

# A study of Koreans and Mexicans opinion's of Korean society's perception of Mexico

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## 한국인과 멕시코인의 관점에서 한국사회가 가지는 멕시코에 대한 인식에 관한연구

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**Abstract** In the past years, the influx of Korean tourists to international destinations has seen a significant rise, especially in non-Asian countries. However, Mexico is still far from a popular destination to the average Korean tourist. Using Keller's brand equity model, this paper researches Koreans' opinions and general brand image of Mexico in an attempt to identify both the positive and negative perceptions they have of this country. Keller's brand model analyses four different levels of engagement between the customers and the brand. We want to know the degree to which Koreans have been engaged in Mexico as a brand nation and as a tourist destination. Research findings through this study will reveal the needs and insights that offer opportunities relevant for the planning, creation, design and development of new approaches for Mexico's nation brand promotion.

**Key Words** : Design research, Nation Brand Image, Design opportunities, Mexico, Korea

요 약 지난 몇 년간, 한국 관광객의 국제 관광지 유입은 특히 아시아가 아닌 국가에서 크게 증가했다. 그러나 멕시코는 여전히 한국 관광객에게 인기있는 관광지가 아니다. 이러한 현상의 제고와 인식의 개선을 위해 본 연구를 진행하였다. 이 논문은 켈러의 브랜드 에쿼티 모델을 사용하여 한국인과 멕시코인이 가지는 일반적인 브랜드 이미지를 비교하고 분석하였다. 한국 관광객이 멕시코라는 나라에 가지는 국가 브랜드와 관광지로서의 수준을 파악하여 연구의 가치를 더하였다. 이 연구의 결과는 후속적으로 이루어질 멕시코의 국가 브랜드 홍보를 위한 새로운 접근법이 될 것이며, 기획, 창작, 디자인 및 개발 연구에 가치있는 초석이 될 것이다.

주제어 : 디자인 연구, 국가브랜드이미지, 디자인 기회, 멕시코, 한국

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Building a strong brand has been shown to provide

numerous financial rewards to firms, and has become a top priority for many organizations[1]. Simon Anholt, who advises countries on how to strengthen their national brands, says, nations have become far more

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cognizant of the value of their brand as an asset[2]. Thomas Cromwell, the founder and president of East West Communications a Nation Branding consultancy said that tourism branding and promotion can best be developed in the context of successful nation branding and promotion. He also notes that in today's world, where technologies connect across international boundaries, the formation of perceptions of a country by others is a complex process, making the management of a country's image a difficult task[3]. Promoting the tourism industry successfully requires a context that allows your audience to appreciate what your country has to offer to visitors. That context is the overall image, or brand, of your country[4]. Therefore, to be able to successfully build and promote a nation's brand, and raise the brand awareness in order to increase tourism and investment from overseas, we must first understand the views and the current situation of that brand from the viewpoint of other countries. When consumers form brand awareness, the quality of the branded product is an important aspect and the consumer evaluates the brand according to their perceived quality[5].

### 1.2 Mexico's tourism and nation brand status

In recent years, South Koreans are booking more flights out of the country, with 40% of the total airfare tickets purchased going to destinations in Europe and the U.S[6]. The top 10 international tourism destinations in 2016 were France, United States, Spain, China, Italy, United Kingdom, Germany, Mexico, Thailand and Malaysia in that order[7].

However, regardless of being the 8th most visited country, according to the Secretariat of Government of Mexico, out of the international visitors that came to Mexico in 2017 for tourism, no Asian country made it to the top 10. The United States is the country from which Mexico receives the most tourists[8].

