

## **THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE MEDIA : DOES LOCAL VALUES AND CULTURES UNDERMINED?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The mixture of culture exists in this world as the effect of global media and the emergence of new technologies. Media plays an important role in displaying the good and the bad to the audience. The emergence of new technologies and the demand from audience has internationalized local media. In contrast, the internationalization of the media is said to undermine the local values and cultures. This paper focuses on the impact of the internationalization of the media and the role played by America as the world's market dominance. Then, the previous researches in the effects of media internationalization to local people in various countries will be studied. This paper is also emphasized on the portrayals of imported programs especially western to Malaysians audience. This paper provides some solutions to prevent our values and cultures from being undermined by foreign media programs.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The mixture of culture exists in this world as the effect of global media and the emergence of new technologies. Diverse and remote cultures are becoming accessible today via our television, radio, supermarkets and shopping centers. We may choose to eat 'Indian', dress 'Italian', watch 'American', listen 'African' and speak 'French' (Baker, 2000). Society may absorb other cultures and values, and use them in their own way. But discussion of this scenario normally emphasized on the negative effects rather than the good.

This paper will focus on the issue of internationalization of the media and the claim that it has affected and undermined local Malaysian values. It will also look at the dominant role played by America in media market, as well as the influence of the media on the national and international level in terms of values and cultures. There are various types of media but this paper will only focus on television programs and film productions, as the exposure is somewhat worldwide.

Chan (1994) defined internationalization of the media as "the process by which the ownership, structure, production, distribution, or content of a country's media is influenced by foreign media interests, culture and markets." The terms 'culture' refers to process, but it can also refer to some shared attribute of a human group such as physical environment, tools, religions, customs and practices, or their whole way of life (McQuail, 1994).

In the context of national culture and values, Zetterholm (1994) defined 'culture' as a "distinct 'way of life' that constitutes one fundamental base for a people's way of defining their own collective identity,

their national identity, distinguishing their own national 'we-group' from other people with their culturally based perceptions of contrasting 'collective personalities' and 'ways of doing things.'

Negrine and Papathanassopoulos (1991) stated that the process of media internationalization especially television and films is based on these four indicators :

- i) Technological development that ease the broadcasters to reach large audience across frontiers simultaneously;
- ii) The internationalization of the media is part of much wider process whereby capital and investment funds flow easily across frontiers, into both program making infrastructure development;
- iii) The increased frequency of international meetings between media producers, executives and regulator. There have also been internationalization negotiations over the creation of common technical standards to facilitate the trade in hardware and software;
- iv) The most obvious feature is the increased trade in media programs especially television.

There are some discrepancies in previous studies and these may reflect the fact that different dependent variables are employed; some studies on media effect examined the influence of American media on images of the U.S. itself, some looked at the image of the native value, while others deal with 'traditional' values and beliefs. The effect of western media programs may vary for different types of viewers in different countries due to the factors relating to the choice of programs to view. Factors such as age, gender, educational background, language, patterns of work, leisure and programming schedules influence viewer's diet of programs when they are offered a mixed menu of foreign and local content. Internationalization of the media will give some, if not many, effects to the national values and cultures, whether directly or indirectly, but the influence seems imbalance from one culture to another.

Huang (1999) stated that western media broadcasting gives impact to both individuals and society in Asia. For individuals, the impact is reflected in their attitudes and values, behavior, children and women's role. While in society, western media play an important role in changing the culture, style, taste and other long-term social changes.

## **AMERICA AS THE WORLD'S MARKET DOMINANCE**

Historically, starting in the early 1960s, American media products such as films, sitcoms, action-adventures and cartoons began to flood into many countries (Straubhaar, 1996). Other countries were limited in the production of their own television programs especially because of the high cost. Furthermore, not many countries owned the equipment, people, technology and money to produce enough programming to meet their audience needs. A few countries limited broadcast hours to what they could fill themselves, but most of them responded by importing television programs from other countries, especially from the United States.

A 1973 study by Nordenstreng and Varis, found that over half of the countries examined imported more than half of their television content (primarily entertainment), mostly from the United States. Another study in Latin America showed that despite the proliferation of media, television programming had become more North American, that 99% of the films shown on Brazilian television were American and the cheap packages of old movies and TV shows were 'dumped' and thus flooded the Latin American media scene (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1997). A follow-up study ten years later also showed a similar pattern, but some countries had reduced imported programming while some imported from countries in their region. The development of technology and industries supported by the growth of national and regional television program genres and audiences cause the decreased amount of imported programming.

