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Media Hegemony and the Suppression of Counter-Hegemony in Nigeria

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Abstract

Media are realized to be the powerful tools in the dissemination and reinforcement of dominant ideologies in order to maintain the status quo thereby serving the interest of the powerful groups at the detriment of the nation's social justice, economic equality and national development. This study therefore, examines the phenomenon of media hegemony and its impact on the suppression of counter-hegemony in Nigeria. Using Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony as a framework, this research investigates how the dominant media landscape in Nigeria reinforces existing power structures, marginalizes alternative voices, and limits the emergence of counter-hegemonic narratives. Through a critical discourse analysis of media operations in Nigeria, their orientations and contents. The study reveals the ways in which media hegemony is maintained and contested in Nigeria. The concentration of media ownership, censorship, and the manipulation of public opinion are key strategies used to suppress counter-hegemony in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study highlights the challenges faced by alternative voices and social movements in promoting counter-hegemonic discourses and resisting dominant narratives. The research contributes to our understanding of the

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complex dynamics of media hegemony, how media shape power structures, normalizes the views of the ruling class and suppress counter-hegemony in Nigeria; and underscores the need for a more inclusive and diverse media landscape that promotes critical thinking, democratic participation, social equality and social justice.

Keywords: Media hegemony, Counter-hegemony, Nigeria, Gramsci, Cultural hegemony

Introduction

The word "Hegemony" is derived from the Greek term "hēgemonia" meaning "dominance over". It was used to describe relations between city-states. Before Antonio Gramsci, an Italian politician and Marxist philosopher, gave it a thorough examination, its application in political analysis was somewhat restricted. Gramsci's exploration of the persistence of the capitalist state in the most developed Western nations led him to discuss hegemony. Gramsci was interested in elucidating the processes by which tangible institutional forms and material relations of production rose to prominence. He understood the dominant mode of rule as class rule. According to Gramsci (1971), force or brutal dominance are two ways to achieve a class's supremacy and the continuation of the associated mode of production. However, Gramsci's most important finding was that in developed capitalist societies, class control was maintained mostly by mutual consent than by force or brutal dominance.

Thus, Altheide (1984), puts forth that a critical examination of the mechanisms by which these capitalist notions are propagated and deemed normal and reasonable is a necessary component of Gramsci's hegemony analysis. A class that achieves the approval of other social forces is considered hegemonic, and maintaining this approval is a continuous endeavor. A group must comprehend both its own interests about the mode of production and the goals, aspirations, and interests of other groups in order to obtain this consent. Gramsci noted that under capitalism, civil society institutions persistently shaped the collective consciousness. He also demonstrated how hegemony necessitated the expression and dissemination of popular ideas outside specific class interests through his concept of the national-popular.

Having established its origin therefore, media hegemony is a perceived process by which certain ideologies, values and ways of thought promulgated through the mass media become dominant in society. It is seen in particular as reinforcing the capitalist system. Media hegemony has been presented as influencing the way in which reporters in the media – themselves subject to prevailing values and norms – select news stories and put them across.

The concept of hegemony, first put forward by Antonio Gramsci, refers to the moral, philosophical, and political leadership of a social group, which is not gained by force but by an active consent of other social groups obtained by taking control of culture and ideology. During this process, the leading social group exerts its impact and gains its legitimacy mainly through social mechanisms such as education, religion, family and the mass media.

Based on the definition of hegemony, media hegemony refers to the dominance of a particular ideology, worldviews, values or agenda in the media landscape which shapes public discourse affects public mindsets, influences public opinion and maintain the power of the ruling elite. Gramsci (1971), notes that the media play a crucial role in perpetuating the interests of the dominant class or groups. In other words, media hegemony serves as a crucial shaper of culture, values and ideology of society (Altheide, 1984).

Counter-hegemony refers to the efforts of social movements and political forces that resist a hegemonic order and seek to reform or replace it.

