

The Effects of Cultural Hegemony in Media Education Based on Critical Theorists of Education

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ABSTRACT: The present study reviews the effects of cultural hegemony and culture industry in media education from the critical theorists' viewpoint, especially Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno. Critical theorists have severely criticized all the available tools, plans and policies which help to maintain and stabilize hegemony in society. They have particularly targeted and analyzed two main and basic tools focused on by the powers, which are culture and media. Frankfurt school followers believe that hegemony through media and culture is the most efficient and effective way that dominant classes have opted for, and regarding the maximum access of the community members to the aforementioned tools, it is worth investment and planning, because forming the thoughts and ideas of the human beings provides the communities towards their interests. Critical theorists such as Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno used the term culture industry for culture and believed that the media and mass communication devices for promoting, selling and pushing culture industry products to the people in their scope establishes hegemony. Cultural hegemony over media leads to consequences and effects such as self-alienation by the media, decline of one's individualism, mere consumerism, and bringing up humans who do not possess critical thinking ability. This matter is reviewed in this paper. The research methodology is descriptive- analytical and in order to analyze the theories, the qualitative content analysis as well as theoretical analogy was used.

Keywords: critical theorists, culture, cultural hegemony, culture industry, media education.

INTRODUCTION

In an era in which on one hand using media and mass communication devices are prevalent and its effect on thoughts, opinions and even ideology of people is undeniable in a way that all social classes are aware of its necessity and importance, and on the other hand, in today world, mass media such as newspaper, radio, television, cinema, etc., play a major role in educating community people towards the progress of human culture and civilization by transferring information and new knowledge as well as exchanging ideas and opinions (Motamed Nejad, 1992, p. 9).

Critical theorists have particularly criticized and analyzed three main and basic tools focused on by the powers, which are culture, education and media. Frankfurt school followers believe that hegemony through media and culture is the most efficient and effective way that the powers have opted for.

Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno have described culture industry as one of the most important features of the era of instrumental rationality hegemony, and say in the era of late capitalism, combination of culture and entertainment, has established a decadent mass culture. Culture industry consumers have no other choice. It is because they see nothing beyond the tangible reality. The function of culture industry in the era of advanced capitalism is to remove any possibility of strong opposition to the establishment of settled hegemony (Bashirieh, 1999, p. 185).

In this paper, first, the concept of cultural hegemony and culture industry is reviewed; then, the focus will be on media and education through media and the role it plays in education. Next section covers the consequences and effects of cultural hegemony in media from the theorist's viewpoint, especially Horkheimer & Adorno finally, there will be a short conclusion.

CULTURE AND CULTURAL HEGEMONY

Albert Schultzer believes that "culture is the sum of all the man and human community advancements in all fields and from all standpoints, since all these contribute to the individual's mental development and even progress" (Kazno, 2006, p. 163).

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After their pessimism about perspectives of future changes increased, Adorno and Horkheimer in 50s turned to Max Weber ideas and accepted this opinion that the rationalism itself is more oppressive than the capitalist system. In this respect, by emphasizing the development of technology and the oppression tools due to deployment of mind, they concluded, "mind loses more than ever its liberal and liberating nature in the process of its development and evolution, and serves the interests of exploiting classes as an oppression tool .

Adorno and Horkheimer presented an analysis of the development and evolution process of instrumental rationality using Max Weber's theory of rationalization, based on which, in fact, they got closer to the Weber's pessimistic image of modern world as a world without a way out of iron cage of bureaucracy and rationalism. On the other hand, they established a theoretical basis for this totalitarian attitude by considering the process of development and generalization of this kind of destructive tendencies throughout the west culture, especially tendencies of excessive greed toward accumulating more capital and, bureaucratic and technocratic hegemony, with emphasis on their catastrophic and inhumane aspects in the form of massacre in Hiroshima and Auschwitz (Ahmadi, 1997, p. 44).

A very important factor in which the formation of a new form of domination has endorsed and supported, i.e. technocratic hegemony, is positivism, and is closely related to it. In fact, science is presented as a tool for achieving instrumental rationality to be able to dominate nature and society (Nozari, 2007, p. 58).

