

Communication and Culture Reflections on the Perspectives of Influence

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ABSTRACT

There are no mass media texts, messages, cues and portrayals that are free from cultural biases and objectives, and advance no relation to power and domination. More often media contents, news, entertainment or commercial, contain prejudices of class, gender, race or representation and social segmentation. Entertainment programs, however, are relatively heavily saturated with cultural biases and prejudices, of which target audience is predominantly the youth. These media contents influence the political thoughts, shape or reshape the cultural traits, pose or propose idols and icons, affect the social order, and alter the relationship between social institutions. This paper mainly aims at exploring the different facets of media effects on culture. How mass media and culture are linked with each other, what different schools of thought comment on these effects and what are the effects of technological developments on mass media and culture relationship? These and some other significant questions are addressed in the paper.

Keywords: Communication; Culture; Classical Marxist Theory, Media, influence.

There are no mass media texts, messages, cues and portrayals, which are free from cultural biases and objectives, and advance no relation to power and domination. More often media contents, news, entertainment or commercial, contain prejudices of class, gender, race or misrepresentation and social segmentation. Entertainment programs, however, are relatively heavily saturated with cultural biases and prejudices, of which target audience is predominantly the youth. These media contents influence the political thoughts, shape or reshape the cultural traits, pose or propose idols and icons, affect the social order, and alter the relationship between social institutions. There is an iota of recent Vol 19, No.8;Aug 2012

Research on mass media nexus with culture which advocates the immense power of media to create myths, renew, amplify and extend the existing predispositions to constitute a dominant culture (Curran et al., 1982).

This paper mainly aims at exploring the different facets of media effects on culture. How mass media and culture are linked with each other, what different schools of thought comment on these effects and what are the effects of technological developments on mass media and culture relationship? These and some other significant questions shall be addressed in the paper. However, before initiating discussion on mass media and culture nexus, it seems apposite to know what we mean by culture and how the construct has been defined in literature.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

For peaceful survival, human beings have to live in a society with politeness, peace and with somewhat compromising behavior. All members who live in a society have to face many difficulties, problems and realities; e.g., they need shelter and food for life. They transmit, what they have, to their coming generations. This transmission of problems, beauties and liabilities to the future generations is known as 'culture'. This feature makes the culture known as social heritage. No country or nation is culture-free. It is one of the basic ingredients of a society. Culture is used to refer to all the activities of life whether these are social, physical, external or internal. Its material components include buildings, furniture, clothing, musical instruments and other tangible stuff. It is the sum total of all the tangible and intangible things including art and craft, customs and traditions, ideas, values, social and political norms and habits etc. Technology and development are also components of a culture. These two concepts are simultaneously

cause and effect for each other and play a vital role in the transformation of a culture from tradition-oriented society to a modern one. And, this transformation happens due to the cultural industries; i.e., mass media (Bennett, 1982, p.31).

Culture is a human medium that translates and governs man's actions and give meanings to what he does or consciously refrains from it. It has roots in a Latin word 'colere', which means 'to build on, to cultivate, and to foster' (Dhal, 2000). The meanings of the Latin word apparently indicate that 'culture' is somehow opposite to 'nature' as 'culture' is built and cultivated while 'nature' has an intrinsic value. In other words, 'culture' is constructed while 'nature' is innate, and a society is the mix of 'culture' and 'nature'. Man, by nature, is a cultural animal who prefers to live in a social system that has the attributes distinguishing it from other societies or social groups (Jalibi, 1984, p.14). This distinguished outlook of a society is due to its culture. As the human being is constantly destined for change in himself and his surroundings, such dynamism in the human nature keeps his culture on a constant change. This is evident from the fact that he is no more a creature of primitive or metal age, but of satellite and space age. During these ages all his efforts aimed at refining his life and surrounding, for which he invented and introduced many new things. These efforts resulted into the existence of societies that taught him to live in an orderly fashion and decorate his life with language, education, ideas, customs, habits, religion, manners, values, music, art, architecture and other artefacts. The manifestation of all these activities was given the name of 'culture'. Rosengren (1983, p.319) contends that culture is the cognitive and evaluative framework within which human beings act, and feel. Watson (2003, p.49) gives a wider outlook in his definition by saying that 'culture is made up of language, history, tradition, climate, geography, art, socio-economic values and every nation sizes its current prosperity with the nature of its culture'. His understanding of the concept makes the culture of a society its peculiar identification – loss of culture, loss of identity. Culture exists in the minds and habit patterns of the member of a society. It is invisible in the behavior of individual as they are engaged in various forms of socially learned ways of doing things. Individuals may not be conscious of what they do and the way they do, but their behavior is Vol 19, No. 8;Aug 2012

