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The impact of social networks on entertainment industry

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracoval/a samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

V Plzni dne 30. června 2023   ……………………………….
                                                              Jméno Příjmení

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ABSTRACT

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This bachelor's thesis is focused on researching the impact of social media on the entertainment industry. The thesis examines various online controversies that have influenced the entertainment industry in some way. It begins by exploring the history of controversial films and then transitions to the history of social media. It further examines historically popular films that would not withstand scrutiny on social media today, such as "Green Mile" (1999). In this part of the thesis, it analyses the plot of the film and, through the lens of current social norms and reviews from the time of its release, which are compared to more recent reviews, highlights racial stereotypes. The thesis then moves on to describe various online movements that have emerged on social media and had an impact on the entertainment industry. These movements arose both due to injustices towards people who were different from others and due to the eagerness of passionate fans to obtain something that had been denied to them, such as the online movement #ReleaseTheSnyderCut. In this case, fans of a film discovered that the released version was significantly different from the original vision, so they decided to organize a movement on social media to try to persuade Warner Bros. to release the film's initial version.

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I.   Introduction

The entertainment industry has undergone significant changes in recent years, and social networks have played an important role in making the industry to what it is now. We have seen that there is no longer content that is being produced at the expense of marginalised groups such are Afro-Americans or the LGBTQ+ community. In the forefront of these changes was so called political correctness.

The term political correctness has been around for quite a while. It's precise origin is the Russian Revolution of 1917, where at that time, it was used to describe "Adherence to the policies and principles of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union" (Roper, 2022, *Encyclopedia Britannica*) and later during 1950s in United States it retained most of its meaning, as it was used to describe an absolute loyalty to the communist party, regardless of any political or moral issues. The first recorded modern use of "politically correct" comes from an African-American author, documentary film-maker and university professor Toni Cade Bambara in an essay named *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), where Bambara said that "a man cannot be politically correct and a chauvinist, too" (Chauvinism is a belief in the superiority of one's own group over the other groups), however it would still take some time for this meaning to be the main definition.

Political correctness as we know it today, that is the push to eliminate the separation of various social groups based on language usage and portrayal in media, has taken roots during the year 1990. As it is usually the case, this socio-political movement began primarily on university campuses, but over the next year, it has spread like a wildfire and made its way to mainstream media and its audience (Kohl, 1992). But with the rise of social networks, primarily Twitter, the push for political correctness is much stronger than ever before, as nowadays anyone with an internet access, personal computer or phone can be heard on the internet by millions of other people. Social media has given a voice to previously marginalized groups and has allowed them to express their opinions and concerns more openly. This has led to a more conscious and sensitive approach to the representation of different communities in the entertainment industry.

This is where the mainstream media and the focus of this thesis, the entertainment industry and social networks, come in. The entertainment industry has been greatly affected

by the push for political correctness and the use of social networks. This is because the industry is highly reliant on public opinion and the reception of its content. If a certain piece of content is deemed politically incorrect, it can result in widespread criticism and backlash on social media, leading to negative impact on the image of the entertainer or entertainment company and its profits. As a result, the entertainment industry has had to adapt to these changes by being more mindful of the representation of different communities in their content. They have made a conscious effort to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes and to instead promote diversity and inclusiveness. This has led to a greater representation of different races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations in films, television shows, and other forms of entertainment. Additionally, social networks have helped smaller content creators to be brought into the spotlight. The entertainment industry can no longer rely on just a small handful of people to decide who gets to appear on our television screens, as everyone can decide to consume content from many different websites, or internet personalities.

While the push for political correctness has led to more conscious and inclusive representation of different groups in the entertainment industry, many believe that the line between political correctness and censorship has been getting smaller and smaller. There are those that fear that the artistic freedom is being taken away, and argue, they should be able to express themselves without fear of being criticized and bashed on social media.

However, despite the progress that has already been made, there is still a long way to go. There are still many different marginalized groups who are either underrepresented, or represented, but in a stereotypical fashion.

Unfortunately, criticism is not the only thing that can happen, as we have seen with for example Mark Meechan. Meechan posted a video on social media, where he taught his pug dog Buddha a nazi salute as a joke to anger his girlfriend. He was immediately criticised on social media and there were even those that took it a step further and contacted the local authorities. Meechan was later arrested and found guilty in court for a "grossly offensive joke". However this was not the end of his troubles, as after this incident, users of social media kept track of him and started impacting his real life by calling his place of employment and essentially forcing his employer to let him go due to many calls and emails per day. This has lead to him not being able to find any long term place of employment.

In this thesis, we shall attempt to explore how has the entertainment industry changed over the years with the advent of social networks and political correctness with the help of intercultural toolbox and cultural intelligence. The focus of this thesis is not only on the entertainment industry as a whole, but also on its parts such as movies, television shows, comedy and stand-up and many more. Additionally, we will examine the impact of political correctness on the creativity of artists and writers in the entertainment industry. The constant pressure to avoid offending any particular group can sometimes result in the suppression of creative expression, leading to a homogenization of content and a loss of diversity. On the other hand, political correctness can also lead to the creation of more inclusive and diverse content that accurately represents different communities.

