

Imperialism of Media and Developing Countries

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Abstract

During the history of mankind imperialism basically was in the forms of politics and economy.

But due to the information revolution media emerged as the central mean and cause of domination not only for politics and economy but culture as well. During the twentieth century media emerged as the forth and central pillar of the society in the world and as usual again dominated by the western countries and was centralized at the few hands of transnational media groups especially USA. Media imperialism emerged from the west and it created entirely new phenomenal dominance of media to control, manage and change the culture of developing countries of the world. Then at national level few media groups created a media monopoly. Then at national level few media groups created a media monopoly so developing countries of the world are under the media warfare. But the advent of social media has neutralized this dominance to certain extent and gradually competing the rage of media imperialism of the west. This paper focuses on this aspect that, how social media is enabling the third world countries to set and maintain their own cultural agenda instead of only following the western media. After the traditional media i.e. newspapers, radio and television, a new form of media emerged in the form of social media due to the latent but robust product of internet. This social media is acquiring strength day by day and now has become a potential competitor of traditional electronic and print media

Keywords: Media/Communication imperialism, Transnational, Social media, Media monopoly, Mind domination, Regional and National communication

The Concept of Communication Imperialism

Colonization has been a phenomenon that started during the 17th and 18th centuries. Great powers of the world ruled the weaker nations and gained control over their resources and manpower using it to strengthen their own states and people. The 19th century brought about revolution in the world by ending the era of colonialism and bringing about freedom to many nations. The pressure from the

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movements for freedom in the 1900s and the heavy losses that Britain and other super powers had to suffer in the world wars, not to mention the rising awareness and demand for human rights and liberty, all led to putting an end to colonization. With such a massive movement for independence and human rights, an act such as imperialism could not be tolerated in the future and thus the idea of occupying and controlling nations physically is obsolete today. However, with that door closing, new ones have opened and today great powers of the world are controlling the third world through their communication media. Infrastructure in the colonial regions was hardly developed and while North had progressed by leaps and bounds, they only began to reap from the developments after their independence. Immense development in the field of communication technology occurred in the 19th and 20th century as faster and better means of communication were invented. As a result of this drastic development of communication means, people's dependency on the media for information and awareness grew leading to mass domination on the minds of people by the media. People never depended so heavily on the media for information, awareness and even education and entertainment. However, infrastructure in the colonial regions was hardly developed and while North had progressed by leaps and bounds, the newly independent states only began to reap from the developments that were taking place around the world. Newspapers, radio, television and now Internet, too bring news from around the world to people at their doorstep. However, the important question here is that from where do all these news come from? Without understanding that who brings us a news story and what his/her objective may be, one cannot fully understand the workings of this industry. While technology has developed, it is still concentrated into the hands of a few powerful in such a way that countries in the third world are heavily dependent on foreign news sources and channels for information. This concentration and centralization of media in the hands of a few powerful nations was never known before. According to Herbert Altschul, by 1970, 70% of international news flow was in control of five major news agencies, all originating from the North; TAAS, APA, UPA, AFP, Reuters. This recently emerged phenomenon is referred to as communication imperialism or media imperialism. The critical theory of Media imperialism or communication imperialism focuses on the vital and prevailing effects of globalization on media of the world. As a result of massive development in technology, the world today has taken the shape of a global village where communication is no longer a problem. Sitting in a far off village in Baluchistan, you can have access to someone sitting in Manchester, a cricket match in Sydney or a flood in Thailand in seconds. The whole world today is just a click away. Communication imperialism is a concept that implies that Northern political and economic powers not only control the political and economical management of the world but also have worldwide control over the means of communication, thus ruling over the communication set-up and its flow even in third world countries. The political and economic domination of the North imposes it on the third world countries to adopt Northern technology, values and structures. The media in the third world is not

developed enough to face the challenges of the first world and the first world, benefiting from this shortcoming of third world enjoys control over the flow of communication, hence strongly influencing the mindsets of the people, especially media recipients, in the developing countries of the world. The scenario of the world painted by these powers is not always based on objectivity, truth and facts but at times promotes bias and prejudice for its own ulterior motives. The 4 aspects of international media in this situation are television program exportation, foreign ownership and control of media distribution, the infringement of capital opinions on other societies, and the transfer of commercialism and broadcasting norms. In addition to the software and hardware and the other forms of communication such as satellites, computers, and transportation of the mass media, there are the cultural effects on the developing countries.

