From Traditional to New Media: A Paradigm of Cultural Imperialism in Nigeria

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Abstract

Debate on cultural imperialism emerged from communication literature, which involves topical issues around media economics and political economy. How we view these seminal constructs shapes our perceptions and understanding of government and its relationship with the private sector through policies and practices. This paper queries the authenticity of cultural imperialism and explores the awareness of a new paradigm, which integrates the new media as a direct-behavior medium of effect with these seminal constructs. The changing role of the media, particularly the mass media in the importation and exportation of culture will remain a queried subject in global communication theories and research for a long time to come. However, it is important to note that the explanations of early communication theories describing the power of the media are now being challenged. Theories such as the 'magic bullet' or the 'hypodermic needle' have speculated about the influence of the mass media upon its audience and how helpless an audience may seem under these influences. However, the veracity and the extent of these influences have remained a subject of debate in communication research since it was first postulated. Irrespective of these differences, global communication and research remain convinced that the media remains a powerful tool in the global exchange of cultures and common heritages though the same literature pursues in critical terms the scope and extent of such influences as the world moves from traditional to new media. Although, some media scholars have continuously queried the conception of cultural imperialism, extant literature has also proven that these scholars have not been able to provide any conceptual alternative. While others have derived their arguments from interdisciplinary literature across the social sciences and humanities which seek to develop theoretical alternatives, the seminal construct of cultural imperialism remains a valid construct in communication research. This paper further discusses how the media has evolved and how technology and the new media have made it possible to integrate economies, communication and cultures through globalization.

Key words: Cultural imperialism; Techno-culture; Traditional Media; globalization; New Media; Media Convergence

INTRODUCTION

Media Evolution

This concept is defined in the context of how the media has evolved from its traditional nature to a medium of shared social experiences (Noll, 2007). It is important to note that the media is not merely a consequence of technology, but also a consequence of invention and the institutionalization of our social architecture (Stober, 2014). In this debate, therefore it is important to clarify that technology only serves to improve the deployment mechanisms of the old media where processes are fundamentally influenced by new media technology. It is also interesting to note that the techno-culture of media is premised on the discoveries of new possibilities for communication; it adopts existing media and formats it into new media.

Empirical studies have proven that the media landscape is changing along the needs of people; this evolution also makes it imperative for new technology and in extension new media to be deployed effectively. A typical example of these advancements in techno-culture is the internet, here the internet infrastructure has exposed citizens to a culture of interactive journalism, where news is reeled out 24 hours a day and seven days a week (Dare, 2010). The new media landscape has thereon created citizen journalist who can produce news without the protocols of the traditional media.

Seminal Constructs of Our Cultural Heritages

Our perception of culture is locked in a global mindset themed in an increasing international politics and business strategy. Conversely, these paradigms explore and operationalize our global construction of culture in unrelated ways, these constructs create problems for empirical researchers as the gap threatens the advancement of testable models (Hwang, 2013).

To unify these paradigms, this paper introduced a third perspective from cognitive psychology that clarifies the new media as a direct-behavior medium of effect. It is easy to apply models of cultural imperialism by adapting any form of mass media; it is also easy to theorize the global exchange of these cultures using the mass media as a medium of exchange. However, to propose cosmopolitanism and cognitive density as experiences to cultural imperialism suggests an equivalence of culture in different climes irrespective of boundary straddling.

Although the existing models provide fertile grounds for media scholars to become cognitively aware of the complexity of the highly layered cultural space, to understand the experiences of multicultural individuals by underlying the seminal constructs of our cultural heritage- we must navigate the different standards and value that define our cultural identities. How societies maintain multiple and separate identities will help us to understand cultural integration and the preservations of our cultural heritage (Maya A. Yampolsky, 2013).

It is without doubt that new media is in the forefront of globalization since its emergence in the last twenty years. It has accelerated global development through digitization, media convergence, web interactivity, hyper-textuality, virtuosity and a seamless connectedness of man and society. The instantaneity of the new media in transforming the human society is largely a result of media convergence that is directly influencing the construction and development of cultural heritages. The advent of new media and globalization did not only unsettle the boundaries and definitions of traditional time and space, it also challenged the meaning and validity of cultural identity (Chen, 2010). This paper therefore attempts to unravel the complex connections between new media, globalization, and cultural identity through definitional processes and construal analysis.

