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# **INDIGENOUS CULTURE, COMMUNICATION AND GLOBALIZATION IN DEVELOPING SOCIETIES: A CASE FOR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT HYPOTHESIS**

*By*

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The relationship between culture and communication is no longer a controversial issue. The communication industry is part of the culture industry, and the media of communication are very strong means of cultural dissemination. What has remained an issue of controversy is the potential influence of globalization aided by ICT on indigenous cultures. Inferring from data gathered from empirical studies, this paper submits that the negative influences of globalization and ICT on indigenous cultural values are highly exaggerated. Indigenous cultures or societies may not be at unusual risk in this age of globalization because the disappearance or the discarding of some aspects of the cultural values of an indigenous society for a global cultural norm may not be caused by the imperialistic tendencies of developed cultures or societies. Second, there are empirical evidences that suggest that most audiences actually have an active reading to any message - critiquing and analyzing ideological, cultural and value-based messages, and interpreting them to fit within their own cultural contexts. In the conclusion of the paper, globalization and ICT are helping the growth of indigenous cultural values, leading to cultural development as against the much touted cultural imperialism. Therefore, cultural development hypothesis is advocated as a theoretical model to help address the continuing existence of indigenous cultural norms in the age of globalization.*

**Key Words:** Indigenous Culture, Communication, ICT, Globalization, Cultural Development, Cultural Imperialism, Nigeria.



## INTRODUCTION

Globalization as a concept has remained a contemporary and controversial issue among scholars, social commentators, corporate organizations and media/cultural critics. Njoku (2007) describes it as "the transfer, adaptation, and development of values, knowledge, technology and behaviour norms across countries and societies in different parts of the world." It indicates a world in which complex economic, political, social and cultural processes operate and interact without any influence of national boundaries and distance (Joseph, 2006:97). Globalization is also a comprehensive term for the emergence of a global society in which economic, political, environmental, and cultural events in one part of the world quickly come to have significance for people in other parts of the world. Globalization is the result of advances in communication, transportation, and information technologies. It describes the growing economic, political, technological, and cultural linkages that connect individuals, communities, businesses, and governments around the world (Microsoft Encarta Reference Library, 2005).

Currently, the term has taken over the research topics of many research institutions and as usual, continues to generate heated

arguments and controversy. The developing nations see the term as a Western ploy to continue to dominate the international scene and make them continually dependent. The Western capitalist nations on their part view the issue differently. To them, globalization is a current drive towards a one-world community, heavily shaped by improvements in Information Technology. And because Information Technology has been welcomed and adopted by almost all developed nations of the world, the developed nations believe that the globalization drive is irreversible. The irreversibility is anchored on the fact that its gains far outweigh its losses. This is further testified to by the interest shown by some developing countries in being globalization-compliant (Ekeanyanwu, 2008).

Developing countries are, therefore, left with little or no option at all than to get prepared and ready to accept the challenges of a contemporary world by capitalizing on opportunities provided by globalization alongside minimizing the attendant risks. This is a positive attitude, which the developing nations should adopt instead of the unrealistic protectionist tendencies most of them are currently displaying. Most of them have embraced Information Technology in their day-to-day



activities but still fear the effects of such over-reliance on Western technology. But, one is tempted to ask, is there really a way out?

“Information Technology” is shorthand for information and communications technology and services. Too often, the “technology” aspect is overemphasized at the expense of the “services”; most users are not interested in the technology as such, but only in the benefits and services it can bring. Information Technology encompasses the full range of the production, distribution, and consumption of information, across all media from radio and television to satellites and the Internet (Ekeanyanwu, 2008). Information and Communications Technology (ICT) brings the idea of globalization to a better understanding as it relates to the media and communication. The effects of the revolution in ICT on modern global information flow are overwhelming. With the onset of the post-industrial age, nation-states are co-players and stakeholders in the process of globalization along with Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on the world political stage. Communication technology is the coordinating force that links all players and stakeholders in the process of globalization.

Friedman (2005) in his work “The

World is Flat: A Brief History of the Globalized World in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” states that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be remembered for whole new world of globalization- a flattening of the world. He seeks to reconfigure the whole globalized world as flat in the sense that the entire world is a level playing field with easy enough exits and entrances. The globalized world is entering a new phase where more people than ever before are going to have access to ICT facilities as innovators, collaborators, and even as terrorists (Joseph, 2006). Friedman argues that every where one turns to, hierarchies are being challenged from below or transforming themselves from top down structures into more horizontal and collaborative entities. This flattening process is happening at great speed and directly or indirectly touching a lot more people on planet at once. Kumar (2005) is of the view that in the globalized virtual flat land of media, depth has yielded to breadth and we surf television channels across a shallow expanse.

It is interesting to observe that McLuhan (1964) had predicted 43 years ago the emergence of this situation when he visualized a dispersed media structure “whose centres are everywhere and margins are nowhere”. Today, globalization and ICT have led to the emergence not only of a global village but also of a global family now sharing common values, economic cum



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political ideologies and socio-cultural orientations irrespective of their places of geographical provenance, race, language and socio-economic status.

