CHALLENGES OF MEDIA GLOBALIZATION FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Since the invention of the printing press in 1450, people have acknowledged the potential influence of mass media messages. Technology facilitated to 'remote control' people and things turned the world into a 'global village'. The very concept of media globalization reenacts debates that often took place long ago in communication research. However, media globalization challenges the concept of 'Normative Theories' of media. With the expansion and extension of media, the debates of impacts, effects and influences of globalization inevitably divide the world into centers and peripheries (Wallerstein, 1974). Though debates of NWICO and MacBride report suggested measures to overcome disparities but the impact of media globalization is very complex as replicated by 'CNN Effect' theory. Developing countries are more vulnerable. Schramm (1963) suggested six "essential functions" of communication in developing countries. This paper addresses the challenges posed by media globalization in the backdrop of these assumed functions of media in developing countries.

Keywords: Media globalization, functions of media, conglomeration, media imperialism

Introduction

Since the invention of the printing press in 1450, people have acknowledged the potential influence of mass media messages on audiences. The development of communication technology enhanced the circle of influence. Mass media brought major alteration in both human thought at the individual level and cultural developments at the collective level. The process of social, cultural and technological evolution is by no means at an end. In the pre-empirical era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, scholars from various disciplines concentrated on the potential influences of press. Among the prominent researchers were Max Weber (1910), Walter Lippmann (1922), Willard Bleyer (1924), John Dewey (1927), and Robert Ezra Park (1940). The empirical era perceived mass media as catering powerful, direct and immediate effects at a large scale. This assumption of media effects led to extensive studies in areas ranging from political campaigns to portrayal of violence, pornography, racial discrimination and women etc.

Technology facilitated the processes of connectedness at a larger scale. This phenomenon of increased interconnectedness of economies, polities, societies and cultures is perceived as globalization. Media served as a tool to accelerate these processes and rubbed the boundaries. Giddens[1] (1990) called this rapid development 'time-space distanciation'. Technology facilitated to 'remote control' people and things. The coverage of world events by global media is so pervasive that almost every key office and operations center around the globe keeps sets constantly tuned to the global channels. In real-time warfare, everyone knows as soon as events happen. The very concept of media globalization reenacts debates that often took place long ago in communication research. These are the debates including hypodermic needle paradigms, theories of powerful effects, theories of limited effects, theories stressing media uses and gratifications, theories of reception and resistance. With the expansion and extension of media, the debates of impacts, effects and influences of globalization divide the world into centers and peripheries. Immanuel Wallerstein's 'World System Theory' helps to understand various dimensions of media globalization.

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[1] Giddens, A., (1990): *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford University Press, p.64.

The World System Theory (WST) describes three levels of technology involved in the global communications; countries equipped with modern technology are labeled as core nations, countries that are in transitional age and striving hard to get an access to modern technology are semi-peripheral nations while countries with poor information and communication technology are peripheral nations. WST is a functional model of the global flow of information, goods, and services from core nations (e.g., US, EU, Japan) to semi-peripheral (e.g., Mexico, Brazil, Middle East) and peripheral (e.g., most of Africa, Latin America, Asia) nations.

Media globalization trends equipped owners to produce and distribute messages at a larger scale. According to Farrar (1997) *"All the world can learn about world events is what New York, London, or Paris chooses to tell them.[2]"* Cross ownership and conglomeration trends equipped the owners to perpetuate similar messages through various media. Conglomeration trends are the product of media globalization and tend to monopolize and blur the idea of plurality of voices. Bagdikian[3] (1997) traces the cross ownership and conglomeration trends in his book 'Media Monopoly.' He says that in 1983, fifty corporations dominated most of every mass medium. In 1987, the fifty companies shrunk to twenty nine. In 1990, the twenty nine had shrunk to twenty three. In 1997, there were ten biggest media firms that dominated almost every mass medium. Transnational circulation of cultures paved the way to acculturation that promoted commercialization and commoditization.

These trends benefited the owners and facilitated political economy of the media. The entire process is assisting concentration of wealth in few hands of the world. Economic disparities and class difference is increasing day by day. Planning and policy making is in the hands of richest. They are the owners of media giants and media moguls, maneuvering ideologies. They formulate policies and control message systems of their corporations. Through the media mechanism they are manipulating the perceptions, thinking and psyches of people. Media globalization facilitates them to control semi peripheral and peripheral nations. Core nations are technologically advanced and rich. The richest 20% of world's population are controlling 82.7% of the world income while the poorest 20% of World's population earn only 0.2% of the world's income. Media globalization assists the richest to control the poor and
maintain the status quo. The argument is corroborated by the following graph.

