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Specifics of Geek Culture and Identity Processes among the Youth of Kazakhstan: A Case Study of Fan Comics

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Abstract. Introduction. The article examines the peculiarities of the spread and perception of geek culture in the comic book format and the shaping of identity among Kazakhstan's teenagers on this basis. The relevance of the research is substantiated by the rapid development of subcultures on a global scale and their competition for influence and creative content with the media. The topic is also interesting in the context of the sociocultural development of the younger generation of Kazakhstan. **Goals.** The article aims to analyze the peculiarities of the consumption of comic book culture and the super subculture of geeks by the youth audience of Kazakhstan (aged 12 to 16) in relation to the shaping of their identity. **Materials and methods.** The study explores materials collected in 2022–2024 and involves such tools as descriptions, reviews (theoretical basis), surveys (questionnaires), analyses, and statistical methods. **Results.** The research reveals both positive and negative factors of the impact of comics and geek culture on teenagers in Kazakhstan: positive self-image through socialization with a group of comic book fans, the desire for interaction, the development of imagination but also — decreased self-esteem and crisis of self-identification, response to comic book images (mirroring of 'I'), imitation of characters, the formation of a 'geek identity' through manipulation and simulacra. **Conclusions.** The work defines the types of geeks and various forms of adolescent identity, such as advertising, artificial, occupational ones. The concept of 'geek identity' (according to E. Erikson) is considered as a form of identification of a person (self-identity) with the media industry, awareness of belonging to a certain group of fans, and a way of mastering reality.

Keywords: geek culture, geeks, comics, simulacrum, advertising, artificial, occupational identity of teenagers, media industry.

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Аннотация. Введение. В статье рассматриваются особенности распространения и восприятия гик-культуры в формате комиксов и определение на этой основе идентичности среди казахстанских подростков. Актуальность исследования обусловлена бурным развитием субкультур в мировом масштабе и их конкуренцией с медиа за влияние и креативный контент. Тема интересна также в контексте социокультурного развития молодого поколения казахстанцев. **Целью** статьи является изучение специфики влияния гик-культуры потребителей комиксов на процессы формирования идентичности молодых казахстанцев (12–16 лет). Рамки исследования: 2022–2024 гг. В ходе исследования использовались следующие *методы*: описание, опрос (анкетирование), анализ и статистические методы. **Результаты.** В ходе исследования выявлены как положительные, так и отрицательные факторы воздействия комиксов и гиков на подростков Казахстана: позитивное представление о себе путем социализации с группой фанатов комиксов, стремление к взаимодействию, развитие воображения, однако также — снижение самооценки и кризис самоидентификации, отклик на образы комиксов (зеркальное отображение «Я»), подражание персонажам, формирование «идентичности гика» посредством манипулирования и симулякров. **Выводы.** Определены виды гиков, различные формы идентичности подростков: рекламная, искусственная, оккупационная. Понятие «идентичность гика» (по Э. Эриксону) рассматривается как форма отождествления человека (самость личности) с медиаиндустрией, осознание своей принадлежности к определенной группе фанатов и способ освоения реальности.

Ключевые слова: гик-культура, гики, комикс, симулякр, рекламная идентичность подростков, искусственная идентичность подростков, оккупационная идентичность подростков, медиаиндустрия

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1. Introduction

Geek culture includes all entertainment industries, including the culture of comic book consumption, as an important factor determining new personality parameters, forms of thinking and processes of individualization. This is the most influential subculture of the 21st century, which has developed from a combination of fan subcultures: adherents of comics, anime, manga, book worlds, computer games, science fiction, TV series and movies about superheroes, cosplay, new devices from leading IT companies... Geeks in a simplified version are fans of any direction: technology, pop culture, programming, science fiction, etc. At the moment, there are no strict professional, social, or gender divisions within geek culture and geek leaders. It is equally possible to talk about the types of subcultures and subcultural heroes; the national modification of such a cultural force in different countries, and the international basis that erases all boundaries and differences [Andreev et al. 2018]. However, it is inevitable that the cultural values of a certain region and the peculiarities of national culture influence the worldviews and cultural preferences of members of the geek community. For instance, foreign culture (western, eastern) in the comic book format is assimilated in the minds of Kazakhstani and has eventually transformed over time into an intercultural concept. In this case, the geek is both the consumer and the creator of culture [Valieva 2020]. Ways of promoting the harmonious socialization of the younger generation, their self-expression and self-actualization in real life, whether it may be considered as a new self-realization or not, in the context of the already popular culture of comic book consumption, is an important scientific problem that requires insights from various perspectives. Comics are the most simplified and understandable communication tool for teenagers, so the research analyzes an audience aged 12 to 16. They begin not only to be interested in comics, but also to create them and try their hand at this format at this age.

Comics have great creative power, and they help solve a variety of social and educational

tasks. For example, Kazakhstan's schools actively use the didactic potential of comics. Teachers involve students in the learning process with their help, arouse interest in the sciences¹. Schoolchildren often prepare projects in the comic book format. In Aktau, students draw comics based on the works of famous Kazakh writers, such as Y. Altynsarin, I. Yesenberlin²; schoolchildren in Karaganda learn the history of Kazakhstan through anime comics³. Writers and textbook authors include comic book elements into the narrative for better clarity. Lawyers draw up contracts in the form of comics, which has made it easier to understand the essence of the documents and the specifics of filling them out, even among people with autism.

