

## Media Imperialism: A Postmodern Analysis

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### Abstract

*This paper aims to build an understanding of postmodern phenomena, that what exactly it means and how it relates to media in general and media imperialism in particular. The claim of modernists that we, the masses are so immersed in the mediatized lifestyle that we have blurred the lines between reality and media is discussed thoroughly that how the distinction has almost disappeared. This study explores how human beings have lost the sense of reality and have started to believe that media reality is the actual reality. It is also worth explaining how it has historical roots, from modern to postmodern era, in which the idea of representation got mixed with intertextual references. This piece of writing also establishes the work of distinguished postmodernists like Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, Edward Said, Boyd Barret and Bandrillad. The article elucidates the vital role played by media to reshape our personal and social lives, and most importantly, our conceptions of reality. It investigates the question that is it really truth that our lives have been dominated and influenced by the consumption of images, where notions of objectivity and empiricism have been disappeared since long while forgetting the true essence of real world? And whether there exists a wish to return to reality or not?*

**Key Words:** Media Imperialism, Hyper-Reality, Images, Postmodernism

### Introducing the Literary Debate

Literature review is an important component in research. It tells about some vital components about the undergoing research area. A researcher must extract the core elements from already existing literature to update his/her understanding of the research area. It avoids the researcher from reinventing the wheel and identifies the proper direction for research.

Oliver Boyd Barrett in his book *Media Imperialism*, explains the relationship between media and imperialism by asking simple questions. He investigates that either information or entertainment content of media really have the power to reinforce, resist or modify our relationships or is it just an exaggerated notion. He also explains the how media operations are colluded with centres of power like political, commercial centres etc. He describes media Imperialism in relation to cultural imperialism, explaining how they have emerged from the same time period having same roots. Media is constituted of and constituted by culture, he adds.

The importance of culture can't be less emphasized as it plays a huge part in directing our social lives and social structures. According to the theories of modernization, media is having a benign role in national development, but theorists of media Imperialism regard media and its institutions as part and parcel of western hegemonic interests, that aimed to work on people of South in the process of making them civilised. But the relationship between media and the phenomenon of imperialism can't be limited to social and economic development, because it has immense importance in social systems, how communication takes place in such systems and preferred epistemologies.

Harold Inis have agreed to this idea and advocates how empires have been able to preserve their survival via communication for instance time based and space based media.

Boyd Barrett digs deep into the meaning of imperialism, how it is always about the oppression and exploitation of one community or a group by another,

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having different forms. Media is one tool to do it as it evolves through different centres of power, ownership, accessibility, audience reach etc.

Tracing the history of this phenomenon shows how imperial nations after giving independence to their colonies, continued to shape and mould and most importantly, control former colonies through economic ties, military threat and imperial culture, influencing through language, culture, deciding what should be counted as knowledge and what should be discarded (epistemology) etc.

The issues lies that these concepts are vast, and broad to yield one definition that is complete and comprehensive. Schiller has tried to define this phenomenon that, "it is the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how it's dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping it's social institutions to correspond and even promote the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system". This controversial term of media Imperialism is defined extensively under the framework of dependency theory as well. It highlights that Western countries were democratic and pluralistic, having freedom of speech and expression so the media was also free, so it was thought that if other non-developed countries would apply the same models they would benefit from it. It explains how media was used as a tool to facilitate the phenomenon of imperialism. (Boyd-Barrett, media imperialism 2015)

Douglas Kellner in his book " Media Culture" has explained how digital media and culture has been entwined and have become a feature of our modern age for instance we experience our cultural life through media in different ways. He explains how, through media we are able to forge our identities, our ideas and expectations from ourselves and other, our sense of class, and most importantly the categorization of "us" and "them". The importance of media is highlighted that how it plays its part to shape our realities and our deepest values, our moral scales are decided by media, positive and negative notions are attached by media to certain actions. It is media who decides who's powerful and who's powerless, who is entitled to use power and how's going to be the victim (Kellner 1995)