Table 1. Ranking of international tourist arrival in Mexico for 2017

RANKING 2017	COUNTRY
1	UNITED STATES
2	CANADA
3	UK
4	ARGENTINA
5	COLOMBIA
6	BRAZIL
7	SPAIN
8	GERMANY
9	FRANCE
10	PERU
11	CHILE
12	ITALY

GfK Group conducts the world's most comprehensive global nation branding survey together with Simon Anholt, an independent policy advisor. The Anholt-GfK Nation Brands IndexSM (NBISM) measures the power and quality of each country's 'brand image'[9]. According to their evaluation, Mexico ranked 31st out of 50 countries for Nation Brand ranking in 2016, having placed 30th, 29th and 31st in 2013, 2014 and 2015 respectively [10]. In 2017, Mexico managed to improve its score and overtake a similarly ranked nation, which resulted in Mexico moving up one rank. This is consistent with the overall progress of the past five years, across a variety of reputational categories. In the past years, Mexico's score improvements are most impressive in the category of Culture[11]. Also, according to Bloom Consulting and their "Digital Country Index" for 2017, which compiles the measurement of the total amount of searches performed by all worldwide citizens toward any given country, Mexico is ranked 13th for overall country brand tourism search out of 243 countries. For the individual sectors, it obtained 14th place for investment and 9th place for tourism [12]. However, even though Mexico places high on search rankings, the reality is that it still lacks strategy for the improvement of its Brand Image in the Asian market. If we look at Mexico's Secretariat of Tourism's website in <http://www.cptm.com.mx/services/campana-institucional>, or in the English version on <http://www.cptm.com.mx/node/31?language=en>, we can

find that even though there is a guideline for the promotion of the Country's Brand, the strategies were only developed for Europe, Latin and North America as shown in Fig. 1.

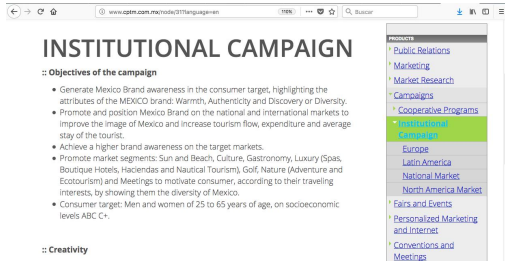


Fig. 1. Mexico's Campaigns for Brand Image promotion.

### 1.3 Goals and objectives

This paper will focus on the relationship of Mexico and Korea. The objective of this research is to find out the opinions of Koreans about Mexico in order to propose a strategy to increase awareness of this country as a tourist spot amongst Koreans. Also, we want to know the perspective of Mexicans living in Korea in order to take their experience of Korean society into account when developing strategies for promotion.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Keller's Brand Equity Model

In order to begin our research, it is important to have a solid theoretical basis that could guide the structure of this work. We chose brand theory model as a foundation since this paper is closely related to nation branding.

“Keller's Brand Equity Model” was the most suitable theoretical model for our analysis. The concept behind the Brand Equity Model is: in order to build a strong brand, one must shape how customers think and feel about the product[13]. The right type of experiences have to be built around the brand, so that customers have specific, positive thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, and perceptions about it. When one has strong

brand equity, the customers tend to buy more, recommend the brand to other people, and be more loyal, which means one is less likely to lose them to competitors. The model, seen in Fig. 2 illustrates the four steps that need to be followed to build strong brand equity.

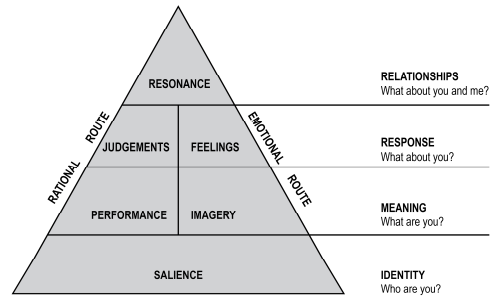


Fig. 2. Keller's Brand Equity Model

The four steps of the pyramid represent four fundamental questions that the customers will ask - often subconsciously - about the brand[14].

### 2.2 In Depth-Interviews

We chose In-depth interviews as the method to collect the desired data. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of people in order to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. They are useful when you want detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors in depth[15].

