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Question 1

1 INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION MEDIA AND MEDIA IMPERIALISM

1.1 Introduction

The lack of thrilling media products has made people in countries in the periphery (underdeveloped/developing) to consume media products that are imported from countries in the centre (developed), thanks to media imperialism. Media imperialism is said to be a subdivision of the cultural imperialism, where domination or control transpire through the media (Martin, Nakayama, van Oudtshoorn & Schutte 2013:132). This paper will explore media imperialism by giving comprehensive definition of media imperialism, provide thorough discussion about the positive and negative impacts of media imperialism relating to the film industry. This paper will further carefully discuss Marvel Universe movies as they relate to media imperialism by discussing *Iron man* and *Black Panther* movies. The paper will also argue if the ideas of media imperialism is still important in the current new media environment by referring to social media and video streaming services.

1.2 In-depth definition of media imperialism

Media imperialism includes a process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any country is subjected to external pressures through the media of any country without mutual exchange the influence of affected country (Sparks 2012:283). The process of media imperialism is deemed to be one-directional flow of media influence in which countries in periphery (underdeveloped/developing) are subjected to media influence from countries in the centre (developed) (Wigston& Lesame 2014:111). The countries of periphery may not be able to export media products such as movies as their counterpart in the centre (University of South Africa 2023:111). This means there is extraordinarily little exchange flow of media products from periphery (underdeveloped/developing) countries to centre (developed) countries (Sonderling 2008:130). The term 'cultural imperialism' is often used to refer consumption of global culture, where domination through the spread of cultural products such as films occurs (Wigston& Lesame 2014:116). Abdurrahman (2015) found that cultural imperialism emphasises that countries in centre (developed)

dominate the media around the world which that has a powerful effect on countries in periphery(underdeveloped/developing) by imposing Western cultures and value, therefore undermining the local cultures and values.

Media imperialism can also relate to the concept of dependency theory, underdeveloped countries may depend on the developed countries to import media products, for example, Hollywood movies (Sonderling 2008:130). This dependency of underdeveloped countries on developed countries often lead to what is deemed as inequalities between countries in the centre and countries in periphery regarded as structural theory of imperialism indicating economic divide (Wigston& Lesame 2014:108). Through the media imperialism and cultural imperialism world is now one global system, namely world system theory, world system theory emphasises that nations are now one part of global network called world system, this means local and international networks have merged, however the relationship between these nation remains divided (Mukhudwana 2014:52). Drysen (2016) argues that is it possible to affiliate cultural imperialism to world system theory where countries in the periphery and countries in the centre interconnected and transnational division of labour, where countries in the centre focus on high skill and capital-intensive production while those in periphery focus on low skill and labour-intensive production, thereby reinforces the dominance of countries in the centre.

1.3 Positive and negative impacts of media imperialism

The impacts of media imperialism vary, depending how one sees it. As mentioned earlier that media imperialism entails domination or control through the media by countries in the centre dominating countries in periphery. This domination lead to various negative impacts such as dependency theory, where periphery countries depend on importing expensive media products from countries in the centre, for example, Hollywood films (Sonderling 2008:130). While the world system is said to be interconnected nations, this global network does not much favour countries in the periphery because the flow of the media influence is one-way direction, which means countries at centre have more control of media imposed through media products such as films (Wigston& Lesame 2014:116). The unbalanced flow of media influence is a result of structural theory of

imperialism which promote inequality between countries in centre and countries in periphery (Sonderling 2008:130).

Abdurrahman (2015) argues that the issue of cultural imperialism also plays a role in promoting negative impacts of media imperialisms because Western products such as films promote Western cultures and values, thereby forcing locals to abandon their cultures and values and follow Western cultures and values. This means the global media flows promote the state of cultural homogenisation leading to a dominant form of culture or has homogenising effect of global culture (Crane 2014:365). Sonderling (2008:132) argues that the media products from the developed country may present ideologies to distort the images of the underdeveloped countries. An example, a film can show a countries as weak nations in terms of military or economy. However, impacts are not limited to only negative side of media imperialism, it can promote positive impacts.