Recent studies have shown how new media is questioning our cultural identities at a generic level, while at the same time threatening our individual identities. These threats manifest through a digitised initiation of our sensory experience. New media is also an embodiment of digital territories that are so powerful by creating an interface of inscribable space for storing and manipulating information (Farman, 2012). In this experience, man is able to interchange limits consistent to sights, sounds, and even touch with virtual or mechanical partners. The configuration where science and technology is building a body of knowledge entrenched in sense experience has fine-tuned our sensations into a shared experience. Acuity and reason are being explored to allow mental processing tasks to be easily allocated to different sensory channels, which will in turn optimise our complex data assimilation.

It is safe to mention therefore that new media technologies are becoming heavily solicited in a move towards a conservative attitude to culture that is often or erroneously considered as an untapped goldmine. For the near and distant future, cultural heritage remains a seminal construct viewed as a bankable patrimony occasioned by noticeable changes as conservationist to culture (Norman, 2015).

The New Media as a Direct-Behaviour Medium of Effect

The media is rapidly growing; the emergence of cellular/personal smart phones, social media, satellite television, cross-cultural movies deployed through the internet infrastructure will continue to marvel us. However, more interesting is how the new media either by content or by infrastructure is shaping the perception of even our immediate surroundings. Among the most mesmerising developments is what we are learning from brain research using Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). Results are revealing explicit results affecting the brain and behaviour (Johnson, Blum, & Gied, 2009). To this end, media psychology is now recognized as a branch of media science.

New media by nature is reproducible with a landscape that is ubiquitous it has proven that news or information can be made available at all times in different locations. This characteristic has revalorized fading aspects of our cultural heritage while opening new frontiers of communication, understanding and shared experiences. The new media today is a set of complex infrastructures that has jettisoned the humanist and technologist of the Manichean oppositions as caricatures. With an initial altruistic intention, the new media was aimed at unifying humanity, conversely commercial media raided the digital space with the allocation of content to win public acceptance but has also ruined cultural institutions (Norman, 2015).

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 The Theory of Cultural Imperialism Theory

The theory was amplified by Herbert schiller in 1975, although other scholars such as John Tomilsom in 1960 have used 'cultural imperialism' interchangeably to also mean media imperialism, cultural synchronization, economic imperialism, cultural dependency and domination, and ideological imperialism. It suggests that rich countries especially western countries control the production of most the world's media. The theory further suggests the dominant influence of one culture over another as the latter (through contact with transnational media) deems it fit to adopt new values, worldviews, societal philosophies and even common aspirations (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2007). In this regard, the lesser culture either abandons its own culture immediately or loses it gradually over time.

This paper therefore, seeks to establish cultural imperialism between developed and developing nations by putting Nigeria into context, but it is also interested in examining the paradigmatic character of the media even as the traditional media is now overwhelmed by the influence of the new media. Because of this paradigmatic character, this paper is convinced that a supporting theory that deals with the paradigmatic character will further enrich this study; thus, the cognitive dissonance theory through the angle of the four paradigms.

1.2 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

It is interesting to note that there will be a dissonance when the theory of cognitive dissonance is introduced in a paper whose central theme is 'cultural imperialism'. However, as concluded in the analysis of the cultural imperialism theory this paper seeks to concretize its conceptual framework with the introduction of the cognitive dissonance theory, which was propounded by Leon Festinger in 1951.

The cognitive dissonance theory is rooted in the assumption that the human mind is framed to seek consistency in beliefs, values and attitudes (McLeod, 2008). Therefore, it creates a systematic relationship to ensure its harmony, otherwise there may evoke a cognitive dissonance when this harmonious relationship is broken. However, if dissonance is translated as a state of discomfort, then it becomes a motivator for man to adapt his cognition to achieve consonance. In this regard, we will examine the initial dissonance by weak cultures when a strong culture breaks into its hymen.

Nevertheless, the central objective of the cognitive dissonance theory in this paper is to view it through the lens of the four different paradigms-

The Paradigm of Belief Disconfirmation- in its rudimentary nature, this paradigm suggests that when our belief towards a given value or attitude is not decreasing, then the alien belief is rejected which created the dissonance in the first place(Flesher, 2005). To this paper, cultural imperialism becomes effective when the original belief, value or attitude is decreased, otherwise there will not be a disconfirmation and the culture will fail to imperialize.

