

The Subject and the State's Media Control

Mr. Manjunathraddi J Ajaraddi

Department of Political Science, Karnataka University, Dharwad

Keywords: Media control; Media discourse; Media coverage

Introduction

The fact that media discourse is an outlet of quasi-interaction between producers and audiences refers, in all probability, to the engagement of people in a virtual environment that operates through managing the necessary information needed to communicate the minds of people. This mental control, so to speak, is exercised by its manipulator, especially labeled as the state, through entertaining discourses and other forms of communication. The state, which represents the official power, depends mainly on such outlet to control, what Lippmann termed, "the bewildered herd". This act of control, however, has taken different forms and has produced different ways for monitoring the individual. In fact, the major objective of media in any society is to "restrict the public arena and transfer decisions to the hands of uncountable private tyrannies," [1] this, in turn, plays an important role in, "removing the public from potential influence on policy" [1]. That is, people should remain out of the realm of politics and simply keeps themselves away from integrating within the elites' matters. People, in the 'sham democracy', are gentle citizen when they are pampering themselves with what the state provides them, yelling patriotic mottos, and believing what is circulated in their media institution. This media propaganda relies on certain models to convincingly market its products to a wider range of people, be they Europeans or non-Europeans. That is, the individuals and the masses remain the main targets of this propaganda that aims at unifying their belief of what is normal and what should be acceptable. This fact is achieved through creating the image of perfect society that could not exist without adopting the way of everyday life casted on the system's screens. To make this point clear, Douglas Kellner provides an example of the role of American television that he perceives, like many other critics, as "instrumental in selling American values, commodities, and ways of life to other countries, and is thus a major force of culture hegemony" [2]. In the same manner, media propaganda in every society tries to redefine the meaning of life, be happiness, love, hate, modernity, terrorism and anything that the system want to implant in people's mindsets. As a result, under the influence of this propaganda, vague notions about anything and everything lead to what Ellul terms "psychological crystallization", thereby becoming powerful, direct and precise. "Propaganda furnishes objectives, organizes the traits of an individual's personality into a system, and freezes them into a mold" [3]. Indeed, media has the greatest potential to influence the masses since they uncompromisingly offer: A deeper level of identification with the characters and action on the screen more than found elsewhere in popular culture... movies do, in fact, succeed at propaganda by presenting one set of values as the only viable set. Over a period of years, these values can both reflect and shape society's norms [4]. Additionally, media narratives are unavoidably tied into ideology and politics. The latter is what monitors these narratives, and ideology, as Pentti Haddington avers, "enters the people's lives as part of their everyday conduct" [5]. In this regard, media narratives remain an essential institution through which these ideology and politics may operate more effectively. Often, those who control the production and dissemination of these narratives struggle over how a certain scripts will fit into the prevailing political atmosphere. This is quite clear in Douglas Kellner's declaration that: Films must have an enemy, an absolute evil Foreign Other, and both Hollywood and Reagan and Bush turned to Arab heavies for the political demonstration necessary for the narratives of Hollywood film and U.S. politics at the moment when Soviet Union was turning to Bid Macs, pornography, and capitalism [2]. In this regard, media are considered to be powerful institutions as their messages may influence the public's perception of different groups [6]. Noam Chomsky suggests that media nourishes and perpetuates stereotypes programmatically, and that the American public is kept narrowly and

rigidly controlled by media; for him, their function is “to be ‘spectators,’ not participants in action. But they have more function than that, because it’s a democracy they’re allowed to say, ‘We want you to be our leader’ or ‘We want you to be our leader” [1]. Such manipulation may lead to one-sided media perceptions that is the state is in the service of the masses and that questioning its reliability would be deemed an act of betrayal to the whole state system and eventually lead to negative perceptions and attitudes towards anything, while the reality is what Noam Chomsky has made clear when he declares: They’re trying to instill the right values. In fact, they have a conception of what democracy ought to be: It ought to be a system in which the specialized class is trained to work in the service of the masters, the people who own the society. The rest of the population ought to be deprived of any form of organization, because organization just causes trouble [1]. The act of surveillance has undergone a new shift within its definition of power, since, in the pre-modern, the head of state and the noble people are the only ones to expose themselves to be seen and to be regarded as models for others, while the masses were departmentalized in the arena of invisibility. However, the case is diametrically opposed to what it is, to use Michel Foucault words, ‘the modern carceral society’, since the authoritative system generates a new strategies to maintain its power over the herd. This latter, in this regard, has become the central subject in media discourse. This centrality is meant to keep them under surveillance by the powers to be. Additionally, this act of controlling society succeeded to keep certain invisibility from both the public and the private activities of people not through powerful agencies but by use of insidious discursive practices. That is, the state has restricted, through media discourse, the individual’s behaviors and instilled certain forms of self-regulation, which constructs the individual to follow recommendations of the state without physical coercion. This discourse holds in check individuals who become unable to take autonomous action outside the scope of the system. In other words, the individual has an un deliberate role to play in measuring the effect of media discourse when they unintentionally become complicit in the act their own control through acting passive. Therefore, the individual turns into a subservient follower of the practices and rules enacted by the state.

