MTV Asia: Localizing the global media

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MTV Asia, broadcast from Singapore to homes in Southeast Asia, has become increasingly popular in the last few years, especially among middle- and upper-class youth. Initially founded in 1991, MTV Asia broadcast for three years, before ceasing programs in 1994 because of disputes with Murdoch's Star TV (Shuker, 1994). In April of 1995, MTV Asia was launched again, reaching over 40 million viewers, more than the 28 million MTV viewers in the United States (Thussu, 2000). One of the unique aspects of MTV Asia is that it has made substantial efforts to modify programming to reflect and attract Southeast Asian youth culture (Einhorn, 1997). For example, the programming includes VJs (video jockeys) of Southeast Asian descent, Asia's Top 20 Hitlist, request and interactive shows, and the promotion of Asian bands both in commercials and in airplay. These examples ostensibly indicate that American programming marketed to Asia has become less culturally imperialistic in nature in comparison to past marketing efforts and exports (Colista and Leshner, 1998; Goodwin, 1992; Goodwin & Gore, 1990; Jakubowicz, 1995; Mohammadi, 1995; Stevenson, 1994).

In the past, the American media industries have been successful in Asian markets, which in turn have increased appetites for American popular culture. MTV seeks to satiate that demand in popular music. The effects of popular music on a particular audience can be wide ranging, especially in conjunction with television broadcasting (Frith, 1996; Jhally, 1987). In this essay, I argue that MTV Asia is essentially a cleverly repackaged and disguised form of Western narratives of class, culture, values, and consumerism that shapes and influences Southeast Asians across class and culture in a potentially culturally disruptive manner. MTV Asia effectively demonstrates how middle-class and elite Southeast Asians accept and participate in media hegemony of Western popular music and ideologies.

Identity Construction and Popular Music

Several authors contend that narratives are the basis for how individuals make sense of their surrounding environment (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994; Frith,
Novitz (1989) contends that narratives are based on past experience and are capable of changing human thought patterns. Narrativity can also legitimize normativity. Narratives are, according to Novitz, a critical element in the formation of group and individual identities. Bhuvnani and Phoenix (1994) argue that the discourses of narratives are the product of human interaction in which individuals construct materialized plots to which others can relate. Stuart Hall (1996) argues that because human identity derives from historical experience, identity is in constant flux in response to new conditions. Hall explains that identity is conceived from the human interiority that is constructed on the basis of historical experience. Furthermore, identity is constantly changing, because it is a temporary attachment.

Frith (1996) and Vila (1996) maintain that music, especially popular music, provides narratives that have a powerful effect on audiences. In fact, Vila (1996) writes that the narrative is the bridge between music and the formation of identity. Frith (1996), instead of viewing the composition of music as something created by the individual, examines the role that music, as a performance, story, or narrative, plays in both self and group identity. Music, according to Vila (1996), is a cultural artifact that, in part, constructs these identities. Music brings satisfaction to the listener and self-definition to the individual, but also creates group identity. Frith writes that:

"Social groups [do not] agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities (the assumption of homology models) but that they only get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgment. (1996, p. 111, emphasis in original text)"

Vila also suggests that music is a means for group identity by claiming that music facilitates the forging of relationships with others and can furthermore affect the listeners' emotional state, by creating feelings of happiness, friendship, and solidarity. Thus, music is capable of articulating an understanding of both self and group solidarity by creating an emotional alliance with an individual's interiority and with others.

Popular Music and MTV

Several authors have argued that MTV and music video have fundamentally changed not only the music industry, but also the way in which audiences relate and construct meanings from popular music (Jhally, 1987; Pettegrew, 1995; Shuker, 1994). Additionally, MTV has had substantial influence on the 18-34 age group; before MTV, advertisers had difficulty in targeting this particular age group (Jhally, 1987).