## 3. Design research Methodology

### 3.1 Interviews and participants

There were two groups of interviewees. The first one consisted of Koreans living in Korea. There were no major selection filters other than nationality. It was preferred if they had no previous visits to Mexico, however it was not a requirement since the answers and results for the study would not be jeopardized, but rather, it would broaden the results. The second group

consisted of Mexican citizens who are currently residing in Korea. The purposes of their stay in the country could vary, as long as they were not here as tourists or for a very short period of time, since we wanted people who had a deeper understanding of Korean society. This would help us create more effective approaches when coming up with solution proposals. The questions created for the interview were based on Keller’s Brand Resonance Model, categorizing them in relation to these four levels. All questions were open-ended questions, since our goal was to collect honest opinions that reflected the experience of the interviewees. Limiting their questions to predetermined options would limit the data. For the interviews of Korean participants, the questions were as follows:

<b>Identity</b>
1- Have you ever traveled abroad? 2- Have you ever lived abroad? If so, where? 3- Have you ever heard of Mexico? 4- Have you ever been in Mexico?
<b>Meaning</b>
1- What do you know (ideas, thoughts, concepts, etc.) about Mexico? 2- Where/How did you learned the things you know or think? 3- What do you know about the tourism in Mexico? 4- Places / attractions you've heard of.
<b>Response</b>
1- Do you know how involved Korea is in Mexico regarding tourism and business? 2- Do you know of Korean companies (other than Samsung and Lg) that have business in Mexico? 3- What do you think is the best way to promote Mexico in Korea? Why? 4- What do you think should be promoted (contents)? Why?
<b>Relationships</b>
1- Have you ever met Mexicans in Korea? 2- What are your perceptions about them? 3- What is your perception about Mexicans and Mexico before and after meeting one? 4- Would you ever consider going to Mexico? 5- If so, which part and why? 6- What would you like to learn or experience about Mexico?

For the Mexican group the questions were:

<b>Identity</b>
1- Why did you come to Korea? 2- Do you have any close Korean friends? 3- If so, how many have been to Mexico?
<b>Meaning</b>
1- What do they know about Mexico? 2- What do you think it's the general image/idea Koreans have of Mexico/Mexicans?

<b>Response</b>
1- Which wrong/misunderstood ideas about Mexico/Mexicans do Koreans have? 2- What do you wish Koreans knew about Mexico? 3- What thing/area of Mexico do you think should be promoted in Korea? Why?
<b>Relationships</b>
1- What's your opinion about the embassy's work so far? 2- What suggestion do you have to promote tourism/business of Mexico in Korea? 3- How has your experience as a Mexican living in Korea been so far?

Since qualitative data sought in interviews does not utilize formal statistical analysis and instead focuses on the meaning and interpretation rather than hard, durable substance[16] a designated number of interviews does not exist. Hence it was decided that 5 interviews for each group would be considered to be an appropriate number, since it was enough to give detailed answers without too much saturation of information. For both groups, respondents were asked to give their full names, age, nationality, current occupation and years living in Korea. These interviews were conducted on one-to-one sessions of about 30 minutes each, in a comfortable atmosphere for the interviewees to ensure honesty in their answers. The data was recollected from November 5th to November 17th, 2017 in the city of Seoul, South Korea.

### 3.2 Analysis of answers by Koreans

After the interviews the answers were reviewed and analyzed. The results were then categorized into four blocks according to the four levels of Keller’s Model.

#### 3.2.1 Analysis of Block 1: Identity

(Who are you?)

Through this first set of questions we were able to find out that out of the respondents: 100% have traveled abroad to more than 2 countries, 80% have lived and studied abroad, 100% have heard of Mexico, and 20% have actually been to Mexico even though at the beginning of the interview, the participant did not recall their visit. This last result was very interesting because the place the participant visited was Cancun,

the most popular destination in Mexico for international tourists. At first, the participant didn't really associate Cancun to Mexico, showing that perhaps, the brand image of this city is so strong in itself that it is separate from what foreigners believe to be Mexico. Another finding was that the number of Koreans traveling and choosing to study abroad is quite high, being in this interview 80% of the respondents. Also, all of them showed an awareness of the existence of Mexico.

