

## **International Communication and The Ideological Battlefields: Implications For Developing Countries**

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### **Abstract**

This study sought to explore international communication and global news flow. It also critically examines the extent the theoretical paradigms used in explaining and describing international communication cover the full complexity of global communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This paper through the library research method examines the entrenched hegemonic dynamics that characterise international communication and its implications on developing countries with a specific focus on evolving ideological and theoretical issues among states in the world. The theoretical framework for this study is pegged within the context of the World Systems Theory. The study concludes that because information dissemination at the international level is vertical and carried out within definite spheres of communication hegemony to the disadvantage of developing countries, the only news that favours capitalist interests (Western ideology-oriented) is disseminated. Further, the study's conclusion indicates that contrary to mainstream capitalist assumptions that emphasise the evolutionary character of growth as a natural consequence that developing nations must follow, capitalism favours what we term "bourgeois ideology", an ideology that makes us feel as though the social world and the technological advantages are there for developing countries to express ourselves, while in fact, these countries are mere pawns on the international chessboard.

**Keywords:** International Communication, Ideology, Battlefield, Developing Countries, World Systems Theory

### **Introduction**

International communication represents the exchange of information, ideas, and interactions transcending national and cultural boundaries, as well as political and economic boundaries facilitated by the interdependence of nations. No country could be said to be indispensable, hence international communication is a process of change and sharing of information, messages, beliefs, and ideas in international settings and contexts. Accordingly, the Dictionary of Mass Communication (2005) defines international communication thus:

Planned information dissemination across national boundaries carried out by a country to promote its activities in the areas of economic, trade, politics, history, arts and culture. For advanced countries, it is an instrument of cultural

domination and neocolonialism. And for emergent nations, they are means of asserting themselves and articulating their viewpoints on global conflict issues (p.116).

In the circumstance above, it holds that international or transnational communication has played a fundamental role in bringing mutual relationships among nations. It has also contributed to resolving crises at the international level. It is viewed as a veritable platform for inter-governmental engagements as well as individual or groups to groups engagements. As a broad interdisciplinary field of study, international communication operates not in isolation but within a dynamic and complex system of states that has an influence on each other's decisions which results in less powerful states behaving in a predetermined way.

When one examines international communication, its workings, and functionality, particularly distilling from the six basic functions it performs which include – cultural transmission, information exchange, mobilization, international social integration, and global agenda setting; there is an apparent inherent close affinity between the aforementioned functions, particularly, as it relates to global agenda setting, ideology, and power.

Thusu (2000) alluded to the above assertion in explicit terms:

An analysis of the evolution of international communication reveals a dominance and dependency syndrome-the dominance of a few countries by virtue of their control of both the software and hardware of global communication and the dependence of many nations upon them (p.6).

Similarly, Pednekar-Magal (2010, p.1) posits that “early scholars of International Communication examined the global communications infrastructure and the asymmetrical media flows. They developed theories about the impact of global media content on national cultures seen as perpetuating dependency akin to colonial structures”. International communication also referred to as global or transnational communication has been enmeshed in ideological battlefields of monumental proportions. Central to this assertion is the contention that “developing nations, lacking the huge financial outlay, technological know-how, and managerial expertise to develop their own expansive media agencies, depend extensively on the developed countries for the bulk of international news and reporting” (Pednekar-Magal, 2010, p.1 & Aina 2017). The nature of ownership, control, and orientation of the international news agencies are essentially oligopolistic; where a small number of international news agencies, Reuters in Britain, the Agence France Presse (AFP) of France, the Associated Press (AP), and the United Press International (UPI) both in the United States, are owned by western powers and it's a natural consequence that the substance and content of the news they transmit are geared towards the sustenance and entrenchment of the dominant Western ideology, “capitalism” (Terry, 2015). Contemporary society has been described as information-centric. This implies that information seeking and information dissemination are the fulcrum of the media ecology locally and internationally. Audiences all over the world depend on the media for accounts of happenings around the world. In a situation where international and national news channels depend on few news agencies because of news syndication, thereby

spreading the ideologies, business interests, etc of the owners. Contributing to the discourse, (Siebert and Schramm 1956, cited by Debanjan, 2011, p. 232). argued that “For their compatriot business, “free flow” assisted them in advertising and marketing their goods and services in foreign markets, through media vehicles whose information and entertainment products championed the Western way of life and its values of capitalism and individualism. McQuail, (2003) posits that “For Western governments, “free flow” helped to ensure the continuing and reciprocated influence of Western media on global markets, strengthening the West in its ideological battle with the so-called Soviet Union. The doctrine also contributed, in generally subtle rather than direct ways, vehicles for the communication of U.S. government points of view to an international audience”.