Communication Imperialism and World nations

When studying communication imperialism with reference to world nations we see how the world has been divided into two fractions, one possessing the resources and the power, the other dependent on the powerful and the resourceful, struggling to attain its own identity, image and independence, not only in terms of economy and growth but also in terms of media strength. Generally speaking, the resourceful and the powerful group include the economic giants such as USA, UK, and France who are the media giants in the world of today. The programming and news content from these countries or their citizen-owned-organizations are a source of information for countries around the world. These countries have developed their media to such an extent that their news coverage exceeds all borders and limits bringing, live, on spot coverage of events. Also the heavy financing of media in these countries makes it possible for them to do in-depth research and investigation on problems in different countries and bring to light bringing issues that need immediate attention. However, here is where the debate comes in. countries in the south believe that the north is exploiting its control over the media and its technology by promoting the ideas and values that suit its interest. They allege that the portrayal of the south by the North is unfair, biased, filled with prejudice, meant to serve the political and financial causes of the North. The impact of the media and its powerful affects of the masses is a reality that cannot be ignored. People today form their opinions and impressions of the world around them on the basis of what they see or hear on the media. With the kind of media the south has, people living in these regions not only depend on foreign media for international news but also refer to foreign media even for national news events. Every country has its own policy and its own interests to guard. With the world becoming closely linked due to development in media and technology, it has become increasingly important to secure national culture and identity so as to keep the recognition and individuality of different cultures alive. But with the massive influence of the Northern media, people in the south are rapidly letting go of their

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own cultures and norms and are taking up the values and lifestyle promoted by the North. The fast growing culture of Mc Donald's, Nike, etc has seeped into the developing and under-developed nations to such an extent that people of these countries, especially the elite seem to relate more with someone sitting in London than with their own fellow countrymen. They consider following the Northern trends as something modern, stylish, in line with the demands and needs of the twentieth century. This is so because the North has promoted it like this. Countries of the North have time and again held the south under strong criticism sometimes due to its political systems, sometimes-religious beliefs and sometimes lifestyle. However, counter argument from the south is not given much coverage; instead search is conducted for those local people who would side with the point of view of the media owners. Thus Northern values of capitalism, democracy are propagated as internationally acknowledged realities that cannot be criticized upon or objected to. Today almost 60% of film and 25% of music world wide are possessed by U.S.Movies of the Hollywood capture 80% film market of the western countries. This result applies to Latin American societies, too. According to the Article "The Ties that Still Bind: Media and National Cultures in Latin America" , Waisbord mentions about the traditionalists of Latin America fears about rush of U.S. media such as American ideas, images and so on and they worry that the value will replace their own. While perspective of the North is promoted with Northern produced programs and news coverage bombarding media in the south, the same is not offered to the media of the south, i.e. media of the south is not given much place or prominence in the North.

Portrayal of Taliban Rule in Afghanistan

In the case of Afghanistan, for example, the Taliban rule was brought under strong criticism and condemnation, the North regarding them as barbarians, uncivilized, uncultured and violent. In his writing, *An Agenda of Disdain-Cultural Imperialism and the Northern Media View of Afghanistan*, Saraji Al Muslima points out that while criticizing the Taliban rule, the North failed to realize that the greater emphasis is laid on "individual_freedom" where the individual takes his personal decisions irrespective of their impact on others, the Islamic system places more value on the betterment of the society as a whole, and an individual is supposed to have the utmost consciousness of how his or her behaviour as it should not affect not only one's family but the society as well. Thus the societal norms and values differ in both the societies. The North may view the trends of Taliban rule as imitations on individual freedom but the Muslims of Afghanistan perceives it as the assurance that the society as a whole, and the the individuals themselves, benefiting from restrictions on their behaviour . This perspective sights the perspective of an Afghani who sees the Taliban rule in a different rule. However, hardly such support and justification for the Taliban rule was presented by the Northern media to give a complete side of the picture, covering all existing