The Paradigm of Induced-Compliance- the assumption of the induce-compliance suggests that there is a cultural compliance by the weaker cultures to belief in the values and philosophies of the stronger culture in a calculated process aimed to achieve certain objectives as such it is 'induced'(Edelstein, 2015). The paradigm of induced compliance can be explained through the deployment of feature films by dominant culture which amplifies the inferiority of the weaker culture and induces it to adopt the strong culture as it 'culture supreme'. In this analysis therefore, we examine cultural imperialism as an induced or deliberate acculturation of societies by developed and western societies.

The Paradigm of Free-Choice- this paradigm suggests that when human cultures are faced with a difficult choice, it seeks avenues to amplify the cognitive value of the preferred choice, in the same vain consciously or unconsciously it reduces the values of those cultural attributes it refuse to accept. Although it does not suggest a complete dismissal of the unchosen attribute, it only suggested that such cultural attributes have received equal attention as the chosen one (Chen, 2010). On the other hand, it cannot also justify the chosen one. As such, it is perfect to explain why weaker cultures will favour a competing strong culture against the other.

The Paradigm of Effort-Justification- this paradigm seeks to explain why humans will cognitively rationalise its struggles when occupied with an un-pleasant culture. Human cultures find excuses for the foreignism of a culture simply to justify its dominance and help in eliminating the cognitive dissonance (Maich, 2014). In this regard, we examine how we have adopted language and writing and have justified it against African orality; we also see how Nollywood's originality for video production is slowly being eroded for celluloids using 'standardization' as a justification.

1.3 Cultural Imperialism as a Theoretical Construct

In 1970 Herb Schiller proposed the theory of cultural imperialism, he explained the theory as a construct using the early media to explain a situation where culture is transmitted and promoted in a one way, top-down system of transmission by dominant countries and in extension their cultures. This process according to Herb resulted into audiences that became passive and a media that became all powerful.

As a theoretical construct, cultural imperialism refers to the involuntary acculturation of any given people. Thus, cultural influences are seen by the recipient culture as either a blessing or a curse. Although, the validity of

this construct has been called into question, it seems to remain useful as it distinguishes the superiority of cultural imperialism and the cultural heritage of a group of people that aim to augment its own cultural production with a foreign culture, where the original culture is actively or passively seen as deficient (Sayre & King, 2010).

It is evident that the dominant media is the western media, and this has led to a continued proliferation of dominant cultures onto otherwise passive societies. This theory became grounded when dominant media promote their own local cultures not because they intend to dominate other cultures but sometimes because of making economic gains. Therefore, with a harmless intent, cultural content is fed to developing countries who begin to crave to act and think as the characters in the promoted culture.

However, if cultural imperialism is said to be what it is, are humans not free to feel, think, act and chose how they live? Our reactions to what we see through media are therefore nothing but a comparison of our own culture to the new culture. These theories, therefore, suggest that as far as the media remains dominated by the West then a continued comparison of culture will remain. To that extent, the theoretical construct is value neutral.

1.4 The Scope and Extent of Media Effect

The scope of new/mass media cannot be over emphasized; new media has proven to transcend geographical boundaries. However, the effect of media on a given audience will always provoke research interests. To understand the phenomenal effect of mass media and in extension the new media, this paper described how the media is deployed to effect change and development: by reconstructing the advancement of thought processes and the efforts to spread modernization (westernization) through the media and the adaptation of alternate viewpoints based on reassuring involvement in development communication. The understanding of this first construct elaborates the theory of media imperialism on one hand and a provocation to replace it as a major theoretical framework in the globalization of communication (Sparks, 2008).

It is also important to note that media effect is quantifiable and can be measured. Therefore, the influence of media or a media message can be gauged. This assumption is true whether the message has any effect on its audience or not. Nevertheless, we must be mindful that media effect is dependent on several causes, such as psychological characteristics and audience demographics. Such effects can be either be positive or negative, unexpected or measured, temporary or lifelong. It is also very important to note that not all effects will blossom into change, but may perhaps simply strengthen a prevailing credence. In the study of media effect scholars will among other things, be interested in observing changes in perception, belief, and attitude, emotional and psychological effects (Huesmann, 2007).

1.5 The Globalization Paradigm

In the initial juncture of cultural imperialism, scholars were more concerned with countries as principal actors in international relations and diplomacy. Early theories were hinged on the power of countries seen as rich and industrialized to export cultural products and in extension, their socio-cultural values on poor and less developed countries. Extant literature has validated these assumptions by demonstrating the graphic flow of information, commerce and entertainment in a biased manner in favour of developed countries (Shah, 2006). This skewed perception is often amplified in terms of *quantity* if exported media is consumed by developing nations and in *quality* if exported media is consumed by developed nations. Dominant media mostly domiciled in developed nations most often promote this perception.