II.   Entertainment Industry and its history

Entertainment is almost as old as humanity itself. Ever since humans started living in groups and tribes, they began to find ways to entertain themselves during the long days and nights. But today, we will not be looking this far into its history, as that is not that much relevant. Instead we will fast forward to the beginning of 20th century, where the first electronic devices were being made. The history of marginalised groups in entertainment, at the beginning it was mainly in cinema, begins in 1910s with the advent of cinematography itself. At that time, racism was rampant and racial segregation was part of everyday life, so it is no surprise that cinematography was no exception. Before we delve into this topic, we should understand that there were different kinds of cinema based on race. If the selected film was made by, for or about Afro-Americans, we can speak about African American cinema.

In 1909, Sigmund Lubin has produced a series of comedies featuring an all-black cast of actors and actresses called Sambo, which is also a derogatory term for a person of African descent derived from Spanish term for person of African or Native American origin. This series of films was being inspired by in that time successful British author named Helen Bannerman and her book *The Story of Little Black Sambo* written in 1899 which follows adventures of Sambo, an South Indian boy and his mother and father named Black Mumbo and Black Jumbo. The film series also follows Sambo, but it deviates from the book, supposedly being about comedic black man who "knows his place" who gets beaten and abused by white people. (Yuill 1976) As of today, there are no known appearances of this series, making it part of the lost media.

In 1914 we have seen first film where an actual African American was the lead role. Uncle Tom's Cabin was a silent historical drama film directed by William Robert Daly starring Sam Lucas, who was born to free black parents and was an American actor, comedian, singer and songwriter. Uncle Tom's Cabin was an adaptation of a novel made by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852 of the same name. It was an incredibly popular anti-slavery novel, being the second bestselling book of 19th century only being outsold by the bible and many historians agree that it had a profound effect on how United States citizens were viewing slavery, as well as being a first step towards American Civil War. (Kaufman 2006), (DeLombard 2012)

Since the later 1910s we can see a rise in films and theatrical performances created specifically for African Americans, sometimes also called race films. These films, and film studios, were created to help independent black movie creators. One of the first known popular films is The Homesteader, directed, written and produced by African American author Oscar Devereaux Micheaux. The story follows six main characters, Jean Baptiste, an African American homesteader in Dakota, Scotsman Jack Stewart and his biracial daughter Agnes, African American Preacher McCarthy and his daughters Orlean and Ethel. In the story, Jean Baptiste gets enamoured by Agnes, but because she looks predominantly white, their love is prohibited by law. As this is another part of the lost media, we have questionable sources only to go about learning about the story of the movie.

Another Film made by Oscar Devereaux Micheaux in 1920 is Within Our Gates. It was, as all Racial Films, a direct critique and response to racism of a film named The Birth of a Nation, which was originally supposed to be named The Clansman, directed by David Wark Griffith, sometimes called "The most racist movie ever made" (Rampell, E. 2015), as it portrays African Americans as unintelligent and barbaric, while the Ku Klux Klan is portrayed as a group necessary to protect the white heritage and maintain the white supremacy.

Within Our Gates has been produced five years after The Birth of a Nation and it was initially blocked for two months due to a debate with Chicago's film censor board. (Simmon 2016) After the film was let trough, a major black-owned newspaper, The Chicago Defender reported:

> "Those who reasoned with the spectacle of last July in Chicago ever before them, declared the showing pre-eminently dangerous; while those who reasoned with the knowledge of existing conditions, the injustices of the times, the lynchings and handicaps of ignorance, determined that the time is ripe to bring the lesson to the front." (The Chicago Defender, 1920 January)

IV. Social media sites

Early sites that we can consider as a part of the social media sites were typically simple messaging sites, first notable being AOL Instant Messenger, released in 1997. AOL was a simple application, where a user could add friends to chat with them and send them images, all in real time. It could be used to send messages to an user who is not online at the time of receiving the message, as it was similar in function to todays Facebook Messenger. Over the next few years, there were competitors who tried to overtake AOL Instant Messenger, competitors such Yahoo messenger, or MSN Messenger, later known as Windows Live Messenger, made by Microsoft. All of them shared similarities, each with their own little quirks and changes, trying to entice users to use their platform.

The first true Social media site came with the launch of MySpace, released on August 1ˢᵗ 2003. It was not just a messaging service, but the first site where users could create, customize, and share their own profiles with millions of other users. They could share their own interests, what they done during the day, or what were their plans for the weekend. Not only was it the first modern social media site, but it has also been the first site that has managed to spread outside of United States and reach a global audience. With such a monolithic rise of MySpace we were, for the first time, able to observe the true impact social networks have on pop-culture and entertainment. Up until now, social media sites were either used as messaging applications, or were not big enough to leave any noticeable change on the outside world. With over 300 million users in early 2008, MySpace gave rise of other platforms like FlickR, an early image and video hosting and sharing site, or YouTube, the biggest video sharing site today. But not everything was looking up, as there were other competitors trying to do the same thing. (Molloy 2008)

Social media giant Facebook, founded in 2004, was originally meant to be used just by students attending the Harvard University and would function as a rating site, where users would rate the attractiveness of students. This idea was ultimately shutdown by Harvard University, but a similar idea, which would grow into what Facebook is today, would be given an approval. Initially access to the website was limited only to members of Harvard University, but in less than a month more than half of the university students have registered. Later that year, Facebook steadily grew bigger, letting in students from

all Ivy League schools, universities and high schools and then finally in late 2006, Facebook opened its doors to everyone who were at least 13 years old. (Phillips 2007)

