

The Politics of Information

POINTS TO DEVELOP

1. Communication explosion marks the beginning of a new era in the history of mankind marked by rising aspirations and new forms of colonial domination.
2. Modern means of communications have had deep impact on ideological struggles.
3. Increased new flow is positively correlated to increase in propaganda war.
4. News flow is controlled by a minuscule group in the West; thus, news is colored by the western vision of the world.
5. Physically, too quantity of new is more on matters of interest to the West than on those of interests to developing countries.
6. Producers decide what information the market requires.
7. Under the misnomer, 'information society', misinformation and disinformation dominate.
8. disparities exist in content and quality of coverage.
9. Commercialization predominates: information is tailored to suit financial sponsors.
10. it is necessary to see beyond the information images created by the media.
11. Conclusion: we must create alternative information packages.

The recent communication expectation is the beginning of a new era in the history of mankind. This era is characterized, on the one hand, by the rising aspirations and expectations of millions of people living in the Third world and, on the other, by the emergence of new forms of domination and colonialism. The recent advances in the field of science and technology have led to an entirely new kind of political dispensation which going to change relations among nations and peoples. The information revolution has also brought about unprecedented transformations, changing the very social, cultural, economic and political fabric of the world.

Revolution in science and technology and the intensifying struggle on major international issues have brought about a colossal increase in the role played by the information media in international relations. The intensifying ideological struggle throughout the world reflects the rapidly growing role of the modern means of communications which have become key instruments of ideological manipulation in the new era. All political streams, all groups of states, individual countries and their organized forces are busy mobilizing their resources to expand and improve the information systems at their disposal.

It is hardly surprising that, with the increase in international news flow, we find the world population covered by a blanket of propaganda. There is a positive correlation between the total mass media content and the total propaganda outpouring. Even a casual observer of the media cannot fail to notice that man's mind is being subjected to a ceaseless and clever bombardment of messages. These messages are calculated to influence and control. Information is treated as a weapon of low intensity warfare – people's perception of a situation drives man from the conscious and the rational to the irrational and the obscure. Never before in history have the basic educational and cultural needs of humanity been so widely appreciated. But while the renounces to satisfy these requirements are physically available, they are directed to other ends.

A small group of transnational and mostly American companies control approximately 80 per cent of the dailies of industrial and developing capitalist countries as well 90 per cent of radio and 95 per cent of television stations. On a global scale the USA controls 60 per cent of foreign programmes. The four largest Western agencies- UPL, AP Reuters and Agence France Presse- supply news to 140 countries of the world, totaling more than 50 million words a day. They control over 90 per cent of international news flows. The contents of their coverage project a Western vision of the world.

Data concerning the scale of the United States' ideological expansion into foreign countries are in sharp contrast to the figures of the import of cultural products and information's from abroad by the United States itself. According to available data, not more than 3 per cent of the information disseminated inside that country is derived from foreign sources. An analysis of the news items which western radio stations and news agencies send to the developing countries today shows that 65 per cent of the information is related to the USA and only 8-10 per cent is devoted to the developing countries. What is more, the coverage given to the developing countries is largely determined by their impact on the political and economic interests of the West. The information about these states is generally sensational and scandalous and often prejudicial to the interests of the developing countries. At the same time, there is hardly anything relating to economic and social problems.

The advance in communication has created an entirely new situation where it is not so much the consumers as the producers that decide what the market "requires" Moreover the "requirement" can be created by distorting priorities of a society. The issue as to who decides research and development policies and priorities has to be critically questioned and analyzed – who decides, for what, for whom, on whose terms, on what basis, with what principles and with what effects?

A lot is being said and written about the –so called information society into which some of the highly developed countries are poised to enter. The main feature of the transition. In information society this resource is basic to all processes. The processing of information is seen to be a major contributing factor to the economic development of societies.

The 'information society', as the name suggests, can at least if not at best be expected to keep citizens better informed. What is actually happening is a rapid growth of misinformation and disinformation. Witness Donna Demac's book *Keeping America Uninformed*, or Henry Porter's *Lies, damned lies*. The powerful resource, information, is controlled by and managed by the same world system which is unjust and unfair.

The key questions here are: what is the image of other countries and regions as received through the news and what other factors shape the quality and quantity of flow. The mainstream of news is 'hard news' oriented: politics and catastrophes get more attention than culture or social processes, 'elite countries' and 'elite personalities' are better covered than non-elites. The uniformity of results is partly reason to doubt the main line of the results. What is surprising is that the uniform the concept of news and news criteria as such. The terms on which news selection is made are developed by the dominant news transmission structures.

What is less apparent, though no less real, are negative characteristics of the media imagery that is being introduced in poorer communities across the globe. Whereas public service broadcasting is hardly visible, a tidal wave of commercial material is flowing over the earth. Everywhere outpouring of commercial broadcasting. Television in the United States is tailored almost exclusively to fit the market finance the programming. The programme material is assigned especially to secure and hold mass audiences in thrall to the delight of consumerdom.

The basic role of the media is to inform and develop understanding of other nations' political, economic and social systems, their histories, their leadership and simply what their people are like. Preferably, this understanding should be as accurate and complete as possible. But the images of peoples and nations as projected by the dominant western media are quite contrary. Their coverage of the Third World countries is generally confined to coups, disasters and wars.

Against this background, it has become very important that one sees beyond the information images the media has created. In most of the cases, these images are a distortion of reality. In a historical process, news market needs as they are perceived by the dominant media. The communication revolution has led to a situation in which a person may be over-informed about certain subjects which do

not conform with his information needs and at the same time he is kept in the dark about a number of other issues on which he requires to be informed.

The biggest challenge is to evaluate these information images and consequently chalk out a strategy to change these images by creating alternative information packages.