Streamlined accordingly to the socially approved ways of society; hence, no deviance, and no cognitive dissonance. Reddi (1989, p.395) supports this premise and says that culture is the way of life of people, a composite of historical and living traditions, beliefs, values and practices, which are reflected in every mode of social behavior. Anthropologists generally define culture as the 'systematic way of constructing reality that the people acquire as a consequence of living in a group' (Red, 1977, p.9). Sociologists believe that 'culture is the product of a group' (Jerzy, 1977, p.58) and 'an aggregate means of achievement and of progress' (Layer, 1978, p.64). Hess and Markson (1988, p.67) define culture as the blueprint for living in a group whose members share a territory and language...feel responsible for each other'. Popenoe (1980, p.102), Stark (1987, p.320) and Vander (1989, p.58) advocate culture as 'being' and 'taught' by society, 'a complex pattern of living' and a mix of material and non-material things, respectively. Culture is one of the most fundamental and universal aspects of human reality. Although its nature is too complex and subtle to understand and there does not seem to have a generally accepted definition, but its influence is all-encompassing. From the above discussion on its definition, culture may be defined as a dynamic value system of learned elements with assumptions, conventions, beliefs and the rules permitting members of a group to relate to each other and to the world to communicate and to develop their creative potential. Precisely, the culture produces cohesion within and differentiation across groups to give the society an identity and distinctness. On the basis of the elaborated and other related definitions, we can say that culture:

- Is the product of social interaction
- Offers socially approved patterns for our biological and social needs;
- Is a social heritage that gets transferred from one generation to other in a given society
- Is learned by every individual in the course of his personal development;

- Is one of the basic determinants of personality and;
- Depends for its existence upon the continued functioning of the society and is independent of any individual or group.

CLASSICAL DOMINANT APPROACHES OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

Media and cultural studies have emerged as one of the most significant academic disciplines over the past quarter of a century. As culture gives an identity to a nation and media are the tools for its promotion or destruction, this area of communication discipline is best characterized as cultural studies (Andrew, 1989, p.2). In this academic arena, culture has been considered as a theoretical problem only because it proves to be socially problematic. Culture, as most communication scholars agree, forms the baseline from where the researchers must begin their analysis, if they want to understand the impact(s) of mass media on masses and their culture. Not only this, how media articulate the dominant values of a social system, what are the prevailing political ideologies and what social changes are taking place can be studied in the light of perspectives provided by the cultural studies to construct the views about world and human behaviour. Succinctly, the cultural studies provide set of approaches to study the relationship between culture, media and society. Contemporarily, instruments of communication (mass media) are considered as revolutionary weapons – as means of education, a commercial product; and can serve ends of drilling human into uniformity (Willis & Willis, 2007, p.40). They are not merely the sources of information, education, or entertainment, rather are regarded, like the old premise by Lenin, as the ‘collective organizers’ (Moragas Spa, 1983, p.509) that contribute to reduce the cultural differences to make the system appear in a universal colour. Most of the research studies conducted in the recent past attempted to describe the relationship between communication and culture using the theoretical frameworks of cultural studies. Vol 19, No. 8; Aug 2012

What are the mass media and what influence they have on society and human behavior and other related questions have since long been under discussion by various quarters. The disciplines adopted to study impact of mass media society, culture and human behavior have been instrumental to set directions for the study of mass media effects on society and culture. Over the past couple of decades, the perspectives used to study the phenomenon in question; i.e., mass media and their effects on culture, have been the Marxist approach, the Frankfurt school, the Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses, and the Gramsci approach. There has been a lot of criticism on all the perspectives and a plethora of literature can also be found in support of these theorems. However, consensus on how mass media effect the culture of a society and under what circumstances with what strength is yet to be reached. Not only this, the advent of new media tools like Internet also opened up new avenues of research to reach to new phase of media effects. Globalization and new information technologies further widened the scope of mass media effects on a social system, particularly its culture. This paper will also shed some light on these aspects. Classical Marxist Theory. According to classical Marxist’s approach, mass media are the ‘means of production’ which are controlled and used by the ruling class. Curran et al. (1982) quotes: “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at

the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (p.22).” This monolithic approach of media use and effects does not leave any room for the participation of audience or ‘the ruled’ in the process of understanding of what is communicated through mass media as they (the masses) have different socio-psychological conditions. As such mass media, as per Marxist’s perspective, produce a sense of ‘false consciousness’ in the working class which is primarily a dominant ideology perpetuated with the help of media (Ibid, p.26). Those who support the Marxist’s approach consider mass media as amplifiers which reproduce the viewpoints of dominant social institutions in a society to create legitimacy for their actions. They advocate that mass media renew, amplify and extend the ‘existing predispositions that constitute the dominant culture’, and do not create a new culture (Curran et al., 1982, p.27). Most of the European communication scholars regard Marxist approach as ‘cultural studies’, and the