The state, or the supreme power, aims by this act of controlling the herd and checking the society from the inside to protect its authority from changes and the ramifications of the outside orbit. In this regard, these state-controlled agencies – media discourses- that operate the act of control have established the idea of victimhood to authorize the enactment of punishment and reward as a way to afford a position of leading the world. The idea of victimhood has been a warrant that establishes the right for the supreme power to keep every individual’s activity under its visibility. The strategic need to rally the masses behind the state against any imminent threat entails seriously considering questions of state function to secure the populous. In so doing, almost every nation develops its ideologies in accordance with its strategic interests of keeping laymen under tight state apparatus supervision. Noam Chomsky avers that for the state to keep its control over the “bewildered herd”, creating threatening figures remains essential to the entrenched need for the state victorious interference. He states: It was international terrorists and narco traffickers and crazed Arabs and Saddam Hussein, the new Hitler, was going to conquer the world. They’ve got to keep coming up one after another. You frighten the population, terrorize them, intimidate them so that they’re too afraid to travel and cower in fear. Then you have a magnificent victory over defenseless third world army that you can pulverize before you ever bother to look at them which is just what happened. That gives relief. We were saved at the last minute. That’s one of the ways in which you can keep the bewildered herd from paying attention to what’s really going on around them, keep them diverted and controlled [1]. At this juncture, the outside threat is loaded with ideological inclinations that instilled through media institutions. Chomsky asserts: “There’s always an ideological offensive that builds up chimerical monster, then campaigns to have it crushed. You can’t go in if they can fight back. That’s much too dangerous. But if you are sure that they will be crushed, maybe we’ll knock that one off and heave another sign of relief” [1]. Media narratives are apparently tied into politics, for they often struggle to insert a script which conforms to the general political scene. Politicians weave stories for the masses to

interpellate. These stories are most of the time linked to salient and present day issues such as “terrorism and Islamism” currently dominant media topics in the USA. In this regard, entertaining discourse contributes to laying out these issues through media outlets. This discourse, however, functions as an alert announcement that informs people of the outside threat and at the same time as a tranquilizing discourse pacifying them through comic stages. This function of entertaining discourse questions the freedom of the comedians to produce and improvise their own creative speech. In other words, one might argue that theater is a free stage upon which the actor performs whatever he or she pleases beyond any restraints. At this point, the performer is set free in a world that encourages creativity and impromptu funny moments. Yet, it is an inevitable fact that there is no absolute freedom. Restraints are made inherent in human as well as global laws. Monitoring human acts and behaviors has long been allied not only to national and international security, but also to one’s ethical considerations. Even when an actor performs upon a stage and claims to be free voice to everything and anything, and yet what he/she is expressing is, in a way or another, obstructed by different social, ideological or political forces. That is to say, media has drawn certain limits that certain discourses are not certified to get beyond. As another example of setting up uncrossed boundaries by media, the case of Moroccan cinema, which is a French legacy, the fields has been regulated by Dahirs (Moroccan juridical terms denoting a law) as the following quotation may show: The French opened the first Moroccan laboratory in Casablanca in 1939, which became a French film production company known as Cine phone. The cinema industry was put under State control and regulated by the dahir of December 9, 1940, then modified by the dahir of August 14, 1941, and again by that of April 18, 1942 [7]. Sandra Carter has tackled in general some of these Dahirs’ decrees and states: “The decree of January 7, 1940, stipulated that it was possible to exhibit a film in Morocco only with permission from the French government censorship committee” [7]. She adds: “Since its creation by dahir of April 20, 1942, followed by its reorganization in 1944, the Service du Cinema was charged with setting the prices of cinema tickets and other means of regulating the profession” [7]. The French colonizers were aware of the effect of media on the popular and that controlling this ground is a key to their triumph. For this reason, the French had controlled not only the institution of cinema, but also “the individuals within the domain” [7]. In support of the French controlling agendas in Morocco, “the decree of January 7, 1940, stipulated that it was possible to exhibit a film in Morocco only with permission from the French government censorship committee” [7]. Assigning these restricted decrees is, in a way or another, a legitimization of colonial practices and through which their ideologies can be well transmitted. This fact illuminates the intentions of the colonizers to control Morocco, not only by the military, but also through the informational as well as technological tools.