The relevance of the research is determined by the fact that the culture of comic book consumption as a manifestation of geek culture is one of the key factors in the transition from traditional norms and changing the identity of the younger generation. For teenagers, identity in terms of own interests and hobbies is a key mechanism that determines stability, reproduces the forms of "self" for the survival of the individual, gaining a certain experience, readiness to make decisions. In this context, it is important to understand that comics represent the clarity of an idea, the transmission of thought in which a whole cycle of history is visualized in pictures and text. *"Comics are a form of*

¹ Amenova D. Young teacher from Abai Region teaches physics through comics. On: Kazappravda.kz (online media outlet). Posted on 19 January 2024. Available at: <https://kazpravda.kz/n/fiziku-cherez-komiksy-prepodaet-molodoy-uchitel-iz-oblasti-abay/> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

² Comics based on works of Kazakh writers created by schoolchildren in Aktau. On: SPUTNIK Kazakhstan. Posted on 26 November 2023. Available at: <https://ru.sputnik.kz/20231126/komiksy-po-proizvedeniyam-kazakhsikh-pisateley-sozdayut-shkolniki-v-aktau--40436279.html> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

³ Karaganda schoolgirls draw comics on Kazakhstan's history. On: SPUTNIK Kazakhstan. Posted on 12 February 2023. Available at: <https://ru.sputnik.kz/20230212/karagandinskije-shkolnitsy-risuyut-komiksy-po-istorii-kazakhstan-32016304.html> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

visual communication that can convey information in a popular and understandable way, because comics combine the power of design into a storyline, and information becomes more understandable” [Lubis 2017: 251].

Under the influence of the culture of comics consumption, profound changes are happening in the “geek identity” with the dominance of its own philosophy. The modern design of the perception of the world through the comics takes the younger generation away from the foundations of traditional identity. A young man is like a traveler in this combination of all kinds of consciousness, and his own consciousness and the concept of “self” are often lost in this network. The thoughts of comics, such form of thinking leave a deep impression in the mind of the reader, who inevitably becomes a fan. Comics contain a dual thinking of good and evil. The reader chooses with whom to associate himself / herself: with a supervillain or a superhero. Comics can teach good as well as evil. According to foreign researchers: “*comics contain a ‘double vision’ in their structural hybridity, their dual (but non-synchronous) narrative of words and images*” [Chute 2008: 459].

The purpose of the article is to explore the specifics of the influence of geek culture, in particular the culture of comics, on the processes of identity formation of young Kazakhstanis in the context of globalization and mediatization of the modern world. Research target — the youth of Kazakhstan, particularly, adolescent schoolchildren. Subject — the specifics of the formation of the social and cultural identity of young Kazakhstanis in the context of their interest in geek culture. The following tasks are defined: a review of terminology on the topic and the main directions of comics culture development; an analysis of scientific discourse on the characteristic features of geek identity as a result of comics consumption; features of perception of geek culture and examples of implementation of own ideas by Kazakhstani youth through comics.

2. Research materials and methods

The research uses a synthesis of sociological and cultural approaches, which allows to comprehensively reveal the specifics of geek culture and geek identity by identifying and

comparing the features of comic book consumption as specific cultural content among various target groups. Such methods as a survey, interview, and literature review were used to achieve the research goal, which make it possible to understand the peculiarities of perception and formation of the “geek identity” in the context of comics consumption. The empirical part of the research was conducted among Kazakhstani school-age youth.

The paper also examines the works of domestic and foreign researchers on geek culture and the comics industry from the standpoint of subcultural approaches: M. A. Lubis [Lubis 2017], J. McCain [McCain et al. 2015], E. A. Andreev [Andreev et al. 2018] and others, from the standpoint of subcultural approaches. The theoretical concepts of E. Erikson [Erikson 1993], G. Mead [Mead 1913], E. Fromm [Fromm 1942], as well as the theory of “soft power” by J. Nye [Nye 1990; Nye 2011], which make it possible to consider the “geek identity” formation process as a result of interaction of social context and cultural needs.

The methodology of the empirical sociological research included an online survey, as well as a series of focus groups among Kazakhstani adolescents to compile a classification of types of geek cultures and subsequent conceptualization and operationalization of the basic concepts of the research. The article was prepared as part of a scientific project funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan under the AP19679699 project “Religiosity / Spirituality, Well-Being and Identity of Kazakhstani Youth: Comparative Nationwide Studies”.

Sampling and survey. The research used a nonprobabilistic sample due to the peculiarities of conducting a survey through social networks and the limitations associated with the pandemic. Kazakhstani schoolchildren aged 12 to 16 years old living in various cities of Kazakhstan took part in the survey. The respondents were selected from among the active users of the social network VK.com, which allowed us to gather diverse opinions from youth representatives interested in geek culture. The sampling type and its formation method provided sufficient diversity among the respondents, how-

ver, the sample is not random, which limits the ability to extrapolate the results to the entire population of schoolchildren in Kazakhstan.