Counter-hegemony is an attempt to critique or dismantle hegemonic power. In other words, it is a confrontation or opposition to existing status quo and its legitimacy in politics, but can also be observed in various other spheres of life, such as history, media, music, etc. Neo-Gramscian theorist, Nicola Pratt (2004), has described counter-hegemony as a creation of an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society in preparation for political change. If a counterhegemony grows large enough it is able to subsume and replace the historic bloc it was born in. Neo-Gramscian use the Machiavellian terms war of position and war of movement to explain how this is possible. In a war of position, a counterhegemonic movement attempts, through persuasion or propaganda, to increase the number of people who share its view on the hegemonic order; in a war of movement, the counterhegemonic tendencies which have grown large enough overthrow, violently or democratically, the current hegemony and establish themselves as a new historic bloc. An

example of counter-hegemony in media could be a documentary questioning the government's involvement in an illegitimate act.

Notably, in Nigeria the media usually reinforce the dominant ideologies of the ruling class (capitalists) in order to maintain the status quo. This has always been the issue for debate among scholars because the media in Nigeria tactically support the government and suppress the voices that contradict dominant narratives. For instance, during the 2024 democracy day in Nigeria, the media ought to have assess the achievements and otherwise of President Tinubu's one year in office. But the media neglect that role which is their statutory responsibility and decided to propagate the change of Nigeria's national anthem which formed the content of almost all media stations in Nigeria. By so doing, they dominate the people with agenda – hegemony. Citizens who were having contrary views regarding the matter, were not picked by the media; to the extent that during discussion programs over the media, guests with contrary view (counter hegemony) were downplayed and relegated to the background.

More so, when the Chief Whip of the national house of assembly Senator Ali Ndume, made honest observation regarding the difficulty, he does face in accessing the President to relate the condition of the nation and how the masses are passing through hardship he was removed from his position immediately on the 17th July, 2024 and replaced by Tahir Monguno. It was the media that disseminate that information tagging senator Ndume's speech as "unguarded comments". There was neither single news analysis nor commentary from any media in Nigeria condemning the removal of the chief whip; rather they supported it by framing the sacked chief whip on the negative lights.

Theoretical Framework

A theory according to Kirschner (2020), is a well-substantiated explanation for a set of phenomena, acquired through the scientific method and repeatedly tested and confirmed through observation and experimentation. The theoretical framework explores the theoretical perspectives of the media hegemony in Nigeria. Based the this, the study adopts cultural hegemony theory to explore the theoretical viewpoints.

Cultural Hegemony Theory

Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony Theory which was propounded between (1911-1937), from his work "Prison Notebooks", explains how dominant groups maintain power through ideological control, rather than just coercion or force. The theory is instrumental

in understanding how mass media contribute to the maintenance of power. Gramsci (1971), notes that hegemony involves the dominance of one social class over others, not merely through coercion but through the consensual adoption of its worldview by the subordinate classes. Mass media are crucial in manufacturing consent by normalizing and naturalizing the values and beliefs of the ruling class.

For example, media representations of gender, race, and class often reinforce stereotypes and power imbalances. Women and minorities are frequently depicted in ways that perpetuate their marginalization and subordination, thereby maintaining patriarchal and racial hierarchies. By presenting these representations as natural and unchangeable, mass media help to secure consent for the existing social order. The concept of cultural hegemony was further developed and popularized by scholars such as Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Stuart Hall, among others, in the latter half of the 20th century. The theory holds that the ruling class through the media gain the ability to shape societal norms, values, and beliefs in order to maintain their power and interests.

Philosophical Assumptions of the Theory

According to Gramsci (1971), the assumptions form the foundation of Cultural Hegemony Theory, which provides a nuanced understanding of power relations and social change.

i. Power is not just coercive, but also ideological: Gramsci assumes that power is not just maintained through force, but also through consent and ideological control.
ii. Dominant class maintains power through hegemony: The dominant class maintains its power by shaping societal norms, values, and beliefs to serve its interests.
iii. War of position and war of maneuver are necessary: Gramsci assumes that both the war of position (ideological struggle) and the war of maneuver (coercive struggle) are necessary for maintaining and challenging hegemony.
iv. Ideology is a lived experience: Gramsci assumes that ideology is not just a set of ideas, but a lived experience that shapes people's perceptions, values, and beliefs.
v. Hegemony is not static, but dynamic: Gramsci assumes that hegemony is not a fixed state, but a dynamic process that is constantly being contested and transformed.