Ideology represents a system of shared beliefs, values, and norms with a group of people that influence the way they think, act, and perceive social reality. It has been used as a potent tool to sustain neo-colonial and imperialistic interests. For instance, capitalism from a western ideological viewpoint is portrayed as a system whereby individuals are allowed and encouraged to create and amass wealth without restriction, limitation, and or control. Accordingly, Gauba (2006, p. 255) posits that “capitalism is a system of production in which the means of social production (land, buildings, mines, forests, machinery, and capital), distribution, and exchange are owned by private entrepreneurs”. The international media has therefore been used to expand the ideological frontiers of capitalism which is a Western ideology. “They justify unequal and unjust social relations in the world community. They justify the capitalist model as a natural consequence of evolutionary order. They convince the developing countries that concepts such as social inequality, and exploitation of workers are good and desirable. While they subtly prohibit alternatives to their ideological stance” (Manovich, 2017).

According to Haibin (2008, p.90), “although ideology has not been notably theorized by intercultural communication scholars, it has fundamentally important implications in human communication”. Data from existing literature (online sources, books, and journals) are gathered and evaluated to corroborate the stance that international communication has been a prism of ideological warfare and its implications on developing countries.

## **Methodology**

This paper is qualitative in context, nature, and structure, hence Library Research Method was adopted. Library research is a method of gathering data through studying and comprehending information from textbooks, journals, articles, virtual resources, and documents. This study also resorts to gathering data and information from journals, academic articles, books, virtual resources, etc. Library Research has been defined as “the act of using the resources of a library, either in print or online, to find information which satisfies a need or answers a question” [www.igi-global.com/dictionary/envisioning-change-and-extending-library-reach-for-impact-in-undersea](http://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/envisioning-change-and-extending-library-reach-for-impact-in-undersea).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theory considered suitable for this paper is the World Systems Theory. The World Systems Theory was postulated by Immanuel Wallerstein in the 1970s. The World System theory assumes that most nations are part of a worldwide interdependent economic and political system based on the unequal exchange in the division of labour and allocation of resources between core nations, semi-peripheral nations, and peripheral nations. Martinez–Vela (2001, p.4) also informs that the World Systems Theory emphasizes “development and unequal opportunities across nations... Among the most important structures of the current World -system is a power hierarchy between core and periphery, in which powerful and wealthy core societies dominate and exploit weak and poor peripheral societies”. Elwell (2005, p. 25) as cited in Godswill, Omotayo and Ayodeji (2019 p. 335) defined “semi-peripheral area... being both exploited by the core and takes some role in the exploitation of the peripheral areas. The peripheral areas are seen as the least developed, and they are exploited by the core”. The theory when applied to the subject matter under discussion posits that the international communication arena is likened to a system with an unequal interplay and interaction of nations via the sources and channels of international media.

In this instance, the core is the Western World with a concentration of international news agencies that sort of dictate news flow and spread their ideology through the media. The emerging scenario is the uncritical hegemonic ideological manipulation of the peripheral or the developing nations with its concomitant effect on culture, economy, and politics and the worst of it all is its effect on the cognition of the developing countries.

## **Implications/relevance of the World Systems Theory on International Communication and The Ideological Battlefields on Developing Countries**

Ideology is a difficult but important concept to explore in international communication. Simply put, it is the ideas behind a media text, the secret (or sometimes not-so-secret) agenda of its producers. It is important to be able to identify the different ideological discourses that may be present in even an apparently simple photograph. In sociological terms, ideology is a body of ideas or set of beliefs that underpin a process or institution and leads to social relations. These sets of beliefs are those held by groups within society, and the prevalent ones are those held by the ruling/dominant groups

The World System Theory provides insight into the current hegemonic dynamics that characterise international communication, and global news flow, and the need to provide ideological and theoretical underpinnings that can explicate the evolving issues around the subject matter. It underscores the nature of international communication within the framework of dominant and dependent ideological struggles.