V.   Change of status of older films

In this part, we will take a look at how older films, that were very well liked at the time of their release hold up today. First movie that was researched was The Green Mile (1999), a movie that I saw as a child without an understanding of racial stereotypes or the African-American culture. I remember siting down with my parents as the movie started playing on the television, thinking I would try to see what it was about and ending up finishing it, absolutely loving it. It is a movie that has 8.6/10 rating on IMDb and 79% critic review on Rotten Tomatoes. In the reviews, we can see that at the time of the release, it was critically well liked, apart from its long runtime with a reviews like "So well-crafted that it seems like a feast, even when your brain is telling you that this story could not possibly be stretched any thinner." (Bob Strauss, Los Angeles Daily News, January 1. 2000) , but as we move further from its release date, we can see that people start to be more mindful about racial stereotypes, as one critic points out "Unfortunately the movie can never shake the uncomfortable and trope-filled premise." (Rachel Wagner, February 28, 2019), or "Erm, this didn't age very well. I kept thinking if they kill the black man, this movie is terrible, and sure enough they did. The whole point of the movie seems to be the black man has to sacrifice himself so the white people can live?" (Kensi B. July 7, 2022)

Even though it was a movie I generally enjoyed, after rewatching it I found out that it is full of harmful stereotypes and racial insensitivities. The main stars of the movie are John Coffey, played by Michael Clarke Duncan and Paul Edgecomb, played by Tom Hanks.

The movie begins with an older Edgecomb, living in an assisted living home in 1999, looking back at the time when he was in charge of a death row prison block called Green Mile. Although the movie is about Coffey, the opening is entirely focused on Edgecomb. At the fourteen minute mark, we see Coffey for the first time, being portrayed as a stereotypical "Black Buck", a stereotype of a tall and muscular black man of low intelligence. The first words that we hear from him are yet another stereotype. When

Edgecomb asks Coffey if there are going to be any problems with him, Coffey stands silent. Edgecomb then asks him if he can speak, to which Coffey responds with "yes, sir, boss. I can talk". This type of speech originated during slavery, when slaves wanted to please their owner as much as they could. During this scene, it is revealed that Coffeys "Black Buck" stereotype encompasses not only the tall and muscular part, but also the low intelligence one, as he cannot spell anything else apart from his surname.

The next scene is a flashback to what happened. Two white girls disappear from their home, when the parents notice it, they find blood on the front of their porch. Mother then calls the police, while father loads a shotgun and runs out to find them. More people join him, each carrying some kind of weapon, be it a pitchfork or a shotgun, forming something resembling lynch mob. When they find Coffey, we see him lying on the ground, holding two dead girls, crying that he tried to take it back, but it was too late. This scene can be considered racially insensitive, as portraying black man with white girl is usually used to show some that the individual is a criminal.

We don't see much of Coffey for the next quarter of an hour, all the while almost every other white people get their time in front of the camera so that we can see their motivation and character. The next time we see Coffey, he appears with yet another racial stereotype to his name, this time it is a stereotype called "Magical Negro" where a black person in a story has some kind of magical power that helps the white protagonist, sometimes at the cost of his or her life. This can be seen in a scene where Coffey magically heals a bladder infection that Edgecomb has been battling with since the beginning of the story.

Another scene that I would like to highlight is a scene where Edgecomb breaks Coffey out of prison in order for him to help prison wardens deathly sick wife. Unfortunately for Coffey, this doesn't mean that he is free to go, even though the Warden saw what he can do. This scene, together with the one I was talking about previously, is sadly another example of racial tropes in moviemaking, that is that the black man only exist to help the white man.

During the last scene, that takes place right after Coffeys execution, we are thrown back into 1999, where now 104 year old Edgecomb talks about how his long life is a "punishment for killing a miracle of God". It could be said, that this is racially insensitive,

as the film tries to make us sympathise with a white man, right after he executes a black man.

While researching trough the social media, primarily Twitter, where issues like racism and stereotypes are being openly discussed, I found many posts discussing the problematic use of stereotypes in The Green Mile. As this is an older film, long after its prime, there is a little social media can do against it. However, what it can do, is spread awareness of such issues. Many of the posts I found were made by people of colour, such as this one made by user named Treventour "What's the worst "acclaimed" movie you've seen? Just one? I have a list lol. But if it's just one, I would go with Green Mile. It's such a racist film ... as in written racistly. It was racist on release and it's racist now", or one made by KaineticEric saying "But Hollywood needs to stop with the "The Magical Negro Trope!" It's damn racist and annoying..."

VI.   How Twitter changed the Oscars

On January 15 2015 a Twitter user, activist and a person of colour named April Reign tweeted "#OscarsSoWhite they asked to touch my hair" in response to the announcement of all twenty acting nominations being given to only white actors, along with no nominations for female directors, screenwriters or cinematographers. While the original post did not receive much attention, earning 185 retweets and 360 likes, the hashtag quickly rose in popularity and began trending on Twitter within a day. Many twitter users used the hashtag to ridicule Oscars in a humorous way, some of them being people of colour that were the part of the film industry.

