

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Boxing is a form of sport that involves two fighters trying to land blows with their fists and attempting to avoid each other's blows. The sport first appeared as a formal Olympic event in 688 BCE, although fist-fighting contests have existed earlier in mankind's prehistory (Arthur, 1999). It is another form of sport involving people physically fighting each other, specifically martial arts tournaments, alongside wrestling, taekwondo, fencing, etc., in which all of them is also the part of Olympic sport. The sport of boxing itself is considered to be controversial, with some have called out to ban the sport (Lundberg, 1983). Despite the sport remaining to be a niche medium with the sport having decreasing popularity (Ribeiro, 2017), there are still the audience that enjoys and demands this type of sport. The sport is still shown by a number of companies, such as the broadcasting provider British Sky Broadcasting (Manchester Evening News, 2013) with their sport related section, Sky Sports (Edwards, 2021), as well as the company of video streaming services like DAZN.

DAZN is a subscription video streaming service that was first launched in August 2016 in a number of countries, and by the end of 2020, DAZN has become available in over 200 countries. The company focused on fighting sports at launch, although it has expanded to broadcast a variety of sports coverage. (Anthony, 2020) The service has covered a number of boxing matches between YouTubers. These YouTubers are successful content creators who managed to become social media

influencers with influence and fame comparable to traditional celebrities, with a lot of persuasive influence (Zanatta, 2017). They managed to build a community by the content they made on YouTube.

YouTube is a free video sharing website where people can upload and watch online videos. The site was originally created in 2005. In 2018, YouTube has become one of the most popular content sharing platforms (Westenberg, 2016), with over 2 billion monthly logged-in users (Duffett, 2020). People on the platform can like, dislike, and comment on videos as forms of feedback to the content creators (Melody, 2018), with them being able to leaving positive messages and sometimes hate or threats (Westenberg, 2016). The platform has become so big and popular, it has replaced television as the place for video entertainment. Through the platform, a number of people called YouTubers who create and upload video contents to the site become a celebrity from their fame and popularity among other viewers who watch and subscribe to them and their channels. These people become YouTube celebrities and social media influencers because of their likeable personality and their effort in becoming good (Holmbom, 2015). The top channel list on the platform is dominated by producers like PewDiePie and musicians like Justin Bieber (Gilbert, 2018).

In 2017, a YouTuber named Olajide Olatunji, better known for his channel name called 'KSI', challenged the winner of the boxing match between two YouTubers, Joe Weller and Theo Baker (Lillicrap, 2019). The winner turned out to be Joe Weller and both him and KSI agreed to have a boxing match which took place in Copper Box Arena in London, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018 which resulted in KSI's

victory. At the end of the match, KSI called out Jake Paul and Logan Paul to be the next to step on the ring against him, in which Logan accepted. The white-collar bout (Horan, 2018) between KSI and Logan happened at Manchester Arena in August 25<sup>th</sup>, the same year, which resulted in a draw. KSI's and Logan's little brothers, Deji Olatunji and Jake Paul respectively, also fought each other in the same event, along with other prominent YouTubers who fought in the undercard (Haigh, 2018). After the match that resulted in a draw, KSI and Logan had their rematch the next year in November 9<sup>th</sup>, which was hosted by DAZN, the subscription sports streaming service. The rematch was held with professional rules of having no headguard unlike the previous fight and 10-ounce gloves (Hale, 2019). The fight resulted in KSI's victory by split decision (Mazique, 2019). A number of other boxing matches featuring one or more YouTubers had been held since then, with Jake Paul's match against another YouTuber called AnEsonGib on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2020 (Alexander, 2019), his other match against Nate Robinson as the undercard event of Mike Tyson vs. Roy Jones Jr. match on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2020 (Glaze, 2020), his other match against a retired UFC fighter, Ben Askren, on 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2021 (Serrels, 2021), as well as his brother, Logan Paul's fight against Floyd Mayweather on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2021, and YouTube vs TikTok boxing event on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2021 (Seychell, 2021). According to Eddie Hearn, the sport promoter, the event would be an attempt to introduce the significant audience of the YouTuber boxing events to the sport of boxing in general, with real professional boxers fought in the undercard unlike YouTubers in the first one. Joe Markowski, DAZN's executive vice president of North American content, said that even if there's only 10 to 20

percent of the new audience of the YouTuber boxing event who are engaged with these professional boxers, that would be considered a good win (Alexander, 2019).

With cooperate companies such as YouTube and DAZN trying to spread the sport of boxing into wider audience, it is an interesting move to see for a sport that is having decreasing popularity. The phenomenon of the YouTubers boxing matches can be used as an example of the event of spreading culture to a wider audience through the use of hegemony. As the corporate company tries to spread the culture to a new audience, hegemony can be used to direct their interest to the culture as it takes advantage of their existing interests and ideology and align it with the target culture these companies intend to spread. With the rise of YouTube as the most popular video streaming service, it is an interesting choice to utilize the platform to lure the audience of the platform to come and see the culture of boxing that is labelled as niche by some. This study will cover the YouTubers boxing match that has been hosted by DAZN, such as the 'KSI vs Logan Paul II' boxing match, which featured the YouTubers named Olajide Olatunji and Logan Paul. These boxing matches feature YouTubers who become white collar boxers in the main event, in order to gain attention to the fans of these YouTubers into the sport of boxing in general by incorporating pro boxers in the undercard. Therefore, using Gramsci's hegemony theory, this study will analyze how DAZN is trying to spread boxing culture into wider audience by introducing it to YouTuber fans and whether or not they managed to increase the popularity by the sport and by how much.

