether young people balance global content with national identity. Studies indicate hybrid outcomes, with youth prioritizing family while embracing environmentalism and self-expression via global media (Buribayev et al., 2025). This can inform educational strategies for promoting balanced youth development through media-integrated learning.

The interplay between global media flows and local cultural dynamics carries profound implications for education, policy, and curriculum development, particularly among teenagers in Kazakhstan. Educationally, exposure to American and British media can serve as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it offers opportunities for broadening perspectives, enhancing English language proficiency, and fostering global awareness, which are essential in an interconnected world (Arnett, 2002; Boyd, 2014). On the other hand, unchecked consumption risks diluting local cultural identity, as Western narratives may subtly promote values like individualism and consumerism that contrast with traditional Kazakh emphases on community and heritage (Tomlinson, 1991; Yessenova, 2005). This highlights the need for educational interventions that empower youth to critically engage with media, recognizing how content shapes perceptions of self and society.

From a policy standpoint, Kazakhstan’s government has already demonstrated commitment to cultural preservation through initiatives like the “Cultural Heritage” State Program and the modernization program “Rouhani Zhanjyru” (The Astana Times, 2024; Satbayev University, 2025). However, broader policies could include regulations on foreign content distribution, incentives for hybrid productions that blend global formats with local narratives, and funding for media literacy programs to mitigate risks of cultural erosion. Such measures would align with international recommendations for protecting cultural diversity in the face of media globalization, ensuring that young people benefit from global exposure without compromising their national identity.

From a curriculum perspective, a significant body of policy and scholarly research supports embedding media and information literacy (MIL) into educational curricula to develop learners’ ability to analyze media representations, critically evaluate information sources, and produce content responsibly. UNESCO’s (2013) global media and information literacy assessment framework highlights that literacy should be both critical and productive, covering the skills to access, analyze, and create media content, and this framework has guided various regional initiatives and teacher-training programs across Asia. In Kazakhstan, governmental initiatives have aimed to strengthen cultural policy and support the growth of local creative industries and Kazakh-language media content, creating opportunities to incorporate media literacy and film-based learning in education (Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025). Moreover, emerging research in Central Asia indicates increasing scholarly

engagement with media-education practices reflecting UNESCO's media and information literacy framework (Tahan & Khussainova, 2024; Yeleussiz & Qanay, 2025).

Despite growing work on media globalization, Central Asia remains less fully mapped than other regions. Key gaps include (1) genre-level analyses connecting specific content types to learning outcomes, (2) longitudinal studies of media's role in identity trajectories among youth, and (3) intervention research testing MIL curricula that explicitly mix Anglo-American, Russian, Korean, Turkish, and Kazakh content. The present survey addresses the first gap by mapping genre preferences and perceived effects among Kazakh adolescents; mixed-methods and longitudinal follow-ups would address the remaining gaps.

## Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design to gather preliminary data on media preferences and perceptions among Kazakhstani youth. Anchored in a positivist paradigm, the study sought to identify patterns and test hypotheses about media consumption effects using structured data collection and statistical analysis. A cross-sectional design was well-suited to mapping current patterns in youth media preferences and perceptions, offering early indications with relevance for educational contexts.

A purposive sample of 64 adolescents (ages 13–18) was recruited from an educational facility in a major Kazakhstani metropolis. The small sample size and purposive sampling method mean the findings are not generalizable but provide initial insights for a pilot investigation. Gender was not collected to encourage participation among minors and to preserve the simplicity of the instrument; this is a noted limitation. The sample size ( $n = 64$ ) provided sufficient precision for the descriptive and exploratory analyses in this pilot investigation, yielding a margin of error of approximately 12% at the 95% confidence level when assuming maximum variability ( $p = .50$ ) (Bartlett et al., 2001). Margins of error of 10–20% are commonly accepted in pilot and exploratory studies where the goal is to identify preliminary patterns rather than precise population estimates (Conroy, 2016; Hertzog, 2008; Julious, 2005).

## Language Learning

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Council / Ethics Committee of Karaganda Buketov University. All procedures complied with the committee's requirements; participants (and parents/guardians of minors) provided informed consent, no personal identifiers were collected, and data were stored securely (CIOMS, 2016; UNICEF, 2013). The survey addressed only general media preferences and perceptions and therefore posed no more than minimal risk to participants comparable to everyday activities (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018).