3.2.2 Analysis of Block 2: Meaning  
(What are you?)

This block served to identify the general image of Mexico for Koreans and the sources or reasons that shaped that idea.

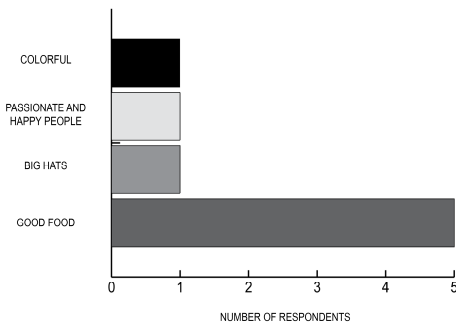


Fig. 3. Image of Mexico for Koreans

The ideas mentioned were good food, big hats, passionate and happy people and colorful. As the sources of those ideas 60% said it was through T.V, 20% through friends and experience and 20% through Internet. In the question regarding what they know about tourism 100% mentioned Cancun, even though no one really described beaches or any other characteristic of Cancun as part of the mental image they have of Mexico.

3.2.3 Analysis of Block 3: Response  
(What about you?)

The questions of this block helped to understand

how much Koreans know about the involvement of Korea in Mexico, showing that 0% of the people interviewed knew if Korea had business in Mexico or knew more about tourism besides Cancun or Mexico city. Only 40% knew Samsung and LG had branches in Mexico. When asked about the best ways to promote Mexico in Korea 60% mentioned T.V, 80% mentioned Facebook and Social media while only 20% mentioned Fairs and events inside Korea. As for the question about the content that should be promoted is as follows:

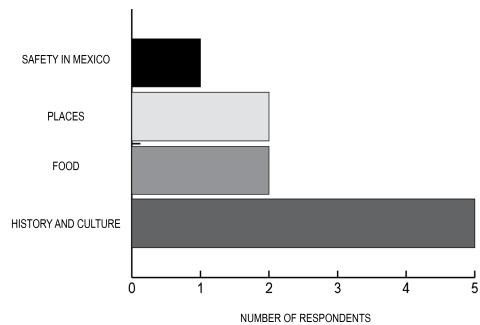


Fig. 4. Content about Mexico that should be promoted according to Koreans

3.2.4 Analysis of Block 4: Relationships  
(What about you and me?)

In this block, we focused more on the personal experiences of the respondents with Mexico and Mexicans. 100% claimed to have met a Mexican in Korea, but only 20% have met more than 2. When asked about the perception they had of Mexicans, 40% described them as happy, loud and bright, 20% as nice, with an additional 20% describing them as active and outdoorsy, while another 20% didn't really have an specific idea. 80% have claimed their ideas about Mexicans haven't changed before and after meeting one, while 20% have become more curious about Mexico after meeting a Mexican. When asked about going to Mexico 100% have claimed to want to visit, the answers for which place they wanted to go were very varied since they don't really know much about the geography or places but 40% mentioned the capital city and 60% want to go to places with nature. In the

question about the things they want to experience 60% want to experience the food and 40% things related to culture and nature.

### 3.3 Analysis of answers by Mexicans

#### 3.3.1 Analysis of Block 1: Identity

(Who are you?)

Out of the people interviewed 80% came to Korea to study through some sort of scholarship and 20% came for work. When asked about close Korean friends, 100% claimed to have but no more than 3 citing the lack of interest of Koreans in opening to foreigners. 60% said their friends have gone to Mexico at least once and 40% said they have never visited.

#### 3.3.2 Analysis of Block 2: Meaning

(What are you?)

This block served to give an idea of what Koreans think of Mexico from the perspective of a Mexican living in Korea. 60% said Koreans know about the food and Cancun and 40% know a bit more because they had spent time in Mexico. As for the general idea of Mexico for Koreans, while they mentioned happy and bright people they also have an exaggerated image about how dangerous the country is.

