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SOC 343: Mass Media & Social Influences

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The Multidimensional Media

**Introduction**

Media is a powerful tool and one of the key socializers in our modern world - it seems that almost everything is touched by media, in one form or another. Its role has evolved significantly over time, from early newspapers and magazines to the huge corporate conglomerations, subcultures, outlets, and influences that exist today. With this in mind, it is interesting to dissect all of the ways in which it is shaped and particularly how it impacts people.

In this paper, I will be exploring the different facets in which media is dynamic and experienced differently through time and cross-nationally. I will begin by talking about media production (Part I), and in particular how the industry itself has evolved structurally and the impact on the experiences of creative producers. Next, I will talk about the patterns of representation in media (Part II) and how these have changed over time, or haven’t. This section will focus the experiences of racial inclusivity in the media sphere. Lastly, I will focus on the audience perception (Part III) and experiences of media among people in different geographic locations.

**Media Production (Part I):**

Life in the arts is one that is commonly associated with hardship, frequently demonstrated in phrases such as “suffering for your art” and “struggling artist”. The reasons for the consistent obstacles to success in the field stems from both, from internal as well as external components: on the internal, employee side, there is a high level of competition in an industry where the supply of talent vastly supersedes the demand from talent acquisition companies, and on the external, corporate side, the shifting structures and uncertainties of the firms and industries due to technological shifts create a sense of instability that unleashes the potential for dramatic shift in the future. However, despite these obstacles, the creative industry shows great promise with the shift in production and loosening of the hierarchies that used to control every step of the process.

In this section, I will be highlighting some of the mechanisms that play a role in the industry dynamics. More specifically, I will be discussing the consequence of technological developments such as internet-based steaming in the media space, the evolution and impacts of regulations such as copyright and piracy, and the impact of high levels of competition in the industry such as rejection desensitization. All of these factors open a niche for potential dramatic change in the industry and welcome the emergence of new structures to maximize efficiency.

Technological Developments

The development of new technologies has entirely redefined traditional operational structures in workspaces, and no industry has been spared from its influence, least of all the media space. For example, in the television industry, improvements in accessibility and affordability have allowed for an influx of new players and restructuring of old players that has reinvented the television experience.

This shift is clearly articulated in Amanda Lotz’s article titled “*Teasing apart television industry disruption: consequences of meso-level financing practices before and after the US multiplatform era*.” One of the ways in which technological improvements spurred the transition away from cable can be attributed to convenience – internet distributions channels eliminated the need for equipment such as satellites and signaling services that posed inconveniences for users. Consequently, the removal of this barrier expanded the pool of television users and increased accessibility to anyone with an internet connection and a mere fraction of the monthly cable costs.

As more users subscribed to internet-based streaming, there was a large shift that extended beyond the technology itself and into the financing practices of television production. The traditional strategy used was deficit financing, where the producer shouldered the risk of a television serious performing poorly by bearing a loss on the first-run and only recovering the loss if the show was successful. Since the expected financial risk per series in the mid-2000s was ~$3 Million based on Lotz’s research, it also limited the participation of independent companies that might not be able to afford that level of risk and drove the rise of conglomerates.

The reign of this financing practice slowly lost momentum after new technologies allowed for the rise of internet-distributed television, which followed a different financing practice: cost plus funding. Here, instead of the production company, the first-run distributer is responsible for funding the production of a television series and also maintains ownership of the intellectual property and licensing of the show. The revenue of the distributer comes from the subscribers, and the companies are thus incentivized to increase the consumer base to increase income.

From this lens, we can see how the emergence of new technologies have widespread effects beyond just the technology itself. In this case, improved technology in internet streaming increased accessibility and lured a large proportion of consumers, which helped fund a new cost-plus financial strategy that eventually caused an overhaul of the previous deficit-funding financial model used in the media space for decades. HBO, which was once a linearly structured, deficit-financed organization has now adapted to be structurally similar to Netflix, and it all goes back to the technological developments that made this possible in the first place.