Data were collected via a structured questionnaire administered online through digital platforms. The instrument contained several key components, beginning with

the collection of demographic information, specifically age group as a categorical variable. Following this, media preference was measured by asking respondents to select one preferred media origin among four categories – Kazakh, US, UK, or Other – in response to the question: “Which of the following is your preferred source of films and television shows?” To gauge personal effects, respondents rated the impact of their media consumption on a three-point scale by answering the question: “How has media consumption affected you personally?” with the options Positive, Neutral, or Negative. Similarly, perceptions of societal influence were assessed on a separate three-point scale where respondents indicated if they believed the broader influence of media was Beneficial, Neutral, or Negative. Genres watched (for US/UK content) were selected from multiple options (fantasy, cartoon, horror, action, family (combined variants), melodrama, romance), coded as binary indicators. All responses were numerically coded for subsequent analysis. To ensure clarity and reliability, the questionnaire was pilot-tested among a group of 12 respondents before its wider distribution.

Descriptive statistics and exploratory chi-square tests ( $\alpha = .05$ ) were conducted in SPSS. Effect sizes are reported with Cramér's  $V$ .

## Results

The results are presented in two subsections: (1) descriptive findings on media preferences, personal effects, perceived societal influence, and genre selections, followed by (2) exploratory inferential analyses.

### Descriptive Findings

Respondents showed a slight preference for Kazakh-origin media (48.4%), with U.S.-origin content a very close second (43.8%).

**Table 1**

*Preferred Media Origin (N = 64)*

Origin	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Kazakh	31	48.4
US	28	43.8
UK	1	1.6
Other	4	6.2

(Russian, Korean, Turkish, etc.)

Additionally, most participants reported either neutral (54.7%,  $n = 35$ ) or positive (40.6%,  $n = 26$ ) personal effects from US/UK media; only 4.7% ( $n = 3$ ) reported negative personal effects. Regarding perceived societal influence of US/UK media, the majority view was neutral (60.9%,  $n = 39$ ), followed by beneficial (29.6%,  $n = 19$ ), with negative perceptions being uncommon (9.5%,  $n = 6$ ). Participants selected multiple US/UK genres (total selections = 214).

## Exploratory Inferential Analyses

Three exploratory chi-square tests of independence were conducted.

Preferred media origin was not significantly associated with self-reported personal effect of US/UK media,  $\chi^2(6, N = 64) = 5.75, p = .452, \text{Cramér's } V = .21$  (small-to-moderate effect).

Preferred media origin was also not significantly associated with perceived societal influence of US/UK media,  $\chi^2(6, N = 64) = 8.97, p = .439, \text{Cramér's } V = .22$  (small-to-moderate effect). The original manuscript listed  $df = 9$ ; this was corrected to the accurate  $df = 6$  after re-running the analysis during revision (no material change to p-value or conclusion).

An exploratory  $2 \times 2$  chi-square test (action viewer vs non-viewer  $\times$  positive personal effect vs neutral/negative) was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 64) \approx 4.27, p = .039$ . Action viewers were more likely to report positive personal effects. Given the exploratory nature of the genre analyses and the number of tests performed, this result should be considered preliminary and interpreted with caution (increased family-wise Type I error risk).

## Discussion

This pilot study provides preliminary evidence of a hybrid media consumption pattern among urban Kazakhstani adolescents, with Kazakh-origin content holding only a marginal edge (48.4%) over US-origin content (43.8%). The overwhelmingly neutral-to-positive personal (95.3%) and societal (90.5%) perceptions of US/UK media further support hybridity theory (Kraidy, 2002) rather than displacing local culture, global media appear to be actively negotiated and integrated into existing identities. These findings align with recent observations that Kazakhstani youth blend traditional communal values with globally influenced self-expression and individualism (Buribayev et al., 2025; Yessenova, 2005).

