

## **Film music and media literacy: case Captain America**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Background**

Hollywood, with its global influence, has a long history of wielding of soft power (see e.g. Laderman 2018), with digitalisation facilitating the reaching of ever-wider audiences and forming of complex media ecosystems. Several mechanisms through which music might participate in the communication of ideas and ideology have been found, for example “narrative cueing” (Gorbman 1987; Herget 2021) and influencing identification to film characters (Hoeckner et al. 2011), identification being a mechanism for narrative persuasion (Graaf et al. 2012). In the digital age, understanding these mechanisms of influence, in which film music and the auditory mode in general play a part, is a part of our critical media literacy.

The Marvel superhero character Captain America has been seen as the embodiment of the idea of U.S. exceptionalism, legitimizing the use of U.S. military force (Gruenewald 2018) and depicting it as a global force for good (Griffin 2018). In the aforementioned ways, the music of the 21st century Captain America films factors into these portrayals.

#### **Aims**

A part of an ongoing PhD work, this presentation zooms in on the influence of music in film in forming and contextualizing the depictions of ideas, values and ideology. It explores the conceptualisations and theoretical viewpoints from which these topics as well as ideology in specifically U.S. mainstream film and have previously been approached. The case of the aforementioned themes in the 21st century Captain America films is examined to demonstrate these relations.

#### **Main Contribution and implications**

This work relates of the role of music as a basic media type with semiotic capabilities in film, an audiovisual narrative, and musicological research within the wider topic of the impact of entertainment on beliefs and attitudes. As the topics of effects of music in film, narrative persuasion, identification, and the political-cultural functions of mainstream fiction film (and entertainment more broadly) are spread across many different fields and non-related studies,

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their systematic evaluation becomes necessary to understand the power that music in film has in shaping the beliefs and attitudes of the audience. Producing knowledge on the mechanisms of influence in mainstream film is critical to our cultural media literacy.

**Keywords**

Film music, music, soft power, media literacy

**Bio**

Saana Sutinen is a doctoral researcher in musicology at Linnaeus University and a part of the Linnaeus University Center for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies. Sutinen holds a Master of Arts degree in musicology from the University of Jyväskylä. Sutinen's master's thesis project titled "Introductory music of the Skywalker Saga characters: gender and character type in Music Information Retrieval analysis" utilized computer assisted quantitative analysis of film music in Star Wars films.