The serial in Latin America, known as 'telenovela', for instance, has become a genre attractive enough to pull general audiences away from U.S. programs.

Despite the decline in importing U.S. programs, it is true that U.S. media have a big influence on the values and cultures of other countries. International growth in new technologies such as cable and satellite has created significant increase in the demand for American products and sales are thriving (Kang and Morgan, 1988). The concept of *Americanization* can obviously be seen in consumer products all around the world, for instance, *Coca-Cola*, *McDonald's*, *Levi's*, and also the world-wide known film *Jurassic Park*, plus the sitcom, *Friends*, which is so popular among youth in many countries. These products have a big influence in other countries and some of them have changed the way of people's living.

The co-production among international companies also does not threaten the content of U.S. media. A Japanese company for instance, has purchased Columbia Pictures and an Australian-turned-U.S.-citizen, Rupert Murdoch owns Fox (Ogan, 1990). These ownership changes have not changed the focus in content. These companies were purchased with the purpose of continuing the production of the successful Hollywood product, not to introducing Japanese or Australian media to the U.S. market.

According to Huang (1999), the percentage of Western programming that is incorporated in a 12-hour programming broadcast in Asia is approximately 30%, including repackaging, inserts, segments, series, movies and infotainment programs. This indicates that the influence of the westerners' is diverse throughout different ways.

## **THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA INTERNATIONALIZATION TO THE LOCAL VALUES**

The media content is responsible for developing an audience's values and norms. The influence of the media is shown in the way local people behave, such as eat and drink, speak, dressing style and attitude. A higher media penetration in Malaysia means that people are spending more time with the medium and subsequently more exposure to its content. A study by Samsudin (2000) showed that among the longest duration of media usage by Malaysians aged 13 and above are terrestrial TV and radio. Other media being used are satellite TV and computer software. Most of the international news in Malaysia mainstream dailies was from international news agencies like Reuters, Australian Press and Associated France Press. This has led Malaysian public experience the media effects that triggered moderate emotional imbalance (Siti Yasmin Mohd Zain et al., 2003).

Many studies tend to criticize the media for the negative influences on audience's attitude and morality. The media is also said to be the cause of violence among teenagers and children. Moreover, cartoons such as Popeye, Superman, Scooby and Scrappy Doo are said to have many violent scenes and proved to influence children in their lives, like the way they play and the clothes they wear (CAP, 1983). Thus, as a result of internationalization of the media, there is likelihood that the foreign media would affect some local values and cultures. But some people in other countries have claimed that the outside media is not undermining their cultures and values. What about in Malaysia? Is foreign media, especially those from the west, affecting our values and norms or is it a normal process in which a developing country like Malaysia have to face in order to cope with globalization?

A study in South Korea identified the influence of American programs to Korean students attending an English-language institute. It compared heavy and light viewers of the U.S. military's American Forces Korean Network (AFKN) to explore whether such programming was eroding Korean values. They found evidence suggesting Koreans both embraced and rejected Western cultural values. The study also noted some impact in peripheral values such as wearing jeans, particularly among women and having a

preference for rock-and-roll music, but this did not encroach upon deeply held values, such as on their views of the Korean family system (Kang and Morgan, 1988).

Another study by Payne and Peake (1977) compared children in three communities in Iceland in 1968. One of the communities had no television, the other was exposed to U.S. programs alone and the final community had both U.S. and Icelandic television programming. They found evidence of association between exposure to U.S. programming and U.S. values. Their data led them to suggest that research model had underestimated the tenacity within which people hold on to their own cultures, thereby limiting foreign influence.

In recent years, local TV stations tend to develop their programs by adopting the formats from other country such as game shows, chat shows, quiz contests and leisure programming. This is to reduce the amount of imported programs from foreign media. These global TV products actually bring both positive and negative impacts to the audience. We can see a new trend in local television stations where reality-TV is one of the famous programs among local audience. Among the top rank programs are *Akademi Fantasia*, *Malaysian Idols* and *Audition*. All these reality-TV programs have been imported and adapted from western countries.