Thus, in the course of studying the topic, a sociological survey was conducted, in which 393 school-age respondents from 12 to 16 years old participated. For the convenience of conducting a survey during the COVID-19 pandemic and observing the principles of ethical responsibility, a link was created on VK.com social network. The purpose of the survey is to determine the opinion of the respondents on the questions asked and to identify the types of “geek identity” among representatives of the younger generation of Kazakhstanis. The questionnaire contained questions designed with the consideration of the research goal.

Sample questions of the questionnaire: “What types of comics do you read?”, “Which comics do you consider the best? Identify the place of Kazakhstani versions among them”, “Which characters attract you in comics?” and “How would you describe your „geek identity“?”.

The following factors were taken into account in determination of the signs of a “geek identity”: the degree of the respondent’s involvement in the comic culture in Kazakhstan; storylines of the comic industry’s content; personality parameters of school-age adolescents (level of imagination, ideals and values). The collected data was analyzed to determine the impact of geek culture on the identification of young people, as well as to identify cultural preferences and perception of comics in the context of Kazakhstan.

As part of the further substantiation of the methodological foundations of the study, it is important to note that the culture of comic book consumption is specific and directly depends on the characteristics of the comics themselves. Unlike other forms of popular culture, comics have unique characteristics that determine how they are perceived and interacted with. This includes the visual component, the interaction of text and image, as well as the features of genres and themes that reflect the diversity of interests and worldviews of the audience. Thus, the culture of comic book consumption is formed not only through interest in the works themselves, but also through the context of their content, as

well as through the subcultures they generate, which affects the behavior and identity of their readers.

Conceptualizing the research concepts in the context of modern trends in comics culture allows to note that initially the word “geek” was perceived with a negative connotation as a translation from the German language “weird, crazy”, and this word was used regarding individuals with some deviations from standard behavior. The genesis of the concept of “geek” in modern culture has been studied in detail by scientists and it denoted a loser, a “nerd”, a socially isolated person who went into the world of technology and science [Mikheev et al. 2016]. Over time, it became clear that the concept of geeks, geek culture, has an evolving nature due to the minimum threshold for inclusion: from outcasts of society living in a fantasy world to anyone who is passionate about something and understands digital technologies, and they all may consider themselves as geeks. Nowadays being a geek is fashionable, prestigious, and interesting. Geeks differ from just fans in that they are able to direct their passion in a creative direction. They are standing in the community, they are the creators of the future, they form the public consciousness, they often become famous over time, thanks to their hobbies and original content.

Geek culture is essentially the culture of certain fan groups with their experiences, philosophy, and symbols around which personal and social identity is built; it includes signs of many cultures: mass, informational, youth, consumer, conformist ones, countercultures, etc. As the researchers note: “*Bearing the features of many subcultures, geek culture, due to the specifics of its unique communications, tremendous pace of development, universality of coverage of its supporters, „low threshold“ of entry, inexhaustible possibilities of technology, outgrows itself to a subcultural phenomenon, acquires a meta-subcultural structure. It’s becoming a super subculture*” [Andreev et al. 2018].

Based on the conducted research, foreign scientists Jessica McCain, Brittany Gentile, Keith Campbell (2015) revealed that participation in geek culture occurs — to create an image of oneself (the great fantasy migration

hypothesis), to satisfy the needs for belonging (belongingness hypothesis), and to meet the needs for creative expression (the engagement hypothesis) [McCain et al. 2015].

The fascination with comics and stories in pictures has the greatest impact on the “self-awareness and self-reliance” and identity of teenagers out of the many areas of geek culture. In sociology, comics are considered either as a primary source of information or as a mirror reflecting social norms. Therefore, it is indisputable that comics have a strong influence on a developing personality both within the framework of self-image, and for awareness of belonging to a comic book fan group and, of course, for self-expression. The comics is considered to be the synesthesia of imagination, i. e. “visual identification of feeling with five senses” [McCloud 1993: 38]. The culture of comics consumption contributes to the formation of a homogeneous culture that determines the unique identity and values of teenagers. Identity is formed from the lifestyle and self-perception of a teenager (the research subject), from a set of associations accumulated over the years of his / her life and memories.

Thus, the operationalization of the concept of “geek identity”, starting from the classical definitions of the term “identity”, introduced by E. Erikson, points out the need to focus on “self-identity” and “self-identification”, defining them as “the process of correlating a person and culture in different forms” [Erikson 1993: 228].

The topic of identity is diverse, there are many concepts, types, and subspecies. In the context of this topic, we consider the formation of social identity among teenagers, self-image, depending on belonging to a group of comic book fans. Social identity can change over time if a person ceases to identify with a particular group, naturally, in connection with personal, national and consumer identity.

The geek identity may be defined as a conscious belonging to a specific social group in accordance with their hobbies. During socialization, similar identities are formed, which lead to the creation of social interest groups in the virtual world. “*Social networks are becoming the most important communicative space for a modern teenager, where fundamental*

age-related changes related to socialization are realized” [Monerah 2020: 1]. Communication in the culture of comic book consumption reveals identity and expands the boundaries of thinking.