Following year, when the Academy announced its line up of actors and actresses nominated for Oscars, it was same case as year prior, completely dominated by white people. In total, 94% of all nominations were white people. This reignited the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite, this time criticizing not only the nominations, but the board of voters that consisted overwhelmingly of white men. The problem with having such a board is that people tend to like and vote for things they find familiar and that represent their feelings and experiences, this in turn leads to films that have different cast or setting being largely neglected. This prompted the Academy to respond with a statement that they created new set goals to allow wider range of diverse actors and filmmakers to join the voting board by the year 2020. Following this promise was a jump of people of colour being nominated from three in 2015 and 2016, to fourteen in 2017. (Crystal, 2017) (King, 2016)

In 2020, the Academy has put out two new announcements. First one being about managing to surpass their goals set in 2016, which released along the list of nominees for that year, essentially doubling the nominations of people of colour, while setting new goals for 2025. These goals included shortening the amount of time one person can serve on the voting board, setting a static limit of 10 nominees for the Best Picture category, and creating a mandatory Unconscious bias training for all Academy personel. The second announcement released later talks about changes to the Best Picture category. Four new standards were created and in order for a film to win Best Picture award, it must meet two of them. These standards were "On-screen representation, themes and narratives" which aims to have more on-screen representation, be it of racial or ethnic groups, women, LGBTQ+ or people with cognitive or physical disabilities, "Creative

leadership and project team" which aims for the same thing, this time for the creative leadership, department heads and other key roles, "Industry access and opportunities" which aims to create new opportunities for paid apprenticeship and internship for people of colour, women, LGBTQ+ and people with cognitive or physical disabilities, and last one being "Audience development" which aims to have the studio or film company have multiple senior executives positions filled with women, racial or ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ or people with cognitive or physical disabilities

VII. Whitewashing of the Ghost in the Shell

Ghost in the Shell is a Japanese animated movie from 1995 that was directed by Mamoru Oshii and animated by Production I.G. It's a movie with a cyberpunk themes, such as high level of technology, mechanical augmentation on human bodies and an unsettling atmosphere. The film explores complex themes of identity, consciousness, and humanity in a world where technology has blurred the lines between man and machine. The main character, a heavily augmented cyborg Motoko Kusanagi, struggles with her life as a cyborg, wondering if she is still a human, or has her soul been replaced by a computer. Ghost in the Shell was a critical and commercial success, spawning a franchise that includes animated series, films, and video games. Its influence can be seen in countless works of science fiction, from The Matrix to Blade Runner 2049 and its themes of identity issues and technology are as relevant today, as they were in the 1995.

In 2017 a live action adaptation of this move was released in movie theatres worldwide. However, the movie has sparked a heated online discourse before its release, over the accusations of whitewashing, that is replacing the ethnicity of a character that is not white with white actor or actress, the movies Japanese characters, as Motoko Kusanagi, its main character, was portrayed by Scarlett Johansson. As the Asian representation in Hollywood was already low, it is no surprise that this happened. The first hint of a controversy has taken place in January 2015, when Scarlett Johansson was confirmed to be playing Kusanagi. The fans of the movie have created a petition for Johansson to be recast, stating:

> The original film is set in Japan, and the major cast members are Japanese. So why would the American remake star a white actress? please sign the petition asking them to reconsider casting Scarlett Johansson in Ghost in the Shell and select actors who are truer to the cast of the original film!

that was signed by over hundred thousand supporters, but had no effect on the movie itself. The controversy was then reignited in April 2016 when Paramount pictures released the first photo of Scarlett Johansson in the movie. What did not help was a report that was released around the same time, that claimed that Paramount Pictures "Tried to use CG to make white actors look Asian". Critics of this movie were not happy about this news, saying not only did Paramount not corrected the problem of whitewashing, but they have effectively deepened it, as an American Asian actress Constance Wu said on Twitter

"It's like way to reduce race to mere phys appearance as opposed to say culture, social experience, identity, history". One month later, an internet website called Geeks of Colour created a hashtag #WhiteWashedOut, under which Twitter users started discussing not only the whitewashing of Ghost In the Shell, but other movies, such as Marvels Doctor Strange. One of the more viral Tweets under this hashtag has been made by user Kristy Rider, saying "Just 2 Japanese gals staring it out... My culture is not just a backdrop. Stop eliminating us. We exist. #whitewashedout".

After its release, the director of the movie Rupert Sanders did an interview with an online publication CNET, where Sanders states that "I stick behind my decision to cast the actress I felt was best in the role" and "The world we've created is a parallel world. It's a global world. "Ghost in the Shell" inhabits a very multicultural, multi-ethnic, and diverse landscape. I think it's very authentic.". In a later interview with IGN, the director of the original movie, Mamoru Oshii, agreed with Sanders, but for somewhat different reasons. He states:

The Major is a cyborg, and her physical form is an entirely assumed one. The name 'Motoko Kusanagi' and her current body are not her original name and body, so there is no basis for saying that an Asian actress must portray her. Even if her original body (presuming such a thing existed) were a Japanese one, that would still apply. (Oshii 2017)

As this movie is rather new, being released in 2017, the professional critics and the audience are much less forgiving when it comes to the topic of racial injustices, with the movie receiving considerably worse reviews than expected in a form of 43% score from critics and 51% score from audience. Many of the reviews found online rate the movie negatively due to its unfair casting, such as "The presentation has been shaped to Hollywood specifications and robbed of its potential uniqueness, insight, or innovation." (Brian Eggert), "Directed in pedestrian fashion by Rupert Sanders of Snow White and the Huntsman ignominy, Ghost in the Shell is both boring and derivative. What's more, the casting is an even bigger problem than expected." (Stephen A. Russell), or an audience review by Alessio W. "One of the worst casting choices in today's cinema by not casting an Asian lead. The movie makes no sense with Johansson as the lead.". Hollywood has been sent a clear message thanks to this, and although Ghost In the Shell

has not changed, the discussion around whitewashing in movies is stronger than ever before.