Crane (2014:366), argues that producers of film in other countries are steadily increasing and are contributing to the diversifying of global culture. The American conglomerates companies provide financing and distribution of films made by small independent companies (Crane 2014:367). And this financing provides film makers with strong competitive advantages in the form of increasing returns of scale and scope and which function as seabed of creativity and innovation of the industry (Crane 2014:367). Cultural imperialism is helping other nations to realise the need of modernising and to realise the free and democratic market economy and consumer culture on global scale (Chen and Shen 2021:208). Drysen (2016) argues that cultural imperialism can promote positive effects like the issues of equal rights and the improvement of life.

1.4 Discussion of Marvel Universe as it relates to media imperialism

Marvel Universe is one the biggest superhero films franchise in the world. Marvel Universe is known for its run of superhero films such as *Iron Man* and *Black Panther*. These superhero films play a critical role in portraying culture and values of different nations around the world. Bryant (2011:9) discusses how a blockbuster film *Iron Man* features an American wealthy businessman

Tony Stark who is kidnapped by Afghanistan terrorists and develop a superweapon suit that he uses to bring justice to those terrorised by the 'evil' Afghans. The *Iron man* film described Tony Stark as wealthy and smart individual who created super powerful weapons which he uses to bring just those terrorised by 'terrorist', this shows the dominant of American as good and smart individual, and Afghans as extremists, thereby contributing the reinforcement of stereotypes that Arabs are extremists (Bryant 2011:9).

Bryant (2011:12) argues that the film also portrays Kumar province vastly separated in terms of being rich, overpopulated, and advanced infrastructure of America indicating structural theory of imperialism, an inequality between these two countries. One the character in film, Yinsen is portrayed as refined, educated, and dresses in a Western fashion and defy stereotypes about Afghans as only as uneducated, barbaric and ruthless terrorists (Bryant 2011:12). The film also portrayed Arab villains as being technological incompetent or far less competent with their tools of persuasion being machine guns and primitive torture (Bryant 2011:12). While Stark is portrayed as technological genius who invent weapons, depicting the inequality between these countries in terms weapons (Bryant 2011:12). In the end, this film represents the heroism, the American way which advocates justice to those terrorised by terrorists from Arab nations and the portrayal of superweapons in the film relate to cultural imperialism where America dominate the world system in terms of powerful weapons.

With over 31 Marvel Universe films earning more than US\$28 billion. Fu and Govindaraju (2010:217) credit culture as one of the reasons for audience around the world to consume foreign films such as those of Marvel Universe. Depicting specific value, beliefs, styles, attitudes, and customs depicted in the imported media products. Fu and Govindaraju (2010:217) state that systematic differences versus similarities in cultural dimensions precede how exchange or communication happens across culture. The American culture such as individualism is one of the culture that may influence global audience to consume more of Marvel Universe films, take for *Iron Man's* Tony Stark for example, He is a successful and smart individual who makes weapon, this gives a sense of important (Fu and Govindaraju 2010:218).

Fu and Govindaraju (2010:218) argue that power distance is one of the cross-cultural dimensions that influence the global consumption of foreign product, again the depiction of *Iron Man*'s Tony Stark as powerful United State of America business who create powerful weapons gives a sense of power. Economic scale is also one of the key factors for the influence of global consumption of Marvel Universe films. Fu and Govindaraju (2010:218) state that the economic scale of the cinema market can influence also influence the importation and global consumption of foreign films. For example, Hollywood cinema is larger cinema in terms of economic scale, so other cinemas can import film products from Hollywood as there are financial means by Hollywood cinema to export to larger audience (Fu and Govindaraju 2010:218).