3. Results

Using the advantages of cultural and psychological methodology in the theoretical part of this study allows to note that comic book characters influence some subconscious forms of imagination development in adolescents and further influence the development of their self-identification. As L. Bender points out: “*Comics deal with universal problems of personality attitude, stimulate fantasies, help solve individual and sociological problems inherent in life*” [Bender 1944: 226]. The image of comic book heroes goes into the subconscious, changes a person from the inside.

Comics are very fragmentary in their own way, the reader remembers only a picture and a quote of a comic book character. According to researcher M. A. Lubis, “*Comics belong to the category of visual media. Some characteristics of comics: (a) comics consist of various plot situations with a sequel, (b) comics are humorous, (c) other characteristics of comics must be taken into account so that the power of this medium can be assimilated, (d) comics focus on people, (e) stories in comics about themselves so that readers could immediately identify themselves through the feelings and actions of the character*” [Lubis 2017: 251].

So, comics and graphic novels are a special means of communication, a form of information presentation that is close and understandable especially for young people. Due to their visual orientation, series in pictures represent a popular genre of literature and art, accessible and entertaining. At the same time, it is a multi-layered and multifunctional component of visual and partly verbal culture, which has both negative and positive sides. Comics are studied by sociologists, linguists, philosophers, historians... As a result, an interdisciplinary understanding of comics as a discourse is being formed. Comics are diverse in genre, subject, and target audience, and are available in various formats, from paper to digital ones. The occurrence of webcomics and well-organized

advertising contributed to their rapid spread around the world and the formation of the identity of the “comic book consumer geek”.

Trends in the development of comic book culture are as follows: Westernization as a borrowing and imitation of Western models, massification, commercialization. Comics as a direction of geek culture represent the source and platform for new ideas, styles and trends, a tool for self-expression in various spheres of life.

Considering scientific discourses about geek culture and the identity of the younger generation, it is possible to identify the nature of the concept of “geek identity” taking into account the culture of comic book consumption. We consider identities primarily as social constructs that classify people. *“Social identity is a multifaceted process by which people identify themselves in terms of similarities with some people and differences from others. Social identification occurs when people identify themselves and others as members of social categories”* [Copes et al. 2008: 256].

In addition, J. Mead and other sociologists have proven that the self is formed in a person only in the context of social interaction. It is known that the opinion of others plays an important role in shaping the individual ideas of a teenager at school age, therefore, the “geek identity” is an instinctive feeling that is reflected in cooperation with peers. *“According to Erikson’s logic, the stage most important for personality formation occurs in adolescence, which is called „confusion between identity and roles“. At the stage of mixing roles, teenagers try to determine who they are in order to highlight the basic identity”* [Sujay 2019: 7].

4. Specifics and signs of geek identity

The signs of geek identity shall be additionally discussed for classification of geek types based on the results of a focus study among Kazakhstani teenagers.

The socialization of personality is considered as an important sign of the geek identity. The theory of social identity [Taifel, Turner 1986] suggests that group membership plays an important role in people’s self-esteem. *“A key element of social identity is personality theory, which suggests that people are motivated to view self-image in a relatively positive aspect”*

[de Hoog 2012: 2]. *“Identity develops during interaction with others and is the result of recognition and a way to recognize ourselves”* [Drinóczi 2020: 113].

The next sign of “geek identity” concept can be considered a personality change that occurs gradually and is accompanied by personal crises and intrapersonal conflicts. The theoretical concepts of a number of authors E. Erikson, G. Mead, E. Fromm, K. Gergen, G. Allport present ideas about the identity crisis. The conditions of globalization process create instability in the geek identity, reducing the self-esteem of the younger generation. Self-esteem decrease leads to an identity crisis. In this state, the younger generation is not aware of themselves in the real world.

The identity crisis can last for years until a person finds ways to acquire a holistic personal identity. E. Fromm notes: *“There is too much individualism, but what we consider individualism has turned into an empty shell”* [Fromm 1942: 228]. As a result of the regression of identity, a person understands and realizes the destruction of his / her individuality. In case of identity crisis, a collective image of a personality is created on the basis of the society and television / Internet. Currently, the younger generation has no fundamental basis and their identity becomes “hybrid, multiple, mixed, floating” [Khenkin 2018: 271]. A teenager with an identity crisis has low self-worth and is highly susceptible to manipulation. Therefore, he / she may not control himself / herself, lose own will and inner core through manipulations of the comics images. The identity becomes blurred and hazy. According to G. Mead, *“a crisis is a „decisive moment“ or „turning point“ in individual existence; a threat to the continuity of a person’s existence in own world; a positive fact is the opportunity to redefine, expand and deepen an individual’s sense of self and the world with which it is ontologically connected”* [Mead 1913: 66].

In addition, for the geek identity, the response to comic book images and the perception of characters as a mirror image of the “self” is important. Clearly, in the era of digital space, there is a process of rapid response of society to novelties and innovations. Naturally, this response directly depends on the maturity of the

younger generation. The response of teenagers to the images of comics leads to fantasies, and reality fades into the background. Branded identity is being formed, for example, someone prefers Marvel comics, and someone prefers DC comics. As a result, the younger generation of society begins to divide into different groups of fans. This process can be called a mirror image of the “self”, a crooked mirror that distorts the reality, which is confirmed by S. Freud: “„I“ is a distorted „It“ that is influenced by the outside world” [Freud 2015: 111]. “*A person sees own reflection in another person or a comic book character, it excites his / her ego, stimulating neurons, mirror neurons of imitation*” [Nepryakhin 2019: 184]. A person doesn’t see himself / herself in the mirror, he / she sees only a formality or triviality.

