

A TREATISE ON NEO COLONIALISM & MEDIA HEGEMONY IN DIGITOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the notion of neocolonialism in the form of digital hegemony in the proliferated digital era. The problem of the study emanated from the concept that though internet and ICT has grown exponentially and reached to the extent that humanity can't survive without it, complexity and issues also emerged as dependency increased. The objective of the study is to analyse the idea of media colonialism in general and digital media hegemony in particular. Content analysis is employed for engendering the findings. Major findings of the study are: media giants such as Google, Facebook, Microsoft etc control, dominate and manipulate data which is the richest thing in the world today as oil was the richest product earlier. Recommendations include: new forms of digital independence by means of media law to protect personal data and privacy, methods of cyber resistance such as China model and maintenance of digital literacy.

Keywords: *Cyber Sovereignty, Data Harvesting, Data Protection, Digitocracy, Facebookopoly, Googolopoly,*

1. INTRODUCTION

“Data is the new oil...Indian data must be controlled and owned by Indian people and not by corporates especially global corporations”- speaking at the 9th Vibrant Gujarat Summit 2019 Mukesh Ambani, drew parallels to Mahatma Gandhi's movement against political colonization to call for a revolution against data colonization (Live Mint, 24.1.2019). Though this media tycoon and multimillionaire has his own hidden agenda with regard to Indian data, one can't deny the fact that his observations are not genuine.

It is evident that, though physical forms of colonialism has diminished to a certain extent after the Second World War, new forms of colonial imperialism and sovereignty proliferated by means of cyber control, electronic colonialism and 'Googolopoly'. Just as the colonial powers like Britain and France conquered the soil during the invasion, the electronic media giants seek to conquer the minds of millions across the world. Microsoft, Netflix, Google, Facebook and other electronic media giants seek to influence the people across the globe, not by physical force of arms, but by packaging media to attract large audiences and this 'packaged consciousness' (Herbert Schiller, 2017) disseminated through media platforms acts like a magic bullet and control the minds of millions.

This digital colonialism is dangerous than the territorial expansionism as colonial giants grew, develop and monopolize the entire digital eco system vertically and horizontally. Different media sectors such as movies, wireless telephony, internet and social media platforms are engulfed by these cyber giants. Not only knowledge domination but also ethical issues such as instruction to privacy, hacking, propagation of hidden agendas,

excessive use of bots and cyber troops to control public opinion, dissemination of hatred -communal - violent messages to defeat opponents are serious concerns related with this domination.

1.1. Background of the study

Since data is the 'new oil', the media conglomerates and digital media giants keep an eye on it and thus digital monopolization or craze for digital dominance, which is often termed as -"digitocrazy"- flourishes. Because of this craziness which includes monetary benefit and overall dominance the media companies indulge in to unethical practices. The recent Cambridge Analytica (CA) incident, wherein millions of Facebook accounts were hacked is a classic example of this privacy instruction. More than that, these media giants manipulate and control our minds. Though the FB and Google are often been grilled (ET 12.12.2018) and fined for violation on privacy (Sarah Miller & David Segal, Oct. 5, 2018) the law and mechanisms seems to be very flimsy. Even though Cyber media invasion may be resisted and restricted in places like China, poor developing countries have no option other than depending on them.

In the background of all these instances, digital media's imperialistic strategies, neo colonial forms of domination, illegal practices, and hidden strategies are problems to be addressed and sorted out.

1.2. Objectives

- 1.2.1. To analyse the idea of media colonialism in general and digital media hegemony in particular.
- 1.2.2. To find out the ethical issues related with this neo colonialism
- 1.2.3. To find how media giants such as Google, Facebook, and Microsoft etc control dominate and manipulate data which is the richest thing in the world today

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In their research paper '*Cyber colonialism in Asia: more imagined than real*' (Loo, Eric and Yeap, Soon Beng, 1998) authors intend to analyse the concepts of colonialism, post colonialism and its implications. Digital colonialism and digital empowerment are other major areas of discussion here.