Soola (1998:86) notes that ICT provides near limitless possibilities of increasing the quantity, and enhancing the quality, speed and availability of information in a complex but increasingly interdependent world of business. Adaja (2007:126) also notes that ICT "is basically the application of modern technologies to information generation, processing, storage, retrieval and dissemination to meet the needs and requirements of individuals, groups, organizations, governments and societies. It guarantees accuracy, efficiency, prompt and instantaneous transmission or distribution of information." References to the "Information Revolution" reflect the rapid advance in the power and speed of computers, the digitalization of information, and the convergence of once-separate industries into a new amalgam of production, distribution, and consumption activities. Made possible by the shift from analog to digital technologies (a shift toward messages encoded in a series of '0's and '1's), convergence merges computers, telecommunications, television, and the Internet into a single multimedia environment. These are typically accompanied by important organizational and commercial changes as well.

Information Technology and the IT Revolution refer not only to traditional communications functions, but also to the steady introduction of computer technology (such as chips) into nearly every sector and activity, from health to transport to education (Wilson 111, 1998).

A recent text on globalization and IT suggests that the current "information revolution" will have a "greater and qualitatively different" impact than any previous phenomenon (Kahin and Nesson 1997, preface). Yet, there is scant consensus in the literature with regard to the impact of IT-globalization on developing nations. Even in a highly developed industrialized country like the United States, which is both saturated with new IT and replete with statistical, empirical, and anecdotal evidences, there is, surprisingly, little consensus among experts on the impact of IT. For example, despite years of research and mounds of evidence, there is no single consensus on what effect viewing television violence has on aggressive behaviour in American children (Lowery and DeFleur, 1995:340).

Beyond opinion and interpretation, causal relationships have been neither adequately specified nor understood to support a wide professional consensus about when, how, and under what conditions viewing television



violence leads to violent behaviour in American children. Thus, it should not be surprising that research on the spread of IT across the entire globe yields very few firm conclusions on the impact of IT on inter-state or intra-state relations. Also, there has been few, if any, large-scale, cross-national research projects using social science research methods to try to measure IT impacts systematically (Wilson 111, 1998).

#### CULTURE, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND GLOBALIZATION

Culture is the totality of the complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. Taylor (cited in Ekeanyanwu, 2005) sees it as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of that society". The World Book Encyclopedia (2005) also views culture as consisting of all the ideas, objects and ways of doing things created by a group. These include arts, beliefs, customs, innovations, language, technology and tradition. It also consists of learned ways of acting, feeling and thinking rather than biologically determined ways. Culture in this sense includes creative expression (e.g., oral history, language, literature,

performing arts, fine arts, and crafts), community practices (e.g., traditional healing methods, traditional natural resource management, celebrations, and patterns of social interaction that contribute to group and individual welfare and identity), the traditional remote control mechanisms (from sorcery and witchcraft) and material or built forms such as sites, buildings, historic city centres, landscapes, art, and objects (Ekeanyanwu, 2008).

This definition of culture by the World Book Encyclopedia particularly underscores my view that the greater or the more influential part of what makes up culture is acquired or learned, and not in-born or innate. The implication of this is that culture could be learned, acquired, experienced or transferred from one place to another through various ways and means. One of the most influential of these ways is through the mass media. This is where communication and the mass media play a significant role in the transmission of culture (Ekeanyanwu, 2008). This relationship between culture and communication is clearly stated in the MacBride et al (1981:30-31) thus:

The role of communication may be regarded as that of a



major carrier of culture. The media of communication are cultural instruments, which serve to promote or influence attitudes, to motivate, to foster the spread of behavior patterns, and to bring about social integration. For millions of people, they are the principal means of access to culture and to all forms of creative expression. In the modern world the mass media supply the cultural fare, and shape the cultural experience of many millions of people.

Okunna (1993:96) also captures this relationship in the statement below:

The communication industry is part of the culture industry, and mass communication is a very strong vehicle for cultural dissemination. Given the nature of the international communication system, there have always been fears that the massive flow of western, predominantly American, media

culture into non-western societies of the developing world could lead to cultural domination which would distort and displace native cultures, and lead to the adoption of foreign values, life style and behavioral patterns.

This introduces us to one of the most hotly contested political issues about the impact of ICT on society in what may be described as the "IT-culture connection". The questions that quickly come to mind in this debate are: Is there really a connection? How strong is such a connection, if any? Is the connection good or bad? And is the connection for the benefit of whom? These are issues that we will not resolve here, but we will indicate the main lines of the argument in our analysis and push for cultural development hypothesis.

Considering that national cultures are very important to most citizens and their leaders, protecting them is a highly sensitive and politicized issue. One of the most frequently cited positions around the world, relied on by governments and referred to by intellectuals and cultural protectionists, concerns the right and capacity of governments to protect indigenous cultures and values against what is seen as IT-assisted assimilation into



global consumerism society. Many commentators like Huntington (1996) and Hamelink (1983) consider indigenous culture at risk in the presence of globalized ICT. The counter-arguments rest on the right of people to make choices freely and the positive or neutral impacts of cultural products like cinema movies.