Role of Mass Media in Facilitating Hegemony

The mass media play a pivotal role in shaping public consciousness, disseminating information, and constructing social realities. From a critical perspective, the relationship between mass media, power, and ideology is complex and significant, as mass media are not merely passive transmitters of information but active agents in the construction and perpetuation of dominant ideologies and power structures. Adesanya (2020), observes that the mass media present information in a way that influences audience perception and favors the ruling class.

Media are seen as powerful tools in the dissemination and reinforcement of dominant ideologies. Critical theorists study how media content, ownership, and control influence public perception and serve the interests of powerful groups. Umechukwu (2019), points that the system allows for concentration of media ownership among the ruling elite, providing them with upper hands to shape public discourse, opinions, dominate them and maintain power through hegemony.

The concept of mass media as ideological state apparatuses, as proposed by Louis Althusser (1971), commonly referred to as a structural Marxist, highlights their role in maintaining the status quo. Mass media disseminate dominant ideologies—sets of beliefs and values that justify and sustain the existing power relations in society. These ideologies become internalized by the public, shaping their perceptions and behaviors in ways that align with the interests of the ruling class.

For instance, news coverage often reflects and reinforces capitalist ideologies by prioritizing stories that favor economic growth and consumerism, while marginalizing or ignoring issues like income inequality, inflation of goods in the country, the hardship faced by the citizens and labor rights. Oso (2018), argues that the media is focusing on stories that support the government's narrative while ignoring or downplaying opposing views. Entertainment media, through films, television shows, and advertisements, frequently propagate cultural norms and values that support the status quo, such as individualism, competition, and material success suppressing ideologies and opinions directed to challenge the dominant narrative of the ruling elite.

Also, regulatory agencies are used to control the media to dance to the tune of the ruling elite. Nwabueze (2018), notes that the ruling class use regulatory agencies to control media content and suppress opposing views. Ojo (2019), says they encouraging journalistic

practices that prioritize official sources and maintain the dominant narrative. By reinforcing dominant views, media in Nigeria help the ruling class maintain power by:

- Legitimizing their authority.
- Suppressing opposition.
- Shaping public opinion.
- Maintaining social inequalities.
- Limiting diverse perspectives.

Consequences of Media Hegemony

Media hegemony is said to operate in several ways within the media. Firstly, the socialization of reporters including guidance, work norms and orientations will be greatly influenced by the dominant ideologies of the powerful groups. Gieber (1960), notes that socialization of journalists means that they are socialized into professional and organizational norms not socialize to be hegemonic. However, some basic values and norms they share are influenced by ideologies and views of the powerful groups, as it is hard to be independent from the culture that the dominant class shapes or hegemonized. Though the media or journalists claim that they are autonomic from the state and marketing forces and that they are always on the side of the public as social instrument, it is undeniable that the ideology and control of economic interests permeate the assumption, orientations and procedure of reporters who are the direct producers of news stories. Journalists can unconsciously facilitate the ideological hegemony by the way they use cultural categories and symbols (Chaney, 1981).

Furthermore, Golding (1981), observes that reporters are inclined to choose and report those issues that are favorable to the dominant ideology and the status quo. This selection process hinders social change by diffusing conservative news reports to the public. To a large extent, the formation of public opinion is based on the information spread by status quo-oriented news media. So unfortunate!

Specifically, if Nigeria media do not take a U-turn from supporting the dominant views and normalizing the ideologies of the ruling class in order to shape, gain and sustain power, the nation would likely face the consequences thus:

1. Further polarization and division: Media reinforcement of dominant narratives can exacerbate social divisions, leading to increased conflict, social unrest and decreased social cohesion (Bennett & Livingston, 2018).

2. Erosion of democratic institutions: Continued media hegemony can undermine democratic participation, critical thinking, and informed citizenship, potentially destabilizing democratic institutions (McChesney, 2015). This however, will equally lead to restricting freedom of expression and limiting access to information.

3. Increased social inequality: Media reinforcement of existing power structures can prolong social and economic inequalities, further marginalizing already disadvantaged groups. This is even visible already, because Nigeria who claims to be rich has citizens who hardly feed once a day while the is there purchasing presidential jet worth one hundred and fifty billion naira. And no media content could challenge it because the views of the ruling class are presented as the final order and no one is given room to oppose it.

