Effect of Intentional Media Contents on Global News Dichotomy: Third World Perspectives

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Abstract:

The dichotomy in international news flow has been a contentious issue for several decades. Despite the recommendation of the Sean McBride Commission for a reordering of world information flow between the developed nations of Europe and North American on one other hand and the Third World countries of Africa, Asia and South America, nothing much has changed. Even the coming of social media has hardly dented the imbalance. With their economic resources, technical know-how and technological advancement, they have largely scoffed at any discourse on the subject matter. Using available literature, this paper appraises the whole situation and the underpinning issues and makes recommendations.

Key word: International communication, Media contents, dichotomy, Third World

Introduction

The controversy surrounding international news flow dichotomy has remained a contentious for many years after Sean MacBride and his team conclude their work several decades ago. Matters are made even hazier with the coming of the social networks and liberalization of information. Okigbo (1996) in Ekeanyanwu and Kalyango (2013) has pointed out that even though the world as a free marketplace of ideas, where information flow should not be hindered, the West’s reluctance to recognize that the saturation of the underdeveloped African countries with news reports and cultural artifacts from the west was a concern to the stability of Third World’s cultural heritage and progress. This is in direct contrast to the submission of Agbo (2003) that for all ages, human societies have been interdependent and that international communication was made possible then, through various means of transportation including newspaper and magazine, distributed across national frontiers on horse-backs and sailing ships.

Ancient Empires such as Rome, Persia, and China, all utilized writing in collecting information and dispersing and creating control on the world system. As early as fifteen century, news were disseminated trans-nationally in Europe. These were trading and economic news letters created and shared among countries for common values and rights of capital. This concept of news as a commodity was the brain child of Samuel Gilbert who had a coffee house at a ship harbour. He exchanged booth containing shipping information for his customers. This was formalized by his assistant, Samuel
Topliff, who created “news books”, containing foreign, local and commercial news. This latter evolved as a newspaper, (Schwarzlose, R.A. 1989).

This discovery cleared the way to what we called international news which forms the bulk of international communication. The invention of telegram in 1837 by Samuel Morse gave impetus for speed and reliability in information. Following this genre, three nations quickly created and subsidized communication agencies to enable them interact and influence others - France, Germany and Britain; owning Haves Agency founded in 1835, Wolfin 1849 and Reuters in 1851 respectively.

Consequently, there was a rise in international radio broadcasting. Both America and Britain established a radio corporation - Voice of America and British Broadcasting Corporation – BBC, which ran a global network to indoctrinate their international audience.

International Communication, also referred to as global or transnational communication (though by the term global, it becomes deeper), is communication that occurs across international frontiers. International communication as a field of study, concerns itself with the way government relates to government, business-to-business and people-to-people across the borders of nations. The products of sale at the level of international communications include political, economic, social, cultural and military concerns, sometimes packaged in a propagandistic manner. As it is, the increasing effects and impact of globalization occasioned by technological breakthrough has epistemolized the need for international communication.

**Issues in Information Flow Dichotomy**

Hamida (1985) notes that, “at the level of international communication, information flow is interpreted in the ratio of output to intake of communication between and among countries and people.” In this respect, he alluded to the decrease in number of American foreign correspondents, around the world in 1969, from 563 to 435, while that of foreign correspondents reflecting other countries of the world to United States, increased from 200 to 835 from 1954 – 1975. The distillation of this fact is that the quantity and quality of information, the speed and fidelity with which it is being transmitted is directly proportional to the number of messengers.

John Galtung in his analysis of the structural theory of imperialism divided the world into two parts: ‘centre’ or dominant and ‘periphery’ or dependant. His summarized hypothesis shows that:

1. There is a preponderance of news from the ‘centre’ as reported in the world press system.
2. There is larger discrepancy in the news exchange ratio between ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ nations, than exchange ratio between ‘centre’ nations.
3. ‘Centre’ news occupies a larger proportion of the foreign news content in the media of ‘periphery’ nations than ‘periphery’ news occupy in the ‘centre’ nations.

