

# The Role of Media in Promoting Indigenous Cultural Values: Critical Discourse Analysis

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## Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the role of media in promoting indigenous cultural values in Ethiopia. The current global communication system affects the thought and practice of the people in the multi-verse. Since the global media is occupied by the developed nations, developing countries, such as Ethiopia, are forced to see themselves and each other through the developed countries' views. Data were collected from different 26 television and radio programs, e-discourse 213 mobile texts, 145 face-book posts, and blogs, 97 posts on public displays like School and University Walls, Bajaj and Taxi posts. The result of the study showed that the indigenous cultures are associated with backwardness and the Western cultures are considered modern. Global discourse is making it easier for the Western culture to wash away aboriginal and local cultures which are precious for the multicultural communities in Ethiopia. There are many global cultures such as "Valentine Day" "Thanks Giving Day" "April the Fool" that invade our people. The media is playing a key role in this regard. Local cultural values which the Ethiopian people have long been preserving couldn't survive the pressure paused on them because of modern technology mediated global discourses which dominated the global information space. Although the educated society of the country could assume the position to raise the awareness of the people to value our aged assets, they themselves have become victims. Hence, the responsible citizens of the country need to write, speak and revitalize the threats that is paused to our precious cultural values by outside intruders of global discourse.

**Keywords:** media, global discourse, indigenous cultures

## 1. Introduction

Intercultural communication is an international or global communication the innocent objective of which is to maintain social, political, and economic relationships among groups who differentiate themselves with their culture, language, religion, state, region and other groupings. This is a growing necessity in response to the need for understanding of an increasingly multicultural and technologically-connected global environment. Intercultural/global communication focuses on communication relationships across cultures and nations or among diverse groups.

It is the objective of this essay to argue that there is an uneven and unjust flow of information between the North and South not mainly because information lies mostly in the hands of those highly developed Western countries that generate information to serve their own interest. The developing nations also have the stories but lack the means and interested audience who gives them ear to listen to what they have to say. Moreover, the West or North is the hegemonic force that is dominating the world of the non-Western countries.

Global communication whose major media is technological is threatening and undermining centuries of tradition, local autonomy and cultural integrity. For example, to exploit and use what the internet has to offer to a greater extent, the knowledge of English language is inevitably essential. This undermines the need to further explore local language, culture and anything that is to do with local. The North is once again, taking advantage of the south through globalization, the modern and democratic form of dominating and exploiting the powerless.

(Globalization is) ... the intensification of world-wide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (Giddens, 1990:64 cited in Rantanen, 2005:6).

Globalization is a process in which worldwide economic, political, cultural and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space (Rantanen, 2005:8).

The first definition claims local happenings in the dominated countries that are actually shaped by what happens elsewhere in the dominant and powerful countries, but I am not sure if the reverse is true. The second definition is an innocent version of the hidden agenda of communicating power of the developed nations. World relation is mediated across time and space for the benefit and interest of the mediator. The mediators are the developed nations. They mediate the developed and the developing nations. It is like the Amharic proverb 'Abatu Dagna Ligu Kemagna' that translates in to 'The father is the judge and the son is the their'. On whose benefit would the father be possibly be passing his judgment? On his son's side, of course.

Globalization realizes itself in economic (world market place), political (power and authority relations), culture (music, fashion, media, lifestyles) spreading to influence in reshaping how people live and think. Intercultural global communication spread through commercial, political and academic discourse.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to investigate the role of media in promoting indigenous cultural values in Ethiopia. Specifically, this study is aimed at

1. Identifying the efforts being made by local media to promote indigenous cultural values
2. Assess the pop culture adopted in Ethiopia
3. Explore the foreign cultural values adopted in Ethiopia.

## 3. Research Methodology

The design of this study is qualitative. Primary and secondary data sources were used. The primary data sources were from different mass and social media. Data were collected from different 26 television and radio programs, e-discourse 213 mobile texts, 145 face-book posts, and blogs, 97 posts on public displays like School and University Walls, Bajaj and Taxi posts. The data obtained from these sources were analyzed qualitatively. The data were coded and the contents were analyzed thematically.

## 4. Global Issues are confined to the stories of the North

The story told is of events and issues within a single country (Sernau, 2006:5). Information is flowing from the developed to the developing in a vertical and top down manner. The freedom to receive and impart information is secured to the powerful nations.

Globalization promised to give opportunities for success. In reality, however, it brings concentration of power that monopolizes opportunity and denies it to others. Globalization pledged interaction for benefit of participants. At the end of the day, it turns out to bring greater exploitation of the poor and powerless and exclusion of the mass of humanity from the promised prosperity.