Advertising, which is becoming the main tool in the culture of comic book consumption, is also important for geek identity. T. Sidorova states: “*Consumer identity is studied within the framework of consumer behavior motivation and is most widely represented in the field of advertising psychology*” [Sidorova 2016: 40]. “Advertising should touch feelings of a person, as in a film and cartoon based on comics, that is, an „emotional approach“” [Огилви 2020: 149]. There is an authoritative identity followed by copies of other identities. If the authority is too high, then a whole generation of people, who have not formed their own identity, may grow up. Trends, standards are the main guides that form the “geek identity”. “*Advertising is a kind of portrait reality of society, which clearly expresses its character and values*” [Hermanto, Adawiyah 2020: 2].

It is believed that when a teenager joins a well-known project, he / she does not feel lonely or deprived because it is more comfortable to hide among the crowd than to have his / her own will and his / her true self’s voice. Researcher N. Anisimov states: “*Meta identity represents the maximum level of abstraction and compensates for the individual’s desire to be part of something great*” [Anisimov 2019: 173].

Teenagers are looking for a role model, as they are not yet aware of their identity. They see the world through someone else’s eyes, something that seems to them unique and worthy of their own values. The geek identity is mir-

rored in someone else’s identity. In this case, teenagers begin to see themselves differently, distorting reality and trying to create a more improved version of themselves from someone else’s world view.

Self-esteem is the basis of identification, which is adjusted by many factors: education, mental health, transitional age, comic book consumption culture, interaction with the social world, etc. The scientist psychologist E. Erikson stated that the decrease in self-esteem is one of the main levers of identity management. Emotional instability and stress make identity very soft and loose. Consequently, it is possible to create a completely new identity, since in this state the younger generation is very susceptible and unable to think rationally. This leads to a violation of the “geek identity” or the formation of an identity that has — rigidity, emotional burnout, stress, anxiety, violation of trusting relationships, self-esteem decrease. R. A. Sabri and Gh. F. Ghasaknote: “*Psychological stress is a general term used to describe a state of impaired psychological health, which consists of a combination of symptoms of depression and anxiety about personality traits, functional disorders and behavioral problems*” [Sabri, Ghasak 2019: 1].

Then, we state that the “geek identity” is a simulacrum. J. Baudrillard emphasizes: “*The whole system loses its fulcrum, it itself becomes nothing more than a giant simulacrum — not something that is completely disconnected from reality, but something that is never exchanged for the real and is rather exchanged for itself in a continuous cycle without a referent and limit*” [Baudrillard 2018: 14]. A simulacrum is a fake image imposed by a temporary fashion. It is believed that the geek identity is found mostly all by oneself. K. Rodin emphasizes “*false identity becomes a consequence of superficial life, ignorance of oneself*” [Rodin 2015: 134].

Thus, the components of the “geek identity” structure are considered to be demonstrating one’s individuality as a unit of society; determining the integrity of one’s past and present in understanding life; synthesizing internal changes under external influences from the culture of comic book consumption; socialization with a certain group of fans as intercultural communication.

5. Geek identity: empirical measurements

Based on the existing theories and developments outlined above, as well as a sociological survey of school-age respondents in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the following types of “geek identity” have been identified (Diagram 1).

The sociological survey has shown that Kazakhstani teenagers of school age have the mixed-form geek identity (56 respondents), and identify themselves with products of multiculturalism and various trends of American and Japanese pop culture and the comics industry. The geek identity of the younger generation of Kazakhstanis covers all genres of graphic comics, fantasy, anime and manga, as well as the film industry, computer games (152 respondents). There are teenagers who relate themselves and their behavior to the heroes of the media industry (56 respondents).

It should also be noted that Kazakhstani comics are not popular enough in Kazakhstan and the world (“Yermek Batyr” and “KazakhMan”). Kazakhstani comics first appeared in 2011, they are based on national markers and reflect the realities of modern life at the same time. Many consider that Kazakhstani authors are only imitators of the comics giants of Japan and America. As the publishers themselves admit, they create their works based on a mixture of American, European and Japanese graphic publications. Creative compilations of other people’s ideas form the basis in the media and pop culture of Kazakhstan.

The popularity of American and Japanese comics in the Kazakhstan media space can be considered as an import of occupation identity. Foreign media products manipulate the consciousness of young people, as domestic media is generally considered self-made and unclaimed. Therefore, Kazakhstani youth are brought up by multiculturalism, which creates an identity crisis to a greater extent and destroys cultural ties with the past.

The comic book industry as a simulacrum of identity and the main way of manipulating the consciousness of the youth of the Republic of Kazakhstan leads to personality alienation and at the same time forms certain values. Kazakhstani teenagers develop according to a certain algorithm that creates a media space.