*Akademi Fantasia (AF)*, for instance, is the first reality-TV program in Malaysia which was adapted from a Mexican television program. The response by Malaysian audience, especially teenagers is really impressive based on the poll received via SMS. This response has motivated ASTRO (the TV station which is responsible for adapting this program) to launch its second series of *Akademi Fantasia 2 (AF2)*. What is more interesting is that, few giant companies in Malaysia, such as Maxis and Coca-cola (Malaysia) are willing to be co-sponsors for the *AF2*. This is due to the fact that *AF1* was able to prove itself as an attractive program. ASTRO also uses other media to promote this program. The impact of television advertisement brought forth by ASTRO for this program is obvious in that people can feel the 'fever' of *AF2*. Moreover, ASTRO provides a chat room via *Short Messaging Service (SMS)* for the audience to give feedback and share their opinion about the *AF2* participants. Apparently, most of the chatters in that '@15' channel on ASTRO are teenagers and they demonstrate high interest in *AF2*'s participants.

What is more concern here is that, despite the difference in content compared to similar local programs, *AF* actually portrays some negative values and these are reflected in the participants' attitude and dressing style, which portray western rather than eastern values. In addition, there is no regulation set by the organizer to limit the male and female participants' socialization. These can lead to the change in perceptions of values and norms among teenagers who adore the *AF* participants. ASTRO should adapt *AF* to our eastern culture as has been done to the programs like '*Roda Impian*' (adapted from '*Wheel of Fortune*') and '*Who Wants to be A Millionaire*' (Mohd Yusman Awang, 2003).

'*Bruce Almighty*', another Hollywood film may also have a negative values influence on local culture. This is another westerner's agenda to indoctrinate eastern people with their values and beliefs. *Bruce Almighty* portrays the story about God (acted by Morgan Freeman) who gives His power to a man (acted by Jim Carrey) who has criticized Him before. Fortunately, the Malaysian government took a positive action to ban the film from being shown in local cinemas. Otherwise, it would give some impact to the people's belief in God and religions. Audience should be trained to choose the best programs to view so as to prevent our local values and beliefs from being destroyed by foreign values. It is not only Malaysian government who is responsible for the prevention action, but also non-government organization and local communities.

## **PROPOSED SOLUTIONS**

Some suggestions can be made to overcome the influence of western media through the internationalization of the media. First, we can stress on the preservation of traditions and values. Malaysian government and NGOs can play an important role to ensure that the traditions and values are maintained with the emergence of new technology. Second, we should set and implement a law and regulation to protect our media industry. This has been done by the government via TV programs filtering. The government has determined that 80% of TV programs must be local (Samsudin, 2003). But the implementation needs to be strengthened to ensure its effectiveness. Another solution is that the Malaysian government should set aside funds for R&D activities in developing local contents and programs, so that local media can reduce the import of programs. Furthermore, the media industry itself has to play a role in ensuring that national values and cultures are protected by offering local programs. And last but not least, parents also have to take part in controlling their children's viewing. This is important so that the children are only allowed to view suitable programs for their age. Ideally, parents should be present when the children watch television so that they can monitor the selection of programs and also to educate them on what they view. It is not a one-person job to overcome the threat of foreign media's influence to our values and cultures. It requires everybody in the society to take part and help each other to preserve our traditions and values.

## **CONCLUSION**

The internationalization of the media is part and parcel of a developing process in many developing countries like Malaysia. But the process of internationalization owes a great deal to the advent of local values and cultures. When Malaysians are exposed to a variety of imported programs, we can see the change in the pattern of our values and cultures. But this is not to say that our society has been totally influenced by the westerners. Malaysians still remain their eastern culture and at the same time adopt other cultures.

Previous studies show that there is no consensus on the impact of the internationalization of the media to undermine the local values and cultures. In reality, the internationalization of the media does affect our values and norms and the influence of foreign media is obviously seen among the way local community behaves. In fact, it is deeper and diverse than we have so far acknowledged. Conflicts and dilemma may arise between people who wish to accept foreign cultures and those who wish to maintain their 'traditional' cultures and reject the external values and beliefs. Nevertheless, to protect our local values and cultures, greater control and monitoring the content of the programs in local media is desirable.

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