In a further study on information dichotomy between the North and South Poles, Buijtenhuijs and Baesjou affirm the dominance of ‘center’ news agencies in the news of two African countries.
Mckenzie and Overton (1981) conclude that the pattern of international news flow to and from Australia has remained largely colonial, with traditional news sources prevailing. Recent studies on news agencies indicate little or no change in the total production of these major news agencies since 1970s. Among the world news agencies, it is the “big four” as commonly referred to that are dominant sources of foreign news for most countries in North America, Africa, Asia and Latin America. These are, AFP, AP, Reuters and UPI, while TASS have influence in Eastern Europe and most of the Socialist Countries.

According to Hamida’s study published in UNESCO Report of 1985, the total amount of news provided daily by the four major agencies, and of course, other minor ones would have altered progressively since then as follows:

AP = 17,000,000; UPI = 11,000,000; AFP = 3,350,000 and Reuters = 1,500,000 totaling 32,850,000 words daily.

Other transnational agencies like Deutsche Press Agenture (DPA) of Germany has 115,000; ANSA of Italy; 300,000; EFE of Spain 500,000; Tanjug of Yugoslavia 75,000 and Inter Press Service (IPS) is 100,000, totaling 1,090,000 words daily.

Given the gravity of news distribution from these transnational agencies from the West to Africa, Asia, and other Third World countries, researchers on content analysis or news coverage from 1960s to 1980s in some countries like: Norway, Kenya, Lebanon, Japan, Latin America, particularly Canada show a heavy dependence on media contents from the Big Four and at least, half of the international news items were from the same four news agencies with Latin America receiving about 80 percent, (Fernando, Reyes Mattas).

Beyond technological inducement of international communication, cross cultural communication as a result of trade and investments has forced nations and people of different nations to engage in international communication.

Today’s economic paradigm has shifted from “thinking globally and acting locally” to “acting globally and thinking locally.” Certain actions in one country can affect the situation in another country. In today’s world, results in certain areas of life of a country require a high level of collaboration across borders. For instance, Nigeria is collaborating with neighbouring countries to tackle the Ebola scourge.

In this interdependency, what forms the bulk of international communication is the manufacturing of news tailored at improving the wellbeing of the home country and at other times bastardizing the foreign country. In this sense, Ndolo (2005, p.174) defines news as how a culture officially perceives and defines reality.

Accordingly, the western culture perceives Africa as inferior and incapable of growth and development. To the West, negative news about Africa is regarded to be of greatest interest than positive news. To the Communist interest, good news is news but good news is not news at all.

From the Third World point of view, bad or negative news is avoided because of the prevalent fragile political structure.

Theoretical Framework

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The theoretical postulation upon which this paper stands is the Transmission Perspective and Ritual Perspective of communication. This communication theory developed by Carey (1986) views mass communication as a process of transmitting message at a distance for the purpose of control—Transmission Perspective while the Ritual Perspectives view mass communication as the representation of shared belief where reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.

The interpreted thrust of this theory is that communicated messages are shared ideology transmitted from a source to a receiver with a purpose or intention to achieve. This actually is what is done at the level of international communication, where nations transport information, news, cultures and targeted messages across its national frontiers in order to interact, impact, influence, include, change or reinforce behaviour and attitude of other nations towards itself in a manner advantageous to itself. This is what Newcomb and Hirsch (1983, p.47) mean when they opine that transmission theory “… is persuasion, attitude change, behavior modification, socialization through the transmission of information, influence, or conditioning”. So, while transmission perspective deals with the process of imparting information for control, the ritual perspectives try to represent shared belief based on the intention of the sender.