4. Loss of cultural diversity: Dominant culture promotion can lead to the suppression of local cultures, diversity, and alternative lifestyles, resulting in cultural homogenization. Herman & Chomsky (1988), note that continued media hegemony can lead to a lack of critical thinking, as dominant narratives are presented as absolute truths.

5. Consolidation of power: Continued media hegemony can consolidate power in the hands of dominant groups, further entrenching existing power structures (Althusser, 1971).

To mitigate these consequences, it's essential to promote media diversity, critical thinking, and inclusive representation, ensuring that multiple voices and perspectives are heard and valued.

Counter-Hegemony

According to Theodore H. Cohn, "a counterhegemony is an alternative ethical view of society that poses a challenge to the dominant bourgeois-led view". Counter-hegemony refers to the process of challenging and transforming the dominant ideology or hegemony. It involves creating an alternative ideology or narrative that opposes the dominant one and seeks to replace it as the dominant worldview.

Counter-hegemony is not just about resisting the dominant ideology, but also about creating a new, alternative hegemony that can replace the existing one. It requires a critical

understanding of the dominant ideology and the creation of new, alternative narratives that can inspire and mobilize people to challenge the status quo. In Gramsci's words, "The task of the subordinate classes is to create their own hegemony, their own ideology, which will be the instrument of their emancipation" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 52).

While mass media often reinforce dominant ideologies, they can also be sites of resistance and counter-hegemony. Although the media still suppress such in order to maintain the status quo. However, alternative media and independent journalism strive to challenge the dominant narratives and provide platforms for marginalized voices. These media outlets play a critical role in exposing injustices, social inequalities, mobilizing social movements, and fostering critical consciousness among the public.

Digital and social media have also emerged as powerful tools for counter-hegemonic practices, enabling grassroots movements to organize, communicate, and disseminate alternative viewpoints. The Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo movements are examples of how digital media can disrupt traditional power dynamics and challenge hegemonic ideologies.

It is thus pertinent to note that the relationship between mass media, power, and ideology is a dynamic and contested terrain. While mass media often function to reproduce and legitimize existing power structures and dominant ideologies, they also hold the potential for resistance and social change.

Consequently, understanding this dual role is essential for critically engaging with media content and fostering a more informed and equitable society. It is expected that by scrutinizing the ownership, content, and ideological functions of the mass media from the critical perspective, the media can better understand the complexities of power and ideology in contemporary society and be more equipped to allow for counter-hegemony.

Counter-hegemony is a key concept in Gramsci's theory, as it highlights the potential for subaltern classes to challenge and transform the dominant ideology. Counter-hegemony involves:

- Challenging dominant narratives: Questioning and critiquing the dominant ideology and its underlying assumptions.
- Creating alternative narratives: Developing new, alternative narratives that offer a different perspective on reality.

- Building counter-hegemonic institutions: Establishing institutions and organizations that promote and support the alternative ideology.
- Mobilizing counter-hegemonic movements: Organizing social movements and activism that challenge the dominant ideology and promote the alternative one.

Conclusion

The dominant class uses ideology to shape public opinion, create consent, and justify its rule. Ideology is not just a set of ideas, but a lived experience that shapes people's perceptions, values, and beliefs. Continued media hegemony can undermine democratic participation, critical thinking, increased in social inequalities and manipulation of the citizen to the detriment of their well-being. It is also as a result of the media hegemony that right-thinking Nigerians always believed that elections are being rigged to the favor of those who belong to the dominant race that have been ruling the country. This is not constitutional but it has become a social-norms that the Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani are the dominant ruling class in Nigeria, marginalizing other minority races. The issue of zoning still favors them at the detriment of other tribes. This has impacted in Nigerian politics to the extent that anyone who is not from these zones hardily gets to power. For example, at side other political factors, it is a known fact that former President Goodluck Jonathan was challenge out of power because he did not belong to any of the dominant ruling race. It is therefore, pertinent for the media in Nigeria to wake up and strike a balance by projecting the voices that challenge the dominant narratives or that counters the views and ideologies of the ruling elites. By so doing, Nigeria will be a nation where the citizens decide who holds power and not by those ruling using hegemony to maintain it. Media in Nigeria should shape public opinion and power structures positively, discouraging social inequalities and promote justice, rule of law, development, equality and peaceful coexistence.

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