

Part 1

The problem of the relations between culture and society is difficult to resolve in respect of media then in any other context. In fact, it may even be more difficult, since mass communication can be considered as both a “societal” and a “cultural” phenomenon. The mass media institution is part of the structure of society, and its technological infrastructure is part of the economic and power base, while the ideas, image and information disseminated by the media are evidently an important aspect of our culture. The aim of the essay is to clarify the criteria of idealist and materialist approach in the relation of media and society. First part of the essay will explain the divergence of idealist and materialist approaches. The second part of the essay will explain the common concept of both idealist and materialist approach by using liberal-democratic approach as a comparison.

As K.E. Rosengren (1981) has offered a simple typology that cross-tabulates two opposed propositions: “social structure influences culture”; and its reverse, “culture influences social structure” (McQuail, 2000, p61). This yields two main options that are available for describing the relation between mass media and society. If we consider mass media as an aspect of society (base or structure) then the option of materialism is presented

As defined by Williams (1981) materialist approach is an emphasis on “a whole social order” within which a specifiable culture, in styles of art and kinds of intellectual work, is seen as the direct or indirect product of an order primarily constituted by other social activities. The considerable body of the theory views culture as dependent on the economic and power structure of a society. As this economic and power structure of a society is measured by the success of people enjoy in life through material gains, reflecting “the conditions for the dominance of a determinate social class whose social power derived from its property ownership”(Marx, 1973, pp.67-80). Such idea also assumed that whoever owns or controls the media can choose, or set limits to what they

do. “The man (audience) with leisure has to accept what the culture manufacturers offer him” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1977, pp.349-374).

On the other hand, by considering the statement: “idealist approach is an emphasis on the “informing spirit” of a whole way of life, which is manifest over the whole range of social activities but is most evident in specifically cultural activities”(Williams, 1981, pp.9-14). The approach consider the media as primarily in the light of their contents (thus more as culture). The media are assumed to have a potential or significant influence but it is particular ideas and values conveyed by the media that are seen as the primary causes of social change, irrespective of who owns and controls. The influence is thought to work through individual motivations an actions.(Barker, 2001, pp.35-44).

A socially based critical concern with the rise of mass culture goes back at least to the mid-19th century, and in the mid-20th century was represented in England in the work of F.R. Leavis and his followers in the field of social literary criticism. The latter movement has also been (indirectly) influential in the rise of more radical (and populist) critical teory as expressed in the work of Richard Hoggart, Roymond Williams and Stuart Hall. The continuing thrust of these critics had been to attack the commercial roots of cultural “debasement” and to speak up for the working-class consumer of mass culture as the victim rather than the villain of the story.

In its different ways, the idealist school of thought conceptualizes culture as interwoven with all social practices (Williams, 1981, pp9-14). It is opposed to the base-superstructure way of formulating the relationship between ideal and material forces, especially where the base is defined by the determination by the “economic” in any simple sense. It defines “culture” as both the means and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, based on their give historical conditions and relationship, through which they “handle” and respond to the conditions of existence.

Analysis of the common concept of both idealist and materialist approach can be explained by comparing with the concept of liberal-democratic approach. The liberal-

democratic approach sees the mass media as helping to secure rights of citizenship by disseminating information and providing pluralism of views, an area essential to the development of democracy and the operation of a public sphere for open debate (Bennett ,1982 ,pp.38-41). On the other hand, unlike the idealists Aroldian and Leavisite and the materialist Frankfurt School approaches, which see mass society as a threat either to democractic institution or to cultural values (Swingwood, 1977, pp.8-10).

For Leavis, mass production and standardization weaken man's emotional experience while, advertising, radio and film impoverish his spirit (Swingewood, 1977, p.3). The initial aim was to redeem the people on whose supposedly "low taste" the presumed low quality of mass culture was often blamed. Since then, "mass culture" itself has largely been rescued from the stigma of low quality, although in the course of this the original concept of mass culture has been largely abandoned (Swingewood, 1977, pp 8-10).

For idealist approach, it leads to a strong belief in various potential media effects for good or ill. A form of idealism concerning the media also les behind the view that changes in media forms and technology can change our way of gaining experience in essential ways and even or relations with others within the society (Swingewood, 1977, pp8-10).

In conclusion, cultural studies is now a movement or a network. It exercises a large influence an academic disciplines, especially on media and communication studies, linguistics and history. Further understanding of the cultural studies is required with the knowledge of liberal democratic, Althusserian and governmental approaches, in terms of the analysis of the relationship between media, communication culture and government.

Part 2

As can be seen from the text by Neville(1997) on “The business of being human” in *The Age* (Good Weekend Magazine). The general approach in the article indicates a materialist approach, which is unlike the idealist. The materialist concept takes up the view of culture as the institutional arrangements, which organize the material practices, and capacities that produce meanings and wider social outcomes. The idealist concept, on the other hand, sees culture as having been conceived in popular social commentary that circulates the way of thinking as a realm of moral spiritual and aesthetic values, independent of and above society (Williams, 1981, pp.9-14)

By considering the statement, “The merging of self and the corporations now begins at an early age, when we start wearing brand names on the outside... We are everywhere in franchise chains. So potent in this culture to desire that some are prepared to kill for a cool pair of sneakers.”(Neville 1997)“ The advent of the megacorp and the interlook alliance between media, entertainment, marketing theme parks, tourism- the whole shebang of casino capitalism – is not only retooling our psychological make-up and moulding our tastes, it is shielding us from an awareness of the process.” (Neville 1997) As it could explain a variant of the high-low cultural boundary, and on which reproduces the “inferiority” of the popular, it that which decries commodity-based culture as inauthentic, manipulative and unsatisfying. This mass culture is inauthentic because not produced by “the people”, manipulative because its primary purpose is to be purchased, being easy to consume (Barker, 2000, p.44).

On the other hand, by looking at the case of the movie *Johnny Mnemonic* and the phenomenon in Argentina as an example. As Neville (1997) explained,” Gibson’s story of corporate dominance was set in the future, but its consequence was left.” and almost one in 10 teenage girls suffers form clinical anorexia or bulimia due to an epidemic of “fashion model syndrome.” The pre-existence of meaning that is used in the media extend an unconscious relations to reality through intertextuality, in which mass media consist of various layers of meaning superimposed on one another, all of which

contribute to the effect. (Adorno 1976. pp239-259). This kind of effect goes through the surface content, overt message and its hidden meaning. Made the idea of the world have to pass through the filter of culture industry. As Adorno and Horkheimer (1977) use movie industry as an example, they stated that “real life in becoming indistinguishable from the movies, forcing its victims to equate it directly with reality”.

As can be seen from this article , the constructed “popular culture” in the society is the result of media ‘s penetration through the unconscious mind, as a result of the recreating the pre-existence of meaning. The school of thought indicates a clear materialist’s understanding of false consciousness in a constructed society, in which the approach is showed as based on the theory of the Frankfurt school.

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