Renata Ávila Pinto (2018) in her research paper discusses the strategies to curtail digital sovereignty and digital colonialism. It focuses on regional, national, and community solutions to restore control and ownership on key information and communications infrastructures- the only possible first step to fix the current massive violation of privacy rights. It will later suggest some local measures to experiment with and advance alternatives at different levels of intervention and action, including proactive policy, capacity building, and new designs inspired in a set of values and principles different from those of the dominant actors in the market.

John Browning (2014) in his research article '*it's complicated: Ethical Concerns in the Age of Social Media*' discuss about the use of social networking sites in the field of jurisdiction and such emerging technologies' ethical issues.

Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2015) one of the authorities in the field of international communication discusses about *Media Imperialism* and its after effects. Media agents, models of imperialism, western media propaganda, media resistance to imperialism etc are broadly discussed in this scholarly book.

Barrajón Pedro (2013) in his research article speaks about *ethical issues and internet*. He argues that though communications system and technology has increased it also created new forms of

dependence. Hediscuss upon the accompanying ethical issues in this field such as: *'privacy, the security and confidentiality of data, copyright and intellectual property law, pornography, hate sites, the dissemination of rumor and character assassination under the guise of news'* (p. 231).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Theoretical background

3.1.1. Theory of hegemony (Antonio Gramsci)

As a concept, media hegemony applies the insights of Antonio Gramsci (1971, 1977), an Italian communist theoretician, who modernized the concept of hegemony in the 1930s. Gramsci explained hegemony as a form of political, social, and ideological leadership. Media hegemony expresses relations and practices whereby a particular system of media production, distribution and use becomes dominant because existing and emerging media outlets follow the lead, the model, the norm of that particular media system. For example, Hollywood- understood as movie production characterized by studio dominated, celebrity star-driven, stylistically “narrative realism” scripted and imaged, and mass-marketed for profits from audience revenue-has hegemonic position in the global film industry (Lee Artz, 2015).

3.1.2. Electronic imperialism (Thomas Mc Phail)

Electronic colonialism theory was first introduced by Tom McPhail in 1990s. It explains how mass media are leading to a new concept of empire by controlling our mind. The theory explains that the global media are influencing the minds, attitudes, values, and languages of individuals around the globe.

3.2. Hypothesis

1. New media giants control the knowledge domain and “googlization of everything” has become the trend.
2. Excessive media dominance leads to new forms of colonialism as data- the richest treasure- is been controlled by them.
3. Media imperialism and sovereignty leads to unethical and illegal practices

3.3. Research method

Qualitative method is utilized here and major conclusions are drawn thorough content analysis by analyzing research articles, media reports and video lectures.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Media imperialism and media hegemony: an overview

Today the global media market is strongly dominated by corporate news agencies like Associated Press (AP), Thomson Reuters, Agence France Presse (AFP) and Bloomberg etc. With the exception of AFP, based in Paris, the foundation of international news reporting by the news agencies is headquartered in America and London (Boyd-Barrett, 2010). CNN, a major wholesaler and retailer for television and online news generally, frames international news in ways that are friendly to the USA (Thussu, 2008; Boyd-Barrett). This process of influencing the government policies and manipulating the mind has often been called as ‘CNNisation’. Its nearest competitor, BBC Worldwide, similarly frames events in ways that are compatible with British government. Though the Qatar based channel AL Jazeera was once hailed as an alternative channel for

western media a monopolization it has direct ties to the interests of Qatarazis, and Muslim dominant countries (Kellner,2011). Most international television news operations, including those of China, France, Germany and Russia, constitute classic examples of state-supported soft power (Oliver, p.121).

For over three decades politicians in Britain considered that in order to win elections they had to deal with Murdoch. Part of that deal was to adjust the regulatory environment to his advantage so that he grew even more powerful. An ex-Newscorp editor, Andrew Coulson, was even appointed spokesperson for Prime Minister David Cameron and continued to hold shares in Newscorp. Perhaps even more alarming was the scope that this influence provided Newscorp – in effect, to blackmail politicians or to punish them through negative coverage or the threat of it. (Oliver Boyd Barrett, p. 12).