Conceptual Clarification

When we speak of media of international communication, we do not mean just the communication channels, such as radio; but essentially, the very many vehicles and or instruments with which countries that engage in international communication transport their ideology and messages across their shores. The western nations (including the United States) have such powerful tools in Voice of America in Washington; British Broadcasting Corporation in London; Radio Deutchvelle in Bonn; Radio France in Paris and other powerful private-owned media houses like CNN; Foxnews, CBS; ABS and many others.

International Communication Tools

The foremost vehicle or tool of international communication is culture - with the ingredient of music, film and sports. America inundated Africa nay, the world, with American free life culture through music and style of fashion. International Communication and cultural sentiments are Siamese twin: they are not interchangeable as they are inseparable. Every communicated message, ideology or opinion has with it, its cultural or environmental underpinning. However, international communication is not limited to the language of culture but a multilayered spectrum of cultural imperialism, media imperialism and technological imperialism.

The use music culture and fashion to communicate internationally was effectively done by music Television (MTV) from America. This multinational media corporation being conscious of its role and power carried the phrase, “think global, act local”. Their argument is that they need to be globally aware of events but the understanding that what happens in their home country should take precedence. To this intent, MTV sets up a global music production and distribution system in many nations and regions. Many other
music channels like MTV blend western style of music with local music to create songs that have strong appeal to younger audiences.

In this sense, the global culture of the West is localized in the country where its influences exist. This became powerful communication technology such as satellites – through which music and fashion are exported, and internet, enables multinational government organizations, corporation, and NGO to wield powers and influence on nations of the world. And as the power of these organizations expands, the powers of their individual nations tend to expand. Davison and George (1961) referred to their power shift to as, “Who” says what. The person saying what through the force of international media will be heard. This is the core issue of who because “whom” is an amorphous audience in another cultural environment. The implication of Davison and George’s statement is that who is saying what matters in international communication. It is often said that when America sneezes the world will catch cold – showing American influence in international relations and communication. Another too of international communication which countries engaged in, apart from music, fashion and technological media advancement are trade and commerce. Corporations of foreign nations that operate in several other nations have made many competitive advantages over those that operate only locally, particularly in third world countries of Africa and Asia. Among other things, they produce goods and services where it is cheapest to do so and market them in those countries where their profits margin is the highest. To do this, bilateral trade agreement and memorandum of understanding have to be signed. These kinds of goods are high when they are information commodities which can be produced and distributed instantly everywhere, such as Cable News Network (CNN) owned by Ted Turner and Foxnews owned by Michael Eisner.

Using one of the multinational corporations, Reuters owned by Britain, Ndolo (2005, p.180) explained how multinational companies facilitate trade and commerce of transnational system thus:

**Information commodities:** Reuters delivers news and price to customers' screens. The provide data feeds to financial markets and software tools to analyze data. To cover currencies, bonds, future stocks, opinion and other instruments including system that allows customers manage their own information flow

**Transaction product:** Enable traders to deal from their computers in such markets as foreign exchange, futures, options and securities

**Professional products:** Reuters supply information related technology to managers and professionals outside the finance and media industries ....

**Media products:** Reuters delivers news in all multimedia dimensions: text, television image, still pictures, sound and graphics

The same applies to other multinational corporation of European and Western decent, with America, owning majority of them all and serving the interests of their home government.

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It is for this reason that we salute the courage of Africa Independent Television (AIT) and other indigenous media outlet for championing an equal or of least, a bargain for an Africa content information community to sell to the outside world.

Other tools used in carrying out international communication by countries engaged in it is scientific breakthrough, research papers published abroad for certification, academic donations, grants and corporations of mostly foreign countries of Europe and America to Africa, Asia and other less developed countries (LCDs) of the world.

Breakthrough in science and medicine which saw some countries patenting some drugs for treatment of certain diseases and sickness, such as Ebola, AIDS offer them the opportunity to relate with other countries that will need the drugs. The same is for academic or professional certification, grants, functions and cultural relations between countries. Also, military intelligence, diplomacy reports, international espionage, training and corporation, especially from West to Africa form a crux tool for international communication. For example, in the wake of insurgency in the North East of Nigeria, several military intelligent reports, espionage and bilateral agreements for special training, assistance and supply were reached and or offered by other nations of the world to Nigeria.