Another area in which technology has reshaped the media sphere is with regard to the barriers to entry in the industry. As Smith and Telang (2016) highlight in “*Chapter 7: Power to the People*” of their book, “*Streaming, Sharing, Stealing: Big Data and the Future of Entertainment*,” artists were previously dependent on media companies for three things: gaining access to production equipment, receiving professional advice, and gaining access to distribution channels to share content.

However, technological developments have lowered the cost of professional equipment used to produce content and made it available to the masses, which has helped blunt this barrier to entry. This is especially evident with the rise of YouTube stars that gain recognition using the tools that are publicly available to them without the help of a major studio. Additionally, distribution channels such as Apple’s iBookstore have also eliminated the need for media companies to act as intermediaries in distribution of media, and empowered artists to independently publish their work.

These technological developments take away the power that media companies once held as gatekeepers to an industry and reallocate it to the people. With the technology that is now widely available, visibility is increasingly possible without professional help and more artists are able to take action in advancing their careers.

Industry Regulations

Regulation in the media sphere has seen dramatic shifts over the past few centuries, and governance today is a small semblance of its original form. For example, copyright law today plays a major role in all segments of art and media – poetry, compositions, songwriting, even this very essay – and this regulation was not always ingrained in the cloth of media.

Its presence has been highlighted specifically for the magazine industry by Heather Haverman in her article titled, “*Antebellum literary culture and the evolution of American magazines.*” In this article, Haverman uses longitudinal data on 5,067 magazines and a dataset of 25,009 annual corresponding observations based on magazine attributes to highlight key characteristics per time period.

From a historic lens, Haverman speaks bluntly about the lack of copyright law to protect American magazine contributors in the early days of the magazine. Even after the initiation of federal copyright laws, American literary property was regarded “as having no literary value,” and this regulation was not applied to magazines until the 1820s. Largely, the expansion of copyright was a consequence of contributors receiving payments for their work – as demand for work notable writers increased, the price charged by said writers increased as well, and magazines began to copyright their publications to protect their now expensive property.

Another tangential area that has seen shifts in regulation relates to piracy, which is highlighted specifically within the music industry by Smith and Telang (2016) in “*Chapter 6: Raised on Robbery*” of the same book. Prior to the 1990s, the United States regulated the media industry using tight copyright laws to prevent piracy and this was effective for the most part. However, after the development of digital technologies that eliminated the barriers in illegal production and distribution of copyrighted material, piracy became “an interconnected global phenomenon.”

With illegally acquired media content more widely available, the looming question in terms of regulation was this: how does piracy affect producers and consumers of content, and should it be regulated at all? The answer was realized via legal-action enforcements. When the US Department of Justice shut down Megaupload.com, a piracy website, Smith and Telang concluded that there was there was a 6.5-8.5 percent increase in legal consumption, which indicated that tight regulation leads to better outcomes in terms of sales.

However, since the shutdown of a website is a complex endeavor that requires cross-national communication, the easier regulation that most countries use is blocking websites. After 19 piracy websites were blocked simultaneously, there was a 12 percent increases in legal consumption of media content. This demonstrates the effectiveness of piracy regulation, and how it has adapted to shifting technologies. As Smith and Telang mention, you can “compete against piracy by making pirated content harder to use, less convenient, or less reliable,” and regulation has done just that.

Competition

As discussed earlier, the media industry is one that is characterized by hardship and a high level of competition. With a large number of aspiring artists and a small number of available spots in companies, there are certain norms and expectations that are built to help progress through career development. Many of these are highlighted in Rachael Skaggs’ article titled, “*Socializing Rejection and Failure in Artistic Occupational Communities*.” In the research study, Skaggs attended a club for songwriters that met on a weekly basis and noted observations of social norms and the culture of the songwriting industry.

One of the key findings from the study was that out of the 403 songs presented to publishers during the course of the study, 327 were rejected. This portrays the high rejection rate faced by songwriters in the community, and Skaggs mentions that artists cope with this rejection using two mechanisms: first, they accept or dismiss the failure, and later, they assume the associated responsibility for the failure. Some may even reattempt the task, viewing the failure as an outlet by which to learn and improve.