The Marvel Universe's *Black Panther* is evident of that, *Black Panther*, a first mega-budget fictional superhero movie with predominantly black cast which portray African heroic cultures, grossed over US\$ 1.190 billion at the box office globally within a month of release (Aiyesimoju 2018:100). Clark, Delouya and Gendron (2023) state that 2018 *Black Panther* grossed over US\$1.3 billion in worldwide box office with a budget of US\$200 Million, on the domestic box office (USA), *Black Panther* grossed over US\$700 million, this means the film grossed over US\$600 million outside USA alone. Clark, Delouya and Gendron (2023) further states that the recent sequence of *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* grossed over US\$859.2 million in worldwide box office so far, with domestic box office of US\$453.8 million, this means the film grossed over US\$405.4 million outside USA alone. Lang (2022) states that the estimated budget of *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* is US\$250 million. The success of *Black Panther* sequel proved that the global consumption of Marvel Universe sequences has been successful in transferring cultures of different people around the world, either by defying or reinforcing stereotypes about other cultures around the world. Also, for the fact that this film earned a lot at domestic box office indicate the inequality between the nations in periphery and the countries in the centre.

1.5 Conclusion

Cultural imperialism is key driver for the relevance of media imperialism during this time of new media environment because people from periphery countries use products from rich countries, whether it is Dell laptop or social media Telegram.

With the advent of internet anyone with smartphone can use social media platforms where they can post media products from the countries in centre (Wigston& Lesame 2014:111). The use of social media platforms such *Telegram* to disseminate media products such as films from countries in the centre proved to keep media imperialism relevant during this new media environment, thereby promoting media products from countries in the centre and undermining their own cultures. The technology advancement has made the internet-distributed television commonly known as video streaming services to become more common place. Omar (2022) argues that companies like *Netflix* show imperialist tendencies in their attempt to monopolies on international regions and *Netflix* is engaging in what is known as media imperialism in which *Netflix* threatens local markets due to its economic monopolisation tactics. Omar (2022) further argues that streaming services strive to dominate position in the market by disseminating media products like films from countries in the centre while undermining local cultures. Omar (2022) argues that despite the availability of local relevant content, viewers are carrying on consuming imported media products from countries in the centre.

QUESTION 2

2 SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE NETWORK SOCIETY

2.1 Introduction

The advancement of technology has made it possible for people to communicate, especially in the digital era where anyone can communicate with friends and family wherever they are. One of the ways to stay connected in the internet is through social networking sites, with *Facebook* and *Twitter* amongst the popular ones. With these social networking sites people stay connected with friends and families and with some using these social networks for business purposes, however not all is admirable with these social networks, especially *Facebook*. People have been subjected to criminal activities such as being scammed and impersonated. This assignment will briefly discuss social networks and discuss how it facilitates communication. This assignment will further discuss *Facebook* as a social network and how people like Thabo Bester use

it to commit criminal activities. Furthermore, this assignment will discuss *Twitter* as social network and how the site can be used to prevent criminal activities.

2.2 Social networking site

Loizou (2012:4) argues that computer mediated communication has become popular over the last decade as method of communication, thanks to the rising of the accessibility of the internet and rapid ways of communication using various software programmes to exchange electronic and instant messages available on the internet. Loizou (2012:4) further argues that social network sites such *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Myspace* and *Google* have rapidly become integrated into the daily lives of millions of the internet users around the world. Loizou (2012:5), describes social networks as form of virtual communities with some based on common interest such as race, language, sexuality, religion whilst others include diversified people. Baruah (2012:4) argues that social networks give a platform that is based on the web for building social networks or social relations amongst people with a common interests or activities, and they provide means of communication over the internet. Loizou (2012:5) argues that social networks facilitate communication by allowing interested people to create a profile and identify other users whom they share offline connections with and navigate around their profiles. Baruah (2012:4) argues that the created profile is like a user's personalised webpage and contains profile information of the person like gender, religion, orientation, interests, place of birth, current location, marital status amongst others. Baruah (2012:5) further argues that these friends are actual friends, acquaintances, and even strangers.