Generally speaking the largest of the media groups outside of the USA, Japan and the UK tend to belong to the “second tier” of global companies and there are numerous networking alliances, joint ventures and other connections between firstand second-tier companies. One list, which appears to have excluded telephone networks such as AT&T and Verizon, includes among the top-tier- Time Warner, Disney, NewsCorp, Bertelsman, Comast-NBC Universal, CBS & Viacom, Microsoft, Google, Yahoo! and Apple (Arsenault and Castells, 2008,p.13).

These older forms of imperialistic tendencies of the media conglomerates are often termed as CNNisation’, ‘Al-Jazeeraization’, ‘Murdochism’, ‘Berlusconiism’ and ‘Foxism’...Now, we witness asort of newmedia imperialism which are popularly termed as often ‘googlization’ ‘googlopoly’,facebookopolyetc

4.2. Neo colonialism by Googlization and Googlopoly

Google, is a California-based, multinational internet company provides digital products and services such as online search and advertising, cloud computing and software. In June 2018, it was ranked first amongst the most visited multi-platform web properties in the US with 247 million U.S. unique visitors and a market share of 63.2 % among the leading U.S. search engine providers. Parent company Alphabet's market capitalization in June 2018 was valued at 793 billion U.S. dollars (Statista 2019).

In 2017, the majority of the company's almost 110 billion U.S. dollar revenues came from advertising through Google Sites or Google Network Sites. Majority of Google.com visitors are from the United States with a global share of 34.3 %.There are many localized version of the Google Search available. Among the leading search engines, the worldwide market share of Google in July 2018 was 86 %. Although Google’s product originally was based upon online search, the company has significantly broadened its services throughout the years. Video content sharing site YouTubewas one of Google’s most prolific and expensive acquisitions. As of February 2017, 68 % of the U.S. population was found to have accessed YouTube to watch music videos or listen to music (Statista 2019).

Apart from online search, advertising and online video, Google has branched out into further content, most notably the Android mobile operating system which as of the second quarter of 2018, accounted for almost 86 % of the global smartphone operating system market. Google has a wide range of products, including Chrome browser and operating system ChromeOS, hardware including the Chromecast and company's series of mobile devices such as the Nexus and Pixel devices, as well as online payment system Google Pay. Recently,

Google has been making inroads in the virtual assistant market by releasing Google Now and Google Assistant (Statista 2019).

Basically, Google 'dominates' us because it tracks our searches and the ads we click on. The company claims it uses that information to deliver better search results and ads to individual users based on the interests and biases they exhibit in their searching and advertising interests. But then it also uses that information in the aggregate to help advertiser's better target prospective customers and makes a lot of money in the process (Does Google Really "Dominate Us"? 10/3/2011).

Dominance through economic control is also upsetting. Its net profit per second- technically called pure profit per second (PPPS)- is 381 US dollar (Andreas Ekström, May 7, 2013). There are 38,700 queries per second globally. It shows the prominence of the Google.

Knowledge dominance is another major area. According to certain scholars, Google knew beforehand the US election who is going to be the president. They explain how it worked. The exact data from 50 states traveled from American voters by means of their searches to google in advance! Thus they could analyze and predict through the google trend that the most googled candidate would be the winning candidate in USA (Andreas Ekström, May 7, 2013). Another example is about the great plague across the globe, namely the bird flu in 2008. By following the google search of the people of USA, google knew where it is going to spread mostly.

Mergers and acquisitions is another major tactic of corporate companies. Google brought YouTube in 2008. The company has acquired more than 200 startups since it was founded, including Android and DoubleClick. The company's modular structure is arguably a direct result of that buying spree, and it's hard to imagine what Google would look like without it. More recent buys like Nest have fallen under the broader Alphabet umbrella, but the core strategy hasn't changed. Would Google still be an AI giant if it hadn't bought DeepMind? Probably, but everyone involved would have had to work a lot harder.