perspective was dominant from 60s to mid 80s to color the mass media research. Kellner et al. (2001, p.xv) comment that classical Marxists ‘employ intellectuals and cultural producers (mass media)’ who ‘produce ideas that glorify the dominant institutions and ways of life, and propagate the ideas in cultural forms’. Major objective of this approach is achieved when an ideology that supports the ruling class is accepted and cultivated through mass media use. In this context, mass media are used to construct ideas, create a naturalness of what the ruling class deem appropriate for the society. This kind of effects generation provides legitimacy to every action of the government by creating an obedient majority. Media are used to maintain domination and create a culture of silence among the masses. Here, the mass media are ideological apparatuses to perpetuate and support the dominant ideologies of the state. The Frankfurt School. Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer were the key figures of the Frankfurt School who worked for the Institute for Social Research, initially founded in Frankfurt, Germany in 1923, but later shifted to New York in 1933 due to the Hitler’s growing aggression against the Jews. This school was predominantly influenced by the notion of ‘mass society’ with leftist slant where mass media were considered as an ‘irresistible force’ (Bennett, 1982, p.42). Adorno and Horkheimer used the phrase ‘cultural industry’ for mass media due to their overwhelming effects on culture of a society. Marcuse, following their line, viewed mass media as the sources of entertainment and information which develop attitudes, habits, intellectual and emotional reactions of individuals and social system. According to him, media outputs are irresistible and create one-

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dimensional thought and behavior among the masses (Marcuse, 1970). He had an opinion that coming revolutions of 20th and 21st centuries would have roots in dehumanization and over-production of the consumer society due to capitalists’ use of mass media to manipulate the false needs of individuals. Like others in the Frankfurt School, he also believed in the passivity and victimization of audience owing to the eroding authentic culture by the commercialized mass media. Frankfurt School recognized the industrialization of mass-produced culture through ‘cultural industries’ (mass media) and declared them as the most significant agents of socialization. Dialectic of Enlightenment by Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, p.163) is one of the most famous critiques of Frankfurt School on ‘cultural industries’ which condemns the totalitarianism by declaring it the ‘end of individual’ where ‘cultural industries’ (mass media) are employed to eradicate the individual and produce mass society. Frankfurt School was interested to study as how the sources of mass communication are controlled and are employed by their owner’s to perpetuate their interests and designs. They attempted to see as how the ‘culture industries’ are engaged to produce ‘mass culture’ by making the sources of communication as the most significant leisure activities, as the most important mediators of political discourses, and as the agents of socialization. The School developed a ‘trans-disciplinary approach to cultural and communication studies, combining critique of political economy of the media, analysis of texts, audience reception studies of the social and ideological effects of mass culture and communications’ (Kellner & Durham, 2001, p.xvii). Critics of the School admit that it was the ‘first to systematically analyze and study the mass-mediated culture and communications’ (Ibid). Walter Benjamin

one of the members, studied the potential effects of coverage of political events on masses by the mass media. He observed the techniques employed by the political players to manipulate the choices of masses about the political candidates and parties. His work is of great significance in terms of the use of technology, cultural reproduction and manipulation to gain maximum submission of masses to media messages. Jurgen Habermas

was another key player of Frankfurt School who introduced the ‘public sphere’ notion which examines the effects of public assemblies like coffee houses, pubs, literary salons where people discuss what they read, watched and listened in print and electronic media on common public affairs. As the world has been dominated by the realm of mass media which are controlled by powerful corporations and conglomerates, the public spheres have become the colonies of these media organizations which are capable of generating desired results in the masses, he argues.

The Frankfurt School has profound contributions towards the discipline of mass communication and culture, which was initially considered as the leftist-wing of Marxist school. Later developments, however, placed its critiques on high grounds. The notions of ‘culture industries’, ‘mass society’ and ‘public sphere’ became the most popular constructs of the discipline. Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). Louis Althusser is a structural-functionalist whose work is based on Marxist philosophies. He recognizes the mass media as a social institution that has the primary responsibility of creating acceptance of dominant ideologies and values in a social system. Althusser refers to the social institutions as the ‘Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)’ that function to legitimize the ideologies offered by the dominant class. Religion, education, family, legal-frameworks, politics, trade unions, culture and communications are some of the ISAs functions in almost every social system. He also believes that every ISA contributes to the subsistence and persistence of every other social institution in a society. His views can better be understood in the structural-functionalist perspective, which says that an activity should not be explained on its own, but as part of a larger unit (Menzies, 1982, p.182).