Per Skaggs observations, all songwriters came to view rejection as normal after witnessing a “high volume of publicly delivered rejection” at the songwriting club. In this way, songwriters rationalized and desensitized themselves to the blunt of rejection, a frequent occurrence in the industry due to high levels of competition.

Another somewhat specific competitive norm that Skaggs mentions is the distinction of “in-town” and “out-of-town” artists in Nashville, where being “in-town” means living in the Nashville area and implied that one was serious about their musical career, and being “out-of-town” meant living in a Nashville-adjacent area and not taking ones songwriting seriously.

Considering the high supply of artistic talent, a common mentality in Nashville bars and production companies is that people that are concentrating on their music will find a way to live in the city and therefore should receive preferred treatment over those that do not live in the city and are, by extension, lax about their music careers. With this mindset, some bars only allow “in-town” artists to perform, which creates an additional level of competition between “in-town” and “out-of-town” artists for performance spots in the limited number of bars that allow both groups to perform and gain visibility.

Although Skaggs speaks specifically about the Nashville space, this competitive dynamic may be transferrable to any city with a booming music industry. It also demonstrates an in-group and out-group phenomenon, which makes pursual of a music career all the more difficult since one might have to move into the city to enter the in-group and be taken seriously.

One more competitive structure that Skaggs talks about is that of insider contacts. In most industries, networking with employees and getting to know the work culture and values can significantly improve chances of entering a company. However, in the music industry, being friends with publishers does not necessarily imply a competitive advantage, and music is viewed using a largely unbiased, impartial lens with only the potential listeners and revenue in mind.

Looking to the Future

As new technologies continue to develop and regulations adapt to shifting nuances in the structures of media companies, the level of competition and the way artists interact with each other shows immense potential for change.

Even though increased technology has made it easier for artists to independently produce and distribute their work, gatekeepers today continue to hold significant power due to control over additional outlets of distribution and more advanced equipment. As a consequence, the industry has several cultural norms that demonstrate this power dynamic where talent is essentially at the beck and call of the gatekeepers.

For example, Skaggs mentions that artists in the songwriting club usually do not hear back from the companies even if their song was accepted, and contacting the publishers is considered taboo and receives strong negative sanctions. These social norms still indicate a massive amount of power in the hands of gatekeepers, and this area shows potential for change as new technologies and/or regulations develop.

Additionally, the emergence of these new technology in media has a substantial potential to alter the fabric of media itself. As seen with the impact of internet-based technology in the redefinition of television production financial models, one new technology in one niche area has the potential to dramatically modify a different sphere of media.

Similarly, new regulation or deregulation also holds the potential to reexplore and rediscover the structures that make up the essence of media. This happened with the emergence of copyright, it happened again with the rise of internet streaming services, and it will without doubt occur again with new regulation (or deregulation) in the industry as it adapts to new players and new corporate structures.

In the words of Amanda Lotz, the transitions in media can be viewed “as a matter of epochal reconfiguration rather than evolutionary transition,” and in my opinion, this reconfiguration can be viewed as something that will likely occur time and time again.

**Patterns of Representation (Part II)**

One of the major lessons that I’ve learned through my undergraduate studies is that our perception of reality is socially constructed and may not be as accurate as we may think it is. Particularly, there are certain prevalent impressions and ideas of the world, such as rhetoric that we live in a post-racial world and have made huge amounts of progress in bringing equality and equity to our society, which not always backed by the evidence.

One of the many reasons for this may be the lack of discussion and conversations regarding racial topics and research in the area. Particularly, social media plays a key role in the absorption and dissemination of news, and since racial inequality is rarely at the forefront of these news broadcast, it can be a misperception that it is no longer a critical characteristic of our world today. In this section, I will be highlighting key research that indicates that we, as an American society, have made very little progress (if at all) in our integration of racial and ethnic cultures and people, and that there is much progress yet to be made.