opinions on the matter. As a result, the image of Taliban came to be as some barbaric, backward people who suppressed their countrymen and inflicted great tortures on them. It wasn't highlighted that under the Taliban rule, peace and security in Afghanistan was high class. The feminist majority fund (FMF) that speaks against the restrictions imposed by Taliban on the women of Afghanistan is considered by many Afghans as an attempt to impose the similar type of western or secular norms and values earlier the Soviets tried to enforce. Projecting beard, as a sign of fundamentalism and veil (*hijab/ burqa*) as a sign of conservatism and oppression, the North tries to show that to become modern, developed, civilized and internationally acceptable, all these things will have to be given up. It viewed the people of Afghanistan as backward and uncivilized according to modern western standards, as it was a benighted culture during the "Dark Ages". To support their idea, they used every Afghani or Muslim who somehow supported their view so to give the impression that these few represent the vast majority of the people. Such propaganda also encouraged the creation of similar organizations such as the Revolutionary Women's Association of Afghanistan (RAWA) which gathered the similar repute like that of Amnesty International, a well established organization, just because of its reflection Northern viewpoint. The Northern media made unauthorized claims regarding the Taliban such as prohibiting the picnics and wedding parties, banning the publication of magazines, newspapers, and books claims that cannot be substantiated by any second source. In famous American fashion magazine, Glamour, the oppression and troubles of the Afghani women were highlighted with photographs of them in veil (*hijab* and *burqa*) captioned with statements of oppression and misery, while colour photographs of women of Afghanistan without veil (*hijab*) and a lot of beautifying makeup captioned with the statements liberty and freedom. The rest of the magazine had vulgar stories and half naked pictures of models. With projecting such images of women and their freedom, the magazine promoted that idea that nakedness and nudity reflect freedom and independence. These images have affected people around the world and many Muslims today think that their acceptability and image in the society is strongly affected by their appearance and as veil (*hijab*) or beard give an impression of backwardness, they opt to follow the trends of the North. The author believes that the objective of such publications by certain organizations is not only to see the Muslim woman, free of her religious beliefs but to be liberated from their veils (*hijab*) the way their models have been liberated in the west. Their desired design is to mould women of Afghanistan as westerly modernized.

Communication Imperialism that Media organizations

It is due to media Imperialism that media organizations want to rule the world," sang Tears for Fears in the '80s. According to one of the media expert Bagdikian who wrote his book "The Media Monopoly," in 1983, in which he claimed that

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media ownership was concentrated in the hands of only 50 transnational conglomerates stunned the world. Today, after the mergers and acquisitions in the '1980s and '1990s the nine international organizations or media groups such as Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, News Corporation, TCI, General Electric (owner of NBC), Sony (owner of Columbia and TriStar Pictures and major recording interests), and Seagram (owner of Universal film and music interests) have dominated the global media system. With such a strong control on information control and flow across the world, these media giants enjoy immense power. According to some critics, this power is misused to propagate the agenda and motives of these huge corporations' sacrificing the values of objectivity, fairness and ethics in journalism. To make this business grows larger and bigger, services of business experts rather than of media professionals are hired to boost profits. These organizations enter into mergers and deal with other existing organizations and thus gain a stronger control on news flow and media content. "What you are seeing," says *Christopher Dixon, media analyst for the investment firm PaineWebber*, "is the creation of a global oligopoly. It happened to the oil and automotive industries earlier this century; now it is happening to the entertainment industry." *The media conglomerates have been a major force in manufacturing politics and social values.* They as a group, single handedly, in their electronic media both radio and television dominance, produced a extra liberal even vulgar culture that celebrates the most demeaning characteristics in the human psyche, greed, deceit, and cheating as a legitimate way to win prizes as in many "reality" shows. The basic motive behind these media organization has been the incessant pursuit for profit that marks capitalism. It is important to know as to which company owns which media channel so that the viewer can interpret the philosophy or motive behind a particular program. In the name of greater market share, these media giants are privatizing airwaves and fencing out diverse voices and trying to create a bland media monoculture. "Most worrisome, some critics say, is the bottom-line agenda of global corporate media: profoundly anti-democratic, dedicated to advancing the interests of the power elite and keeping the rabble entertained and docile. Media moguls and the powers they serve want happy shoppers, not freethinking citizens, the argument goes.