Ideology is central to Althusser’s approach on communication and culture. According to him, an ideology ‘represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,’ Vol 19, No. 8; Aug 2012

(Stevenson, 1995, p.37). Ideologies, in fact, are human behavior control mechanisms of social nature. These are the set of ideas, of which compliance is considered mandatory for the peaceful existence of a social system. In other words, ideologies are the control apparatuses of societies that are used to avoid deviance besides developing conformity. Mass media, on the other hand, are the sources to reproduce and establish the control of these ideologies in a social system. They (mass media) create a culture of compliance to and obedience of these ideologies among the masses. The acceptance of dominant ideology greatly depends on the influence of mass media in a social system. Thus, it is argued that mass media do not produce any ideology themselves rather create an environment for its acceptance, the Althusser’s approach advocates. Bennette (1982, p.53) observes that Althusser appears to be a functionalist who sees all ISAs contributing to the maintenance of a social system (homeostasis) in a monolithic fashion where internal conflicts are non-existent. This criticism rejects the notion of passive audience whereby audience consume whatever they are exposed to, rather they have internal frames and schemata in the form of their personal experiences, cognitive structures and freedom of processing information which give meanings to the text/messages of the media. However, Bennette appreciates the Althusser’s approach of structuralism and semiotics to alter the Marxist perspective to the mass media (Ibid). Kellner et al. (2001, p.xx) names Althusser’s approach as ‘Structural Marxism’ which ‘interpellate’ individuals into preconceived form of subjectivity leaving no space for opposition and resistance. Althusser combined different disciplines to analyze and synthesize as how individuals’ compliance to the demands of capitalist society was achieved using the social institution of mass communications. Though he presented complex bundle of episteme to describe how media of communication could help perpetuate the capitalists’ objectives, but besides a great amount of criticism on his initial work he proved to be a great source of intellectual discourses in the contemporary mass media research. Gramsci’s Hegemony. Antonio Gramsci theorized that a society is composed of diverse social groups wherein ‘hegemony’ or ‘dominance’ of a social group over others is achieved through the use of social institutions, particularly mass media. Here, ‘hegemony’ represents the dominance of a social group by projecting the ideas of a particular group in a way that they appear as ‘common sense’ and natural for the subordinate groups (Alvarado & Boyd-Barrett, 1992, p.51). The appearance of being ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’ of some constructed ‘dominance’ or ‘hegemony’ is usually the result of excessive media advocacy. Although other social institutions also contribute to developing ‘hegemony’ of a particular social group, however, the mass media as a social institution takes precedence over others. Fisk (1992, p.291) contends that ‘hegemony’ or ‘dominance’ is the ‘consent’ of the subordinate to the dominant, so it must be ‘won and re-won’ because people’s ‘social experience constantly reminds them of the disadvantages of subordination’ which may ‘pose a threat to the dominant class...hegemony’. Kellner et al. (2001, p.xv) also refers to ‘hegemony’ as the ‘consent’ to the ‘intellectual and leadership’ and expands the Gramsci’s approach by saying that ‘social orders are found and reproduced with some institutions’ while

mass media are used to 'induce consent to the dominant order through establishing the hegemony or ideological dominance'.

Even in the Gramsci's school, the mass media are central to perpetuating, introducing or reproducing a culture of acceptance among the masses. Though there are conflicting forces functional to resist the culture being introduced by the mass media, but they (the conflicting forces) fail to sustain long due to their inability to counter the pervasive and powerful effects of mass media. This sequels, in most of the situations, in departure of the resistance to mass mediated culture. Nevertheless, what matters most is the time lapsed in the struggle. The societies with narrowly-based culture usually take more time to accept the mediated culture than those with broad-based culture. There are other intervening factors that determine the acceptability or dominance of mediated culture; like, the relative advantage of the Vol 19, No. 8;Aug 2012

Mediated cultural traits, the use of technology by the people, overall state of modernization of the society etc.

MASS MEDIA EFFECTS ON CULTURE: NEW PERSPECTIVES

Classical dominant approaches greatly explain the relationship between communication and culture at societal level where means of communication are the vehicles of power and dominance. The central theme of (almost) all approaches has been to see as how effectively a society can be controlled; how thought process at masses level can be changed and how best can mass media be used to serve the dominant forces of the society. Being the most influential social institution, mass media have been considered instrumental in accomplishing the desired goals set by the powerful elite of the system.

Contemporary literature on the relationship between communication and culture, nevertheless, opens up new avenues of discussions. Unlike Marxist, Gramsci and Althusserian approaches where ruling class and economic determinism are easily identifiable, the perspectives emerged recently are quite subtle but sufficiently signify the role of mass media in the cultural change process. Some of the key areas that might help us understand the relationship between mass media and culture are explained in the following lines.