VIII. The controversy over the casting of Ariel in The Little Mermaid

In 2019, Disney announced that Halle Bailey, a young African American actress, would be playing the lead role of Ariel in the live-action adaptation of "The Little Mermaid." This casting decision immediately sparked a heated debate, with people expressing both support and criticism for the choice. One of the main discussion points was the fact that Ariel, a fictional character, has been traditionally depicted as having white skin, red hair, and blue eyes. While this might be the case for the original movie made in 1989, in its source material, a book written by Hans Christian Andersen in 1837, the little mermaids colour of the skin is never talked about, as we even do not know her name.

The movie was officially announced in May 2016 as a live-action remake directed by Rob Marshall, but it would take few more years for the public to get more information about things like cast and art direction. There were many casting choices that the fans found unexpected, such as changing the gender of the supporting character Scuttle, but the biggest shock came with the announcement of who will be playing Ariel, the little mermaid. The actress chosen for the role was an African-American singer Halle Bailey. It has been announced together with some promotional material featuring Bailey as Ariel and came as a surprise to many. However, as the movie did not have an official trailer yet, the online remained relatively civil. Fans expressed a variety of opinions. Some didn't care about the change, some liked it, and others hoped that there would still be time to reverse the casting decisions. The anticipation grew as fans eagerly awaited the first glimpse of the movie. That would ultimately change, when on March 13, 2023, Walt Disney Studios uploaded to their YouTube channel video titled "The Little Mermaid | Official Trailer". The online discourse quickly shifted as the video began to amass millions of views. Within three months after its release, the trailer had already garnered an astonishing 22 million views. The discussions on social media platforms, particularly Twitter, started to gain traction. Hashtags supporting Halle Bailey and the new direction of the film, such as #SupportHalleBailey and #NewAriel emerged, while opposing viewpoints were expressed through hashtags like #NotMyAriel and #TraditionalAriel.

As the online discourse intensified, many industry professionals and celebrities voiced their support for Halle Bailey and the film's diverse casting choices. They applauded Disney's commitment to inclusivity and encouraged others to embrace change and celebrate representation on the big screen. While Disney itself never gave the issue of any attention, their parent company, Freeform gave a quick statement on the situation on their Instagram account:

> Yes. The original author of "The Little Mermaid" was Danish. Ariel… is a mermaid. She lives in an underwater kingdom in international waters and can legit swim wherever she wants (even though that often upsets King Triton, absolute zaddy). But for the sake of argument, let's say that Ariel, too, is Danish. Danish Mermaids can be black, because Danish *people* can be black. Ariel can sneak up to the surface at any time with her pals Scuttle and the *ahem* Jamaican crab Sebastian (sorry, Flounder!) and keep that bronze base tight. Black Danish people, and thus mer-folk, can also *genetically* have red hair. But spoiler alert – bring it back to the top – the character of Ariel is a work of fiction. So after all this is said and done, and you still cannot get past the idea that choosing the incredible, sensational, highly-talented, gorgeous Halle Bailey is anything other than INSPIRED casting that it is because she "doesn't look like the cartoon one", oh boy, do I have some news for you… about you. (Freeform, 2019)

The huge outrage that came first with the announcement of who will play Ariel and then with the release of the films trailer would let many to believe that it was meant to fail, but looking at the reviews, one can see that the film was quite popular on both sides, the critics and the audience, although there are few exceptions, but those are generally critical towards the style, content or the length of the film, not towards the casting choice, just as critic for the Chicago Reader, Noëlle D. Lilley, says "Overall, it's a visually gorgeous film, buoyed by a strong ingenue in Bailey with enough laughs for the kids and the nostalgic adults—just don't expect anything new.". While going trough the audience reviews, one can notice that most, if not all, of the low ratings from the audience are either because they do not like that the new Ariel is not white, or that they have no objective criticism other than the movie is bad, I did not liked it, such as by John W "Horrible movie one of the worst movies I have ever seen they should just stick with the original". But these reviews are not enough to give the film a bad score in total, as we

can see from the overwhelming support for the film from other audience members that totals to 94% positive rating on Rotten Tomatoes.

This controversy shows us, that amidst the ongoing online debates, it's important to remember that the reaction on social media doesn't necessarily reflect the sentiments of the general audience. Ultimately, the success or failure of the movie will be determined by its reception at the box office and the reviews it receives from viewers.

IX. Harvey Weinstein sexual abuse scandal and the #MeToo movement

In the October of 2017, allegations of sexual abuse and harassment were brought up against film producer Harvey Weinstein in a form of a story in New York Times detailing decades of allegations. Weinstein was accused of promising to help women advance their Hollywood careers in return for sexual favours. This scandal had significant impact on the entertainment industry and helped in spreading the knowledge about the #MeToo movement.

The phrase "Me Too" was originally coined by an American activist from New York City in 2006 to raise awareness about the prevalence of sexual assault and to provide support to survivors, particularly women of colour. However, it gained widespread attention and momentum when actress Alyssa Milano encouraged people to use the hashtag on Twitter with a message "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." to demonstrate the magnitude of the problem after the Weinstein allegations came to light. (Langone 2018) During the writing of this thesis, this Twitter post has 55 thousand comments and has been shared more than 80 thousand times. The movement itself aims to break the silence surrounding sexual misconduct, challenge the culture of victim-blaming, and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. On the social media space, it has been used as a platform for survivors of sexual assault and helped them to share their stories. Not only did it help bring awareness to the victims, but it has also brought forward conversation about systemic changes necessary to address the root causes of sexual misconduct and create safer environments for all. While the #MeToo movement was generally successful in raising awareness about the issues of sexual harassment not only in Hollywood, but it has also been criticized online as allegations as serious as this could potentially harm innocent individuals. (BBC News

2023) The push behind the movement was so strong that truth behind allegations of this nature were rarely discussed online.