Regional and National Communication/Media Imperialism

Communication imperialism not only exists at the global level but also at a regional level as is the case of south Asia here Indian media has taken over the media of all the other media of the region. Cultures, values and traditions of all south Asian countries are under strong influence of what is promoted through the Indian media and their own media is finding it hard to compete with such massive cultural invasion. Indian channels are accessible in these countries through satellites that promote Indian culture, values and traditions and also propagate India's stance on different social, political and cultural issues. As a result of this,

the local cultures and traditions of the neighbouring countries are being badly damaged and people are encouraged to follow the trends that they see on these communication leaders.

Media Imperialism is not always an international or global happening. If a single media group or organization dominates in a country, it also is a form of Media Imperialism. Italy and Canada are often alleged of possessing an Imperialistic media equation based on the fact that one corporation or owner controls much of their media. Even within the United States itself, information flow is controlled by a few major corporations while the smaller, weaker ones are dying out. Large corporations are buying out small production houses and are creating their own rule in the information industry thus creating a state within a state. These strong media giants have so strong an influence that they can easily blackmail the establishment to meet their own ends or bring about a mutiny by their power. In the case of Pakistan, the strong media centers are Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad while the strong media organizations are the JANG group, DAWN group, NAWA-I-WAQT group, PTV and INTERFLOW who all own more than one publication or media type and thus assert their point of view strongly through different channels or in different communities through the same channel. Information from the cities mentioned above flows to the smaller cities and rural areas while publications of those areas and community based media efforts in those regions are gradually becoming extinct, as they are unable to compete with the more powerful media organizations. A new phenomenon is the ownership of media organizations by corporate sector who promote their own company and projects through their media as are the case of Malik Riaz, owner of Bahria Town, who owns the newspaper, Jinnah and now launching a channel as well .

Impact on Language

Communication imperialism has had terrible impacts on national, regional and local languages, in fact if one says that language is one factor that has been most terribly affected by communication imperialism, it won't be wrong. Basically, English is the language that has been promoted strongly as a result of communication imperialism. The language becoming a means of international communication has gained drastic importance while value of regional and local languages has undermined. Where local languages still hold ground, their foundations have been damaged by mixing two or three languages to communicate and considering it okay to pollute one language by using terms of the other. The idea that only those who can speak English are modern, internationally compatible has also been promoted by the media that encourages the learning of English rather than one's own mother tongue.

Media Ownership

This is an issue raised by the critics of communication imperialism who feel that the concepts promoted and propagated by these media giants are those that best suit their marketing and corporate objectives and not those that are burning issues in the world or the way that they exist in the world. These organizations not only own different channels of a same media but also go for cross media ownership where they own different media such as newspapers, radio, television and news agency. Through all these different channels, these corporations hammer their own objectives and interest leaving qualities of authenticity and objectivity somewhere behind. According to Ben Bagdikian in his book "The Media Monopoly", in this era of information, "media power is political power." in today's world, media is considered as the strongest tool to promote political ideas and campaigns and generate massive for the most unjust of actions. By showing only one side of a picture, or distorting realities to support your viewpoint, peoples' opinion can be moulded so as to be in favour of that of the owners of these media organizations. Since these giants share the common feature of favouring or serving the elite and the powerful, hence not much different opinion on major issues come up, thus leading to creating consensus amongst the people regarding these issues. Also since people cannot reconfirm this news through any other channels as others are not as resourceful to have their correspondents in every nook and corner of the world, the picture shown by the large corporations is taken to be as the only reality that exists." Ben Bagdikian warns that, "When a handful of companies control much of what we watch, read, and listen to, it's time for us to take a long, hard look at the private powers who own our media windows on the world." Edward S. Herman and Chomsky's book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* points out that most of the media outlets are owned by large corporations whose funding basically comes from advertising, but not from readership. Hence they are profit-oriented businesses to sell certain products to viewers and readers, they tend to publish their own desired news and writings which would reflect the promotion of their businesses.