Micro VS Macro Level Effects

Mass media do and do not alter our opinions at the same time. They do affect our attitudes and opinions in some circumstances, but not all of us receive same effects of media exposure. Taking example from advertising, it can be argued that mass media force quite a few number of people to buy any product. Repeated and persuasive communication of a particular brand may be able to generate short-term limited effects. In this regard, Erie County study may be referred to where three variables: 'reinforcement', 'activation' and 'conversion' were studied to explore the mass media influence. 'Reinforcement' was referred as strengthening the already existing preferences of people on what they were exposed to. 'Activation' was used to measure the positive latent opinions/attitudes of people on the issue in question. While, 'conversion' indicated the change of minds of people towards the issue the mass media covered. It was found that 50% of people got reinforced their already existing opinions, 10% were found having activated their positive latent attitudes/opinions while only 8% of the audience changed their opinions as a result of mass media campaign and coverage of the issue in question. This was a seminal study which opened up new spheres of discussions to understand and further explore the mass media effects at micro level. At the same time, if we look at the hidden impacts of mass media on masses at macro or societal level, these are 'much more important' (Baran, 2004, p.17). Taking example of violence on television, Baran argues that it 'contributes to the cultural climate' instead forcing the audience to 'shoot people' (Ibid). An aggregate of people may not have one and the same opinions towards a particular issue, but they would most probably behave in the way that they feel 'the climate' favors. Thus, mass media might have limited effects on individuals and might not have been able to achieve 'conversion' at large scale, but their impact on the development of a 'trend', making an issue salient, or introducing or reinforcing a 'culture' can hardly be over-emphasized.

Cultural Transmission

One of the main functions of mass media is to transfer the cultural heritage to future generations. Not only this, we talk with the past and at times with the future generations with the help of mass media by consulting historical records and leaving today's literature for future. In this way, the culture persists and propagates whereas mass media are the conduits through which this transmission takes place. And, mass media are not innocent and absolutely unbiased rather they alter and alter significantly the cultural transmission process. Mass media transfer the cultural norms and values of old generations through their contents. Almost all forms of mass communication perform this function to enlighten the masses about the successes and failures of the past, and compare and contrast it with what was there in the past with what exists at present. This form of transmission of cultural values, knowledge and patterns is known as historical.

Cultural transmission

The cultural transmission process does not end here; rather mass media inform their audience about other cultures, communities and nations. Such sharing of cultural traditions and systems among various cultural groups increases the chances of cultural change. This process is regarded as the contemporary cultural transmission which may be one to many – one cultural exposure to many, and many to one – many cultural systems are shown to a particular culture.

The phenomenon of cultural transmission has been researched at length which generated interesting debates and theories. One such theory is 'diffusion of innovation' that explains how alien cultural values or ideas are adopted in a system. This theory has many dimensions to explain the diffusion of a new idea or cultural trait into a system ranging from attributes of the idea which is being introduced through mass media to the grouping of people who adapt to the change on a time scale. From this theory and its critique one thing is quite obvious; that is, mass media are instrumental in the socio-cultural change process.

Transnational Cultural Intrusion. The issue of cultural intrusion revolves around the technological development of mass media. With the advent of new information technologies, the developed nations started dominating the life abroad which affected their culture more than any other aspect. Developing and under-developed countries remained at the receiving end for information gains, Vol 19, No. 8; Aug 2012

And no information transfer is pure objective without having any cultural domination and dictation. The 'free flow of information' doctrine furthered the cultural intrusion process debate. Some quarters criticized it by saying that 'free flow is like free fox among free chickens' (Schirato & Webb, 2003, p.176).

With powerful effects background, mass media are the primary sources of information and are considered to be the builder of social realities. These realities have shared meanings among all those who are the objects or target of mass media. That's why, it is believed that every reality is 'constructed' or 'mediated' wherein mass media frame it 'in a predicted and patterned way' (McQuail 1994, p.331). So much so, constructivist media effect model propounded by Nueman et al (1992, p.120) stresses that more often the 'reality' is 'built from personal experience, interaction with peers, and interpreted selections from mass media'. This interactive model of construction of reality has significant implications as a theory of media effects where mass media are the main sources of shaping the social realities. Here comes the question of media control. One who controls such powerful instruments is in a position to dictate and dominate.

Herbert Schiller notes in Vivian (2007, p.412), in the cultural intrusion's perspective, that the 'Western-controlled international mass media pre-empt native culture' which he regards as 'robbery'. From information to entertainment, the developing and under-developed nations are dependent on a few international media conglomerates. Their preferences are taking precedence over the native cultural and social needs. Whole world seems to have same level of information and entertainment needs that media conglomerates furnish. This notion has given birth to the phenomenon of 'cultural homogenization' which talks of a 'universal solvent that will dissolve all cultural differences in a dull and colourless homogeneity throughout the world' (Lechner & Boli, 2001, p.283)

with the help of power of international mass media system. Other side of the picture indicates the monopoly of media conglomerates which are means of replacing the indigenous cultures with international popular culture.