The main theme of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which is presented in the introduction, is self-destruction and enlightenment, i.e. self-destruction of mind, which is considered like a critical and negative approach to the facts. Because of the false clarity which has appeared in academic thinking and positivism philosophy, this modern academic awareness is considered as the major source of cultural decadence as a result of which the humanity is stepping into a total humane status, is plunging into a new kind of barbarism. And this situation arising from rationality is called cultural hegemony. In their opinion, science and technology are like ideologies, which pave the way for establishment of new forms of hegemony and promote them (ibid, p. 61).

MEDIA EDUCATION AND ITS ROLE IN EDUCATION

The concept of media or communication medium (its plural form is media) is a Latin word and in general, it means the process of transmission through mass communication devices (Kazno, 2006). Media refers to any kind of device or tool which provides the condition for communication and message transmission, and it consists of all mass and individual communication devices including written, audio, visual, internet, etc. devices.

Along with the growth and development of science in the world, we are witnessing the increased use of mass communication devices and media insofar as media is the tool for exercising power and implementing bullying policies, and there is fierce competition between governments, especially politics and economy giants, for making use of media for pushing the thoughts and forming the preferences and interests of nations and changing their life style.

At the time when the media has proved its presence in all aspects of peoples' lives and it is one of the most effective tools for unifying the thought and aligning the ideas and thoughts of the people with desired and

favourable thoughts of the rulers of a community; we no longer see governments who resort to violence and force for pushing their desired and favourable thoughts.

Critical theorists have also criticized the modern technology and mass media which are among the representations of modern technology, because of demagoguery. All the critical theorists have attacked the culture and politics of the ruler of their time, in such a way that Marcuse have brought this school fame in the book title *One Dimensional Man* in 60s, and attacks those Western communities which restrict man's freedom in any way and suppress any objection; and also criticizes the technical, manufacturing and distribution equipment in industrialized countries, and attacks the suppressed and restricted freedom of this time's man as well as contemporary racial, ethnic and sexual hegemony. Thinkers such as Gramsci and Paulo Freire have considered education as caste-based and criticize the powerful and affluent classes who stabilize domination and deprive the people of freedom, welfare and real knowledge (Kardan, 2009, p. 201-202).

In an era in which on one hand using media and mass communication devices are prevalent and its effect on thoughts, opinions and even ideology of people is undeniable in a way that all social classes are aware of its necessity and importance, and on the other hand, in today world, mass media such as newspaper, radio, television, cinema, etc. play a major role in informal education of community people towards the progress of human culture and civilization by transferring information and new knowledge as well as exchanging ideas and opinions; it is in such a way that many scientists have called the current era, the communication era (Motamed Nejad, 1992, p. 9).

On the other hand, using media in the education has properly positioned itself nowadays. "Experts have considered addressing the educational technology since 1900, even if they believe the Sophists in 5th century BC provided systematic education and used preliminary tools for message transmission in education (Ahadian, 1995, p. 11).

The media and means of education provide the conditions for the audience, under which the effect of the messages would be quicker and more effective. The education is accomplished in the shortest duration; and provides access to remote areas as well as unique experiences for the audience, and also affects the interests of the audience with respect to the subject (Ahadian, 2006).

In addition to the positive effects of the media on the audience, there are some negative effects as well attributed to the media, especially those such as television, such as:

The audience become passive; and they do not pay attention to the interests and preferences of the audience. They make the teaching and learning impersonal. They do not consider personal differences (N. Brown, Oke and P. Brown, 1990, p. 195).

Based on what has been mentioned, it can be stated that today the media and media messages are not separable from life and culture, it can even be admitted that in the today populated community, most people are educated through media messages especially internet, satellite and television, more than schools and formal institutes, especially in exploited countries. Such a subject matter has not overlooked by the critical theorists whose viewpoints have always been raised in areas of culture, economy, morality and education, and there have been serious discussions.