The exchange of information and ideas at the international level is influenced by ideological superiority. Ideology in mass media is like all other forms of image manipulation described in communication and media studies. It involves meanings and stories that embody claims about whether things are of positive or negative value. It also lays out action programmes, for what can

and should be done, which it depicts as of positive value. Like the other forms of image manipulation, the claims of ideology are embedded and implicit in communications, in addition to being made explicit. In part, they take the form of implicit justifications or legitimations for whatever is being communicated and done. In the case of the news media, ideology is embedded in everything it does, in the form of the implicit claims it makes about the nature and validity of its enterprise, and the reasons it has for various kinds of action. All these claims, together, form a coherent explanation of the implications and relevance of the World System Theory.

World systems theory offers a model of human interaction that transcends national boundaries in terms of economic, political, and social dimensions. In addition, world-systems theory describes the nature of integrated systems globally. The components of a world system are typically referred to as cores, peripheries, and semi-peripheries. The interaction among these segments involves the process of incorporation. While developed countries exploit developing countries through the spread of dominant ideology in the name of international communication.

The theoretical underpinnings of the world systems theory in the study of international communication help with the interpretation, understanding, and the negotiation of meaning, as well as to decipher nuances of media contents.

### **Conceptualising International Communication**

The interdependent nature of nations and human beings makes communication very central in every facet of our lives as a people. Individuals, groups and inter-group interaction is a function of either distance or face-to-face communication. It is this flexibility of interaction that shape intercultural and international communication. There is no worldly acceptable definition of international communication. The definitions vary from one scholar to the other. According to Mohammad (2005),

International communication is a complex and fast-growing sub-field within the major field of communication and media studies. It entails the parameters of culture and cultural commodification, (the turning of cultural products into commodities), the diffusion of information and news broadcasting by empires around the world, and the challenges faced by the developing world in the light of these processes.

The Collins English Dictionary (2006) enunciates that “the term international communication should be understood to focus mainly on interactions between and among nation-states. International communication as a field of study has indeed developed from the study of international relations (Mowlana 1996, 1997). Thus, analyses of international communication have traditionally been associated with inter-state and inter-governmental interactions such as diplomacy and government propaganda in which powerful states dictate the communication agenda (Mowlana 1996, 1997). Relatively, the vast developments in the media and information and communication technology (ICTs) in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have resulted in a radical expansion of the scope of international communication. (Smith, 1980, p.74) corroborates “thus the information network was both the cause and result of capitalism”. Currently, communication across national borders has expanded to a large diversity of business-to-business and people-to-

people interactions at a global level. “Furthermore, not only the representatives of nation-states but also a variety of non-state actors such as international non-governmental bodies, social movements as well as ordinary individuals are increasingly shaping the nature of transnational communication” (Mowlana, 1996).

Mowlana (1997) consequently proposes a shift from the view of international communication to a vision of global communication to reflect the full scope of communication between nation-states, institutions, groups, and individuals across national, geographical, and cultural borders. Thus (2000, p. 1) “defines international communication simply as communication that occurs across international borders”.

According to the Massachusetts Institute for international studies (MIT center) as cited (in Mowlana 1996, p. 6) “words, act, or attitudes, can be depicted as international communication whenever they impinge intentionally or unintentionally upon the minds of private individuals, officials, or groups from other countries”. These definitions not only broaden the scope of international communication beyond the ambit of inter-state and inter-government communication but also deviate from a mere technological focus by acknowledging the human and social dimensions of global communication within a complex process of manifold interchanges employing signs and symbols. It depicts international communication as an extremely broad field involving social conditions, attitudes, and institutions that affect the production and/or reception of various forms of communication among people. It recognizes not only the media and technologies through which impulses pass but also the attitudes and social circumstances of the sources, the predispositions of receivers as well as the effects and impact of the contents.