Nevertheless, this debate of mediatized popular culture leaves some space for cultural hybridization that may be defined as 'the blending of foreign and local' (Shirato & Web, 2003, p.156) cultures to form a new cultural environment which is symbolic in nature without having deep roots in the given social system, hence fledgling and fragile in nature. In other words, hybridization of culture is the net consequence of technology explosion which pave the ways for transnational cultural intrusion.

GLOBALIZATION, CULTURE AND MASS MEDIA

Waters (1995, p.3) defines globalization as a 'social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding'. Globalization, as the definition refers to, seems to be detrimental to national and local culture of a country. However, some quarters regard globalization as a synonym to 'Americanization' or 'Westernization', in other words, 'imposition of adoption of Western culture, values and life style eroding the indigenous one' (Dahal, 2005, p.57).

Globalization is an antonym to 'cultural diversity' and 'cultural sensitivity', which aims at homogenization of understanding of social, political, economic and cultural issues. Net end of this process, as Waters (1995, p.3) refers to, is the disappearance of distinct cultural identities and receding individualism. This is, indeed, the homogenization but it has a tinge of domination of those whose values and cultural patterns are replacing the culture of the dominated. Nonetheless, globalization process may get inverted to another extreme having 'culture-philiac' effects. These effects may generate nationalism and ethnocentrism which is capable of isolating a society from being part of the mainstream technological development process. From the recent past, USSR may be considered as an example that attempted to dis-align itself from the mainstream socio-cultural development, even technological advancement. That's why we see Russian technology far different from the Western one.

Though this isolation was less due to the fear of domination of the capitalism, rather mainly due to the growth of a self-sustaining socio-political ideology (communism) which was capable enough to dominate and survive on its own. Vol 19, No. 8; Aug 2012

Globalization has many attributes like transnational flows of economic goods, political thoughts and ideologies, cultural traits and products, and Western style consumerism. These attributes demand transnational organizations not only those import/export economic products, but also political and cultural philosophies. Nation-states, in such circumstances, do not stand sovereign anymore rather they seem to be the global cities having distinct geographic locations and placement on economic development stratum. Economic and cultural autonomy is threatened due to the emergence of powerful multinationals. In a nutshell, the globalization is to galvanize the process of internationalizing the localized.

Cultural change as a result of globalization is termed as 'cultural globalization'. Mass media speed up the process of globalization and process the 'cultural globalization'. Cultures mix and negotiate through mass media and ultimately hybridization or domination takes place. As the developed countries are homes of international media moguls, thus no space for the under-developed country's culture to nourish on its own by avoiding change process. Cultural globalization, then, facilitates the overall globalization process by generating even effects, connecting everyone in the process, reducing the differences of culture/ideologies and disguising the inequities.

Contemporary world has technology at its center, while the epicenter of cultural change is technology and communication. As mass media are the relentless pursuits of technological enhancements and the means of communication within and across the cultures, they not only have potential to alter a culture, but are capable enough to invent and impose an absolutely new culture in a social system. Thus mass media may be regarded as the monopolizing technological enhancements/institutions, referred as 'technopoly' by Postman (1992). Dozens of examples can be taken from the present world scenario where mass media have replaced centuries old cultures

with media induced culture and many old languages, one of the main ingredients of a culture, have been vanished (e.g. Archi in the South America and some indigenous languages in Canada).

Another aspect that the media and technological advancement have impacted on in the cultural domains is the concept of time, space and human relations. Just-in-time (JIT) technologies or real-time information flows have changed our perceptions of freshness. Geographic distances no more seem to be significant in the present day communication systems, and same effects can be observed in human relations that have become more contractual and impersonal. More media have resulted in less communication between people. Earlier, language, distance and context were the issues which were considered significant in the communication process. However, use of fast or slow media of communication and amount of media an individual is engaged with play vital role in the present day communication process.

Succinctly, it can be commented that mass media are central to the process of globalization wherein cultural change is the net outcome. Here, mass media, the cultural industries as pronounced by the Frankfurt School, produce the culture that facilitates the globalization process in achieving its objectives by altering the existing culture, or introducing an absolutely new one. How technological developments have affected the different institutions of a social system is discussed in detail in the following lines.

TECHNOLOGICAL BOOM, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The current wave of innovation is unprecedented throughout the history of mankind. Rather it has been observed that innovations of extraordinary nature take place only once in three generations. Taking example of telecommunication and informatics, it can bluntly be said that these innovations are producing a real communication technology revolution. Industries have been transformed from their old fashion capital and labor-intensive technologies to these innovative technologies which include robotics, cellular communications, miniature motors, super computers, software production and high performance materials.