"According to Adorno, radio and television, new advertisements and etc., establish pre-planned, mass produced cultural and social attitudes. These circumstances ruin the individual's initiative and result in an administered society. It is a society characterized by technologism coverage, in which those who dominate hide behind the reality, and make use of them to govern, and the final result is that the people cannot think by themselves" (O. Craver & S. Craver, 1986, p. 270)

The Effects and Consequences of Cultural Hegemony in Media Education

Cultural hegemony affects the values and national religious beliefs of a nation, and is more dangerous than other forms of hegemony such as military domination, political hegemony, etc., and in fact, as Horkheimer says, if we dominate the space between to ears (rationality) of a nation, we have dominated the entire nation (Adib Soltani, 1980, p. 56). Hegemony is a possibility that an order which bears a particular content be undertaken by a certain group of people, and cultural hegemony is a rational and mental order which an individual makes him/herself to obey it (Weber, 2000, p. 10).

Adorno and Horkheimer use culture industry to refer to industries which deal with the mass production of cultural products, and seek to highlight the fact that some key aspects of these industries are not different from other areas of mass production. Culture industry leads to increased commodification of cultural aspect (Ahmadi, 2000).

Culture industry goes for a kind of fooling and intellectual mental tyranny of people in the society in a mandatory manner, and presents the same the content of all the cultural manifestations in order to make all the people look the same and one (ibid, p. 28).

Such cultural and media hegemony will have some effects and consequences:

A- Self-alienation by the Media: From the Frankfurt school's viewpoint, the media is capable of causing self-alienation in people, and changes the attitudes of the audience toward a subject, person, school of thought,

religion, policy, and all their aspects of ideology, or fixes them in favour of the powers by writing analyses seemingly reasonable and logical in written media, broadcasting analytical programs and pushing hegemonic ideas in the form of seemingly expert and logical comments, making attractive video clips and TV series with religious and ideological themes, and this investment has generated much profit for the powers.

From Marcuse's and other the Frankfurt school's theorists' viewpoint, the social media have violated the realms of the conscious and unconscious dimensions of the individual and affect the society; violation and breach of man's privacy by the modern technology has led to the destruction of inner freedom and uniformity in the way of thinking and looking at the issues (Ahmadi, 1995, p. 128).

B-Mere Consumerism: Mere consumerism without thinking about its consequences is one of the outcomes of cultural hegemony. Consumerist culture and serving capital and economy giants is a phenomenon that is intended by the governments and moves the humans towards gaining more profit and leaves no space for them to think and contemplate; this thought is also conveyed through mass media easily. The requirement for establishing such culture is eliminating thinking and forming an induced attitude. Mere consumerism is the result of eliminating thinking and induced attitude through clamorous empty but pretty attractive advertisement by the governments by different methods especially the media which will result in outcomes such as average oppression. Average oppression, the oppression of rulers, regimes, and authoritarian governments is totally obvious form of bullying and act of hegemony. In a consumerist community, the commodities are possibly manufactured and supplied for the largest groups of consumerist groups. The mass media, art and entertainment are designed as products to attract the most audience (Gutek, 2010, p.174).

In culture industry, the objects are considered which are worth exchanging and can greatly seduce people. Judging such products is not based on quality, but it is based on the ability to attract and stimulate to consume; Reification of cultural commodities is one of the important features considered (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972, p. 158)

C- Decline of One's Individualism: In individualized culture industry, the declined individual is doomed to integrate into community and collective values, which is often imposed and is a combination of the demands of the powers. They design an imposed pattern on the minds of the people on the pretext of the era of collective wisdom. They believe that in the world dominated by bureaucracy, the mind serves the hegemony and has lost its liberating capability; that is, it considers no identity for the individual and states in somewhere else that as long as the world's history continues in its rational and logical manner, it cannot realize the man's true nature. It means the hegemonic system in the contemporary world has even destroyed the hope for utopia and freedom thought as well. Adorno in this regard states, escape is the only way for informed people to get away from hegemony (Ahmadi, 1995, p. 28). In the culture industry criticized by Frankfurt school, the identity and intellectual basis, character and personality of the individual is taken from him/her and a basis is established which is desired by the powers on the ruins of the individuals identity through tempting and attractive products, in return for false satisfaction and momentary pleasures. The culture industry attempts to establish an artificial and unreal personality for utilization of the powers and the wealthy, in order to create individualism in the public who exhibit behaviours towards the public unity and allegiance to the powers. Culture industry creates a false individualism for the humans and makes them all the same, identical and normalized (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2001, p. 39).