Fred Fejes in his analysis of media Imperialism explains that there exist a great deal of concern over media Imperialism because this instigates a sense of fear over the consequences of this phenomenon as it

posits grave threats to the integrity and development of national cultures of third world countries. This severely affects the audience's behaviour and their world view. Apart from its grave and serious implications, a little has been done in the theoretical domain. There are questions the need answers like how does modern communication relates to the larger structures, furthermore, discrete aspects of media Imperialism should be discussed and examined. (Fejes 1981)

Same ideas have been propagated by postmodern thinkers. They claim that we the human beings have been immersed in media all day long, either we are at work, or at home, travelling or lying in our beds, we are constantly engaging ourselves with media. We have started to understand and perceived everything with the lens of media. This over immersion in media has made us oblivious to the realities of life and the world. Our minds are no longer able to differentiate between the reality and media reality. Tracing back to the roots, it has been witnessed that during modern era, people used to experience things and experiment with the representation of reality but when the postmodern era begun, ideas were represented through intertextual references. In simpler terms it could be said that, in history, media was seen as an authority, as an institution showing the realities of the world, holding up a mirror, reflecting social realities. But unfortunately, now it only reflects surface reflections, distorted information.

Postmodern analysis of media shows that any text, or any product that is bought to media, is totally worthy of attention. This means anything could be art, worthy of reaching an audience.

## Research Questions

### Primary Question

1. Is our life dominated and dependent upon the production and consumption of images for instance media?

### Secondary Questions

2. How much media shapes our world and concept of reality?
3. Is media imperialism a subcategory of cultural imperialism? Has it really done damages to developing societies and their national cultures?
4. Does contemporary media shows reality or hyperreality?

## **Hypothesis**

Postmodern media has reshaped our lives with the abundance of images and hyper-reality.

**Independent Variable:** Postmodern media

**Dependent Variable:** Our lives

## **Theoretical Underpinnings**

The chosen theory to explain above mentioned subject is postmodernism that is one of the most controversial of theories. It propagates that knowledge claims are connected to power and politics. Moreover, it talks about the importance of non-obvious observations that it is important and quite necessary to step outside the box and observe the world in one's own way. Postmodernist also reject grand theories, while supporting different ways to see and think about specific historical junctures.

By taking into account, the importance of knowledge, they believe that it is always conditioned by political and historical context. Postmodernist claim that there is no truth just competing perspectives. This means that there exists not just one perspective, it's always more than one, and every perspective embodies certain set of values and ideas. In simple words, there's no object or event outside or prior to perspectives.

Postmodernism is sometimes used to explain cultural changes from modernism. It is mostly concerned with the nature and implications of modernism, as well it critiques enlightenment. The phenomenon of postmodernism emerged across western world in late 1960s. There existed dissatisfied groups of students, feminists and environmentalists. Those people were mainly disappointed and frustrated with the continuing emphasis on the importance of social classes, which were determined economically. It was believed that other important social issues were neglected such as racial and gender discrimination. It should not be believed that postmodernist always critique every existing idea, instead they critique on what is different, unique and seemingly defies existing ideas. They prefer to think outside of the box, appreciating marginalized angles. Though they don't provide any alternative blueprint for any social problem, but still they can't be called as conservative. It has to be noted that postmodernist are always willing to admit that in the end there might not be any solid grounds or appeals to establish what is right and what's wrong in the context of social

systems. There exists no claim to peep inside or have an insight into the truth or the inherent virtue of human condition or any event.

Postmodernist reject grand narratives, they are doubtful to establish universal categories and explanations. According to them, if there exist any universal conditions for human liberty and freedom or emancipation, they would surely be used to marginalize and subordinate others who don't have same conditions. Liberal ideas of modernity, civilization or progress have always been and would be used to categorize and segregate people as advanced and backward, civilian or barbarian. It is argued that every society has its own culture and values which are practiced by their people, such actions are not bad or good, right or wrong, progressive or uncivilized. Such notions of backwardness or wrongness are added by supposedly superior models of Western world. The categorization of others is done by associating negative attributes with them, perceiving them as a threat to self. Self is made important and meaningful when category of other exists. Without the difference of others, there would be no self.