**Table 2**

*Most Frequently Selected U.S./U.K. Genres (Multiple Selections Allowed; N = 64)*

Genre	Number of selections
Fantasy	39
Horror	30
Family (combined)	39
Romance	14
Cartoon	31
Action	27
Melodrama	15

A crucial mediating factor is that most Western content reaches Kazakhstani audiences through Russian-language dubbing or subtitling rather than Kazakh. This creates a double-layered cultural filter: Russian linguistic proximity makes Anglo-American media feel more accessible and familiar (reinforcing Straubhaar's, 2007, cultural proximity at a regional rather than national level), yet it simultaneously marginalizes the Kazakh language and reinforces the post-Soviet linguistic hierarchy in which Russian remains the default medium for global culture (Laruelle, 2020; Fierman, 2009). Consequently, direct exposure to original English-language audio and its associated cultural nuances is reduced, potentially limiting incidental English acquisition while creating hybrid Russian–English–Kazakh translanguaging practices that deserve specific study.

The exploratory finding that action-genre consumption was associated with higher rates of positive personal effects ( $p = .039$ ) is particularly promising. Action genres are characterized by high arousal, clear moral narratives, heroic problem-solving, and mastery experiences (Raney, 2004; Reinecke et al., 2012; Tamborini et al., 2010), features known to enhance enjoyment, mood repair, and perceived self-efficacy in adolescent viewers. This suggests that genre characteristics may outweigh country-of-origin effects in driving perceived benefit, offering a practical pathway for educators seeking high-engagement materials.

These results have immediate implications for adolescent education in Kazakhstan. Genre preferences (fantasy, family, cartoon, horror, and action, all selected by  $\geq 42\%$  of respondents) indicate clear “hooks” that teachers can leverage to increase motivation among adolescent students. Action sequences can be used for critical thinking and ethical debates (e.g., analyzing heroic decision-making), fantasy for creative writing and world-building exercises, and cartoons for accessible narrative analysis and visual literacy tasks.

More broadly, curricula should support adolescents in moving from passive consumers to active, critical producers of meaning. One highly effective and already-tested approach is comparative media analysis, in which students examine parallel scenes or themes across Kazakh, US/UK, Russian-dubbed, Korean, and Turkish content, making cultural differences and translation choices visible and discussable. The prevalence of Russian rather than Kazakh dubbing creates a unique pedagogical opportunity, as dubbing and linguistic mediation shape how audiences interpret global media (Cintas & Remael, 2014; Nornes, 2007; Smagulova, 2008).

The prevalence of Russian rather than Kazakh dubbing creates a unique pedagogical opportunity. In English-language classes, teachers can deliberately select short original-language clips with subtitles to maximize authentic exposure, as subtitled viewing has repeatedly been shown to yield superior incidental vocabulary acquisition and listening skills compared with dubbed versions (d'Ydewalle & Pavakanun, 1997; Koolstra & Beentjes, 1999; Vanderplank, 2016). In media-literacy or social-studies classes, the Russian-dubbed versions themselves become primary texts for critical analysis: students can compare how voice-acting choices, idiomatic translations, and cultural adaptations alter

messaging, thereby revealing the constructed nature of all media texts (Chaume, 2012; Pedersen, 2017).

Future research should (a) replicate these patterns in a larger, nationally representative sample; (b) use mixed methods to unpack what adolescents actually mean by “positive” or “neutral” effects; (c) employ longitudinal designs to track developmental trajectories; and (d) directly compare cognitive, linguistic, and identity outcomes of dubbed (mostly Russian) versus subtitled/original-language consumption.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The small purposive sample ( $N = 64$ ) limits statistical power and generalizability beyond urban, school-recruited adolescents. Gender data were not collected, precluding gender-based analysis. Measures of personal and societal effect were broad single-item indicators lacking qualitative nuance. The cross-sectional design cannot infer causality or temporal change. Finally, the study did not distinguish between dubbed, subtitled, or original-language, or Russian-subtitled consumption pathways, an important omission given the mediating role of Russian established above. These constraints are typical of pilot work and reinforce the exploratory nature of the findings.

## **Conclusion**

This pilot investigation provides initial, tentative evidence that Kazakhstani youth navigate a complex media landscape, blending local preferences with global engagements in a manner consistent with hybridity theory. The findings, while not generalizable, challenge simplistic cultural imperialism narratives and highlight the active role of the audience. The study successfully identifies promising avenues for both pedagogical innovation and future rigorous research, particularly emphasizing the need to account for the ubiquitous practice of dubbing. By framing these findings as exploratory, I hope to lay a foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of the media’s role in shaping the identities of Kazakhstani youth.

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