Weinstein was a prominent figure in Hollywood, known for co-founding the production companies Miramax in 1979 and later The Weinstein Company in 2005. He had significant influence and power within the industry, making it challenging for victims to come forward due to fear of career repercussions. The scandal exposed the extent of sexual misconduct in the entertainment industry and highlighted the power dynamics that perpetuated such behaviour. It prompted discussions about the abuse of power, the culture of silence, and the complicity of those who were aware of Weinstein's actions but chose not to intervene. Following the public revelations, many prominent figures in the film industry, such as Woody Allen or Scott Rosenberg, as well as people other sectors, expressed support for the victims and condemned Weinstein's actions. One of them being Weinsteins personal chauffeur, Mickael Chemloul, who said that he had to drive "tearful aspiring actresses" and that he would often had to console them after their encounters with Weinstein. The scandal led to investigations, legal actions, and significant repercussions for Weinstein's career and reputation. In May 2018, Weinstein was arrested and charged with rape, criminal sexual act, sex abuse, and sexual misconduct in New York City. In February 2020, he was convicted of rape and sexual assault and sentenced to 23 years in prison. The case against Weinstein and the subsequent trial drew extensive media attention and highlighted the importance of holding powerful individuals accountable for their actions.

X. The Time's Up movement

The Time's Up movement is very closely related to the previously explored issue of Harvey Weinstein and the #MeToo movement, as it is essentially the continuation of the fight that #MeToo started. It is a movement that emerged in 2018 as a response to the revelations of sexual harassment and assault in the entertainment industry. Time's Up movement aimed to go beyond just raising awareness and instead focused on tangible actions and solutions to combat sexual harassment, gender inequality, and power imbalances. (Langone, 2018)

It had two main objectives. First being an industry wide change, that being promotion of diversity, inclusion, gender equality and workplace safety trough high-profile events and public statements by important people from the entertainment industry. One such high-profile event is the 75th Golden Globe Award's red carpet, where Time's Up members invited activists into the audience and wore pins with the movements name and logo. During the main event Oprah Winfrey also referenced the movement in her speech. Another important event that Time's Up was a part of were the 60th Annual Grammy Awards where several female musicians, such as Lady Gaga, Lana Del Rey, Kesha or Lorde, expressed their support by wearing black clothing.

The second objective of the Time's Up movement was the foundation of Time's Up Legal Defense Fund that was established to provide legal and monetary support for the victims of sexual harassment and assault who may not have the resources to pursue legal actions. They have managed to rise over 24 million dollars in donations.

In 2021 it has been uncovered that Time's Up leadership has allegedly been covering up allegations of sexual harassment by Andrew Cuomo, the then 56th Governor of New York. As the organization has been unable to carefully navigate the consequences of these allegations, together with the allegations of siphoning funds from the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund for executive rewards, they have put out a statement in January 2023, that they were ending all operations of their main organization and directed all survivors of workplace sexual harassment to their Legal Defense Fund site that still operates as of writing this thesis. (Seth 2023)

XI.   Zack Snyder and Justice League

Not all movements that change something in the entertainment industry develop due to inequality or harassment. This was the case for the movement #ReleaseTheSnyderCut that has gained traction in 2017, when Snyder himself acknowledged that his cut of the superhero film *Justice League* existed, although it was unfinished and required additional post-production work. (Dayton, 2021)

To understand how this movement came to be, it is important to note that during the production of the film, Zack Snyder served as a director, but due to a family tragedy he had to step away. Warner Bros. brought in Joss Whedon, known for his work on Marvel's "The Avengers," to oversee the reshoots and post-production. The involvement of Whedon resulted in significant changes to the story and visual style of the film, straying away from Snyder's original vision. This sparked speculation among fans about the existence of an alternate version of the film that better reflected Snyder's original vision. The fans and supporters of the movement started creating fan art, organizing various online campaigns, and interacting with the cast and crew of the film on social media platforms in order to raise awareness and to get noticed by the industry insiders. What started as a relatively small online movement gradually gained momentum and support from a growing number of fans. The dedication and enthusiasm of the fans caught the attention of the media, leading to widespread news coverage and discussions about the elusive "Snyder Cut". This increased visibility eventually reached the executives at Warner Bros. who in May 2020 announced the release of *Zack Snyder's Justice League* as a four-hour long film. (NBC News, 2021) (Dayton, 2021)

The eventual release of *Zack Snyder's Justice League* shows us how passionate fans can use the power of social media to influence the executives of powerful companies such as Warner Bros.