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The epic of technological advancement and improvement like internet and computer mediated communication indicate that the communication technology revolution is still young. Virtual environment, another surprising invention, is also communication media and they have both physical and abstract components. Furthermore, the high cost of telecommunication has been reduced drastically as compared to what it was in the last decade: almost negligible. Similarly, superconductivity and data compression and integration techniques have made it possible to produce ‘mobisodes’ – short episodes for mobile viewers, and ‘episodes’ – monodramas to view on net and in advertisements (Vivian, 2007, p.197).

Structural and operational changes are introduced in business practices due to technological boom in the recent times which introduced new facets in the cultural settings of every society. Internet and cyber-spacing are stretching the commercial organizations to the boundaries of imagination. Paperless business transactions through e-mails and internet have altered the ways of doing business and changed economic culture. National frontiers do not seem to exist anymore as business alliances have expanded beyond physical boundaries. Logical lines distinguish the business’s nature and extent, while complex transnational commercial alliances are taking place where the manufacturers do not know for whom they are producing and ordering agencies do not know where the products will be marketed and used. Competition has expanded worldwide and capital is flowing through satellites. Such business environment is absolutely unprecedented that has affected the cultural spheres with the same speed and spirit.

Other face of technological development is the value of information. Information has become a commodity, which affects economics immensely. Contemporary advanced technology has not only made economics too smooth and faster through rapid flow of data and information, but it also has created a culture conducive to economic growth. Similarly, unlike old indicators and predictors of economic growth, communication technology has set new standards and parameters to gauge development of a society. For instance, those who have access to modern

technologies and benefit from them and those who don't have access are two main social classes with different cultural identities.

Poverty and affluence are two binary features of every society, and they have ramifications on the construction and development of culture of a social system. Technological progress has also affected the primitive social stratification regimes which has bases in economic wealth. New social categories have been created by the technologies. These categories are less economic-based rather rely on the degree of diffusion of innovative technologies in a society. The four distinguished features are: high-speed, knowledge intensive, transnational and highly disciplinarian. The old disparities between rich and poor have been overwhelmed by new differences: fast and slow, learning and static, plugged-in and unplugged, and localized or globalized. Apparently, the difference between the poor and the rich is visible from their acquisition of education and institution of enrolment. This distinction is quickly vanishing as poorly staffed educational institutions are being upgraded almost overnight through virtual links with premier universities of the world. 'Virtual educational environment' is developing on strong footing affecting cost and quality parameters of education. Now, due to technological enhancement, it is possible for people to learn anything, anytime, anywhere (William et al., 1994).

Even governments and their efficiencies are not immune to the effects of modern-day wave of technological development. Ineffective government is the primary cause of under-development of a country which increases the cost of doing business by 20 to 30 percent. Other disadvantage of inefficient government results in reluctance of foreign investment. Nonetheless, developed media and widespread communications system may inevitably lead to greater governmental accountability, transparency and even democracy.

In short, technological innovations and advancement impact all aspects of a social system and human life, and not only culture. Marshal McLuhan, a media theorist from Canada, believed that mass media Vol 19, No. 8; Aug 2012

have immense effects on human as a social being, culture and society overall. He was a staunch supporter of technological determinism.

Technological and Media Determinism. The notion of technological determinism advocates that technology provides change incentive to a society. The effects and practicality of this theory can commonly be observed around ourselves when a new technology is introduced and the socio-cultural changes it brings. For instance, telephone is an old invention while cellular phone has been introduced quite recently. The new technology has introduced new ways of communication and has almost become a mass media through which you can communicate like conventional system without geographic limitations, receive/send pictures and messages instantaneously, retrieve latest news, can locate you and store a huge data which is almost like a mobile artificial brain. Additionally, cellular phone is nearly part of human attire in the present age.

However, there is an approach opposing the technological determinism which stresses the significance of society over technology. This approach is defined as social determinism. This explains that society brings changes in technology foreseeing or pushed by its needs. Technological advancements are result of human endeavors to search new ways of doing things as the societies are becoming more and more complex; hence, they need the kind of technologies which can help the system work/function smoothly. Like, invention of computer is the result of human inability to perform complex calculations in timeliness manner. Internet was initially invented to facilitate communication among the government departments and various units of military. Similarly, population explosion forced human being to live in flat buildings to save land for which he invented technologies to build skyscrapers.

Marshal McLuhan, in early 1960s, focused on a different aspect of technological developments called media determinism. The epistemological assumption of media determinism explains that the society changes its ways of communication with the change of information medium. McLuhan says that new technologies alter the culture for better understanding of the technology and ways to use it. This indicates a constant change process of culture and societal ways of doing things due to fast growing information technologies and emerging media.