The “geek identity” largely depends on “current cultural trends” [Narotzky 2009: 64]. The culture of comics consumption, which is a free individual choice of the media industry among Kazakhstani teenagers, is quite high, and it began shaping in the 1990s. Adolescence is characterized by a high intensity of the processes of socialization and individualization. Several generations of Kazakhstanis have grown up in this industry.

Thus, the “geek identity” of Kazakhstani teenagers manifests itself in the following forms: advertising — identification with advertising brands of media products on social networks; artificial — identification with a simulacrum of the multiculturalism image; occupation — identification with a foreign culture,

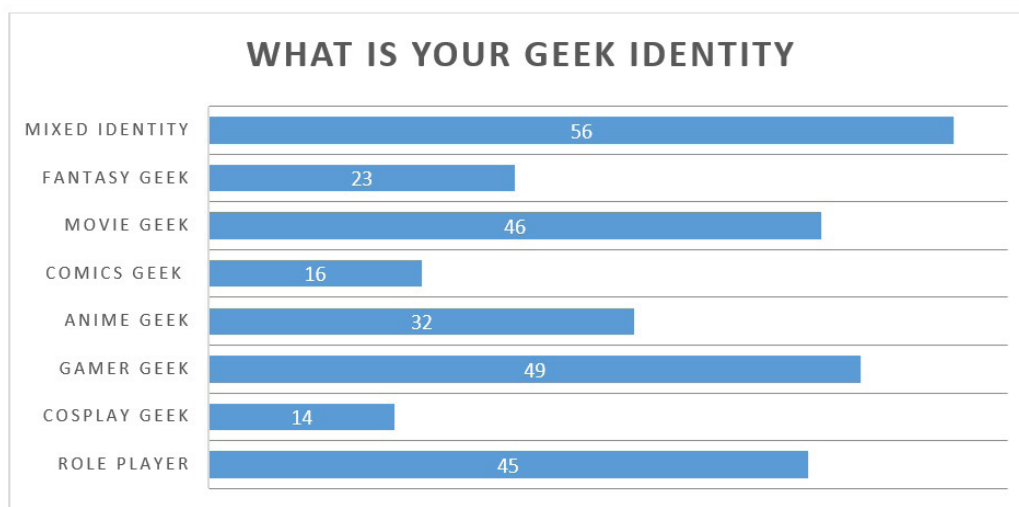


Diagram 1. Types of geek identity

thinking, values and ignoring the national code (national mentality).

According to the results of the sociological survey “Which comics are better?” the preferences of Kazakhstani teenagers were determined (Diagram 2).

Marvel comics are considered the most popular comic books (49 respondents). Kazakhstani, Russian and DC comics are not very popular among Kazakhstani teenagers. Marvel comics created by Stan Lee have the greatest influence on teenagers. The characters of his comics reflect certain motives and convey vivid emotions. Marvel comics are more of science fiction, about how fascinating science is and what it can give to the world. DC comics reveal a dark philosophy in which Batman acts as the main superhero. DC comics present instructive stories about life, and teach a deep perception of life. Manga and anime hold the second place in popularity among Kazakhstani teenagers. Khan comics and Tengri comics¹ are two Kazakhstan comics studios, often focused on ethno-folklore fantasy, many characters taken from the history of Kazakhstan and the daily life of Almaty, and according to the survey results, they poll the smallest number of respondents' votes.

According to the results of the research, it is possible to propose a conditional classification of the forms of “geek identity” among

¹ Tengri Comics. On: FantLab.ru. Available at: <https://fantlab.ru/publisher8234> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

the younger generation of Kazakhstanis, which correlates with the known types of geeks:

– mix geek, mixed identity — a person who has various forms of identification with multiculturalism and modern pop culture;

– fantasy geek — a person who identifies him- / herself with the heroes of fantasy and science fiction, he / she is also aware of various forms of magic and scientific achievements in this field;

– movie geek — a person who identifies him- / herself with the heroes of the movie industry and keeps a huge number of associations with a particular movie created on the basis of comics;

– comic geek — a person who has a subjective sense of identity and integrity of his / her personality arising from the perception of all types of comics and belongs to a certain group of fans;

– anime geek — a person who identifies him- / herself with the heroes of the Japanese comics industry;

– geek gamer — a person who identifies him- / herself in the image of an avatar, a video game reality technically created by the game world;

– cosplay geek — a person who associates him- / herself with the image and behavior of famous heroes of the media industry in the framework of processions, interest clubs, etc.;

– role player is a form of the self of a person who lives in his / her own fantasy image all his / her free time.