### **Ideological Battlefields (conceptual clarification)**

Ideological battlefields as used in this study reflect or represent the competition of ideas and the surreptitious infiltration of dominant ideologies in the international arena through the mass media. In this sense, the spheres of international communication are likened to a battlefield but not of war but of ideas. It is about whose idea dominates and influences the other conducted in the guise of international communication. Media ideology is the product of how messages (media products) are used either to fulfill a certain objective or to trigger a new one. This proposition implies that ideology itself has a close affinity with power because ideology is concerned with or determines whose influence is dominant in a relationship. Laying credence to the above, Gouldner (1976) as cited in Amadi (2006) buttresses this point when he said “ideologies serve to mobilize social movements with publics through the mediation of newspaper and other media”. (P.34).

Lylo (2016, p. 13) posits that the concept of “ideology” was introduced in 1796 by French philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy in his work “Elements of Ideology”. He interpreted ideology as “the science of ideas” that “aims to establish the source of our beliefs, perceptions, and opinions...”

Amadi (2006) informs that:

Ideology is all about whose influence (power) will determine how this inevitable relationship should be sustained. In any relationship, those whose influence (power) determines how the relationship goes are usually at advantage. An advantage because they usually ensure from the word go that anything that must happen in order to keep the interaction (relationship) alive happens in ways that will never put their interest at a risk. (p. 127)

Amadi's proposition above tacitly explains and has also illuminated what ideological battlefields are all about.

The selections of international news through which international media agendas are set are what media ideology seeks to explain. Accordingly, Haibin (2008) posits that "Ideology confounds the cultural issues of intercultural communication. Ideology sometimes transcends national, racial, ethnic, and other cultural elements and becomes culture itself in intercultural communication". Lee (2015, p. 6) informs that "From the outset, international communication research has been affiliated with power and the nation-state, and most particularly with U.S. foreign policy interests and objectives"

### **Review of literature on International Communication and The Ideological Battlefields**

Many studies have examined international communication and ideology in Nigeria or other parts of the world. These studies looked at different perspectives of international communication, its influence, and related concepts. Debanjan (2011) in his study titled "international communication at the crossroads" examines some theories that offer ways of approaching the subject of international communication and assesses how useful their explanations are, in terms of an understanding of the process involved. Debanjan studied both the Marxists and world-system theorists and stress the importance of the rise, of the global dominance of a capitalist market economy. Debanjan haven extensively examined theories of international communication and assess how useful their explanations are concluded as follows: As a matter of fact, global mass, development, and international communication content have also fallen into the capitalistic trap, thus a free flow of information is prevalent, and sometimes it is also made in the owner's interest. Interestingly, international communication content is suffering a new malady called "biases". Leading nations and the so-called developed countries made the content in favour of their political, economic, and social policies, and imposed such on the weaker sections of the world deliberately. This lays credence to this study that international communication is enmeshed in hegemony and ideological battlefields. The conclusion of Debanjan (2011) above is a clear depiction and illumination of what ideological battlefields are all about.

While contributing to the international communication and its effects discourse, Hasan (2014, p. 686) points out that "there are questions about distortion and imbalance as the world's news is filtered predominantly through Western prisms". The encapsulated and entrenched ideological hegemony across global space, as influenced by a structured international communication system is sustained by western powers. Such structure has been reasoned to be responsible for what is

been used to expand the ideological frontiers of capitalism as justifies unequal and unjust social relations in the world community.

Madikiza and Bornman (2007) in their study “international Communication: Shifting paradigms, theories and foci of interest” investigated the development of the paradigms and foci of interest in attempts to theorise the vast developments and far-reaching changes as well as the impact and effects of global communication in the world of today. Attention is first given to the current nature, impact, and implications of global communication in the first decade of the 21st century as well as a shift in emphases in the (sub)discipline of International Communication. A critical overview is then given of discourses on the free flow of information, modernisation theory, dependency theory, the structural theory of imperialism, world system theory, hegemony, political economy, critical theory, the public sphere, cultural studies, the information society, and globalization. The study because of its leaning concludes that the overview presented in their article reflects the diversity of issues and foci of interest dealt with in International Communication. It furthermore not only reflects how discourses and theoretical paradigms have adapted to developments in global politics and the global economy and the virtual explosion in the development and worldwide proliferation of ICTs in the last few decades.