Representation in Children’s Books

One area that certainly has room for improvement in terms of racial representation and diversity lies within the realm of children’s books. As articulated in research by Bernice A. Pescosolido, Elizabeth Grauerholz, and Melissa A. Milkie, children’s books have historically and continue today to overwhelmingly underrepresent people of color, specifically African Americans. In their research, they examine three sets of children’s books from 1937 through the 1993 and observe racial representation within them. The first set of books includes the most prestigious and expensive set of books that received the *Caldecott Medal* or *Caldecott Honor* award (235 total books), and second set includes picture books from *Children’s Catalog* (1,190 total books), and the third set includes *Little Golden Books* (1,023 total books). Within these books, they noted two metrics: when the books included at least one Black character, and when the books included only Black characters.

One of their key findings in this research study was there the levels of representation fluctuated over time, and this fluctuation was largely dependent on the social and cultural context. Prior to the Civil War, African Americans were not represented in children’s books frequently, but when they were represented, they appeared as “multi-dimensional central characters in juvenile novels”. In terms of interactions between White characters and Black characters, these books portrayed a mostly surface level relationship and did not show much depth.

However, after the Civil War when racial tensions reached much higher levels, the representation of Blacks plummeted to near-zero levels, and in the instances where they did appear in books, they had a tendency to be in a derogatory context. Since the social context in this time period revolved around African Americans fighting against the systems of injustice and demanding human rights, the content produced represented a response to this imbalance of power and served to “recreate dominant systems of order”. This period lasts from the 1950s through the mid-1960s.

In the next phase, from the mid-1960s through the 1975, the representation of Black characters improves dramatically, and in some cases, they replaced White characters as leads in some series of books. In addition to increased representation in books, Black authors were awarded Caldecott awards for the first time and the books began to address racial identities and characters in a multi-dimensional manner. In summary, this period showed great promise and a steady improvement in racial inclusion.

This brings us to the last phase, from 1975 through the 1990s. After a substantial increase in representation in the previous period, the level of representation of Black characters stabilized at about 20%-30% of all books. Although some progress was made in the 1990s when Caldecott books addressed interracial themes and political issues for the first time, this period symbolized a plateau in improvements – interracial interactions primarily remained at surface levels, African Americans were largely represented in the context of historical, folk themes rather than in a present day context, and Black characters portrayed in central roles was rare.

One important thing to note in these findings is that the increases in representation were disproportionately observed in Caldecott award winning books, which were really only available to people with high socioeconomic statuses due to the increased cost. The books that are available to the largest percentage of children showed marginal increases in representation, with the percentage of books that only included Black characters never rising over 9%.

Overall, there are mixed opinions on whether the representation of African Americans has truly improved with time, and while high-end children’s books do show some improvements, the books that are available to most children do not and there are certainly concerns that this representation has declined in more recent years as well. Literature serves as “one of the most powerful vehicles through which children assimilate their cultural heritage”, and this assimilation is incredibly limited by the lack of progress made in increasing multi-cultural representation in widely available children’s books.

Racial Framing

While African American representation in children’s books seemed to have plateaued at relatively low levels in the mid-1970s, the way that race is spoken about, known as racial framing, is an area where it seems like progress has moved backwards in the last 15 years. One important research study that showcases this was completed by Adia Harvey Wingfield and Joe Feagin and revolves around the Obama presidency.

In the research article, there are two forms of racial framing that are described: the first, called hard racial framing, typically uses harsh and explicit racist language, images, and denotes a strong disgust toward people of color. On the other hand, soft racial framing portrays the ideas of a post-racial world and rejects the notions of institutionalized racism. These frames are commonly used when discussing racial narratives and perceptions of reality and tend to justify racist concepts by either believing that they exist for a reason and should continue to exist (hard framing), or that they don’t exist at all (soft framing). To combat this, counterframing is often used to explain the structurally racist systems in society and how they serve to oppress.

By examining the rhetoric during Obama’s campaign for presidency followed by the duration of his first term as president, the research article observes the stark increase in hard racial framing as well as soft racial framing, with less conterframing in media. Although hard racial framing never ceased to be spoken of, the Obama presidency marked a shift in that this obscenely racist stereotyping and language moved from being present in small pockets of conversation to being cited in the conservative mainstream media. Comments describing African Americans as “subhuman and apelike” was spread through the public domain, along with drawing parallels between Obama and Hitler although there were no commonalities in platforms and ideas.