XII. Pay Up Hollywood movement

The #PayUpHollywood movement is quite similar to a movement we went over before, Time's Up. It is an online campaign that was created in 2019 in order to show public the issues of low pay, long working hours, and unfair practices within the entertainment industry, particularly for assistants and other entry-level positions. The origin of the movement lies in a Twitter thread by a TV writer assistant Liz Hsiao Lan Alper who shared her experiences of working long hours for low pay in the entertainment industry. The #PayUpHollywood movement aims to address and overhaul the exploitative practices prevalent in the entertainment industry. It calls for fair and transparent compensation, improved working conditions, better benefits, and enhanced career opportunities for workers across all levels, particularly those in lower-tier positions. The issues this movement attempts to address were many, but the main ones were three issues that all revolved around wages and money. First one being low wages of the many entry-level workers, such as interns, assistants and freelancers, that would often have a problem with the cost of living in the areas where the entertainment industry is located, mainly in the expensive cities such as Los Angeles and New York. The second issue that the movement tries to address is long working hours that can negatively impact physical and mental wellbeing of the employees in an already demanding work environment, and the last one being unpaid internship, that has been viewed as necessary for lower level employees in order to advance their careers in the future. The movement gained traction trough social media platforms, primarily Twitter, where industry insiders shared their stories about the beginnings of their careers, the injustices they faced and the overall work environment. The #PayUpHollywood movement has also resulted in real life benefits to the people affected by these issues, mainly in creation of wage transparency spreadsheets that allow the industry workers to anonymously share their wages as well as other information about their current positions. (Low 2021)

During this year, we had the opportunity to observe the Writers Guild of America strike, where more than 11,500 of film and television writers went on strike due to increase of residual payment for the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers that greatly cuts the wages of writers compared to the decade ago, and due to the creation of artificial intelligence prediction algorithm tools such as ChatGPT, that could potentially replace the writers. At the beginning of June 2023, the #PayUpHollywood movement has partnered with organization Women in Film, and created a financial aid

fund for the workers impacted by the writers strike together with message from CEO of Women in Film, Kristen Schaffer:

With many of Hollywood's support staff workers being women and people of underrepresented genders, WIF is committed to supporting the next generation of these storytellers through our partnership with #PayUpHollywood and an investment of $10,000 in the Hollywood Support Staff Relief Fund. We applaud #PayUpHollywood and the Entertainment Community Fund for offering these much-needed resources to help sustain the industry's already cost-burdened support staff (Schaffer, 2023)

XIII. Netflix's Cuties

Yet another controversy that originated on social media is one with a hashtag #CancelNetflix. It is a movement that originated in September 2020 with the release of a French Film named *Cuties* on Netflix. It sparked a widespread backlash with calls for the streaming platform to be cancelled. The film was directed by Maïmouna Doucouré, a French filmmaker of colour, and it explores a story of an 11 year old Senegalese immigrant girl who joins a dance group. The controversy arose due to the films marketing materials, in which netizents thought that the young girls were unnecessarily sexualized, and raised concerns about the exploitation of children. The movement itself gained popularity on social media platforms like Twitter, with many users expressing their outrage and calling for boycott of Netflix.:

> Just a reminder to #CancelNetflix if you haven't already. My dear friend & fellow child advocate @drjohndegarmo called @Netflix & after a calm and lengthy discussion on why #Cuties is child exploitation, promoting pedophelia, and is soft core porn, Netflix says they stand by it. (Jen Lilley, 2020)

Critics argued that the film's content crossed ethical boundaries and contributed to the hyper sexualization of minors. Supporters of the film, on the other hand, argued that it was a nuanced critique of the sexualization of young girls in society.

The controversy forced a broader discussion about the responsibility of filmmakers and content distributors in representing sensitive subject such as child exploitation and the potential harm this type of content may cause. While Netflix responded to the online backlash by defending the film as critique of the sexualization of children in media rather than endorsement of it, they clarified that the "marketing materials were not representative of the film's actual content". Despite the enormous backlash and online controversy this movie caused, *Cuties* still remain available on the platform. Following the #CancelNetflix controversy surrounding the release of the film *Cuties*, Netflix did reevaluate its content policies and made certain changes in response to the backlash. While the exact details of their internal policy revisions are not publicly available, Netflix took steps to address the concerns raised by users and the broader public. From what we know, Netflix changed two things. First, they acknowledged the need for improved communication in representing sensitive topics to ensure that future promotional materials would more accurately reflect the true nature and intentions of the content they promote. Second change that took place

was a discussion about the ethical considerations surrounding the depiction of children in their content. The impact of the #CancelNetflix movement likely contributed to ongoing discussions within Netflix and the entertainment industry at large, regarding the responsible portrayal of sensitive subjects and the potential effects of media on society. These conversations often involve a delicate balance between artistic freedom, social responsibility, and the diverse perspectives of audiences worldwide. (Spangler, 2020) (O'Malley, 2020)

XIV. Sonic and the visual aspect of movies

The controversy surrounding the *Sonic the Hedgehog* movie in 2020 was centred around the initial design of the iconic character, Sonic. With the release of the first trailer for the movie, in April 2019, fans were left confused by Sonic's appearance. The characters design deviated significantly from the original video game character, featuring human like appearance with realistic proportions, small eyes and human teeth. The reaction on social media was overwhelmingly negative, with fans expressing their disappointment and criticism of the design under the hashtag #SonicMovie and #GottaFixFast, a word play on Sonic's catch phrase "Gotta go fast". With fans like Alanah Pearce and Preeti Chhibber writing "Good morning to absolutely everyone and everything other than the live action Sonic the Hedgehog's creepy human teeth" and "WHY ARE HIS TEETH SO HUMAN". The hashtag quickly gained popularity with fans posting comments, fan art, new design and jokes, all centred around Sonic's appearance. (Lamadrid 2022) (Lee 2020)

Responding to the overwhelming backlash, Jeff Fowler, along with Paramount Pictures and the movie's production team, made the unprecedented decision to listen to the fans and address the concerns. They acknowledged the online criticism and took to Twitter to announce that they would redesign the character to better fit his iconic video game appearance:

Thank you for the support. And the criticism. The message is loud and clear… you aren't happy with the design & you want changes. It's going to happen. Everyone at Paramount & Sega are fully committed to making this character the BEST he can be… #sonicmovie #gottafixfast

This was an unexpected move, as this was the first time that producers and movie studio listened to fans and changed the design of a character while the movie was in production. The revised design was revealed in November 2019 and featured larger eyes, better representation of Sonic's original proportions. The response to the redesign was overwhelmingly positive, with fans praising the studio for taking their feedback into account and delivering a more faithful portrayal of Sonic. Stewart Cornelius said on Twitter:

Okay this actually looks like @Sonic. Thank you for doing the reshoots, I know it wasn't cheap or easy but you've done yourselves a HUGE favor.