Agba (2003) observes that the ultimate interest in international communication is for a state to have sufficient impact on each other’s decisions to cause them to behave at least in some measures as parts of a whole. In international communication, the underlying issue is for state to be in regular contact with one another, to the extent that the interaction between them suffices to make the behavior of each, a crucial element in their calculations.

Perhaps, the most crucial and potent tool of international communication is propaganda. The word propaganda, ordinarily has acquired an amorphous meaning. However, among states, it is an important psychological weapon of warfare (Utobo, 2102). Propaganda entails any attempt to manipulate information shrewdly packaged to achieve predetermined goal. According to Utobo, “states being socio-political constructs, comprising communities of men in continual social process to influence them; serve as a means to the maximization of the satisfaction of human value demands through the utilization of its resources - man, materials, money and institutions”.

The submission of Utobo is the key underpinning of international communication usage of propaganda tool: a country increasing her natural and human resources to influence and impact other countries with whom she has socio, political and economic interactions, to her own gains.

In all, these tools of international communication are packaged and transmitted through the barrel of international mass communication media, defined as a system in which various news and information media use specialized technical mass channels to transmit or disseminate specialized and skillfully packaged pile of information on a global scale to several foreign countries (Agbo, 2003).

These international communication media are divided into print and broadcast. Times International, BBC Focus on Africa, Readers’ Digest and Newsweek among others
Implications for the Third World

There is actually more to international communication than ascribing a definition to it. It is a tool upon which far-reading decisions are taken in world politics, economic, social lives, military cooperation, religion, international conflicts and wars are either won or lost. It is the global political ground between and among nationals of the world.

Thus the consideration for the implications of international communication tools for the Third World countries can be reinforced by the statement of Sankore (2001) in Nwosu (2004, p.5) that “every word written or spoken by the media is a potential matchet, bullet or bomb in the minds and hands of victims and perpetrators.”

The nomenclature ‘Third World’ is a derogatory reference to African, Asian and Latin American countries to describe their lack of technological and economic advancements. It is a simple indication that they are not the first or the second in the race of industrialization and economic capitalization. Another name for third world is less developed or developing and recently in a humorous sense, never-to-develop nations.

Given this backdrop, international communication is fought along the line of communication technology and information and news dissemination. Agba (2002) points out that “international communication is often approached from the point of view of communication imbalance”. This is in fact, the bedrock of many troubles of the less developed nations called Third World Countries. It is this Western overbearing tendencies and hegemony communication-wise across boundaries that have resulted the terms such as “neo-colonialism”, “imperialism”, “domination”, “electronic colonialism”, “communication imperialism”, “media imperialism”, “actual synchronization” (Nwosu, 2012, p.81-182).

Therefore, as long as this imbalance continues, African countries will continue to depend on the western nations as pathfinder. Ogan (1988) observes that as long as the Third World nations consume foreign media products, they will be influenced by the values inherent in the content they consume, which is alien and capitalist to African taste. Similarly, Righter (1984) in Aliede (2004 p.91) observes that:

As developing countries seek to establish their national identifies though self-reliance, they are increasingly focusing on the role of the international media, which promote what they see as alien value…

The scenario can be likened to a freedom fighter relying on his oppressor to gain his freedom. African countries demand a balanced information and news coverage and reporting of Africa, yet they rely on the west for technical support, training and even supply of the media equipment. Related to this and equally worrisome is that most African countries nationals regard and use news from the transnational media as credible, elite value and high social status, thereby, becoming “Atghansistanic” (knowing more about foreign events than local happenings) (Ndolo, 2005, p.192) agrees that in most
developing countries of the world, western media, particularly American news media are widely utilized by the elite as a model. Lamenting this self-inflicted damage, Egwu (2001:9) quoted in Aliede (2012) expanded it when he observed that Africans cast aspersions on themselves and portray themselves in bad light, to the extent that some create an image problem capable of re-inviting the colonialists back to rule Africa.