Distribution of world GDP, 1989	
Quintile of Population	**Income**
Richest 20%	82.7%
Second 20%	11.7%
Third 20%	2.3%
Fourth 20%	2.4%
Poorest 20%	0.2%

Source: United Nations Development Program. 1992 Source: Human Development Report

Almost all the richest belong to the core countries. However, the majority of the ruling richest in third world is indebted to core nations for their intellect, legitimacy and sustaining power. Although new communication technology is providing additional means of dissemination of information but in developing countries it is leading to widen the gap between those who have access to information and those who do not have it. This phenomenon of "communication imperialism" is a conscious and organized effort taken by the U.S. military-communication conglomerates to maintain a commercial, political, and military superiority. They are policing the world system through global media. McKibben[4] (1992) writes, "We believe that we live in the 'age of information', that there has been an information 'revolution'. While in a certain narrow sense this is the case, in many important ways the opposite is true". It has become a challenge to get a conceptual grip on a rising, wide-ranging and globe-shaking processes caused by global media. Individuals' cognitions are susceptible to the dominant media. Even regimes are affected as well as empowered to affect the wills of individuals due to global media. The 'CNN Effect' theory explains this point in detail.

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[2] Farrar, Ronald t. (1997). *Mass Communication an Introduction to the Field*. New York: The McGraw Hill Companies, Inc.
[3] Ben H. Bagdikian (1997). The Media Monopoly. Boston: Beacon Press
[4] Bill McKibben. (1992). *The Age Of Missing Information.* New York: Random House. P.160.

CNN is seen in 212 countries with a daily one billion global audience. A vivid example of CNN effect is George H. W. Bush's decision to send American troops in Somalia in 1992 and Clinton's decision to withdraw them the very next year in 1993. Since the September 11 attacks on the US, international and US media provided millions of people around the world different images of hijacked planes slamming into the World Trade Center in New York. In response, US attacked Afghanistan on 7th October 2001 and the coverage was mainly provided by US media. There was not a single voice from Afghanistan or any other developing countries' media. A critical analysis of the framing of US-Afghan conflict (what and how content is included and excluded) brings forth the challenges of media globalization for developing countries. The conflict is framed as 'War on Terrorism' or 'War Against Terrorism.' However, an in-depth analysis proves it vice versa.

As a result of New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), less developed countries decided to reduce their dependence on the media of core countries. Import of information technology was promoted to get independence but the further extension of technology gave rise to domination of core countries and dependence of periphery countries. This phenomenon promoted media imperialism. Schiller[5] (1992) defines "communication imperialism" as a conscious and organized effort taken by the U.S. military-communication conglomerates to maintain a commercial, political, and military superiority. Though, the Mac Bride Commission[6] issued a report in 1980 that demanded for 'wider and better balance' and a 'plurality of channels and information.' Varis[7] (1984) pointed out that although new communication technology may provide additional means of dissemination of information, it may also lead to widen the gap between those who have access to information and those who do not have it. As the knowledge-gap hypothesis suggests that better educated people are more benefitted of the information technology as compared to the less educated people. Moreover, people who belong to higher socio-economic status are better facilitated of the information technology than the lower status. Global media is widening the scope and sustaining this gap. Since its inception, Pakistan is facing economic disparities. Pakistanis who belong to higer socio-economic status can avail vast opportunities. They have an access to a variety of information sources. They are better informed and they can easily handle issues pertaining to technology.

They know internet terminology and they can follow machine related instructions. According to the researcher's observations as a teacher, talented students who belong to lower socio-economic status usually remain ignorant of different scholarships and job opportunities. Though, such incentives are meant for the financial assistance of the poor. Foreign and Higher Education Commission (HEC) scholarship announcements usually appear on internet. Pakistan is experiencing three worlds within it. There are handful of people (upper class) who enjoy all luxuries and facilities of core countries. Situations are maneuvered and controlled by them. They are the political elite and their roots are in feudalism. They have an access to every kind of information. Majority is poor (lower class) and belongs to rural areas. They are experiencing the conditions of peripheral countries, depending on ruling class for every kind of information. They neither have an access to latest information technology nor can benefit of it. Intensive load shedding makes it hard for middle class educated people to enjoy the benefits of latest information technology. Thus the latest information and communication technology is empowering the upper class.