International communication is about the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and beliefs among various peoples of the world and therefore is regarded as having the potency in resolving global conflict, and promoting mutual understanding amongst nations, hence it is seen as mutually beneficial participants. It is also a platform for inter-state, inter-group, and interpersonal engagements.

Despite international communications' prospect in the exchange of ideas, information, and sharing of meaning, international communication is viewed as a potential tool for promoting unidirectional ideological osmosis either covertly or overtly in the international arena. It is a truism, that international communication is necessitated by the growing need for interdependence among nations of the world.

“Ideology influences interpersonal communication through its being the variances of personal cultural identities nurtured by social cultural milieus involving cultural infrastructures, agencies, power structures, and personal inclinations (Haibin,2008, p.89). Ideology has been relentlessly discussed under the realm of identity, power, and hegemony by critical and cultural scholars”.

The extrapolation above is that international communication is characterised by entrenched ideological struggles that impact developing countries. This is corroborated by Simpson (1983, p .5) as cited in Amadi (2006, p. 41) where he describes ideology as “ways in which what we say and thinks interacts with society”

### **Implications of International Communication and the Ideological Battlefields on Developing Countries**

International communication's hegemonic ideological implications on the developing countries fall within the purview of the global media content and portrayal, its impact on culture, world view,



and the power relationship between the developed or core nations and the developing or periphery nations. Accordingly, Stevens (2003) points out thus:

This section interprets how the global media reflect power dynamics in African societies as carriers of ideas and frames that constitute hegemonic behaviour. This power is not limited to direct political control but is one where dominance is maintained through the creation and communication of a particular world viewpoint. In this context, hegemony is a form of rule that operates through the consent of citizens with African nations conforming to particular stereotypes or ideological frames created by the global media systems (Stevens, 2003).

After the Second World War and the end of hostilities, was the emergence of a dialectic world of capitalism and socialism, these are ideologies of the West and the East. Communication scholars use theories of international communication to analyse and explain the new cold war in their discourse. Accordingly, lylo (2016) argues that:

Analysis of relationships and mutual penetration of ideology and communication gives grounds to state that there exists a certain ontological dependence between them. In other words, the ideological existence in society is preceded by communicational existence. First, as Wilbur Schramm argued, only communication can create community, and therefore society, as a community is a form of social interaction (p.14).

The global arena constitutes a highly complex, dynamic, competitive, and ideologically oriented environment. It should be noted that the international arena is not static but evolves, sometimes in an unexpected dimension with unimaginable consequences for developing countries. The collapse of the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and the dismantling of TASS as an international news agency were the foundation of the Western-dominated global media. The presupposition here is that global information flow, ideological orientation, and the inherent hegemony of international communication continue to sustain a dominant–dependence relationship between developed and developing nations.

Pointing out the implications of the imbalance in the global news flow, and its inherent hegemony on developing nations, Asadu (2012, p. 37) informs that “ the mass media play a very important role in this process. The involvement of the media, understandably, is to quicken development through the transfer of information. this model prioritizes one–way, top-down dissemination of modern ideas through mass media channels for direct impact on the attitudes and behaviour of the people”

The significance of the above proposition lies in the saying that “ if one wants to capture and control a people, first capture their mind” because attitudes and behaviour are manifestations of the mind’s disposition. The mind is the standard of man. This is a subtle form of the ideological implication of international communication, global imbalance in information flow. Also, other scholars Anaeto and Anaeto (2010, p.11) assert that “ this state of dependence is multifaceted,

involving economics, media control, politics, banking and finance, education, sports and all aspects of human resource development”

Another scholar (Kulyk, 2010, p. 107) posits thus:

The subsequent theoretical studies again started viewing the media as capable of exercising ideological influence on the audience. However, this effect was characterised as completely dependent on the structure of media ownership and their market orientation rather than self-contained. Hence, the media are seen as intermediaries in the ideological influence of the capitalist class.

Contributing to the implications of international communication and ideology on the developing countries, Lylo (2016) informs that “the press becomes one of the parts of the political system, an intermediary between the authorities and society, and an essential factor in relations between ideologies and political practice...and international news. This increased the potential of influencing the human mind and coincided with the emergence of new political doctrines and ideologies”

Thussu (2000, p. 224) while alluding to the argument of the media as a contributor to the imbalance flow of information and the hegemonic ideological inclination of the developing countries pointed out that “communication technologies were crucial in the establishment of European domination of the world”.