Similar to the representation in children’s books, this can be explained to some degree with the social context. During this period, for the very first time, an African American man served in the most powerful seat in the country. As a consequence, hard racial framing evolved via the idea that if Blacks acquire positions of high power, they will disseminate the inherent advantage that Whites have in the institutions and structures of the country and thus, they posed a threat. The derogatory context of hard racial framing reaffirms white superiority, and therefore was a tool to fall back on when racial hierarchies were perceived to be at stake.

In response to this hard racial framing, it is important to note that Obama tended to respond with soft racial framing rather than counterframing. He expressed the rhetoric that our society lives in a “colorblind” world and that skin color does not have an impact on all sorts of outcomes in life. The only instance when he implied the structural racism in our society was after the arrest of a Black Harvard professor on his own property. However, when Obama cited the impacts of skin tone in policing as a response to this unjust arrest, he was met with a strong backlash and ultimately apologized for his statement.

The one of the most important takeaways from this research is that the use of hard racial framing in the public mainstream media has increased drastically starting during the Obama presidency, and counterframing to combat this has not seen the same increase. Despite perceptions that electing Obama as presidency marked a milestone in racial equality, the rhetoric around the presidency and the consistent and explicit hard racial framing implies otherwise and may emphasize the undoing of progress on that front.

Race & Hollywood

Lastly, one other realm that shows a lack of progress in racial inclusivity is within the Hollywood sphere, and this extends beyond African Americans to all people of color. In her research study, Nancy Wang Yuen examined the experiences of people of color as they navigated through gatekeeping in Hollywood and noted common themes. Unsurprisingly, her findings indicate a lack of progress in racial equality and strong stereotyping that limits the opportunities available to people of color.

There are several common themes experienced between people all people of color, and one of the most powerful ones is the stereotyped casting requirements, especially early on in acting careers. When actors of color audition for roles, they are usually expected to perform in a culturally stereotyped fashion using accents and behaviors, many of which do not even reflect their cultural group. One commonly cited phenomenon that Yuen explains is the in-betweenness experienced by people of color that were raised in the United States, because they are not considered “American enough” to play the role of an American character, but are also not “ethnic enough” to play the role of a foreign character.

First and foremost, the expectation to complete stereotyped behaviors for the sake of humor reinforces existing stereotypes and limits progress on the front of moving past them to view people as unique and as their own individuals rather than based on pre-determined characteristics. By stating this requirement, gatekeepers reduce actors down to their accents instead of understanding the real cultural and unique background of each individual. Secondly, it creates an inequality in expectations for people of color versus non-people of color in that one of them must be able to complete an accent and play stereotyped roles while the other is never asked to do so.

Impact

Social media serves as one of the key socializers, and the presence of racial inequality is simply not spoken about enough to emphasize the degree of segregation that exists in our world. A few metrics that would typically mark progress on the racial integration front all show discouraging results: the representation of African Americans in children’s books has plateaued at relatively low levels, the use of hard racial framing has increased in recent years while counterframing has declined, and Hollywood continues to require stereotypical accents, behaviors, and unequally assessing the acting skills of people of color.

These patterns largely reflect a lack of understanding of ethnicities and rich cultural histories and reinforce a racial structure that prioritizes people of White descent. To combat this, there must be an increase in representation of people of colors in media sources such as literature, and an accurate portrayal of individuals as unique people with complex backgrounds.

**Audience Perception (Part III)**

As mentioned in the previous section, audiences may infer that we live in a post racial world or assume other conditions about the status of representation and racial inclusion based on their media consumption. In this way, it is clear that the way the audience perceives the world is influenced by the role that social media plays in it. However, the degree of media influence is far greater, and it has the potential to deeply inform personal choices, life philosophies, build human connections, and shape world views.