Man was social and engaged in interpersonal communication before the advent of press or print media, McLuhan argues (Vivian, 2007, p.403). However, he got 'alienated' from his natural tribal environment and his

involvement in books and printing material caused 'detrribalization' – alienation from humankind's tribal roots. But, television brought back 'tribalization' - wherein an individual's senses are also in use unlike newspapers or printing words where mind is engaged. McLuhan argues that television has 'retribalized' the human beings by abandoning 'the print media's linear intrusions on human nature' (Ibid). His primary assumption rests on individual's interpersonal communication where he uses his senses to understand what is communicated to him, which television has revitalized.

And, interpersonal communication is the basis of 'tribalization'. Primarily, the advent of television, its reach and influence 'de-alienated' the masses which he called a global village.

'Medium is the message' is the title of McLuhan's bestselling book where he explains his ultimate position on media determinism. He believes that 'we shape our tools (media) and they (media) in turn shape us' (Griffin, 2003, p.344). For him, it has become less significant as to 'what is said', rather 'how it is delivered' matters. It is partly due to the reasons that media audience utilizes different sensory organs and cultural patterns to facilitate delivery system in response to different media stimuli.

For instance, a reader needs greater attention while reading a newspaper as compared to his exposure to a telecast. He may engage himself in other auxiliary activities when watching TV, but he might need to concentrate on newspaper contents if he really wants to understand what is written. Thus, medium signifies the contents and the way we take them.

Besides 'global village' and 'medium is the message', McLuhan's phrase 'technology as extensions of the human body' also attracted media theorist and generated a great debate. He used the term 'extension' to explain an extended system of technology which supports and enhances the scope of a Vol 19, No. 8; Aug 2012 work. For instances, as he said, automobiles are extensions of foot which support and facilitate man to travel faster with less efforts. Similarly, he called media as 'extensions' of human senses, bodies and minds

. Another term which he coined was 'amputations' that reflects the loss of an attribute which may otherwise develop in the absence of any 'extension'. As per his approach towards 'amputations', cultural effects or changes, which may sound to be negative, can be considered as amputations of technology. Similarly, he used 'tetrad' to explain the effects of technology on culture and society. He divided the effects into following four main categories

- What does the medium enhance?
- What does the medium take obsolete?
- What does the medium retrieve that had been obsolesced earlier?
- What does the medium flip into when pushed to extremes?

Marshal McLuhan visualized the effects of mass media on society and culture in early 1960s when technological development had not hit media spheres as immensely as it seems now. Due to his prophetic approach in understanding the effects of technology on culture of a society, he gained the status of a cult hero and 'high priest of pop-culture'

Mass media are the technological institutions. Changes in these institutions have enormous bearings on culture of a society. The discussion made above solicits that mass media are dynamic in nature and change their shape and contents very quickly. And, technological developments in different media spheres have multiplied its impacts on culture. With these technologies, societies and their traditional practices, understanding of issues and relationships are at rampant change. There is no denying the fact that mass media are 'cultural industries', as enunciated by the Frankfurt School, which are capable of producing and altering the culture. However, in modern age, mass media are not just 'industries', but are 'cultural mixers' which facilitate the cultural assimilation process. Here, important aspect to consider is as to which culture's colour gets more prominence; of course the culture of media regulators.

CONCLUSION

While all cultures are local, all communication is global. This notion carries strong bearings of unprecedented technological revolution that our age has witnessed. The revolution has galvanized the influence of mass media over indigenous cultures. Huge literature indicates mass media effects on culture due to the commercial productions of media as negative and detrimental to youth, having disruptive effects on overall social environment. In contemporary ‘global media environment’, the ‘mass media hold a power position’ and are capable of changing or creating new social and cultural realities.

Interestingly, cultural homogenization is the product of technologically rich mass media, especially new media like internet and convergent media (TV, internet & phone), while increasing civilizational cleavages as envisaged by Huntington (1998) in his celebrated work *Clash of Civilization* also seems to be the outcome of developed information media. The differences in civilization highlighted and crystallized by mass media are dividing the world into many blocs with extremely distinct civilizations. However, at the same time cultural differences are reaching to the point of extinction. For instance, ways of doing things at home and life styles in Far East, Gulf, Latin America and most part of Asia are consonant to what Europeans do at their homelands, while the realization of being ‘different’, ‘white and non-white’, ‘us and them’ and other racial connotations are on the rise.

Due to increased mass media role in the contemporary societies, the vehicles of communication operate in and propagate ‘virtual or symbolic culture’ which is more often dissimilar to the cultural environment in which the media are operating. It seems like a constant cultural conflict that the developing and under-developed nations are undergoing. Thus, it is high time for the developing

Nations to understand and extrapolate the potential dangers of cultural domination, effects on their cultural policies, cultural industries (film, drama, poetry etc.) and other cultural spheres of their life.

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