Technological advancement brought changes in the perceived roles and functions of media. Wilbur Schramm listed the following six "essential functions" of communication in developing countries. To contribute to the feeling of nation-ness, to be the voice of national planning, to help to teach the necessary skills, to help to extend the effective market, to prepare people to play their new parts, to prepare the people to play their role as a nation among nations. Commodification of information and outsourcing of media contents restricted the 'essential functions' of media. The early concern revolved around the effects of the press as the press was the only mass media effecting people at a larger scale. Scholars studied the press to bring reforms in society so the early concern was 'reformist media'. Social responsibility theory of the press reflects this approach. The focus was on potentially changing rather than defending media practices. Harold D. Lasswell described following as functions of media; surveillance of the environment, correlation of different parts of the society in responding to the environment, and transmission of the social heritage to next generations. Charles Wright added the function of entertainment. Though, the processes and effects of modern media were not similar to print media. Television and internet changed the scope, nature and types of media effects.

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[5] Schiller, Herbert. (1992). *Mass communications and American empire*, Westview: Boulder & Co.

[6] UNESCO, Many Voices, One World. (New York: UNESCO, 1980).

[7] Varis, T. (1984). The international flow of television programs. *Journal of Communication, 34(1)*, 143-152.

Television is perceived as a 'goblet' empowering common people to see the entire world in it. Cultivation theory assumes the role of television as a family member, telling stories and serving as a cultural arm at societal level. Television contents are controlled by the owners and agenda is set by the policy makers. Audience gets source-centered messages and information. Early communication debates and research projects revolved around 'says what' and 'to whom' aspects of communication. A critical study of 'who' did not get attention for a long time. In case of global media, agenda is not arranged by local forces. It deeply effects on policy agenda and public agenda. Contents of global media cannot be a voice of developing country's planning. Multi-national Corporations and Trans-national Corporations that sponsor global media contents, promote foreign business. This phenomenon destabilizes national economies.

Immediate effects of global media appear in rearrangement and revision of foreign policies and long-term effects are observed in the form of acculturation and shift in ideologies. Though plurality of channels promoted political polarization, but the west considered rise of rest as threat. Chris Patterson[8] noted that wire and television agencies' coverage is not neutral, because journalism has an "ideological component" a way of seeing the world. Demonization of Muslims is very vivid in western media. Muslims are identified as liberal, radical or extremists. News has a predominantly North-South flow so, international news agencies treat western governments and trans-national corporations as 'priority' sources over institutions from developing countries. However, latest technology is perceived as equipping people to contribute in the manufacturing of contents. Internet blogging, tweeter and face-book are relatively providing space to interact, control and launch contents according to their own will. But their usage lies with upper socio-economic class. They can easily interact with the people of the other corner of world but they cannot communicate with their own folk. Martin Luther King[9] said, "Men often hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they can not communicate; they cannot communicate because they are separated (1958). This foreign communication phenomenon hampers the way to the feeling of nation-ness.

The result is absence of correlation in different parts of societies in responding to environment. It also serves as an impediment to the transmission of culture, norms and values of one generation to the next. In general the essential function of media to create feelings of nation-ness is hindered. Culture of any society serves as a glue and bond to bring people closer and united. Entertainment is considered as a classic function of media. A large number of Hollywood films, and other entertainment programs, are outsourced and imported by developing countries. Glamorous picture of developed countries results in brain drain. The trends of immigration to developed countries are at increase. Moreover, people often use information technology for entertainment. Festive media keeps audience in a festive mood. Access to cable channels is almost free as the subscription is extremely nominal. Such environment hampers media to be the voice of national planning and to create feelings of nation-ness. Inefficient system capabilities, including extractive, regulative, distributive, responsive and symbolic capabilities do not provide opportunities to the media to be the voice of national planning.

Media in developing countries should help to teach necessary skills. Most of the developing countries have been colonies of Britain so they have continued with the same legacy. Their systems are almost the same even the educational system is almost the same. Medium of instruction is English. People of a same country do not know the languages spoken in other parts of the country. English reflects the master slave relationship and indigenous languages are dealt with high headedness. English is the language of the majority of global media available in developing countries. Feelings of nation-ness can not be created through a foreign language. As far as indigenous media is concerned, a 'two-step flow of communication' effects on it. Global media contents, formats and agenda shifts to indigenous media. Film themes, television talk shows and dramas are copied. Imported solutions can serve only in similar perspective and backgrounds. Global media is promoting celebrity cultism and media celebrities are serving as guides and role models irrespective of the cultures, languages and religions.