Despite the fact that Morocco has gained its independent, though partly, the colonial regulations and pacts have been maintained in the Moroccan institutions. Allegiance to the French protectorate has not yet ended. Rather, Morocco is apparently not going beyond some important issues that might disarrange Moroccan/French relation. This allegiance is epitomized through the influence of francophone prescriptions on Moroccan usage of French language in most administrative provisions and media broadcasts. Moreover, France, as a way to “keep power localized and centralized”, has supported Moroccan media financially. Sandra Carter has stated evidently, “France also benefited from maintaining a tight relationship with its former colony and in 1961 even created a Ministry of Cooperation to aid former colonies financially and technically and to simultaneously maintain French hegemony in the region” [7]. These and other colonial legacies or, say, forms of colonial surveillance have become crippling, for the Moroccan development and total independence. In this sense, media coverage is not an innocent form of discourse, since it relies on ideologies of its controllers, especially the states whose aspiration lies in controlling “over the shaping of public order and public morals by controlling and censoring public projection of films.” In support of this argument, Sandra Gayle Carter notes that: In many ways these controls on cinema and expression were reflective of the State’s need to cement to itself the loyalty and adherence of its populace. To achieve this, given the nation’s past of decentralized power and regional

struggles, the central government sought to take power out of localities and regional affiliations and anchor it more firmly in the institutions it could easily monitor, such as the CCM and the ministries [7].

That is to say, the way government takes control of matters is quite intriguing, in that they rely on media discourses to control the public. Media discourse, in turn, does all it takes to keep the public sphere limited within a restricted field of knowledge; the audience have limited access to knowledge in media outlet. Over and above all, this limited accessible knowledge functions as an ideology disseminated implicitly within content of Media (and more specifically entertaining discourses) to serve the interest of its monitors. These entertaining discourses are introduced to the audience without having an effect on the superior/inferior relations between the sublime authorities and the populace. In this sense, the state is constantly troubled by certain voices, That is to say, the way government takes control of matters is quite intriguing, in that they rely on media discourses to control the public. Media discourse, in turn, does all it takes to keep the public sphere limited within a restricted field of knowledge; the audience have limited access to knowledge in media outlet. Over and above all, this limited accessible knowledge functions as an ideology disseminated implicitly within content of Media (and more specifically entertaining discourses) to serve the interest of its monitors. These entertaining discourses are introduced to the audience without having an effect on the superior/inferior relations between the sublime authorities and the populace. In this sense, the state is constantly troubled by certain voices,

For this reason, the state has adopted the strategy of persuasion instead of imposing orders on people; and has made media discourse a channel through which its interactions with people can be functioned, and, thus preserves the its ongoing hegemony. Bernadette Casey, et al. have drawn an analogy between parents educating their progenies who choose between using a stick or using a carrot: How much better for a parent to convince a child that it is only sensible to work hard at school to get on in life, than to beat them with a stick to make them do their homework. Parents could choose to do this (they are the ‘dominant’ group here, both physically and economically), but it is arguably much more effective to use persuasion to get children to see things in the same way as themselves (and parents who do not see the value of formal education can be just as ‘successful’ in persuading their children that there is no point in bothering with school work). In this example, hegemony can be seen as secured when parental (dominant) ideology becomes embedded in the consciousness of the children (the subordinate group) [8].

In the same manner, the state as a sublime authority employs the politics of persuading people as the main approach for the success of its project of controlling people instead of implementing dictatorial governance. Besides, the state always resorts to the act of distracting and amusing people with festivals and spectacles for the sake of muffling its politics of hegemony [9]. In this regard, through these entertaining discourses, people remain under control. In other words, these acts of amusements exposed in festivals and media are the main channels through which power is distributed in the society. Therefore, hegemony can be maintained as long as people continue to be subjects of the politics of persuasion and the politics of surveillance and as the state “succeed in framing all competing definitions within [its] range”. From this point, media discourse proves to be an ideological institution that warrants the ongoing control of the state over the subject [10,11]. The process of this media control runs in the name of providing people with space for promoting their own cultural meanings, whereas this promotion is already oriented by the system’s regulations that restrict these media discourses. The fact that entertaining discourses are mechanisms utilized for circulating popular culture among people and casting in media as politically pointed outlets presupposes an investigation of its industrial production that gives rise to an unseen disruption to people’s unconsciousness that is constantly stormed and blocked up with false notions and ideas.

References

1. Noam N (2006) Failed States. New York: Metropolitan books.
2. Douglas K (1993) Film, politics, and ideology: Toward a multiperspectival film theory. Combs, James E. Movies and politics: The dynamic relationship. New York.
3. Jacques E (1965) Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
4. Jowett, Garth S, Victoria O'Donnell (1992) Propaganda and persuasion. Sage publications, Newbury Park, CA.
5. Pentti H (2006) Identity and stance taking in news interviews a case study. Lassen Inger, Strunck Jeanne, Vestergaard Torben. Mediating ideology in text and image: Ten critical studies. J Benjamins 69-96.
6. Paul M (2001) Visual culture: Movie fantasies and personal realities. Lull, James. Culture in the Communication Age. London: Routledge.
7. Carter, Sandra G (2009) What Moroccan cinema? A historical and critical study. Lexington books Plymouth.
8. Calvert B, Casey N, Casey C, French L, Lewis J (2002) Television studies: Key concepts. London: Routledge.
9. Media control (2002) The spectacular achievement of propaganda. (2nd edn), Seven Stories Press, New York.
10. Hellen D (2004) Understand Stuart Hall by Helen. Sage Publications, London.
11. Kellener D (1981) Network television and American society: Introduction to a critical theory of television. Theory and Society 10: 31-62.