Based on the propositions above, certain salient questions need to be asked “if “what is communicated . . . changes as a result of changes in the readers and the worlds they inhabit” (Simonson, 2006, p. 6) and if “changes in communications alter cultures—expanding, changing, and destroying them” (Greig, 2002, p. 225), then it is theoretically imperative to scrutinize how the changes in the global media environment have been reflected in the life cycle of existing concepts or theories central to the field of international communication inquiry”

The general pattern of media ownership indicates that the west, led by the USA, dominates the international flow of information and entertainment in all major media sectors. But what is the impact of such a one-way flow of global information and entertainment on national and regional media cultures? “It has been argued that international communication and media are leading to the homogenization of culture, but the patterns of global/national/local interaction may be more complex” (Adelakum, 2016).

Lee (2015) argues that:

we should understand international communication as being shaped by the cultural consequences of imperialism. He is explicitly critical of capitalism as a force or source of imperialism. As a pronounced feature of the contemporary world system, he notes that states in the advanced countries tend to colonize international communication through direct or indirect uses of the media (p.19).

Similarly, Thussu (2000, p.43) asserts thus:

The international information system, the NWICO protagonists argued, perpetuated and strengthened inequality in development, with serious implications for the countries of the south, which were heavily dependent on the north for both software and hardware in the information sector. It was argued by the Third World Leaders that through their control of major international information channels, the western media gave an exploitative and distorted view of their countries to the rest of the world. The existing order they contended, had, because of its structural logic, created a model of dependence, with negative effects on the polity, economy, and society of developing countries.

Westernization is the term used to describe the influence media conglomerates from the Western hemisphere have on the culture of other countries, resulting in such phenomena as media imperialism, and other related issues as pop culture. The spread of western dominated media including TV programmes, film, and music, has been considered a veritable component of the westernization of other countries.

The paper argues that the dependency of developing countries on mainstream western media for information and reporting is neocolonial and imperialistic, ideological, and power based. This account for the retardation of the development process among developing nations.

### **Conclusion**

Countries are microcosms of the global system, and at all times characterised by hierarchies of power. This presupposes that a nation's position in the hierarchy is a determinant of the type of ideology, information, and direction of information flow. Essentially, media content and portrayal have been observed to always mirror the socio-economic cum political values and ideologies of the emanating nations. Similarly, and akin to the thrust of this study, it is impossible to generate discussion on international communication relating it to ideology without talking about power. The power structures of the world are based on the principle of who wields domineering influence on the other. In the field of media and communication studies, news stories are defined by the principle of power – who will be greater than the other? How are the news stories reported? Who reports them? When they are reported are dependent on power. The conceptualization is that power is the ability not just to report news events of other people and places but to make it the definitive news report of those people.

Conclusively, the paper corroborates the stance that because information dissemination at the international level is vertical and carried out within definite spheres of communication hegemony to the disadvantage of developing countries, the only news that favours capitalist interests is disseminated. It further holds that contrary to mainstream capitalist assumptions that emphasize the evolutionary character of growth as a natural consequence that developing nations must follow, capitalism favours what we term “bourgeois ideology”, an ideology that makes us feel as though the social world and the technological advantages at the international arena are there for developing countries to express ourselves, while in actual fact, these countries are mere pawns on the international chessboard.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are posed in this paper:

1. Africa must find and develop a new international communication model which is applicable and workable because the erroneous idea and belief of one size fits all is no longer tenable.
2. Nevertheless, the mental shift in the perception of international communication and the ideological battlefields should be conceived as a multi-dimensional osmosis rather than the global information flow osmotic to be in one direction.
3. Media literacy skills have been adjudged as an effective antidote to the uncritical consumption of international media content and adoption of international media-portrayed behaviour and ideologies, the paper further recommended that media literacy skills awareness campaigns be encouraged by the government of the respective States.
4. The government and people of Nigeria should learn the media skill of critically examining international media content before consumption to avoid being hegemonic to western ideologies perpetuated through international communication.

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