There are several implications of such a large viewership for popular music and its audience. First, MTV has created a music industry that makes it nearly impossible to achieve success without a music video and extensive airplay on MTV to increase exposure. In fact, Jones (1992) and Shuker (1994) contend that MTV airplay is the most effective way to break a new artist. MTV Asia has reserved a 20% quota for Asian videos, but as Banks observes (1997), 90% of the videos broadcast on MTV Asia are non-Asian videos. This potentially means that Southeast Asian artists are crowded out of the popular music markets or undesirable in comparison to the choices available from Europe, Australia, or North America.

Jhally (1987) and Nash (1999) also argue that MTV plays videos that are targeted for white suburban youth. While MTV in the United States currently airs African-American or Latina/o artists, the primary audience remains white, middle-class viewers. Additionally, Banks (1997) has observed that MTV Latin America has refused to play salsa or cumbia videos even though such styles of music are high in viewer demand. Unfortunately for musicians without videos or that fail to target white, middle-class youth culture, widespread success in the United States is difficult to obtain without MTV airplay. Furthermore, the American MTV program "Total Request Global," which features the top 10 countdowns from around the world, demonstrates that most songs requested in each region are American or European. While this program attempts to diversify its programming through more global music exposure for American audiences, these global trends are in fact very much American (Banks, 1997; 1996).

A primary purveyor of popular culture, MTV is above all a commercial enterprise that bases decisions on its advertising projections—which music will attract the largest audience that can in turn be sold to the most advertisers. In essence, MTV is one large, continuous advertising scheme (Grossberg, 1993; Pettegrew, 1995; Shuker, 1994). Not only does MTV fund its endeavors through advertising of commercial products, but each music video functions as an advertisement for the band or musician in the video. Additionally, musicians also advertise products within videos, by wearing advertisers' clothing or using other products, such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and clothing (such as Nike, Phat Farm, or famous designers). Musicians or their songs often are used in commercial advertising. Rather than serving as an arena for musical talent, MTV has "fetishized" popular music by conferring cultural significance to videos that they do not possess (Jhally, 1987). Thus, music videos provide a marketing tool, not just for the music, but also for other commercial products, including the rhetorical power of celebrity conferred.

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on chosen musicians. Pettegrew emphasizes that this fetishization has caused MTV, which claims to be a text of subversion or rebellion, to perpetuate corporate hegemony, where viewers believe they are buying into underground culture of subversion, but in reality, legitimizing the ideologies of white, middle-class cultures and consumerism.

Finally, audio texts and simultaneous visual texts often change the viewers' or listeners' interpretation of songs. Frith (1996) and Vila (1996) both contend that popular music acts as part of the identity formulation process. Interpretation of music allows individuals to construct multiple meanings and contribute to their own identity, as well as allows them to formulate ties with others through the social construction of meaning. However, the nature of MTV and music videos change this process because the visual text more clearly embeds the meaning of the music in a visual framework in which viewers are less likely to develop alternate interpretations of the audio text. Gehr argues that "MTV is a context that seems to abolish context, removing the freedom of the record listener to edit his or her experience, or the radio listener to imagine the music as playing some indirect part of his [or her] life" (1983, as quoted in Jhally, 1987, p. 99). The presence of the visual text cements a visual image and prevents listeners from developing their own interpretations. In essence, the video fixes the narrative for the viewer by superimposing a story that accompanies the music.

MTV represents an important amalgamation of popular culture for youth. It functions as an acculturation of popular music, fashion, and an ideology of consumerism (Pettegrew, 1995). MTV is a central component of American popular culture, affecting how audience members construe meanings of music, how music becomes commercialized, and musicians achieve success in the industry. Banks (1997, 1996) argues that these effects change across cultures. MTV Asia in particular, seeks to develop an international youth culture, based on a shared affinity for consumerism. Banks concludes that this international identity becomes one of consumption.