This explains imperialism, how values of one dominating group is converted into universal and civilized ones, and he who doesn't follow becomes backward and narrow minded.

It could be said that postmodernism undermines and challenges supposedly self-evident truths that are backed up by power and domination.

Postmodernist doesn't deny the reality or its existence but they advocate that we don't have access to this reality as social reality is discursively constructed. One can never speak of the reality objectively, because it is not directly accessible to us because our understanding of it is always mediated and conditioned by prevailing discourses. One is not able to access reality in its essence, but to read and interpret the world, through the interpretations of others. (Der Derian, 1989)

Taking into account the work of Jacques Derrida, it is clear how media Imperialism has taken place in our societies. He says that structure of nature and culture dichotomy has been repeating itself in other binary oppositions as well. The first term in each of these oppositions enlists privileged entity and the second term is always seemed as the inferior one. Such segregation is used to draw strict boundaries between what is fine and what's not, what's acceptable and what's not, what's sense and what's

nonsense, what's reason and what's madness. His concept of deconstruction has helped to understand this phenomenon that how a text is read to expose the ways in which meaning has been constructed from it.

Another French philosopher Michael Foucault has viewed the idea of power knowledge nexus and of discourses. He says that human beings don't and can't control discourses, because they are so powerful in themselves that they generate knowledge and core concepts and we believe all of them without questioning. This concludes that there are no disputed truths about the nature of human or the world, because everything we think we know is linked with our discursive context we believe things because this is what we have been taught in our schools and universities, in our homes and our social gatherings, proving the point that power doesn't reside within individuals but discourses. Foucault also believed that history was the account of powerful, the marginalized and less privileged had no say in creating history. Genealogy shows how and who have been neglected in such accounts questioning the legitimacy of history

Jean Francois Lyotard in his book "The postmodern condition", talks about the incredulity towards Meta narratives". He says that there has been a shift in ways we relate to knowledge after World War 2 and due to the technological advancement. He says that knowledge has become information that can be stored in databases, which can be sold and bought. He calls this phenomenon as mercantilization of knowledge. With knowledge being externalized, is no longer helpful in the development of minds, it has lost its transformative power. It is being disconnected from the truth, being judged not on the basis of its truth but in terms of how well it serves certain ends. We ask questions like how much this knowledge could be sold then this no longer remains knowledge but information and a commodity. He fears that when this happens, private corporations could seek to control the flow of knowledge and decide who can access what types of knowledge and when. (Buckingham 2011)

Postmodern paradigm in the context of media extensively debates about the effects and cultural forms of the modern media, the virtual space and advancements in the communication means through media technology. Kellner explains that postmodernism implies implosion of borders, that thinking process and ideas have been generated transnationally, postmodern paradigm is to be seen with its relationship with new developments of the society. It is a feature of new and modern society that

includes new forms of audiences and publics. It involves the emergence and importance of symbolic space, how means of communication have been changed and advanced, how monopolies have been ended, how there have been declassifications at social levels, how there has been favor for images, for the visuals instead of words, how our society is now characterized by hegemony of images as compared to the verbal and narrative. (Rudolf 2010)

Marshall McLuhan on his analysis on postmodernism, gives a key assumption that media, simulations and cyberbilitz have constituted a new form of society, creating new experiences. According to him, media is and has been playing an important role in constituting contemporary world. To him, media is a sovereign and autonomous social force that has so many effective implementations for the world and society in particular. In postmodern society, there exists novel form of culture, new mediums of communication that have changed our ratios of senses, our everyday lives, our ways and modes of communication and social interactions. He describes the evolution of society, that how it has evolved from oral based culture to print culture and now culture produced by media. He proposed that, in a postmodern society, there would be an implosion of ideas, there would be decentralization, a new media, and particularly there would be computer culture to be called as cyberspace.