D. Cultural Repression of the Individual: Critical theorists stress the cultural repression of the individual in the communities. They believe that the individual should be educated under the cultural domination imposed by the powers, and he/she should accept those culture and cultural behaviours which is desired by the powers. As a result, the individual should accept the packaged and presented culture without resistance. Altogether, from these thinkers' viewpoint, commodity is considered as the most important ideological tool in this process.

In Adorno and Horkheimer's opinion, today world and future world is a totally controlled world and man's true freedom in the light of this world, is damaged due to development of rationality. In today world, the individual's happiness and satisfaction will not be realized unless in a historical process which comes along with the decline of the individualism. This decline causes the uniformity of awareness and human reasoning through guided communications, ignoring nature and quality of the individual during the evolution of forms of production and transformation of mental structure of human being due to men's same socialization (Saeed, 2003, p. 8).

E-Bringing up Humans Who Do Not Possess Critical Thinking Ability: The media, from the Frankfurt school's viewpoint, teaches the criteria for thinking about the manifestations and phenomena around to the communities' people. In their opinion, the intended criteria are usually predesigned by the media operators who are the powers. The individual, in such a way that the point of view and attitude toward the world around is aligned with and desired by the hegemonic powers, has the impression they want, sees what they desire, and as a result, exhibits the behavior and reaction they expect; and the individual does not have the power of choice and will, and his/her personalities and behavioral characteristics are the same as offered by the hegemonic powers. One of the important phenomenon which bring about one dimensional behavior is the availability of mass communication devices, entertaining and time wasting as well as educating industries, which ruin individual's

creativity and thoughts. The consequence of such a situation, from Marcuse's viewpoint, is de-politicization of the society and elimination of political and ethical issues from the social life (Mehdi Zadeh, 2001, p. 42).

Therefore, in such a society, the public opinion and mass media are the tools for creating such an atmosphere. In this totalitarian system, obviously, we cannot even have the illusion that the working class is a revolutionary class. Current wellbeing and happiness, however, is false, and it has not brought real freedom, but it is only the result of realized capitalist economy and government (Bashirieh, 1999, p. 201).

The media has taken the flexibility and multi-capacity of human being and has downgraded him to a one dimensional man who is very passive. In this case, through common advertisements in the media, people tend to consume more and do not recognize their interests, so there would be a kind of integration in the community which is oppressive and harmful. Marcuse, by differentiating between man's true demands and false demands, believes that mass communication devices cause the true demands to step aside and the false tendencies replace them (Emam Jomeh Zadeh & Oughli, 2011, p. 141).

CONCLUSION

In the present paper, first, the concept of media and cultural hegemony was reviewed from the critical theorists' viewpoint; then, the role of the media in bringing up the community's people was addressed. Finally, in the last section, some of the effects and consequences of cultural hegemony in media education was reviewed from the critical theorists' viewpoint such as Adorno and Horkheimer. Given the importance of criticism and its application in analysis of issues, especially in receiving the messages from the media which play an informal role in educating people, the people can be empowered to think critically when facing media and cultural hegemony, and overcome such exploiting powers and negative consequences of the media through formal education, especially via critical analysis of the messages contained in the textbooks. On the other hand, not critically analyzing the media and internet messages, especially in today world, will bring up the young generation with stereotypical and cliché thoughts, and reduces their creativity and criticizing ability. Such an issue shall not be overlooked by the media and education thinkers. Thus, in line with this study, it is suggested to conduct a similar study to investigate the effect of internet, television and satellite on fostering freedom of thought and critical thinking among students and the audience.

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