**Popular Music and Hegemony**

Because popular music has the potential to play a large role in the social construction of identity for its audiences, the effect of MTV and popular culture across cultures has important implications for viewers, listeners, and identity (Hamelink, 1994; Jones, 1993; Mohammadi, 1995; O'Connor & Downing, 1995; Wasko, 1994). Culture industries often reflect economic exploitation and an ideology of consumerism rather than social culture or identity (Ang, 1995; DeFleur & Dennis, 1994; Negus, 1995; O'Connor & Downing, 1995). This is especially true of popular music genres (Goodwin & Gore, 1990; Malm & Wallis, 1992; Straubhaar, 1991). According to Petras, cultural imperialism is "the systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the popular classes by the ruling class of the West in order to reorder the values, behavior, institutions and identity of the oppressed peoples to conform with the interests of the imperial classes" (1993, p. 140). Colista and Leschner (1998) argue that discussions of imperialism are too simplistic because audiences are active rather than passive; the entirety of the system should be examined. Media do not dominate or influence people because of blind or passive acceptance; in fact, audiences have the capacity to accept, censor, or reject Western popular culture. As argued elsewhere in this book, hegemony is a process in which a dominant group acquires the consent of other social groups by including (in political, social, economic, and cultural ideologies) some minimal interest of other social groups (Crabtree & Malhotra, this volume; see also Artz & Murphy, 2000).

Pettegrew (1995) argues that MTV specifically represents interests of big business and capitalism far more than its cutting edge, adventurous image leads viewers to believe. He also contends that the viewers buy into the hegemony of the MTV culture, because MTV promotes consumerist and capitalist ideologies, under the guise of something that viewers find more appealing. The effects cross-culturally are much more influential when considering one-way exportation of media. Individuals in other parts of the world may consume Western popular culture specifically because it is Western and the way in which all Western media have advertised their programming, illustrating the hegemonic effects of popular culture. Additionally, producers rarely make accommodations to the local cultures of the region where these shows are viewed, and the shows may not even be translated into other languages. MTV's regional adaptation efforts seem substantial in comparison to the nature of other Western programming exports that have little, if any, modification for their international audiences.

**MTV Asia: Cultural Hegemony and Music Videos**

*Singapore Investment News* (1996) reports that MTV Asia's efforts to broadcast with local interests in mind follow the "think globally, act locally" MTV philosophy. However, this study of MTV Asia's programs reveals that there is very little inclusion of Southeast Asian "local action" or music. Based on several hundred hours of MTV Asia's programming from 1997 to 2000, five main categories for cultural identity were distinguished for further analysis: (1) the language (English, Thai, Indonesian, etc.) of the programming; (2) the number of songs from East Asian or Southeast Asian singers or bands (some
in English and some in other languages); (3) the number of songs from Europeans or American singers or bands (all in English); (4) nationality/ethnicity of VJs; and (5) the origin and content of the programs (Southeast Asia, Europe, or the United States). MTV Asia adds new programs and removes old programs regularly. While some shows have aired since the inception of MTV Asia, other programs are constantly revised, and the schedule changes frequently. For this ongoing study, I have reported scheduling hours that range from April 1999 to April 2001. Total viewing hours and percentages are based on April 1999 schedules as reported on the MTV Asia Web page.

Although many of MTV Asia's shows are produced in Singapore rather than exported from the United States or Europe, there are few that play only Southeast Asian music. For example, Thai music is aired on two shows, "Bangkok Jam" (aired for one hour late Sunday night, Saturday morning) and "MTV Wow" (aired late Tuesday through Friday nights and 3 a.m./4 a.m. on Wednesday and Friday). However, "MTV Wow" is a mix of Thai and international music, meaning that the four hours of music videos are only part Thai. Another show filmed in Thailand, "Life's a Beach," is a guest talk show that takes place on a Thai beach (aired in the late evening on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday). "Para Bos," a show filmed in Manila, is aired three times a week, in the late evening, Sunday through Tuesday. A VJ travels around Manila to find the most popular clubs and hangouts for Filipinos, sometimes discussing music. Neither "Life's a Beach" nor "Para Bos" are music video programs, although seemingly more reflective of Thai and Filipino popular culture than imported programs without modification.