Research in media and communication studies has continuously been dominated by the interest in globalization of culture; it has become an intangible lodestone attracting disciplinary and interdisciplinary research such as anthropology, cultural studies, comparative literature, media and communication studies, geography, and sociology. Furthermore, international communication has remained an integral active converser in this argument; it has allowed information technologies play vital roles in the process of cultural globalization.

Fittingly, globalization of culture remains a debated issue that revolve around the following philosophical questions:

Is the media responsible for cultural globalization? or

Is cultural globalization an old phenomenon that was only accelerated with the advent of new media?

A critical analysis on the globalization of culture is suggestive of cultural imperialism in terms of the nature of the effect of media on culture, the notion that media is a major contributor to the homogenization of global cultural differences lends credence to this theory. This view however governs conservative knowledge on cultural globalization.

1.6 The Media as a Medium of Cultural Exchange

The media landscape has also served as an avenue for cultural exchange; a place where practices and developments of traditions become systems of our cultural heritage; a landscape that has shaped and influenced ideological dialogue. The media landscape is implicit of information vulnerable to scrutiny by means similar in ways in which literary and other scripts are scrutinized.

Furthermore, it is easy to note that the new media especially the social media has become powerful tools for cultural exchange, its growing influence and how they shape human perception cannot be ignored (Furedi, 2016). History is replete with significant roles the new media has played in human culture. A recent survey of the social media gives credence to the new media as an agglomeration or acculturation of philosophies and

values. The famous Arab spring, the resistance in Ukraine against Russia, the resistance in Hong Kong against China and even the occupy Nigeria protest of 2012 shows how the new media has mushroomed into a global cultural player through its ability to mobilize, influence and monitor cultural inclinations and societal activism often shrouded in the imperialism of philosophy (e.g. western democracy).

Scholars are in complete agreement that the new media is most significant in the way and manner we mobilize and educate the populace; it is also not in doubt that it has become a powerful instrument. However, the signal here is not on its prowess, but on its technological imperatives that allow the media to dominate human mobilization and indeed its cultures, accessed and deployed as a creative resource, which reacts to the aspirations and needs of our individuality. Although there is refraction of the near segmentation of our social media experiences, it has received greater momentum given its technological dynamism. The amplification of our social trends directly influences our experiences of the social media on our everyday culture.

In this regard therefore, if our collective experience of cultural exchange serves as a precedent, it is likely that the new media simplify the rigour that seeks to prevail on our indigenous culture, but also provide the needed platform for reinterpreting its meaning.

1.7 Cultural Imperialism as a Fall-Out of Globalization

It is a common believe that the globalized economy is responsible for cultural imperialism. This became glarer with technological advancement in new media technology. As a fall-out of globalization, we begin to see cultural imperialism as a form of '*soft power*'. To support these assumptions is the theory of 'electronic colonialism', which extends this debate to the globalization of cultures and the impact of new media infrastructure, such as CNN, Facebook, Google and Microsoft among others(Sayre & King, 2010).

History has proven that cultural imperialism is also a direct result of globalization, however, we cannot examine every channel of history in this debate but to narrow this paper to just two, namely:

English cultural imperialism and Chinese cultural imperialism

English Cultural Imperialism

From a simple game of cricket to a dominating language (English), the English will remain a big chapter in history of cultural imperialism. The English have successfully replaced the original Latin language with English language and made it popular by declaring it first as an official language in all the English churches and later in all aspects of official correspondence. Language is not the only cultural product the English has deployed but also its games such as cricket, which initially gained ground

in British colonies and now in most parts of the world. We should note that the English game of cricket has one of the largest followers in the world with an estimated followership of more than 3 billion fans (Romanian Cricket Council, 2009).

Chinese Cultural Imperialism

While the English cultural imperialism is promoted towards passive cultures and voluntarily accepted to seemingly fill a cultural gap, the Chinese cultural imperialism is a repressive form of cultural imperialism where the mainland Chinese language, culture and lifestyles are imposed on neighboring regions like Tibet and Taiwan within the popular policy of 'one China'. This move by China in the name of standardization of language and culture is seen by many as repressive of local dialects and cultures and as an indication towards cultural imperialism. The new and global China fuels this form of Chinese imperialism, which is inundate with the socio-cultural structures of various global capitals that lean strongly towards an existing cultural dominance.