The news flow pattern has a huge problem especially for developing countries. Developing countries are really concerned because the four major Western countries got hold of the bulk of the world's news flow with 30 million words daily (Rampal, 2007:123). Among the issues developing countries raise, some of them are,

1. Developing countries are forced to see themselves and each other through the developed countries' news agencies. Incomplete and unreliable information disseminate about developing countries.
2. Western information dominance includes judgments about developing countries that also provide inadequate, negative and stereotyped picture. State-run Radio and TV stations distort the information to incorporate the interest of their country. Besides, Radio and Television signals freely crossing international boundaries had the potential to interfere with one another and destroy any usefulness the medium might have; they also had the potential to carry political and social messages that affected other countries' interests (Huffman, et al, 2007:80).
3. The flow of news is heavily imbalanced. The information flow from the developed West to the developing countries.
4. 'Soft Power' strongly promotes the Western culture through television, music, books, films, and magazines that threaten and damage local cultures of developing countries.
5. A global approach to communication of mutual cooperation furthered social goals such as the protection of intellectual property rights like patents, trademarks, and copyrights (Huffman, et al, 2007:80). It can also furthered bribe, blackmail and injustice as the information is made available across boundaries.

The Third World complains pushed 'a new world information order' (NWIO) through UNESCO. The NWIO debate pulled the United States and Britain from UNESCO (Rampal, 2007: 124). UNESCO suggested that the developing countries should establish their own news agencies which resulted the *Non-Aligned News Agencies pool*, *Latin America's Inter Press Service*, *Manila Based DSPTH*, *the Pan Africa News Agency*, and *the Caribbean News Agency*. None but Inter Press Service posed a serious challenge to the Western media (Rampal, 2007:125).

The only hope left seems to be the internet for the developing countries' effort to seek a more balanced flow of news globally. The internet has a better promise in serving as an equalizer of information flow. Even the internet is not a completion free media for developing countries as every major information agencies are using the internet too to disseminate their information. But then, the access is more costly and far reaching as much for the developing countries as the developed ones.

Developing countries cannot expect much from an 8% international news coverage of an average US daily TV news programmed report; neither can they expect much from any Western press to carry extensive story from developing countries. For example, a Cyclone hit the East Indian State of Orissa on October 1999. The incident affected 15 million people and 10, 000 died. This did not get a cover page on The Washington Post when it was posted on November 12, 1999. Rather, it ran on page A27. A reader of this incident wrote a letter to the editor that the news was ignored as such because either 'Orissa is not Europe' or 'Orissa does not own oil underground' (Rampal, 2007:126).

## 5. Cracking National Identity/Indigenous cultural values

Belief in local cultural values such as nationalism is the belief in the value, rightness and magnificence of own nation. A change from national to global identity is becoming evident as the national cultures are being transformed to universal set of beliefs. Internet flows centring on the US and other English speaking nations – UK, Canada, Australia, India, and to a lesser extent Japan, Germany, and France (Barnett and Rosen, 2007:169). This suggests that global identity will converge to an Anglo-American or a liberal Western culture than any other as these are the potential candidates controlling the world information market.

Globalization challenges nationalism that advocates people who share the same geographic area belong to the same nation. Nationalism is inward looking and closed. To be able to continue doing so, it has to protect itself from the influence of other cultures from outside. Globalization is working against nationalism making it difficult for nationalism to persist.

National citizenship is lost as it is being replaced by global nationality (Sernau, 2006:4). Globalization makes it possible to experience different cultures without ever leaving home. Culture awareness, in turn, makes people feel at home in the diversified world. At the same time, new ways of life from new people of new culture challenge home life style.

An evaluation of the linguistic data of the online population in internet use also suggests the same conclusion. English is used by the online population of 35.6%, other European languages constitute 34.9%, and Asian languages are used by 29.4% (Barnett and Rosen, 2007:170). This indicates that more than 70% of the online population use English or other Western languages which explains the linguistic dominance of the developed countries over the online population.

USA is controlling international communication and information flow including the internet. This may change in the future as non-West/US countries are coming online. Internet hosts in China is growing by 48.7% and India by 55.4% annually (Barnett and Rosen, 2007:174). The pattern of online language use and impact on converged universal culture may change to these countries as they dominate the online population over the West and US.

As to the particular kind of culture the world is adopting, global culture is becoming more individualistic because the network is centred to countries high in individualism: the US, UK, Canada and Australia. Individualism is a typical Western culture which they accomplish as a result of their civilization. Primitive society of human beings reflects a collective and collaborative way of life where cooperation rather than competition is at the center. African and Asian cultures are still holding onto this concept since they are not more into competition. This is being threatened by the Western culture of individualism.

Because of the individualistic culture, people identify themselves less with their nation, ethnic group and collective interest but rather individual values. They will take on the culture that gives more emphasis on individual. Individualism is less related to nationality but more related to global citizenship.

## 6. Hegemonic Relationship

It is common to hear people saying that there is no middle class but higher and lower class only. This is true of the individuals and nations. The gap between the rich and poor countries is getting greater and greater as a result of unjust global communication. The 5% world's richest people receive more than 100 times the 5% poorest (Sernau, 2006:11). Even more, the richest 5% alone receive more income than the poorest 50% of the world people. The situation is getting worse as the system leaves many of African countries behind the rest of the world. In 1820 per capita income of Western Europe's was 3 times Africa's. This figure becomes 13 times that of Africa in 1992 (Ibid). The hegemonic global mediated communication system is further widening the existing gap (Amare, 8).