Indonesian music programs include "MTV Ampuh" (aired late Monday night, Saturday afternoon) and "Seratus Persen, 100% Indonesian" (aired late Saturday afternoon for one hour). Both of these programs play entirely Indonesian artists. "Getar Cinta" (Love Vibrations) is also an Indonesian program, but is a talk show on relationships aired late Sunday night and Friday afternoon. A new program that features Dangdut music (a style heavily influenced by Indian popular music that is favored by Indonesian working classes) is aired on Thursday at 3 a.m., but in Indonesia airs on a public channel (ANTV) on Friday afternoons. Another program that focuses on Southeast Asian artists is "Live and Loud," which each week features a different band or musician from Southeast Asia performing live and is aired late Thursday afternoon, Friday evening, and late Sunday night. Finally, "MTV Syok" is a Malaysian music video program aired late Sunday night.

These localized and adapted programs air for a total of 14.5 hours a week, representing 9.2% of all MTV Asia programming hours. However, if only the programs that play Southeast Asian music videos are counted, the total number of hours is reduced to 8.5, or 5.4%. Additionally, most of these programs are aired after midnight. Although MTV's primetime hours are usually different from other networks, programs aired after midnight more than likely occur during low viewing hours.

In other MTV Asia programs, music videos are predominantly European or American. The most frequently aired programs are: "Non-stop Hits" (56 hours/week), "MTV Hanging Out" (9 hours/week), "MTV Most Wanted" (6 hours/week), "MTV Asia Hitlist" (6 hours/week), "MTV Land" (5 hours/week), and "Classic MTV" (3 hours/week). Together, these programs represent almost 60% of MTV Asia's weekly programming and are aired during prime viewing hours, except for "Non-stop Hits," which is aired during both on and off hours. Furthermore, all of MTV Asia's shows are in English with the exception of a few programs. Thus, 91.5% of the week's programs are broadcast in English, although only 5 hours (3.2%) of programming has been imported directly from MTV in the United States or Europe. These findings also confirm Banks's (1996) contention that 90% of the programming features non-Asian music or television shows. He also reports that an MTV Asia representative claimed that as much as half of some programs throughout various times during the day are devoted to Asian artists. This study demonstrates that this claim is somewhat spurious and misleading. Clearly, the number of programs that dedicate at least half of the show to Southeast Asian artists is very minimal.

Commercial slots are one area in which Southeast Asian musicians have received exposure on MTV Asia. In translated interviews during commercials and programs, musicians report their musical influences and favorite bands. The bands almost always report that they are influenced mostly by Western musicians, usually American bands. These include bands such as Pantera, Public Enemy, Rage Against the Machine, Metallica, and others, usually various forms of American rap, grunge, heavy metal, and pop music. Furthermore, the Southeast Asian musicians that do receive airplay almost always play Western style music (pop, alternative, rap). Generally, Southeast Asian artists featured on MTV Asia follow North American or European trends in popular music. In essence, MTV seeks regional bands that demonstrate Western musical tendencies for air time. Often, local bands popularize Western musical genre and values. This practice demonstrates how MTV Asia is able to attract subordinate participation and consent to this globalized, hegemonic relationship.