In this section, I will dig a little deeper into the role of media content on an international scale, how this shapes micro and macro level perceptions, and serves as a social connector. More specifically, I will be talking about media consumption in the form of movies as it is experienced in India, and then delve into the themes of authenticity and connection as experienced via US TV shows streamed in China and the K-Pop fandom in the US. Ultimately, the ways in which audiences are impacted by media are subjective and can have long lasting influences.

Media as Social Glue

As I recall through my movie theater experiences over the past several years in the United States, the process generally is initiated by a new, well sought out movie being released. When this happens, a group of my friends get together, go watch the movie, and perhaps get dinner before or after the experience. The movie time itself is solely for watching the movie, and therefore the social aspects of spending time with each other must happen before or after the movie.

However, when recalling my time going to the movies while I lived in India for nearly a decade, the movie theater experience is vastly different. One research article that reaffirms many of my personal experiences is written by Lakshmi Srinivasi (2002), titled *“The Active Audience: Spectatorship, Social Relations and the Experience of Cinema in India.”* In this article, Srinivasi investigates how film content is experienced by the audience in India and its impact.

First and foremost, it is important to note that the film content in India’s Bollywood movies is drastically different from what is typically produced in Hollywood. While Western firms are generally under 2 hours long and explore a certain genre or theme, Bollywood movies are generally three and a half hours long and all musicals, typically “melodramas with comedic elements and a strong romantic theme”. Movies therefore tend to become a one-size-fits-all product, where people that like comedy movies, romantic movies, musicals, and so on can all watch the same movie and have a good time, which renders the movie theater experience as something that has the potential to be social.

Since going to the movies is something that everyone in the friend circle or family can do together, regardless of the movie, the movie pick itself tends to fall low on the priority list when making a plan to go to the theater. Srinivasi talks in particular about how considerations regarding theater proximity and finding a screening time when the greatest number of people can make it are some of the most important considerations, since the experience is made deeply social.

Additionally, the movies themselves have embedded features that make them even more interactive and people oriented. For one, they have a 10-15 minute intermission in the middle for people to stretch their legs, get some food, and interact with one another. Due to their musical nature, some audience members also wait for a “song sequence to begin so they [can] all sing along, waiting for remembered lines of dialogue so that they could repeat them loudly”.

Audience members also tend to engage in conversations and discuss movie features while the movie is playing, making it less of an individual watching experience and more of an open, social discussion. Everything about the movie watching experience is social, from the planning all the way to watching the movie itself, so much so that going to the movies by oneself is essentially unheard of in India and is seen as “pointless”.

Due to the dynamics and structures of Bollywood movies in India, the movie theater experience is made engaging, interactive, and open for people to come together in a social capacity. The contrast between this and the individualistic western movie theater experience thus embodies how media experiences and perceptions are subjective and change between different cultures.

Themes of Authenticity and Connection

As seen with films and movie theater outings, the way that media is experienced can vary between different groups of people. Another way in which this rings true is in the form of US TV influences as seen in China, and one of the key research studies in the area was conducted by Yang Gao (2016) in the article titled “*Inventing the ‘Authentic’ Self: American Television and Chinese Audiences in Global Beijing.*” The method used in this study is 29 interviews conducted with university students that watch US television shows in Beijing, and the research observes that the perception of US shows is largely shaped by the contrasting eastern culture; the role of television extends far beyond presenting an outlet of relaxation and entertainment.

In contrast to the themes of family, community, and the divergence from western ideals of individualism present in the east, the US TV viewers in China particularly note the freedom that characters feel in staying true to who they are, regardless of judgement and whether it conforms to the societal norms. For example, one of the interviewees notes that in China, “you have to consider what other people would say; you have to consider your family’s opinions… Those forces are with you every step of the way throughout your life… In comparison, Americans are freer, more casual and autonomous.”

The individualistic emphasis in western cultures strikes a chord in youth that to some degree feels constrained by the bounds and obligations of the culture that they must abide by, and thus they look to this media form when reflecting upon what type of people they want to be in the future. For example, one of the respondents noted that watching the show *Boston Legal* and observing the philosophy of challenging authority and seeking the truth, no matter who you are, inspired her to go to law school. Another respondent, upon watching *Desperate Housewives*, reflected on the institution of marriage and noted her admiration for women that are authentic and have a “clear sense of self”, even if it is outside the career world.