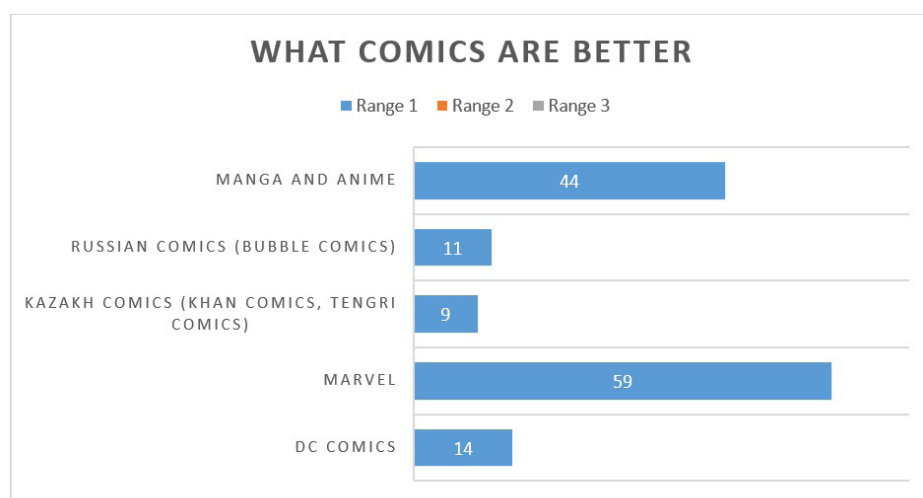


Diagram 2. “Which comics are better?”

6. Discussion

The fascination with comics, as a rule, occurs in adolescence, when a complete world view of a person has not yet been formed. At this stage, it is especially important for society and the state to explore both social and antisocial subcultures, and to shape the positive impact of subculture on the socialization of the individual by all possible means. In this case, self-confident people who value their individuality and create effective communication will join the society.

As the survey shows, Kazakhstani teenagers, as well as teenagers all over the world, find educators and mentors among the bright characters of media and comics: superheroes and supervillains. Recently, there has been a growing interest among young people in comics with national heroes: Yermek Batyr, Abai, Kerey and Zhanibek, Tomiris, Shokan Ualikhanov. The creative community discusses the story of the Golden Man (Altyn Adam), novel of M. Auezov "The Path of Abai", which can be used as the basis for Kazakhstani comics. However, Western comics are in the lead, which are, of course, more popular and have more interpretations. Thus, the hero of all youngsters and children has been Spider Man and later Iron Man and the Hulk, many children dreamed of having the same superpowers. As they get older, they have found more serious characters such as the Joker, Two-Face, Mr. Freeze. Some prefer Batman or the philosophy of characters like Venom and Carnage. Comics are action, and children start to think that life is like a computer game where everything or almost everything is possible. It is charisma and radical behavior (black and white tones) that attract teenagers in comic book characters, they are the engine of modern culture. Spectacular scenes and extraordinary quotes of comic book characters with a special intonation, the plot manipulates the consciousness of Kazakhstani teenagers. The story is important for comic book fans, since it relates to the destinies of real people. American comics approach the reality, whereas manga is a fantasy philosophical folklore. Teenagers see their personality reflected in an American or Japanese comic book character, and teenagers' behavior becomes very similar to that of anime characters.

Statistics on comic book consumption in various regions of Kazakhstan shows that interest in comics has been steadily increasing from 2004 to 2024 (for 20 years)¹. The influence of the American comic book industry in Kazakhstan has decreased significantly recently, but the influence of Manga, Manhwa, and Anime has increased due to pop culture advertising. Kazakhstani youths consume foreign media products without skepticism and are often influenced by social media trends. That is why teenagers of Kazakhstan prefer to read only the most popular online comics and watch superhero movies. In addition, the number of fans of the comic book industry is increasing due to the crowd effect.

The geek community of Kazakhstan is actively developing: geeks gather once a year at a large festival and exhibitions of comics held in Almaty and Astana. The recent example is the Comic Con Astana-2024 festival (launched in 2019), where public figure Galim Baytuk presented a series of comics in the format of superhero heroic acts about Shoqan Walikhanov². This is the first comic about the historical personality of Kazakhstan for children and youth, telling about the expedition, exploration activities of the great scientist and ethnographer. Festival faces: Mads Mikkelsen, Sanjar Madi, Aisultan Seitov, Spider-Man, Naruto and Monster High. This year, the festival has attracted 50,000 guests.

Some geek meetings are held in comic book stores; a small audience of fans interact in the COMICS KZ group on VK.com social network; new information on Kazakhstani comics is published on the websites: Geek.pont, Khan comics³, GBKZ, MAGuire MARVEL DC, Qazcomics⁴. It is worth noting the activities of enthusiasts A. Sapargaliyev and A. Kusnutdinov,

¹ Google Trends. Available at: <https://trends.google.ru/trends> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

² Comic Con 2024 geek culture festival: How it was. On: Elorda.info. Available at: <https://elorda.info/ru/novosti-stolitsy-ru/kak-prosel-festival-gik-kul-tury-comic-con-astana-2024?ysclid=lz9wl5cevo748553884> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

³ Khan Comics. Available at: <https://www.khancomics.kz> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

⁴ Qazaq Comics. Available at: <https://qazcomics.kz/ru> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

the first founders of Kazakhstani geek stores. They became interested in comics in their teens, presented and implemented their full-fledged projects for the development of geek culture in Kazakhstan during their studentship. The Kazakhstan Comics Fan Community provides all the necessary news to the geeks of Kazakhstan; EnjoyShop¹ — geek things and gifts store; Geekshop group in Karaganda publishes comics; “KazInside.com — Kazakhstan’s first Geek Portal publishes geek-themed art and articles; geek gamers have a community Overwatch-Kazakhstan (Games Geek Journal is a Kazakhstani information portal that covers topics such as science, cinema, games, e-sports, and of course comics)²; Kazakhstan comics studios Salben and Qazaqcomics³ (The largest comic book publishing house in Kazakhstan, which also translates publishing houses: BOOM! Studios, Dark Horse, MARVEL, Oni Press, Image, Fantagraphics), focused on historical style, specializing in translations of foreign comics into Kazakh.