In a representative sample of MTV Asia's most popular programming, including one "Live and Loud" episode in which all the videos were Indonesian, 22 of 181 videos analyzed were from Southeast Asian musicians, representing 12.2% of the total number of videos. Of both the 9.2% of programs and 12.2% of videos that are distinctly Southeast Asian, neither percentage is close to the 20% quota MTV Asia claims (Shuker, 1994). Many of the most popular programs are request shows or videos that are selected based on record
sales, demonstrating that Southeast Asians participate in selecting the music aired. For example, “MTV Asia Hitlist” is a top 20 countdown program that selects videos based on record sales, radio airplay, viewer requests, and video airplay in Southeast Asia. Almost every single week, all 20 videos on the hit list are or have been European or American. Similarly, on the Filipino countdown program “Dyes 10,” the top 10 videos for the week are nearly always Western videos, even though the MTV Asia Web page claims that the show heavily features local acts. The selection process of videos through its viewers signifies that viewers prefer North American or European music to their own local music. Another possible explanation is that many Southeast Asian musicians do not have videos for airplay, which can lead to failure in a saturated market of videos (Jones, 1993; Shuker, 1994). However, this explanation does not explain why those Southeast Asian artists with videos are not as requested as are their North American or European counterparts.

Video request shows such as “MTV Most Wanted,” “MTV Select,” and “Lili and Bebe” allow viewers to request videos via letter, e-mail, fax, telephone, or hand phone. Viewers can send letters, faxes, or e-mail at any time before the program airs, and during some programs, such as “MTV Interactive,” viewers can make live requests. On “MTV Most Wanted,” there is a daily contest for the best request that a viewer has sent via regular mail. These requests are often elaborately and artistically constructed cardboard cutouts in some form of the letters MTV. The VJ then selects from these requests the “Request of the Day.” VJs invite viewers to participate via these sorts of requests as part of MTV Asia’s attempt to incorporate local music preferences. Viewers often call in or send a request because they would like to see a particular video, but also as part of a social network. Often, viewers who request videos ask the VJ to say hello to numerous friends and family. For the viewer, having a request played on MTV is sort of like winning a contest.

However, almost all of the music requested on “MTV Most Wanted” is North American or European, and almost all of the requests in general are for non-Asian music. “MTV Select” only allows viewers to choose from a short list of 35 songs, almost all of which are North American or European. These programs, reliant on communication technology for sending requests, demonstrate how MTV Asia perpetuates consumer ideologies by requiring requests from hand phones, faxes, or e-mail. Other programs, such as “Non-stop Hits,” “MTV Hanging Out,” and “MTV Land” also primarily broadcast Western music. “Classic MTV” airs virtually no Southeast Asian videos, since the focus of the program is on videos from the 1980s and the early 1990s, before Southeast Asian musicians had access to music television. These programs that air few Southeast Asian videos, comprise 60% of MTV Asia’s total programming. They are also all broadcast in English, a language mostly accessible to the middle class and elite. These programs that require requests or participation through purchases illustrate how viewers consent and participate in this cultural and globalized hegemony. Viewers desire and even prefer Western artists over Southeast Asian artists, perhaps because such a preference, and access to the English language and communication technologies distance them from traditional cultures, lower classes, and the “uneducated.”

“MTV Interactive” also demonstrates how Southeast Asian viewers participate in media hegemony. The hosts of the program play videos and discuss comments from the MTV chat line, which is broadcast simultaneously at the bottom of the television screen. This program represents Southeast Asian viewers’ opinions on chosen subjects of the day, such as the dangers of the Internet, which bands should be reunited, and what one would do if she or he were president. The entire show is broadcast in English, including the interactive chat. Additionally, because it is a chat line, to participate in the program, participants must have access both to a computer and the Internet. Southeast Asians (with the exception of Singaporeans) rarely own their own computers, and the Internet is generally accessible and affordable only to the middle and upper classes. Poster (1995) indicates that the effects of the Internet and English as the predominant language illustrate the “extension of American power” in other nations, noting that the Internet and new communication technologies undermine other nation-states, as the predominant users of the Internet are still wealthy, white, and male.