4.3. Neo colonialism by Facebookopoly

According to 'global voices' report, Facebook.org's aggressive expansion into developing countries is a form of "digital colonialism" (Tony Roberts, 25 April 2018). Free Basics, Facebook's free, limited internet service for developing markets, is neither serving local needs nor achieving its objective of bringing people online for the first time (Olivia Solon, 20 Apr 2018). Whistle-blower Christopher Wylie describes this as "modern day colonialism". Facebook confessed that all two billion FB user accounts worldwide are likely to have been compromised-including those of 5.6 lakhs citizens in India. 'Cambridge Analytica have been using that data to psychologically profile Facebook users in Indonesia and Malaysia in order to micro-target them with tailored messages to shape their thinking and voting behaviour'(Tony Roberts, 25 April 2018). Cambridge Analytica were paid £6m for just 90 days work in Kenya Cambridge Analytica are not alone in this business; Kenya's opposition party employed consulting firm Aristotle.

New evidence has also emerged that co-ordinated social media campaigns were specifically designed to enflame racial tensions in Myanmar, in Ethiopia and in South Africa. And we learned that it is not just Russia

and China that train and employ troll farms and bot armies. It is increasingly hard to find any country in which state or non-state actors are not using trolls and bots to attack opposition candidates, spread fake-news, to drown out open debate, or inflict online gender-based violence on women activists and politicians. An Oxford University study listed at least 30 countries were using trolls and bots to shape people's thinking and frame online debate at home and abroad (Samantha Bradshaw & Philip N.Howard, 2017).

Shaping consciousness and controlling our mind is outsourced to agencies like Cambridge Analytica. Troll farms and bot armies are available for hire and deployed anywhere, anytime and on any issue. Rather than colonizing a territory, it is easy to territories and conquers a mind through this way. Christopher Wylie, who was research director with SCL Group (2013 to 2014), the parent company of Cambridge Analytica, made certain revelations of political campaigns of FB, during a lengthy statement he gave to the committee at the House of Commons. Wylie had blown the whistle on Cambridge Analytica's alleged use of data of millions of Facebook users for political campaigns (Naomi Canton, 28 Mar 2018).

Another revelation to the congress was from, Paul-Olivier Dehaye, an IT expert, who revealed that Dan Mursean former research director at Cambridge Analytica, was working in India for Congress but had been paid by a billionaire to weaken the party's chances. *"There are stories starting to come out that he was working for Congress when he died in Kenya. Apparently he was really paid for by an Indian-origin billionaire who actually wanted Congress to lose"* (Naomi Canton, 28 Mar 2018).

Facebook is a monopoly in the social networking category even though it faces small competition from other technology companies. In the Technology Industry, Google ranked number 1, claiming \$79, 4 Billion from advertisements revenue globally in 2017, while Facebook came in 2nd claiming a total of \$67,4 Billion (Kollewe, 2017). Facebook attracted a stellar 2.13 billion monthly active users (MAU), while its competitors YouTube recorded 1, 5 billion MAU and Twitter recorded 33 million MAU in 2017.

4.4. Colonialism in other media sectors:

4.4.1. Movie Industry

In terms of revenues the international movie industry continues to be dominated by the six principal studio-distributors of Hollywood and the multinational conglomerates that own them. These are News Corporation's 21st Century Fox, Viacom's Paramount, Sony's Sony Pictures, GE and Comcast's NBC/Universal, Walt Disney, and Time Warner's Warner Bros. Some other production centers, such as Mumbai (Bollywood) in India and Lagos (Nollywood) in Nigeria, make more movies and reach even larger audiences. Yet almost 40% of the revenue for global movie production and distribution (worth \$86.7 billion in 2012) is generated from North American audiences, followed by Europe with 23.5% (IbisWorld, 2012). While MPAA studios and studio subsidiaries accounted for a modest number (141) of films released in 2011, most film-makers collaborate with these giants to acquire finance and/or distribution. Of the top 25 films in terms of 2011 box office revenues, 24 came from the big six.

4.4.2. Wireless

Microsoft has long enjoyed over 90 per cent control of the global desktop operating system market for PCs (91.5% in 2012), followed by Mac (7.3%) and Linux (1.25%) (Netmarketshare, 2012). In the mobile/tablet market, dominant operating systems were Apple's iOS with 61%, followed by Google's Android (28%) and

Oracle's Java ME (7%). Google had a global share of over 84% of the desktop search engine market, followed by Yahoo! (8%) and Microsoft's Bing (5%). Google's lead was even stronger in the mobile/tablet market at 91%, followed by Yahoo! (6%) and Bing (2%).