Global media is considered to promote and extend effective market. Market forces shaped the corporate culture and giant media corporations emerged as a result. However the economic structures are different in various parts of the world. American capitalism is based on liberal and free market concept while Asian capitalism is sate controlled and guided capitalism. Global media is promoting the business of transnational and multi-national corporations. That is again destabilizing the economy of developing countries.

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[8] Accessed on 3rd July, 2002. www.disinfo.com/pages/article/id1298/pg1
[9] http://uspolitics.about.com/od/biographies/a/mlk_quotes.htm

Debts of developing countries are increasing day by day while TNCs, MNCs are making money in developing countries. Due to increased commercialization trends, fetish culture is flourishing and resulting in consumerism promotion. Gerry Levin, chief executive of AOL (America Online) Time Warner[10], announced that global media would become the dominant industry of this century, perhaps even more powerful than governments. This dominant industry is maneuvering developing world. For example, if we look at the agenda of elite press of US and Pakistan, the space given to US news items in Pakistani press is all encompassing. While news items about Pakistan in US press are negligible. This is not the case with Pakistan only; it applies on the rest of the developing world. After the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989, international news seem to lose its urgency for many Americans and the agenda turned to domestic news. The international news agenda for US media confined to the issues of environment, human rights, trade and regional hot spots. But the media agenda of developing countries still revolves around the Western countries. News about Hollywood celebrities, U.S. foreign policy and statements of high-ups get utmost coverage. Media agenda influences public agenda as well as policy agenda.

That is why the real issues are not covered through media resulting in an increasing gap between rich and poor. Moreover, people who belong to higher socio-economic status are better facilitated to get benefits of information technology than the lower status. In developing countries majority of the population is poor so they are deprived of certain benefits. Global media is widening the scope for rich and sustaining this gap. Knowledge-gap hypothesis endorses this point as the better educated people are more benefited of the information technology as compared to the less educated people. Since literacy rate in developing countries is not encouraging, this effect is quite apprehensible. Media globalization has become a challenge for developing countries on different fronts including, economic, political, cultural and ideological. Early communication debates and research projects revolved around 'says what' and 'to whom' aspects of communication. A critical study of 'who' did not get attention for a long time. In the backdrop of media globalization, it is indispensable to conduct studies about 'who' of the media. As the ideology, policy and content always reflect 'who' of the media. Media conglomerates have reduced the diversity of expression. That is why the same Taliban in Afghanistan have been receiving different connotation during the last thirty years. Dominant global discourses of 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are determined by the conglomerate media.

Though the first amendment in the American constitution guarantees its citizens with the freedom of expression and free press but practically it is subjugating these rights of developing countries. Embedded journalists help to construct opinion according to the desire of their masters. It is evident especially in case of Afghanistan and Iraq. Media globalization in the form of interlocking of media giants in the developed world is becoming a threat to the sovereignty of developing countries. In a survey conducted by Stephen Hess regarding US media correspondents working in other countries, only ten out of 774 were able to conduct interview in Arabic language. While Arabic is at 6th among the list of top languages by population. That is how media globalization is promoting one region at the expense of marginalizing other region.Media globalization is a challenge to the role of free press as a 'Fourth Estate.' For a functioning democracy, it is very important for citizens to have an access to different discourses. Concentration of media ownership in the developed world and increased dependence of developing countries on them has restricted the ability of citizens to make informed decisions. If media moguls control media distribution and content, then their political and commercial power is dangerous for any democracy.

The dominant circulation of global media contents in the developing countries is not only a challenge to their democracies but to their cultures, economies and ideologies. Normative theories of media in developing countries are also facing a challenge by media globalization. Developmental media theory calls for government and media to work jointly. The objective is to assist the planned and beneficial development of the country. In case of local media's increased dependence on foreign media for various contents, the developmental media theory can never be applied. Social Responsibility Theory also appears at the crossroads of media globalization. Since, societies are peculiar and different in historical, cultural, and structural sense; same media contents can not be suitable for all societies. Same is the case with Democratic-participant theory that advocates media support for cultural pluralism at grassroots level. According to this theory media should work for the transmission of culture so that increased integration can be attained. The theory believes in co-relation of different segments of a society but the contents of global media can not coordinate in this regard. There is a dire need to devise a strategy for establishing a balance. The promotion of regionalism can help to cope up the situation.

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[10] Accessed on 3rd July, 2002. www.newint.org/issue333/keynote.htm

Though there are already many regional associations and organizations like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) but they are not effective and functional in the true sense. European Union can serve as role model to developing countries and they can recognize themselves as nation among nations.

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