MTV Asia’s VJs are mostly Southeast Asian, Australian, or North American. However, the shows are always in English, meaning they all speak in English, rather than in Indonesian, Tagalog, Thai, or Tamil. Some Western VJs have seemed generally culturally ignorant of Singaporean and Southeast Asian cultures. For example, when reading requests, they may mispronounce words in non-English languages, even simple words, such as terima kasih (the Indonesian words for thank you). On one show, for example, the VJ demonstrated his lack of knowledge about Southeast Asian fruits and his disdain for the durian, a particularly pungent, but very popular, fruit in Southeast Asia. All current VJs are Southeast Asians, but in the past they have not always been. However, all the VJs (Western or Southeast Asian) represent Western values and ideals through their dress, speech, and musical preferences, demonstrating their own consent and participation in this media hegemony. The program seems largely focused on Western popular culture, both through the VJs’ interactions, and music requested and broadcast.

Finally, the show “It’s My Life” (fashioned after U.S. MTV’s “Road Rules” and “Real World”) features the lives of seven so-called typical Southeast Asians, generally ranging from 18 to 24 years of age. While this show is not a music focused show, the popularity of its American counterparts illustrates its potential in Southeast Asia. Although the participants for the show are Asian (coming from countries such as India, China, the Philippines, Singapore,
Diani observes that these participants are often professional models, actors, or singers, or else hold jobs that require high educational backgrounds, such as journal editors or magazine reporters. These so-called representatives are typically middle or upper class. Diani writes,

judging from their outfits, houses, and cars, it is clear that the monetary crisis which battered the region in recent years had nothing to do with their privileged lives... [one character] sure has a fun life as a reporter, and she really filled her spare time with exciting activities like diving, bungee jumping, traveling abroad and stuff. Then again, how many young people can afford such activities? (Diani, 2000, p. 12)

Diani’s observation demonstrates MTV Asia’s attempts to target middle- and upper-class Southeast Asian youth and values to create the consumerist culture that Jhally (1987) and Pettegrew (1995) describe.

MTV Asia’s advertising especially illustrates an ideology of consumerism. Almost all of the advertisements are for hand phones, CD players, Western movies, or an MTV Asia promotion. The request show “Lili and Bebe” is “powered by Ericsson,” a Swedish hand phone company, and commercials for Nokia hand phones are also frequent. One 2001 contest commercial only allows entry by hand phone; in order to enter, viewers must go to the MTV Asia Web page to get detailed instructions for entering by hand phone. Such contests are clearly targeted to the middle class and elite in Southeast Asia. Most Indonesians, Thai, and Filipinas/os are entirely too poor to even own a telephone or send an MTV Asia request by regular mail, let alone via a hand phone, fax, or e-mail.

**Cultural Implications of MTV Asia’s Hegemony**

The nature of MTV Asia’s programming and selection of music videos fails to include indigenous music, culture, and representation. This cultural exclusion and resulting media hegemony have several implications. First, MTV Asia’s programming perpetuates Western narratives in music in Southeast Asia. As Frith (1996) and Vila (1996) have argued, narratives in music play an important role in both group and self-identity. MTV Asia’s videos fix the meaning for songs and Western cultural narratives for Southeast Asians. Southeast Asians develop new group and self-identities based on the extensive influence of Western music. They are attracted to MTV Asia because it represents success, cosmopolitan and Western lifestyles, wealth and consumerism, the pinnacle of fashion, and the cutting edge in technology, while presenting highly stylized and technical products and music. Because Southeast Asian musicians and VJs are recognized as spokespeople for Southeast Asian youth, MTV Asia appears and develops as a unique and trendy Southeast Asian cultural experience. Unlike MTV India, or MTV Mandarin, where many videos and programs are based on local music and culture, MTV Asia has a much more pervasive cultural hegemonic relationship with its viewers. Diani argues that MTV is “hip among young people and sets trends for them” (2000, p. 12).

MTV Asia also popularizes globalization and Western lifestyles and cultures. As one of the “It’s My Life” participants says “I want to [live] in the United States for the rest of my life” (Diani, 2000, p. 12). Clearly, MTV Asia is influential with Southeast Asian middle-class youth, and they consent to what they see on MTV Asia. MTV Asia plays a significant role in the development of a globalized, music culture through a process, as Frith argues, of getting to know themselves as a group with similar interests. MTV Asia functions as a key component of global youth culture because it differentiates the middle class and elite from their poorer counterparts through an ideology of consumerism, a global language of English, education, fashion, and music.