The representativeness of the forming personality in the “geek identity” is very contradictory. The younger generation of Kazakhstanis are influenced by culture in the form of collective norms and values of society on the one hand, and it “creates its own identity” on the other hand [Hansen 1995: 139–140]. Therefore, S. Freud considers: “*The mechanism of interaction between a person and a social group is important*” [Freud 2015: 111].

Considering the fact that personality formation is simultaneously influenced by the culture of comic book consumption, the nature of the individual, the socio-cultural component, his / her spiritual and practical experiences, it can be stated that the “geek identity” has both negative and positive foundations for the process of personality formation of Kazakhstanis in adolescence and his / her socialization.

¹ EnjoyShop (online store of geek clothes and gifts). Available at: <https://enjoyshop.kz> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

² Games Geek Journal. On: VK.com. Available at: https://vk.com/overwatch_ggj (accessed: 24 March 2025).

³ SALBEN Comics. On: VK.com. Available at: <https://vk.com/salbencomics> (accessed: 24 March 2025).

Positive aspects of the culture of comic book consumption for teenagers in Kazakhstan include as follows: intercultural communication, mobility, which is considered the main motto of youth, and a community of fans with interests as a stable communication system. Groups of comic book fans are the basis of social interaction. Scientist P. Kollock emphasizes that “*people tend to join communities because of the expectation of reciprocity, increased reputation / prestige, and / or a sense of effectiveness*” [Kollock 1994: 313]. Fans have an incentive to improve their understanding of a particular comic book, and a teenager’s life position and world view are formed in watching superhero comics and philosophical anime and manga.

The positive motivation of young people, inspired by comics, is manifested in the desire to solve life problems, be noble and have fortitude (Japanese comics Naruto, Ninja Villages, and the American — Batman). For example, the manga “Desires of the Rejected” vividly reflects the feelings and emotions of school-children, and this is close to Kazakhstanis. In anime, teenagers are looking for answers to questions that adults cannot give them. Comics subconsciously or consciously teach teenagers to determine the purpose of life and how to be motivated, treat other peoples with dignity, wisdom accumulated by many generations.

Negative aspects within the culture of comic book consumption (propaganda of cruelty, development of clip thinking, simplification of the moral and value system) make a person dependent, characterless, destroy the moral values of society, deny the need for comprehensive mental, moral and spiritual development of a person, which leads to manipulation of consciousness.

Therefore, the comic brings up fortitude and empathy in a person, but also selfishness, cruelty, infantilism. Nevertheless, with such a duality of comics, neither side prevails, since each person determines to what extent and how this will impact him / her.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the specifics and spread of geek culture through the prism of comics among children and youth of Kazakhstan are determined by

historical, geographical, social and mental factors. In Kazakhstan, comics are not perceived as part of the national culture, as, for example, in America; the culture of domestic comics is in the formative stage. The development of the comic format for young people goes in two directions — entertaining and educational ones. However, there is an interest in reading, watching and creating Russian graphic novels based on national history and culture.

As the observations of scientists and a focus study on this topic show, teenagers around the world, including in Kazakhstan, are adopting different identities of the West and the East, which are in constant conflict. This is what creates an identity crisis when only fragments of different cultures are present, which determines serious problems of cultural identity of the emerging personality and standardization of their values. The geek culture of the comics industry and the media space creates a limited philosophy of a young man and a kind of imitation of the inner world. However, at the same time, an identity crisis is a potential for personality formation. The study of the “geek identity” of Kazakhstani teenagers provides an understanding of the specifics of the culture of comic book consumption and the representation of personality in the socio-cultural space. Firstly, the paper notes a strong influence of American, Japanese and Korean comics on the youth audience (consumption), and the promotion of national comic products in this stream (creation). Secondly, it has been revealed that the main form of “geek identity” in Kazakh-

stan is mixed identity, which creates an internal conflict of personality, disorienting it in a huge information flow.

As a result of the conducted research, it was revealed that the majority of teenage respondents are involved in geek culture and perceive comics as part of their social identity; the characteristic features of “geek identity” are identified as a result of the influence of comic book consumption culture on personality formation. It can be stated that an image of youth with a special worldview has been formed, a new person has been formed in a digital society where teenagers are acquiring the so-called “fast applied knowledge”, being superficial in life, searching for their identity. In the authors’ opinion, fast visual information both helps master reality and primitivizes the organization of the world, which hinders awareness of identity.

Without doubt, the fascination of young people with comics, the desire to explore and create new worlds, the emergence of geeks, the spread of geek culture in Kazakhstan through the culture of comic book consumption, can be considered as positive phenomena in general, that contribute to the identification of personality, the development of the domestic comics industry, new technologies, the exchange of experiences with America, Europe, Asia and the launch of original startups.

However, further research is needed to explore new cases related to subcultures and youth identification processes to get a complete picture of the spread and perception of geek culture in Kazakhstan.

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