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The Impact of Mickey Mouse

Today, the circulation of goods, ideas, and people around the world connects people’s lives in often surprising ways. A can of Coca-Cola, the t-shirts bearing my college logo, or my cellphone’s components as well as functions connect me with the everyday lives of people in many places. One such item that connects people’s lives around the world is not quite an item, but a character-Mickey Mouse. The impact of that connection can be felt in different aspects of their lives, and mine. In this paper, I explore different sites and ways that the impact of Mickey Mouse is experienced.

Since the first day Mickey Mouse was sketched on a sketch pad on a train to Hollywood, millions of lives have been forever changed. Walt Disney, the creator of Mickey Mouse, had gone through some very difficult career challenges when his previous cartoon ideas were stolen. Those challenges did not stop him from chugging along. The first two cartoons he created were unsuccessful, but then came *Steamboat Willie*. Walt Disney Studios, entertainment, and people’s lives were forever changed. This show was the first to use synchronized sound. Because of Walt Disney many technological advances were made. Those including sound, color, and storytelling. One of his own inventions was the multiplane camera which allowed depth perception in animated movies. This was just the very beginning of how Mickey Mouse affected the lives of many from the United States to Hong Kong and everywhere in between (Gluck 2012).

Today, there are six Walt Disney parks across the world. Those located in California, Florida, Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. Not only are there all of those parks, there are also Disney Cruise lines and a resort in Hawaii. Just to show how big of a cooperation Disney has become, they “attracted 132.5 million guests” in 2013 (Sylt 2014). That is a huge number, however those 132.5 million individuals only see one side of the business. All of the mickey mouse ears being worn, the fancy light toys being sold at the night parades, and the thousands of souvenirs being bought all come from the side of Disney that the public does not see. This other side can be described as flexible accumulation which is “the increasing flexibility strategies that corporations use to accumulate profits in an era of globalization, enabled by innovative communication and transportation technologies,” (Guest 2018: 20). Souvenirs mentioned before as well as other toys and other fun Disney things are all being made in China where they are produced as cheap labor. The workers of Zhen Yang Toy Factory spend twelve hours daily nonstop making toys for Disney. Specifically *Frozen* toys. The hourly wage of these workers is $1.32. If that does not seem bad enough, sixteen workers have to share a sixteen square meter dorm room and three hundred and twenty workers have to share twenty-four bathrooms (Qiang 2016). The crazy thing is that this is a common thing in China. In fact, there is this thing across the country called the “996: working from nine in the morning to nine in the evening, six days a week,” (Hruby, 2018). So, Disney is not the only company that is allowing workplace bullying, it is a way of life there. Focusing on Disney, they use their workers as a way to get more for their money and they are able to do this by the advancements made in transportation throughout the years, otherwise known as time-space compression. This will be further elaborated on in the following paragraph.

When David Harvey came up with the term time-space compression, he was focusing on how things are accessible and available from one country on one side of the planet to another on the other side of the planet. In a more precise sense, he defined this as the “rapid innovation of communication and transportation technologies associated with globalization that transports the way people think about space (distances) and time,” (Guest 2018: 20). With that being said, the toys being produced in the Zhen Yang Toy Factory are able to be shipped all the way to the United States in a matter of days via plane. If it were not for the plane, it would take several months to get the toys to the United States where they are being sold. The United States is not the only country these toys are being shipped to. Others include, France, Shanghai, Japan, excreta. Essentially, any place that is selling Disney merchandise. Not only are Disney toys being shared across the globe, so are pictures and videos. It is through social media, text messaging, video chatting, and more, that pictures and videos are able to be sent from one place to another near and far. For example, in the article talking about the Zhen Yang Toy Factory pictures were present showing the condition in which the workers have to live and work thus emphasizing how flexible accumulation is used within the Disney business. Besides the negative aspects of Disney, often times a picture of Cinderella’s castle pops up on an Instagram or Facebook feed when a mural friend is at Walt Disney World. This is thanks to the time-space compression that is being talked about here. Things are able to be shared much more quickly.