This study will use Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory as a base to examine and analyze the spread of boxing culture through YouTuber's boxing,

particularly the one that is developed by Gramsci himself. There are number of theories that is the result of the development of theories concerning soft power and the spread of ideas, which include the theories of hegemony, habitus, state apparatus, etc. Gramsci's theory in particular is the one that will be used to conduct this study as it is the theory that later inspired other ideas surrounding the topic, and it focuses on the cultural aspect of a hegemony and power relation. The data that is going to be analyzed in the study is a video interview of a promoter that worked with the company as he explained and elaborated the company's intent to spread the culture and sport of boxing through YouTubers, as well as the comment section of the video that represent people's opinions on the event and the idea of spreading the culture through influencers. The idea that is expressed in the video will then be broken down and analyzed through Halliday's transitivity and Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory.

## **1.2 Previous Studies**

A qualitative study of popular content creators such as the YouTubers (Holmbom, 2015) focus on what do YouTubers do to grow with their effort, investment, and their ability to stay relevant, some by standing out from others. The study concludes by showing endless opportunities that can come to these content creators with their established YouTube channels, with some managed to develop an entire business plan around the platform. Another study conducted by Wilma Westenberg in 2016, shows the significance of YouTubers and what it means to



their teenage audience. study shows that social influencers on YouTube has become part of teenagers' daily life as most teenagers watch online videos on YouTube every day. These teenagers become fans by watching videos, going to fan meetings and buying merchandise from their favorite YouTubers. One other study (Melody, 2018) also shows how YouTubers are able to build interpersonal relationships with their audience through parasocial interaction, which is the illusion of face-to-face friendships through watching shows (Horton and Wohl, 1956) such as YouTube videos. Another study (Zanatta, 2017) stated that YouTube has become the new television, with YouTube culture being established and slowly shaping the millennial and younger generation. The platform of YouTube has helped many people take off their careers and make themselves celebrities or better known as Content Creators. When a content creator creates something new, it can become popular, but popular content fades out sooner or later, replaced by another new popular. These findings show some correlation in terms of identifying the fame of YouTubers, as well as their significance. In the topic of comparing YouTubers with traditional celebrities, the study conducted by Melody in 2018, concluded how social media influencers such as the YouTubers are able to gain more audience and have more influence over traditional celebrity. The study shows how they have more advantage over traditional celebrities because they have interpersonal relationships, more relatability and authenticity, which are things traditional celebrities, the study argues, don't have or are lacking due to their disconnect with their audience because of fame and fortune, as well as their more superficial quality of product endorsements. The author suggests that product marketing efforts should

use social media celebrities as the main advertising platform because of their significance with more influence and efficient audience penetration. Similar suggestions can be found with another study (Duffett, 2020) that also suggests how organizations should engage with YouTubers in promoting their products and take advantage of their benefits to evoke favorable affective attitudinal among young consumers. Like the study conducted by Jessica A. Zanatta in 2016, this study also focuses on young generations as the audience of YouTube, such as Generation Z cohort, who according to the study, has not known life without personal computers and the internet and are independent, individualistic, and ambitious. The author of the study states the importance of Generation Z as a target group of organizations with the steady growth of these consumers' buying power, with them being crucial in creating marketing communication. One correlation that is tied to the studies is the effect YouTubers have on influencing audience to support certain brands. YouTubers have influence on the behavior of their audience (Westenberg, 2016), including buying behavior. Most of these studies focus on the significant influence YouTubers have on affecting their audience, especially younger audience, in their buying behavior. The audience supports certain brand deals signed by content creators because of the fans being the reason these creators have fame in the first place (Zanatta, 2017), and they are influenced to buy to these brands and products. These findings tie to the correlation to this study that analyzes corporate company such as DAZN's decision to take advantage of and utilize the significant influence from content creators such as YouTubers to spread their own boxing cultural hegemony to these YouTubers' audience in order to influence their behavior into

buying into the boxing culture, especially with the conclusion made by the study (Duffett, 2020) that states how several organizations utilize influencers such as YouTubers to endorse these organizations and spread positive information.

### **1.3 Research Gap**

Recently, companies started to promote the sport to new audience who might have not been watching the sport before with the use of hegemony through the platform they had been comfortable using in order to prevent the sport from staying stagnant, especially with the rise of YouTubers and their influence to affect audience's behavior to get interested and buy certain products and brands. This study aims to discover and identify the hegemony process of content creation established by streaming companies and YouTubers to expand the audience of boxing by promoting the sport to new audience who are content consumers on YouTube, as well as its relation with the motivation why people are interested in the sport.



#### **1.4 Research Question**

- 1.4.1 How does the process of cultural hegemony work in events of social media influencers?
- 1.4.2 How successful is the process of cultural hegemony on the target that is the audience of social media influencers?

#### **1.5 Purpose of Study**

- 1.5.1 To examine how companies such as DAZN attempt to spread boxing culture through social media influencers such as YouTubers.
- 1.5.2 To examine the process of hegemony used by companies and social media influencers.

#### **1.6 Significance of Study**

This study will benefit those who are interested in or fans of sports and/or social media. The findings of this study can help to better understand how social media influencers and corporate companies operate with their influencing power in the social media platform to spread a form of niche culture to a wider audience through cultural hegemony. These findings can hopefully also be used for future researches that focus on the effects and influence of social media influencers and/or sports culture.