Related Theories

Theories Supporting Concept of Communication Imperialism are Magic Bullet theory, Powerful effects model, Cultural hegemony, Agenda setting, Cultivation theory and Spiral of silence and Theories Supporting Counter Argument are Limited Effects Model according to which Media cannot completely change people, as it is not the only factor that influences people's culture and lifestyle. Interpersonal communication has the greatest role to play. Moreover, one's own media and own language have a stronger impact on him as he can relate to them better. Thus, if south establishes its own media, then its people's attachment with their culture will grow stronger and Uses and Gratifications Theory/ Theory of

Selectivity which strongly suggests that the audience are not passive they do not completely adopt whatever they see on the western media. They pick and choose specific patterns or habits that are in their best interest.

Mc Bride Commission

Bringing up the issue of uneven flow of information from the North to the south, in the UN general assembly in 1970, Third World countries demanded reduction in the parity in development; economics and information flow between the two societies, i.e. the core and the peripheral. Third World Countries demanded that the First World reconstruct their societies in such a way so as to ensure even flow of communication throughout the world. During these debates, various media scholars and politicians demanded that a new world order be established where:

1. The flow of news between the Southern and the Northern hemispheres would be equalized;
2. The dominance of the world's five largest news agencies would be broken down by the development of regional and national news agencies in the Third World;
3. More attention would be given by the media to development news rather than to violence and conflict;
4. Government controls of the media for developmental purposes would sometimes be acceptable.

It was pointed out that if agencies of the North give information about the Third World, the news compiled by the Third World should also reach the First World. UNESCO supported this idea by the Third World Countries and in 1970 set up the Mc Bride Commission that called scholars from the world over to find out the plight of communication in the world. It gave its report in 1980, under the title, *Many Voices, One World* that discussed how cultures are being displayed and portrayed. The US protested to this and resigned from the membership of UNESCO in early 1980s with Britain following suit in 1986. UNESCO began its cause for formation of information society but due to withdrawal of US and Great Britain, UNESCO grew short of finances. "Conclusions and Recommendations of the Mc Bride Commission: Introduction and Part I." suggests respect of diversity as the report pointed out that to deal to communication issues, various solutions were adopted in different countries in accordance with diverse traditions, patterns of social, economic and cultural life, needs and possibilities. It emphasized that this diversity is valuable and should be respected and called for the need to establish, common aims and values in the horizon of communication, based on common interests in a world of interdependence. "The contemporary situation demands a better more just and more democratic social order, and realization of fundamental human rights. These goals can be achieved only through understanding and tolerance, gained in large part by free, open and balanced communications." 2. Elimination of Imbalances and Disparities in Communication

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& Its Structures The review also showed that utmost importance needed to neutralize the imbalance and minimize the disparities in communication, its structures, and especially the flow of information. Developing countries badly need to reduce their dependence on western media and claim justified and more equitable order in the field of media.