One other aspect to point out in regards to Disney is the entertainment such as the television shows and movies. Specifically in France, “six million French children watch Disney cartoons on TF1 every Sunday morning and ten million buy *Le journal de* Mickey…Disney movies usually succeed in France,” (Zuber 1992: 77). Those who cannot afford to visit a park because let’s face it, it is expensive can turn on a television and be directly influenced by Disney. Not only a mean of entertainment, Sylt, a writer for Forbes states “DVDs and merchandise sold in the gift shops promote Disney’s TV shows just as the rides themselves act like teasers for the big screen movies they are based on,” (Sylt 2014). This then circles us right back into flexible accumulation and time-space compression due to the merchandise and the shipping. Nonetheless, there are some people who cannot afford or do not have access to television which can be described as uneven development. This is when there is an “unequal distribution of the benefits of globalization” (Guest 2018:21). Third world countries such as Haiti or Mali may not even know what Disney or who Mickey Mouse is. They spend most of their days focusing on surviving rather than entertainment.

Overall, Mickey Mouse has created so many means of opportunity for so many people across the globe whether that be a job in a factory to earn a wage or simply an experience by visiting a park. Yet, there is a concern some have regarding the continuing spread of Disney throughout the globe. A specific example would be in Euro Disney which is the Disney that is located in Paris, France. Some are questioning whether or not Disney is homogenizing culture and taking away from the rich culture already present in cities such as France. This thought was brought up in the *French Politics and Society* journal article when Euro Disney was just a thought. France is known for their museums, their food, the Eiffel Tower, Tour de France, and more. Individuals were worried that tourists coming to France would no longer visit the culturally rich museums because Disney would take over. An individual named Fitzpatrick was particularly concerned that the Louvre would not get the attention it typically gets because, again, people would go to Disney instead. In terms of further homogenizing, the food was a big aspect. One questioned, “did the promoters feel they had a mission to show off American cuisine…many serve what Disney calls ‘a taste of America’ such as Oysters Rockefeller or barbecued spareribs,” (Zuber 1992: 74). Instead of having baguettes, macarons, choucrouts, croque-monsieur, and other popular French foods that the French normally eat, it is Americanized. On the contrary, despite the lack of spreading French culture in France, Disney has a culture of their own that they are spreading. In fact, Zuber said the Disney Imagineers were debating whether or not to replicate the American parks or put a European twist to them. They went with replicating the American parks, thus diminishing the European culture further homogenizing the world around (Zuber 1992). In the end, Euro Disney was thought to be successful because roughly half of the visitors in the American Parks were French or Europeans themselves (Zuber 1992).

Despite all the talk about Disney homogenizing culture around the world, they also work to spread culture. Walt Disney World’s EPCOT park is known for their World Showcase. According to the *Journal of Anthropological Research,*

“you won’t find the real Germany here, rather the country’s essence…the food approximates native cuisine, and the entertainment is as authentic as the Disney casting directors can make it, with native performers consistently featured…nearly all the World Showcase staff members in restaurants, shops, and attractions were born in the countries the pavilions represent, and that contributes still more atmosphere,” (Weigle 1989:134).

With all of that being said, despite Disney’s culture of their own, they are also promoting other cultures. The World Showcase was actually an idea taken from New York World’s Fair in 1939. Not only does Disney promote different cultures, they also promote different times in history though some of their attractions. In Walt Disney’s Magic Kingdom in Orlando, Florida, there is a ride called Big Thunder Mountain Railroad which depicts the Santa Fe Railway. Overall, Disney does not work to condemn different cultures, they embrace them (Weigle 1989).

From an idea on a small sketchpad to a life must do. “Mickey is now an icon of American culture, and the statue points to the fullness of what he has come to represent, beyond items featuring Mickey Mouse to a wide array of other cartoons, movies, theme parks, merchandise and an entire global communications corporation,” (Forbes 2003: 242). The statue this quote refers to sits inside of Magic Kingdom, a theme Park within Walt Disney World. As you walk in, this is one of the first things you will see. It is a statue of Walt Disney himself, and Mickey Mouse- the two that started it all. Through globalization, Mickey Mouse has impacted the culture of many. Moreover, Mickey Mouse has also increased globalization by their entertainment though films, television shows, amusement parks, and iconic figures. From China to France Disney has affected the way these individuals live. It is one of the largest productions that anybody is able to recognize just by the sight of a mouse wearing red pants, gloves, and a yellow bow tie.

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