2.3 Social networks bringing people together

It does not matter where one is, social networks make it convenience for people to communicate wherever they are. People can use social networks such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* to communicate with people who are far away by updating their status on their profile's timeline using text (Loizou 2012:4). When people update their status, that let their friends and family of their whereabouts, and that they are okay, and people have a chance of commenting on the updated status. Users can always post videos

on their profile's timelines, where their friends can also comment and like the videos while also can send them direct instant message (Loizou 2012:4). Some social networks will let their user to video call their friend in real time, wherever they are, giving them a change to stay in touch with friends, family, and possible business partners (Loizou 2012:4). When people update their status, this informs friends and public of their activities (Ekwok 2017:792). Users can send private messages to their friends that are connected to them (Ekwok 2017:792).

2.4 Facebook as social network

Launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his college mates from their Harvard University room to accommodate high schools and corporate networks (Loizou 2012:5). *Facebook* was initial made for college users but as time goes on, anyone allowed to join *Facebook* (Loizou 2012:5). As of February 2017, *Facebook* has over 1.86 billion monthly users (Ekwok 2017:788). *Facebook* as social network allows people to interact and communicate, these includes individual looking to make friends or business, business who want to stay in touch with their clients, corporate organisations and government and state agencies (Ekwok 2017:787). People will have to create a account before they could unlock *Facebook* features so that they are allowed to create and share user-generated content such as individual profiles, pages, texts, photo, audios, and videos (Ekwok 2017:788). *Facebook* has played as significant positive roles such as friends do businesses, sharing ideas, accessing information and others becoming influencers by sharing photos and videos (Ekwok 2017:788). However, some people have discovered opportunities to commit criminal activities. Several criminal acts have occurred on *Facebook*, these criminal activities include scam, fraud, impersonation, cyber bullying, robbery, identity theft, defamation, harassment and hacking of accounts (Ekwok 2017:791). Ekwok (2017:795) argues that fraudster will often open fake account to defraud unsuspecting members of the public.

Ekwok (2017:794) states that criminals will often impersonate well known personalities by opening fake accounts or hack their accounts with intentions of defrauding unsuspecting members of the public, one of those impersonated individual is Nigerian Pastor E.A Adeboye, he claims one could find more than 60 Facebook accounts on

his name. Some of these criminals will impersonate other people by opening these fake accounts or hack accounts with intentions of asking people to donate money, making some excuse such family member being sick or in urgent need of treatment (Ekwok 2017:796). Criminal will use these fake accounts to ask unsuspecting desperate job seekers to pay sums of money for prospective employment in some federal agencies (Ekwok 2017:797). Liozou (2012:18) argues that cyber bullying is another form of harassment that happens on *Facebook* where users are bullied, they may be bullied in form of insults or bleak comments directed to certain users about what happening in their life, for example, if users post about academic achievement, those who are jealous may become bullies. Liozou (2012:18) argues that people maybe attacked if they post something on *Facebook* by those who suppose to love them, for example a jealous boyfriend may attack his girlfriend if the girlfriend post a comment on another guy's post or status. Liozou (2012:18) states that sex offence has become a common phenomenon on *Facebook*.

Liozou (2012:19) argues that *Facebook* has become a place for sexual grooming, where suspected paedophile will use social networks to meet up with young people with the aim to sexually assault these young people. Liozou (2012:19) argues that these suspected paedophiles identify these young children and attempt to contact them and then establish an online relationship with the victim and when the victim trust the offender, the offender will asks the victim to meet face to face and suggest sexual intercourse. A lot of people have been scammed in *Facebook* by criminal posing as connected people who may help users get opportunities they often seek. One of the extreme cases in South Africa is that of Thabo Bester who has been duped '*Facebook* rapist'. Steyn and Damons (2023) states that Thabo Bester used social network platform to lure him victims by promising them opportunities. Steyn and Damons (2023) Thabo Bester lured scores of young women, raping them and robbing them and promising them lucrative modelling jobs. Thabo Bester would contact women on the social network platform by posing as representative of a modelling agency and then he would ask this want to be a model women and take them to one the hotels where he would instruct them to take their clothes, assault them then rape them and after that rob them of their valuables.