On the other side, Baudrillard developed his analysis on media in his article called as "Requiem for the media", in which he has established a very pessimistic vision of media, that means that media would be used to manipulate and dominate others, and to control such instances, there would be rigid social control in which radical intervention and cultural politics would be made impossible to take place. Most importantly, he talks about hyper reality, that in postmodern world, information, entertainment and communication technologies would be providing experiences more intense and involving as they don't exist in reality, making the individuals escape from their surrounding realities and urging for ecstasies of hyper reality.

He talks about the reversal of the relationship between representation and reality that nowadays media is showing a new media reality, more real than the real. And this happens when there is proliferation of signs and information in the media, which neutralizes and dissolve all other content, where the meaning is destroyed and the distinction between reality and media is blurred on purpose.

He proves his point by drawing an analysis of the stages of simulacra, in his study of "Simulacra and science Fiction". The very first stage relates to the time of pre modern society in which there was a natural Harmony between people, their cultures, and overall the world. The second stage came when modernity was introduced in the society that brought along proliferation of ideas and images leading towards conflict of ideas and cultures. In the third and final stage of simulation, there is an operational order, with hyper real computer and media system, that models our lives and eventually controls it. This is the stage where the media creates misinformation, meaning less ideas, creates information overload and finally leads towards the collapse and chaos between the real and virtual.

In his writing "The Ecstasy of Communication", he claims that in a postmodern society, the notions of privacy and private life have been turned into a dream, most intimate and personal events of our lives have become the virtual feeding ground of the media. Everything has become visible, of more visible than visible. Everything has become a transparent, nothing is now a secret or private. Living in such a world means that we have become saturated with information and images and ecstasies. The inner life is over, the charm of secrecy is over. (Peter 1989)

Postmodernists also deal with the idea of never ending references, and fear that this would lead towards the disappearance of reality. Due to this, there has been a constant struggle to search for meaning in images, such practices are exhaustive. It is felt that there should be images different from already existing images and ideas, so that we could re-find our trust in images as art. Living in a postmodernist world, we have mediatized our relationships and emotions, we are relieving events and experiences through images losing the memory of the real. Because we remember the image but not the event.

Postmodernist reject the idea of reality as mentioned earlier, the idea of finding something original and authentic was discarded. For example to understand one image, we have to refer it to the other, which will have to be referred to another image and so on, this never ending reference would lead us towards the loss of real. The sense of real within art has been lost due to the reality being discarded in favor of mass inter textual referencing. It is true that technological advancements have been a source of bringing each other closer, but on the other side, we have mediatized our relationships to others. We take

thousands of pictures with our cellphones and cameras, randomly without any purpose, without any special event, this unlimited sense has been brought into photography that leads is towards the loss of value in photography. Before digital, it was precious, every single photo was considered important and enjoyed afterwards, through such images we used to recall the whole event. And not only photography, but now films, advertisements etc. also use inter textual and referencing to those other images. Images have been so important that no news or entertainment is considered complete without them. We have become a society of spectacle, where images have become a reality, real life experiences have become unimportant, everything takes place mediatized. (postmodernism in media 2017)

### **Analytical Discussion and Conclusion**

We are living in postmodern society, where there's a need to deconstruct truths so that dominant ideas called as grand narratives could be challenged, competing ideas and truths could be taken into account. Simultaneously, new media has to be given the responsibility and recognition for blurring the lines between the real and images, for blurring the lines between goods that are essential and goods that are constructed to be essential through commercial images. The fact has to be accepted that, media has the power to influence individuals, living in different societies. Individual's behaviors, lives and their relationships with others have been reshaped due to the media influence. Media is, and have been used as a tool to imperialized nations, to exploit and oppress others through power and ownership. It has been used as a tool by colonial powers after giving independence to their colonies, so that they can still have influence to shape and mold those former colonies.

Postmodernism explains how notions of backwardness and barbarianism have been attached to the societies who were less developed, how they were exploited in the name of liberty and civilization. by explain the work of famous postmodernists, it could be concluded that, media has played a massive role in our social lives. The abundance of media dependency has made us oblivious of our realities, we have forgotten the meaning of real. We believe what we see on media, we believe what our society tells us, we blindly follow others, we act upon our preconceived ideas, thinking of knowledge as a commodity.

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