The revised Sonic design was considered a vast improvement and generated renewed excitement and anticipation for the movie's release. The impact of this controversy went

beyond just the visual aspect of the character design. It highlighted the power of online communities, particularly on Twitter, to voice their opinions and influence creative decisions in the entertainment industry. The Sonic movie controversy became a prime example of how social media platforms can serve as catalysts for change and hold creators and studios accountable to the expectations of their fan base.

XV. Conclusion

the examples explored in this bachelor thesis show the power of social movements and public discourse to change status quo within the entertainment industry. These controversies have not only generated widespread debate but have also instigated significant change, pushing the industry towards a more inclusive and diverse future where the people in charge can be held accountable. The #OscarsSoWhite movement stands as a proof to the impact of collective action, originating from frustration over the lack of diversity in Oscar nominations, it forced the Academy to reassess its practices and strive for greater representation and it shows us the power of social media. The subsequent introduction of new goals and increased recognition for people of colour in nominations signifies a positive shift towards acknowledging and celebrating diverse talent. Furthermore, the controversies surrounding whitewashing in films like Ghost in the Shell have brought to the forefront the demand for authentic and culturally accurate portrayals. These controversies have not only challenged traditional norms but have also highlighted the importance of diverse casting choices and showed us that there are many people that are underrepresented in the entertainment industry. Audiences' overwhelming support demonstrates a growing awareness and acceptance of the need for representation that reflects the rich roots of our society.

One of the most significant catalysts for change in recent years has been the Harvey Weinstein sexual abuse scandal, and the subsequent #MeToo movement. This powerful shock within the industry has exposed the prevalence of sexual misconduct and the culture of silence that protected perpetrators. Survivors were courageously speaking out and sharing their stories have broken the veil of secrecy, sparking a much-needed conversation and demanding accountability. The #MeToo movement has empowered individuals, particularly women, to reclaim their voices and has placed an emphasis on the protection of vulnerable individuals and the establishment of safe working environments. Collectively, these controversies have showed us the influence of social media as a impulse for change. The

power of public opinion, amplified through platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, has forced the industry to confront its shortcomings and strive for meaningful progress. No longer can the industry turn a blind eye to the demands for diversity, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all talent. The collective call for change has become increasingly prominent and can no longer be ignored.

As the entertainment industry moves forward, it must continue to address these issues and work towards a more equitable and representative landscape. Meaningful change requires ongoing commitment and an active effort to dismantle systemic barriers and biases. By embracing diversity and fostering an environment of inclusivity, the industry can not only reflect the world we live in but also contribute to shaping a more just and equal society. However, it is important to acknowledge that the journey towards true inclusivity and equality is far from over. While these controversies have initiated important conversations and brought about some positive changes, there is still work to be done. Systemic issues deeply rooted in the industry, such as the underrepresentation of marginalized groups both in front of and behind the camera, persist and must be addressed. Moreover, it is crucial to move beyond surface-level representation and ensure that diverse voices are not only present but also given equal opportunities, access to resources, and decision-making power. True change requires an examination of the power structures within the industry and a commitment to dismantling them in favour of a more inclusive and just system. As the entertainment industry evolves, it must listen to the voices of the marginalized, centre their stories, and actively work towards a future where everyone is seen, heard, and represented. It is incumbent upon industry stakeholders, including studios, production companies, casting directors, and talent agencies, to take responsibility for the narratives they promote and the talent they elevate.

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XVI. Shrnutí

Tato bakalářská práce je zaměřena na výzkum dopadu sociálních sítí na zábavní průmysl. Práce se zabývá různými online kontroverzemi, které nějakým způsobem ovlivnili zábavní průmysl. Ze začátku prozkoumává historii kontroverzních filmů, ze kterých se nadále přesouvá na historii sociálních sítí. Nadále se zabývá pohledem na historicky populární filmy, které by dnes pod pohledem sociálních sítí neobstály, jako například *Green Mile* (1999). V této části práce prochází skrze děj filmu a pomocí pohledu na dnešní sociální normy a na recenze filmu z doby vydání, které jsou porovnávány s novějšími recenzemi, upozorňuje na rasové stereotypy. Práce se následovně přesouvá a popisuje různé online hnutí, které vznikly na sociálních sítí, a které měli dopad na zábavní průmysl. Tyto hnutí vznikaly jak díky nespravedlnosti vůči lidem kteří byly odlišní od ostatních, tak díky chtivosti nadšených fanoušků dostat něco, co jim bylo odepřeno, jako například u online hnutí #ReleaseTheSnyderCut. Zde fanoušci filmu zjistili, že film který vyšel byl značně odlišný od originální vize, rozhodli se tedy že na sociálních sítí uspořádají hnutí, aby se pokusili donutit společnost Warner Bros. vydat prvotní verzi filmu.