Hegemony constitutes the laws, constitutions, theories, ideologies and social institutions that express and ratify the dominance of a particular class or nation over the others (Hirst and Harrisin, 2007:49). The relationship between developed and developing nations is hegemonic.

Hegemony is the domination of a particular set of ideologies that benefit the ruling group, but gives the mass of the ruled the feeling that they are well off (Hirst and Harrisin, 2007:51). The global communication is hegemonic in a sense that the North dominates the South in ideology.

## 7. Pop culture

Popular culture or pop culture is the entirety of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images, and other phenomena that are within the mainstream of a given culture, especially Western culture of the early to mid 20th century and the emerging global mainstream of the late 20th and early 21st century. Pop culture is a shortening of the phrase "popular culture." It refers to the stuff that falls under the pop culture umbrella is the popular culture that the youth of today are experiencing. Pop culture can come in a wide variety of different forms. ranging from:

- Video games
- Film

- Comic books
- Music
- Television
- Novels

Examples of pop culture in video games: Video games have exploded onto the scene in the last 10 years, becoming one of the biggest industries in the world. Here are some games that have dominated the video game pop culture space such as Call of Duty (1990s), Pokemon (1990s), Super Mario (1980s).

Examples of pop culture in film: Films are a big part of pop culture, and have a good number of examples, including Star Wars (1970s), Die Hard (1980s), Pop-culture in music as driven by *American Idol* or *America's Got Talent*

Examples of pop culture in television: The Simpsons (1990s), Law & Order (1990s), "The Biggest Loser," Pop-culture in TV as driven by *Reality TV*.

Examples of pop culture in novels: More so than the rest of the media being discussed, novels rarely fall into "pop culture." There are certainly examples of pop culture novels, but they aren't as common as in the other media. Some examples include. The Lord of the Rings (1970s), Harry Potter (1990s), Twilight (2000s)

Pop culture in various aspects of life: Examples of popular culture come from a wide array of genres, including popular music, print, cyber culture, sports, entertainment, leisure, fads, advertising and television. Sports and television are arguably two of the most widely consumed examples of popular culture, and they also represent two examples of popular culture with great staying power. Sports are played and watched by members of all social classes, but the masses are responsible for the huge popularity of sports. Some sporting events, such as the World Cup and the Olympics, are consumed by a world community. Sports are pervasive in most societies and represent a major part of many people's lives.

Generally, the Western culture dominates. American Pop Culture generally refers to media created by people or organizations in the United States. While some media in other countries will emulate the style of American films – particularly, films such as Die Hard or Star Wars can expect to be followed by other film industries – but generally speaking, it's a lot more common to see American pop culture creators to emulate styles of foreign media, such as French romance or Japanese samurai.

## **8. Indigenous Ethiopian Cultures being promoted by the media**

In the mass and social media, the Ethiopian people promote their culture. Indigenous ethnic cultures are highly respected in Ethiopia. In this multi-verse, culture is functionally linked to the popular media forms - radio, TV, and the press. Pop culture is heavily criticised. However, there seems to be no way out of it in the current media-dependent way of life adopted by the world people. On the one hand, Popular culture allows large heterogeneous masses of people to identify collectively. On the other hand, the local cultural values are left out and are subjected to death.

## **9. Foreign Cultures being promoted in Ethiopia**

There are many foreign cultures promoted by the social media which are making it difficult for the domestic cultures to survive and persist. The people are adopting foreign culture in many aspects of life such as dressing, sports, entertainment, fashion, film and so on. For example, in many Ethiopian films, males adopt the culture of asking for marriage by getting down on the knee and saying 'will you marry me?' The TV, Radio, press, the social media promotes foreign cultures like 'valentine day', 'April the fool', 'thanks giving', 'mothers' day' and many others.

## **10. The Role of Media in Promoting Ethiopian Indigenous Cultures**

This report assesses the threat posed to Ethiopian national culture by foreign cultural values through manipulation of the local media. Media in indigenous languages characterizes a people-oriented communication approach to programs of national development and the preservation of socio-cultural values, ensuring in the process cultural self-determination. Local Nigerian media should be restructured to reflect the socio-cultural dimension of the country; its people; and their culture, language, and education.

## **Conclusions**

In the current information system, there is no escape from the influence of the media in every sphere of our lives. Culture is at the centre of it. In Ethiopia, the indigenous cultures are promoted by the media – both by the mass media owned by the government and private as well as the social media of the cyberspace. However, the struggle to make sure the local cultural values survive in the realm is not easy. There are many foreign cultures adopted by our society. It is becoming very difficult for our indigenous cultural practices to show themselves out and become a pop culture. Since the media is owned by the developed countries, contents of the pop culture are dominated by their own items. To elevate our own indigenous cultural values, there is a lot to be done by the



developing countries. Although Ethiopian cultural values are being promoted by the media; more efforts are required before our cultural values are swallowed by the pop culture of the West who owned the media at large.

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