For poorer or lower-class communities, globalization has a somewhat different effect. For Southeast Asian middle-class and elite youth, MTV Asia reinforces globalization and abandonment of traditional or local values, culture, and language. However, because the middle and upper classes have more mobility and access to globalization through satellite television, education, movies, the Internet, and consumerism, globalization has the ability to create a widening chasm between classes. MTV Asia reinforces the manifestations of this developing globalized youth culture. In Indonesia for example, MTV Asia is widely watched by Jakarta youth of all classes. In more rural and other urban communities, MTV Asia is seen only by those who have access to satellite or cable television. MTV Asia audiences participate in a global, popular culture in part through music television, whereas members of lower classes do not or cannot afford to participate in such a culture. Furthermore, younger members of lower classes may develop a sense of consumerism that they cannot afford. Certainly among the middle class in Southeast Asia, credit card debts related to consumerism are increasing problems. Not only does MTV Asia function as an advertising scheme for Western music, but it also relies on advertisements for movies, cellular phones, CD players, and other technology often unavailable and unaffordable for the poorer classes. This ideology of consumerism leads to the potential development of societies filled with unsatiated desires and dreams.

In addition, MTV Asia reinforces globalization through its predominant use of English both in music and with its VJs. Because those who have...
access to English education in Southeast Asia tend to be middle or upper class, MTV Asia perpetuates the divide between the rich and the poor by creating a youth culture in music that is accessible only to those who speak English. English as a global language may connect cultures, but it also disenfranchises those who do not have access to English education (Asuncion Lande, 1999; Crane, 1991). MTV Asia, even though members of poorer classes can watch it, functions as a global culture that unites the middle and upper classes across Southeast Asia, but widens the cultural gap between the elite, the middle class, and the poor.

Finally, the MTV Asia phenomenon globalizes and sanitizes Southeast Asian music. Southeast Asian musicians often emulate Western styles of music, particularly those who receive airtime on MTV Asia. Furthermore, MTV Asia only plays Southeast Asian music that is Westernized to some extent. Southeast Asian musicians adopt a Westernized or globalized style either because they are attracted to Western music in the first place, perhaps because of influence of MTV Asia or radio air play of Western music or because they know it is the best way to become well known. Musicians that receive airtime on MTV Asia or other music channels are more likely to gain a wider audience than those who do not receive similar exposure.

In effect, MTV Asia facilitates the construction of a globalized, consumerist culture for middle-class Southeast Asians based on their consent and participation of MTV's cultural hegemony. MTV Asia demonstrates that many Southeast Asians embrace Western music and its effects of globalization, particularly in the middle and upper classes. Southeast Asians surely can choose to reject Western music and its influence, but many do not. For viewers, there is an attraction in music globalization. It represents class status and education because it can create a music culture that is based on identification with Western music, consumerism, and the ability to speak English. The fact that 40 million Southeast Asians watch MTV Asia illustrates the very nature of cultural hegemony. The effects of media hegemony result in consequences in Southeast Asia that may include loss of culture, usurpation of local music groups and concerts, elitism among those who speak English and have regular access to the Internet, and the promotion of consumerist ideologies. It may also further widen the gap of cultural understanding as the middle class and the wealthy become part of a globalized culture, and the poor remain isolated within traditional communities. Although MTV Asia purports to think globally and act locally, they really reinforce a globalized, consumerist culture enjoyed by the middle class and elites in Southeast Asia that functions to exclude or transform local music and cultures. The effects of such cultural hegemony are complicated to be sure, but MTV Asia is a culturally powerful phenomenon with far-reaching influence on youth cultures in Southeast Asia.

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References