Gist of the Argument

It is first ever in the history that there has been such domination on the minds of people by the mass media. Similarly there have not been such a concentration and centralization of media, capital and military power in the hands of so small number of persons. The countries which constitute the “group of seven”, also called countries of the North, control almost all the technological, economic, media, information and military power as well in the world. Thus as a result of communication control by the North, third world is colonized again. Through this control over communication technology, they are controlling the minds of the people. Therefore, although they are not physically present, yet through their programming and news content, they are enslaving the minds of the people. Today, they may not be directly looting the resources of the Third World but by promoting their objectives, values and cultures, they are generating billions of profits from their business in the third world. The Pepsi and Coke culture, Mc Donald’s ‘the new in thing’ are clear examples of that. Previously they came physically, but today they can do the same sitting thousands of miles away as the mechanisms and tactics have changed. The first world shows distorted pictures of the third world choosing to show only that side of reality that serves their ends the best. Presenting Islam as a conservative, extremist religion. Taliban as barbarian and uncivilized, people of the third World as deprived, uneducated and unaware of their rights and promoting Northern values and cultures as the ‘thing’ of the modern and the civilized class, the North has promoted a complex society in the South, that considers its success and development in pursuing the values of the North and sees reality as shown by the great media giants.

Complete objectivity doesn’t exist while developing countries may bring up the issue of communication imperialism and say that the North is promoting its own ideas and realities around the world, it cannot deny the fact that somehow or the other, a media organization has to decide on which news to present how, which to send first, which to second, etc. no matter how all this is planned, each plan has chances of coming under criticism for promoting or highlighting one idea or the other. With so many channels and media organizations coming up, people will be able to get the same news in different ways so then it would be up to them to decide as to how to interpret it.

Media within States also creates Imperialism. Third World countries may complain about global communication imperialism but it is not as if such a communication does not exist within the countries themselves. Even in the same

country, a few media organizations or specific local television centers control the amount, quality, content and flow of news and other programming. Before addressing global imperialism, communication imperialism within states should be addressed and dealt with such as communication imperialism by nationalized channels in developing countries. If peoples association and relationship with their own, local or national culture is strong enough then no matter what the Northern media shows, their relationship with their culture and values will stay strong and lasting. However, if they themselves don't have the faith and pride in their own values, then even a little temptation of the North will distract them.

The Internet, a Welcome Change

There are multiple dimensions of the Internet which clearly indicates and denies cultural imperialism. Unlike television, radio and the newspaper, where only selected information and cultural messages are produced, and diffused from single source possessing overall control, the Internet is almost decentralized. Though currently vast majority of the web sites are located in the U.S, and few hands control information and entertainment products, but due to internet or social media barriers of time and distance have been removed and people continue to participate in their "local" culture so Internet or social media can become a tool for the preservation and celebration of domestic culture as receiver or viewer of messages on social media is not a passive listener. So desired or designed information cannot be pushed or imposed on him. So instead of absorbing and promoting the western cultural imperialism, the Internet user can better receive and sustain multiculturalism

Conclusion

While the Northern media does exercise strong control over the flow and content of information around the world, the developing nations cannot be out rightly declared innocent. The threat of communication imperialism from the North has existed for quite some time, so the developing countries should make efforts to counter these threats by promoting and supporting the growth of their own media. Instead of imposing heavy restrictions on their local media, they should strongly support its growth and speak up against the North's plan to turn the entire world into a consumer society that favors and appreciates the products that the North has to offer. In spite of all the obstacles, struggle should be continued to achieve even flow of communication and information around the world. The countries in the South should focus on creating their own media and they can do so well owing to the advancement in technology that has made it possible for people to access each other with minimal money and less time. There is a dire need of decentralization of the media and communication technology, and it can be shifted to the larger benefit of the entire world community. According to Straubhaar's (1991) "research

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and predictions of Pool(1977) and Read(1976), local cultural producers would eventually begin to compete with American products, and as these productions increase and become more readily available, audiences would prefer regional or national products to international products". According to Fiske(1987), "These audiences actively read television in order to produce from it meanings that connect with their social experience." Thus, communication imperialism cannot survive for long if the south sincerely makes efforts to develop its own communication media .As new means of technology has opened and widen doors for the massive inflow of American or western cultural products ,on the other hand it has also increased national cultural production .So social media is helping the people of developing countries to have their own agendas setting instead of following the western media .The findings and discussion of this research concludes that internet based media has neutralized the media imperialism not only that of international media groups but also nation level media imperialism.

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