Lastly, a common and replete example of cultural imperialism is in the form of Americanization. This form of imperialism is possible through the dollarization of global economy and the individual trade relationship of American multinationals and most developing countries. Although this form of cultural imperialism is seen as a passive form of imperialism, it is usually adopted by passive cultures almost voluntarily.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing, we have examined the change in people's culture as a daily phenomenon. This paper also examined it against a people's attitude and their way of life. Our daily cultural exchange occasioned by the media and the new media is changing our perception about the generalizability of the terms culture, cultural imperialism and globalisation of cultures. This is indeed a paradigmatic effect in our perception and the delineation of what is indigenous and what is foreign, what can be accommodated and what should be rejected. It was on this premise that we examined the four paradigms of cognitive dissonance and how it affects our perception of cultural imperialism. Looking at cultural imperialism from the angle of induced compliance it is easy to conclude that cultural imperialism is a flow from strong cultures to weaker cultures. However, when it is examined from the angle of free choice it becomes evident that imperialism has no effect as adoption of cultures is by free choice. Moreover, looking at it from the paradigm of effort justification, we see cultural imperialism as a symbiotic relationship between weaker and stronger cultures where the weaker culture augments its culture with assumed cultural attributes.

However, if we look at globalisation of cultures as a substitute to cultural imperialism we see how the world

is gradually becoming hegemonic in beliefs, values and philosophies, which will include economic, political or even moral philosophies. Globalisation is seen as the result of a sustained cultural exchange between cultures based on how the human mind acquires, comprehends and disseminates information or new knowledge. This is usually the case when the media becomes involved, especially through television and films. But, as the society is changing, so is human advancement and the need for the instantaneity of information, occasioned by the growth of the new media and resulting in the paradigmatic effect of cultural imperialism.

At this point, it is safe to conclude that nobody either individually or collectively can live in isolation. The need to associate with other people cannot be separated from the imperativeness to copy, share, borrow or adopt ideas and philosophies of life. Although the consumption of these cultures especially a foreign culture to the point of abandoning one's culture can be termed as cultural imperialism, it goes beyond this generic term. However, if we substitute this generic term with terms like 'cultural transmission' we can also see the same effect but from a different lens. Thus, it becomes a tool for development and cultural awakening, which can stimulate the imagination, creativity and artistic abilities of a culture to lead in the production of cultural artefacts and in extension its heritages.

There is no doubt that the media is a major purveyor of culture, by helping to balance the cultural exchange of demand and supply. It has succeeded in meeting the demands of developing countries but has failed to make any significant impact in transmitting their cultures back to the developed societies. This alteration in mutual exchange of cultures has often been interpreted as cultural imperialism.

Today in Nigeria, the transmission of cultures promoted by the media has been able to bring Nigeria's ethnic diversity to the fore. The process is seen as a means to access its different cultures and cultural expressions. However, when applied on a transnational scale it is cultural imperialism, this is so because in our theoretical framework the paradigm of induced compliance and effort justification becomes apparent in the manner these cultures are consumed. Albeit, there is absolutely no basis to discredit cultural imperialism as tools for promoting noble ideas like education (western), health systems, housing policies, agricultural styles, systems of government and even living styles, which are adopted for the progress of the nation.

Nigeria is guilty of picking cultural habits quickly without suspicion, as a country it has become a dumping ground for western cultures sometimes at the detriment of its original cultures. Perhaps its over-exposure to foreign culture by way of new media and by extension, the social media is the cause of this shift in our cultural and religious structures. This is true, because Nigerians have become immersed in the westernization of their dressing, eating and social lives that they have failed to realize that perhaps they have been imperialized.

The manifestations of cultural imperialism in Nigeria are evident from a simple examination of our daily lives. Women have come to accept the 'ideal skin' as fair/ white, and will continue in a skin bleaching spree to achieve it. Nigerians also see how music has been used to promote wild fashion, where boys with ear rings are becoming the generation of pride. Strangely, we have also adopted the western dressing in a rather hot climate- the banks and some corporate organizations are guilty of this. Crime is also on the rise as the proliferation of films and music hit Nigerian markets, the continued desecration of traditional values such as respect for elders, moderation in dressing and reverence for societal norms are gradually being replaced. Perhaps, it is only wise to admit that Nigeria, from the traditional to the new media, has become culturally imperialized.

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