4.4.3. Mobile Telephony

In the more diverse world of mobile telephony market share, Nokia, Samsung, LG Electronics and Apple dominated in 2012, and similarly in smartphone manufacture where the dominant names were Nokia (swallowed by Microsoft in 2013), Apple, RIM. Of the top 10 global mobile operators, five were Asian and four were US /West European. But the mobile phone operating systems were dominated by Google's Android (72%) (Android is open source, but substantial revenues are earned from applications that are based on Android), Apple (14%) and Nokia's Symbian (3%) (mobithinking.com) (Oliver, p.127).

4.4.4. Music Recording

The international music recording industry in 2014 was dominated by three players. These were Sony BMG, Time Warner's Warner Music Group, and Vivendi's Universal Music Group. A fourth, EMI, was sold off to Sony and UMG in 2011. The USA is the top national market, accounting for \$4.37 billion in 2011, ahead of Japan (\$4.09 billion) and Germany (\$1.47 billion) (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), 2012). A long period of industrial contraction, reflecting the impacts of digitization and piracy among other factors, continued into 2013 (Oliver, p. 123).

4.4.5. Computing hardware software

AMD, Apple, Cisco, Dell, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Intel, and Oracle – now owner of Sun Microsystems and Java. US-based corporations remained exceptionally strong in computer software and Internet services (including Microsoft, Amazon, Apple, eBay – which owns PayPal – Facebook, Google, and Twitter), nurtured as many of these are by the concentration of talent and capital in San Jose's Silicon valley, California (Boyd-Barrett, 2006). Top Internet Service Providers (ISPs) globally in terms of 2012 revenues were US corporations Comcast Cable (7.15%), Road Runner (4.58%), AT+T (2.5%) and Verizon FiOS (2.15%). Global desktop browser markets were dominated by Microsoft's Internet Explorer (55% of the market in 2012), Mozilla's Firefox – affiliated with Time Warner's Netscape (21%), Google's Chrome (17%), and Apple's Safari (5%) (Netmarketshare 2012).

4.4.6. India's entertainment and information media

India's entertainment and information media have been concentrated into conglomerates (such as Bennett Coleman, owner of the Times Group; Ananda Bazar Patrika; News Corporation's Star Network- which also holds 20% of Tata Sky; Infosys-the largest software exporter in India; the Sun TV Network- supporter of the regional Tamil party DMK in Southern India; Ramoji Rao, supporter of the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh; Network 18; HT Media; Zee; and Reliance Adlabs). These have had close ties, variously, with plutocratic families (including the Tatas, Birlas, Goenkas), real estate (including the Alliance Group, Hathway, Maytas Properties), political parties, politicians, and even criminal elements

4.5. Ethical issues

PedroBarrajon raised a major question, are the media being used for good or evil?(Pedro Barrajon, 2013,p.233). He argues that even when new media and Internet are not asource of problems, but of benefits to the human race, there are some ethical questions that are at stake: privacy, the security and confidentiality of data, copyright and intellectualproperty law, pornography, hate sites, the dissemination of rumor and character assassination under the guise of news, and much else (Pedro Barraón, p.231).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Digital sovereignty: From the above content analysis we can observe that digital monopoly and related unethical practices exists. Thus digital sovereignty is the need of the time. A few countries in Latin America like Brazil and Venezuela (2004), Ecuador , (2013), Uruguay (2013) and Bolivia (2013) led the early steps towards digital sovereignty in the early 2000s (Renata Ávila Pinto, p. 21). They have startedstrategies to increase free software literacy among children. Cuba developed its own operative system, Nova. Full migration to free software was announced by Russia also.

5.2. Protection for Commercial organizations: Commercial organizations are susceptible to political pressure- as proven by theWikiLeaks case when Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Western Union and PayPal blocked payments to the organization (Renata Ávila Pinto). They should be protected by law so that it would encourage others to point out the atrocities of tycoons and conglomerates.

5.3. Privacy protection law: Only few countries have implemented strict laws with regard to the violation of the individual's privacy. Certain universal law should be enacted by the global organizations and corporate companies should be punished if any such violations occur.

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