2.5 Twitter as a social network

Twitter is a social network that operates as micro-blogging service which allows users to post short messages entailing up to 140 characters as well as photos, links to other websites and videos and messages can be reposted in a form of 'retweeting' and receive replies by other users (Coomber 2015:4). Twitter also allows users to follow other users in order to see what they are posting and users can follow links posted on tweeter streams, and as of 2016, there are more than 500 million tweets daily (Coomber 2015:4). Twitter is one of the social media platforms that offers a platform for communication, where law enforcement agencies engage and interact with public (Ceccanto, Solymosi& Muller 2021:456). The platform offers individual police officers to interact with different audiences at an unprecedented scale and has become more than source of information for public (Ceccanto et al 2021:457).

Information is made visibly and accessible to people and this include sharing crime preventing and tips to reduce crime, informing public about police's work to increase security and reaching out that the police want tips and witness information to solve crimes (Ceccanto et al 2021:458). Police are using Twitter to warn citizens about threats, encourage them to report problems and engage citizens in investigations (Ceccanto et al 2021:458). Nikolovska, Johnson and Ekblom (2020:3) argue that Twitter has today become a primary platform for sharing information and news during crisis. Nikolovska et al (2020:3) argue that the use of Twitter by law enforcement agencies has been found to be transparency which tend to legitimise police. The Twitter may be used to share alerts, warnings, up-to-date and verified information and involving and educating citizens in and on governance of crime, risk and insecurity and for sharing successful enforcement stories (Nikolovska et al 2020:3).

Nikolovska et al (2020:3) argue that before the pandemic Covid-19, agencies frequency tweeted about fraud, domestic issues, cybercrime, child abuse and stalking. During Covid-19 police tweeted warnings about criminal exploiting of the pandemic and victimisation. In the United States of America social media platforms like twitter are used by more than 95% of US police agencies to help with investigations, improve their image and strengthen community policing (Coomber 2015:13). In South African, South African Police Service has over 150 000 followers on Twitter which allow SAPS

to have an interactive dialogue with users and to share crime prevention tips, identify problem and improve efficiency at station level (Police use Twitter...2015). *Twitter* gives SAPS the opportunity to share information with the public and offers the platform to make widely held misconceptions about criminal procedure and the mandate of the SAPS easier to understand (Police use Twitter...2015). Users can tweet a picture on *Twitter* about the recent attacks on foreign nationals and police can look at the picture and verify it to prove that the attacks date back or recently, thereby preventing more criminal activities against foreigners being attacked (Police use Twitter...2015).

Police department use *Twitter* as a tool for communicating to public by providing situation reports, general information and riot clean up event information (Coomber 2015:16). Police can use *Twitter* to ask public to attend events to have face-to-face interactions with the police during community events to discuss matters relating to criminal acts (Coomber 2015:16). In South Africa *Twitter* has been helpful in expose the 'fake death' of the Facebook rapist. Steyn and Damons (2023) *Groundup* received photos of a man resembling the 'dead' 'Thabo Bester shopping and a women thought to be his 'celebrity doctor' girlfriend Dr Nandipha Magudumana shopping in Sandton, *Groundup* published a story with a tittle 'Man resembling Thabo Bester spotted in Sandton, nearly two months after his supposed death in prison fire'. The story published by *Groundup*, with the article shared on Twitter gained a momentum which made the story trend on *Twitter* with other media houses publishing a story making it further to trend with *Twitter* users sharing the information about the possibility of Thabo Bester being alive, eventually leading to the investigation which led to Thabo Bester being re-arrested, so *Twitter* played crucial role in exposing the lies about Thabo Bester dying in prison fire.

2.6 Conclusion

Social media plays important role in lives of the people as they can communicate with their friends and family while others do businesses and get opportunities. This essay detailed more about social networks and how people use social networks to interact with others who are in various places. This essay explained how Facebook is used to commit criminal activities such as scams, fraud. This essay also described how Twitter is used to fight different types of criminal activities around a world.

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