#### 3.3.3 Analysis of Block 3: Response (What about you?)

In this section, the questions focused on more specific ideas about the way Mexico is viewed from their perspective, focusing on both the negative and positive points to help see the things that should be changed. In the first question 60% mentioned insecurity and danger as the most misunderstood idea of Mexico in Korea, 20% mentioned geography and size of the territory while 20% had mistaken ideas on the development of the country and cultural diversity. These were also the three main things they wished Koreans would change their perspective on when asked about what they wished Koreans knew about Mexico. In the last question of this block, 80% mentioned

culture and cultural heritage as the thing they wished could be promoted more in Korea, while 20% mentioned they wished Mexican commercial exports and products could be more promoted in Korea.

#### 3.3.4 Analysis of Block 4: Relationships

(What about you and me?)

The aim of this set of questions was to find out their opinions and suggestions on the promotion of Mexico in Korea. Out of the respondents, 60% thought that the Mexican Embassy in Korea was doing a good job in terms of promotion while 40% had a negative view about their work so far. When asked about suggestions of promotion, their ideas were promotion of culture, promotion through events like festivals in which people could interact and learn about the culture in a more active way, and the promotion of the working culture to lessen the cultural shock that may affect the business relationship of both countries.

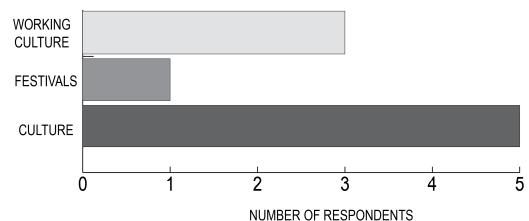


Fig. 5. Ideas for content promotion

As for their experience as Mexicans living in Korea 40% mentioned it was good while 60% said to have both positive and negative experiences while being here. One of the recurring problems mentioned was Koreans not having an open mind to other cultures.

## 4. Conclusion

Through the collection of data using the in-depth interviews we set out to determine the current status of Mexico's brand image in Korea from the point of view of both Koreans and Mexicans living in Korea.

#### 4.1 Mexico's nation brand image for Koreans

The relevant points we were able to find were as follows:

- Koreans are aware of the existence of Mexico but have little to no knowledge of its culture and society.
- The only places known to them are Mexico City and Cancun.
- The brand image of Cancun is so strong that sometimes Koreans fail to realize it is a part of Mexico.
- The things Koreans know that are related to Mexico such tequila, tacos and sombreros were learned through T.V. more specifically American shows.
- There is no knowledge on collaborations or general relationships between Mexico and Korea.
- Most Koreans are interested in visiting Mexico but also are scared of how dangerous it seems to be.
- Koreans seem interested in knowing more about the culture and history of Mexico.

#### 4.2 Mexico's nation brand image in Korea according to Mexicans

- Koreans are aware of the existence of Mexico but have little to no knowledge of where it's located or the size of it.
- Koreans ignore the multiculturalism of Mexico.
- Koreans are misinformed about the actual status of security in Mexico.
- Koreans tend to confuse or mix Mexican culture with other Latin American countries.
- Koreans would be more interested in visiting Mexico if the culture and touristic spots outside Cancun were to be promoted on Korean T.V. shows.

#### 4.3 Opportunities and strategies

After analyzing the information we obtained from the interviews, we were able to reach the following

conclusions:

- The brand image of Mexico in Korea needs a better approach in Korea.
- Mexican culture in Korea needs to be presented in a way that sets it apart from other Latin American countries.
- The image of Mexico as a whole needs to be stronger than the image of Cancun as a tourist destination.

Therefore, strategies need to be created in order to increase the positive image of Mexico's national brand in Korea. The strategies that can be created are:

- Promote Mexico through Korean T.V. and through social media campaigns.
- Create a campaign that promotes on its first stage raises awareness of Mexico and then promotes its culture, places and food besides the already known.

The era of creative economy is arriving, in which imagination becomes contents and culture becomes national power[17].

With the boom of social media and influencers, it seems that creating an engaging campaign that transcends and connects both Mexican and Korean cultures is very much possible and there is possibility for many ways of collaborations when you are able to understand the point of view of your target group.

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