Nwosu (2012) opines that truth is one and that no matter what, truth can never change, arguing that as long as the third world countries continue to air western civilization’s programmes, the third world will always believe they should act, feel, and live as western civilizations dictate... He (Nwosu) describes it as the invasion by the first world culture of the third world through which the local culture is conquered.

The summary implication of the above for the African countries is loss of cultural identity, value and absence of future, because a nation without rich cultural and social value is a nation without future.

This is why some communication scholars of African descent describe the mass media of the developing countries (third world) as “Trojan horses” for the transmission of western values and for the perpetuation of media and cultural imperialism of the west. They note that, “our screens have been surrendered, more or less to foreign programmes that have little or no redeeming values as far as our culture is concerned” (Uyo, 1999, p.25).

Agba (2012) adds that African media consistently feature foreign programmes that debase the African culture. He concludes however, that such situation spells misfortune for African development. Udokah, (1998) similarly regrets that:

Many third world countries, including Nigeria, import over 50 percent of their television programmes. They do this not from other developing countries which may be near self-sufficiency in media product as the United States (for example, India), but from the United States and Britain. The grave danger of this act is perpetual underdevelopment of the media of the Third world and the continual dependence of the media and government of the Third world on the west and Europe. The reason is that the buoyancy of any country is directly proportionate to the strength of its media technology. For example, the five most powerful transnational news Agencies: Reuters, United Press International, Associated Press and Agency France Presse and TASS have the ample technology and economic resources with which to gather all kinds of information from all nooks and crannies of the world and distribute them globally in an instant at the lowest cost.

In the past, mass media played an important role in creating and reinforcing national identities. Today media globalization has made individual and national identify almost impossible (Morely and Robins, 1995). This is another implication of international communication tools for the Third world countries who are being absorbed into larger international communities through the stronger power of Western Transnational media. According to Igbigbogba (1995, p.11), “African communication has since been exchanged for western individualism which in African application is unmatched greed and selfishness”.

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Unarguably, the economic and technological power play of international communication cannot be overlooked. As already stated, there are serious implications for the Third world. Media observers at the international levels believe that those countries who have the wherewithal to finance global news gathering and dissemination would only process the news within the framework of their news values and disseminate it to an information-crazy world. On this side of the coin is the western and European media but at the other side is the poor Third world countries of Africa, Latin American and Asia whose media contents or programmes are of low pedigree owing to either lack of qualified production personnel or lack of fund to finance good and quality programmes production and dissemination across frontiers.

**Conclusion/Recommendations**

Certainly, international communication will be an information gathering, treatment and dissemination battle front for countries for socio-cultural and technological hegemony for supremacy. Owing to this, having a genuine, equal and fair flow of information between the South Pole and the North Pole may remain as it were: the Third world being at the receiving end while the developed countries of America and Europe call the shot.

We conclude equally that Third world countries of Asia but particularly Africa, should promptly stop the self-devaluation and rejection of our cultural values and orientation.

African media and nations must not always present themselves as if they can do nothing without the Merton ideology and in direction of purging our colonial mentality.

Again, African media should develop a model amenable to African situation that can help her achieve a self-reliance and self-sustaining media development that will in turn, give a push to the home countries to achieve a technological and democratic growth.

Having concluded so far, this paper recommends that Third world nations should take immediate steps to curtail the foreign nations’ cultural themes, targeted at eroding their cultural heritage and identity.

Besides, Third world scholars should make a reversal of what constitute news elements against the backdrop of the transnational news media of oddity to usuality.

The paper recommends strongly that the western foreign media should show balance and fairness in their reporting of the third world countries.

In other words, the other side of the developmental efforts of third world should be collated and interpreted and disseminated in such a way that will allow them-third world countries, to articulate and improve their lives.
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