Through this lens, we can see how television influence and perception is subjective and varies across different people and different subcultures. For some students in China that feel many external pressures due to the culture that they are embedded in, the process of viewing television is reflective and the characters on the shows can serve as role models for being headstrong and authentic. In some cases, the values and philosophies portrayed on these shows may influence career decisions and make students reflect upon their own goals and ambitions.

The search for authenticity and fascination with people that stay true to who they are extends past the study sample in Beijing and may be one of the reasons for the loyalty and dedication seen in the K-Pop fanbase. One of the studies that examines this was conducted by Rebecca Chiyoko King-O’Rian (2020) in her article titled “‘*They Were Having So Much Fun, So Genuinely…’: K-Pop Fan Online Affect and Corroborated Authenticity*.” The method used in this study was 30 interviews conducted with people from fan bases in the United States and Europe.

King-O’Rian defines K-Pop as a “a musical genre consisting of electronic, hip hop, pop, rock, and R&B music, which comes from South Korea sung primarily in Korean”, and it has a network of global fans that are incredibly loyal to their respective boy bands. Due to the language and cultural barriers, it is particularly interesting to examine the draws of this genre cross-nationally and how it is experienced by its audience. One of the major themes that comes across is an admiration for their authenticity and the connection formed due to perceived commonalities.

One important distinction to make here is that authenticity is defined differently than what is perceived to be authentic in US television characters. Due to the globally televised and professionally staged nature of all celebrity interactions on social media, authenticity is now defined as something that is corroborated and projected onto the camera. While elements of the band member’s personality likely are authentic to who they really are, it is unlikely that the social media presence accurately captures true emotions and responses.

King-O’Rian particularly notes that there are likely restrictions on levels of sharing allowed, certain topics that are off limits, and an encourage upbeat and optimistic tone. Additionally, even though the members may be wearing less make up and seen in more intimidate settings, such as a hotel room, and framed by close camera like one would see on FaceTime/Skype calls, there are likely production members that are setting up high quality cameras with high-speed internet.

Despite all of these factors that indicate that there may be a certain degree of separation between the audience and truly knowing the personality of a band member, the general belief is that the authentic self is portrayed on media due to the sheer nature of number of hours being recorded. Some respondents believe that it would be impossible for the member to “fake” a persona as a result of the everyday contact over several years, especially since there are consistencies in behaviors and tendencies throughout the period of time.

Regardless, since the fanbase has established that the members are being authentic on social media in their perception, they then emotionally invest in the content and many of them believe that they have a lot in common with their favorite members. One respondent mentioned that her favorite member, like her, “can be moody and doesn’t like to move”. This phenomenon of observing a celebrity’s life and finding relatability in their personalities creates a social connection that is further strengthened by increased with engagement on social media.

However, the social connection in this situation has the potential to be much more powerful – one respondent mentioned that she had a history of depression prior to her introduction to K-Pop. Upon emotionally investing in the subculture, she found that it motivated her to get out of bed every morning because she was eager to see the updates from the bands while she was sleeping. King-O’Rian infers that the “constant video streaming engagement is a way to fill what she described as an ‘emotional void’”.

In this way, we can see that the impact of social media is cross national and can have strong influences on its consumers. They can shape ideologies, personal motivations, and build powerful social connections.

**Conclusion**

The role of media is extremely expansive and a comprehensive study on all of its impacts and influences would take eons to write, at which point it would have evolved into a whole new beast. While this paper does not investigate every facet of its power, it is clear that its evolution and reach has shaped many aspects of modern life.

The historical structure of the industry has been redefined through time, and has now opened up new ways for creative producers to have agency and control over their futures and careers. While the different experiences of people of color in the industry have yet to see the improvements in representation that would ideally exist in our modern world, there is yet hope for the future as the industry continues to evolve. Ultimately, the experiences of media are largely subjective and different consumers are shaped differently by the content; for many, it is lifechanging.

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