The "cultural impact" hinges on several assumptions and a tight chain of logic: ICT brings increased exposure to cultural content; artifacts produced by non-indigenous foreign cultures will lead to rejection of, and decline in, adherence to local cultural values and their substitution by either anomic or foreign values. Changes in values and attitudes will, over time, lead to a change in behaviour, with new behaviours inappropriate to and injurious to the health of indigenous society as a whole. This line of argument is relied upon heavily, but is often based more on simple assertion than the collection and careful analysis of empirical evidence. If, however, one questions the logic at each step, other important questions emerge: Is more exposure equivalent to changes in values and behaviours? Does culturally derived selectivity by audiences filter out what is alien and repugnant to their sensibilities? The evidence is mixed. Wang reports survey evidence from Asia indicating that when audiences have opportunities to choose between foreign and domestic

programming, they strongly prefer local content. Equally interesting, there are cross-national differences within the region about relative preferences for foreign and domestic content (Wang, 1996).

There are also more policy-related debates that consider how less-developed-country governments should respond to the challenges. Some argue the most appropriate policy response is to impose negative restrictions on imported content; others argue for more positive encouragement to local and more diverse cultural production using traditional and cutting-edge ICT. Some media more than others may help diminish this problem of undesirable content. For example, videocassettes may be used to buttress indigenous cultures (Cuthbert and Hoover, 1991; Ogan, 1998 cited in Ekeanyanwu, 2008). The ease and low cost of producing, distributing, and viewing videocassettes make them an attractive and viable medium to compete with more expensive media such as television and cinema.

Under the concept of globalization, there have been rapid developments in Information Technology over the last few years. The introduction of the Internet, the email, fax, independent video productions, electronic games, cell phone and an increased use of the fixed telephone have raised a number of questions on the impact of such advances on African countries in terms of culture



and the development process as a whole. The Internet phenomenon has also led to what we refer to today as "Virtual Communities". A virtual community, according to Oyebode (2004:93) "is a congregation of like-minded individuals who rarely, if ever at all, meet physically but who maintain a relationship over the Internet. It is a community not bounded by the lines of a map but knit by shared ideas, beliefs, experiences and circumstances."

This virtual community ushers us into the primary concern of this paper, which is on the future of indigenous culture in a highly globalized world. Culture is at the heart of the controversy on the effects/influence of globalization and information technology on indigenous or local societies. Some scholars such as Schiller (1996) and Hamelink (1983) argue vehemently that globalization and ICT are gradually eroding local cultural values and norms leading to what they call cultural imperialism. The other school of thought led by Meyer (1997) and Zwizwai (1999) argue that ICT has only aided globalization to integrate societies into a global community as envisaged by Marshall McLuhan otherwise called the global village. The disappearance of local cultural values and norms to more enduring global cultural artifacts, according to this school of thought, is not leading to cultural imperialism but to cultural homogenization/synchronization (Ekeanyanwu,

2008).

The relationship between technology and culture is another subtle issue which this paper addresses. Many cultures have been submerged and some have been smeared as a result of their inability to accommodate the change, which often follows technology. And this is today the lot and the woe of Africa. The new information and communication technologies are also worsening the developing societies' situation as it concerns cultural imperialism. With these improved technologies, the world is further and daily shrinking to 'clans' (Ekeanyanwu, 2008). Richard Blake observes that the global village or McLuhan era probably never existed and if it was the logical goal of a trend at that time, that trend has hit a detour. He goes further to observe that technology has broken the global village into what he calls "condominiums" and has made the world look less like a tribal village and more an urban apartment building where people in adjacent flats cannot recognize one another (Herbert, 1985:492 cited in Ekeanyanwu, 2005). Uche (1996) citing Strover (1987:69) agrees no less when he states thus:

There is no doubt that new communications technology have smashed the concept of



the global village because with the advent of computers and their networking capabilities, competitive phone and data services, cable television, and host of new telecommunicating opportunities, urban telecommunication system became jungles of fiber optic and coaxial cable, with several businesses competing to offer new services to an array of public and private customers.

#### THEORETICAL SUPPORT

Theories are the benchmarks upon which new and novel ideas could be tested. They also offer empirical support to such novel ideas. A theory has also been defined as a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and statements that present a systematic view of a phenomenon by specifying relationships among the concepts with the purpose of explaining the phenomenon (Kerlinger, 1973 cited in White, 2001). This is the primary reason two theories are discussed below to help focus the current analysis and draw readers to the existence of the possibilities which the present effort holds. First of the theories that will support some of the arguments raised in this investigation is the Technological Determinism Theory

by McLuhan (1964). Innis (1950) first used the term "technological determinism" before McLuhan elaborated on it and built a theory out of it. According to Innis (1950), the nature of media technology prevailing in a society at a given point in time greatly influences how the members of that society think and behave. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982) state that McLuhan elaborated on Innis's thesis and characterized television as a "cool" medium because of its capacity for rich configurations of audiovisual stimuli, which elicits high but passive audience participation. From the technological determinist's perspective, the most important characteristic of the audience-media interface is the technological properties of the medium. Thus, McLuhan asserts, "The medium is the message" (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982:184).

According to McLuhan (1964), all social, economic, political and cultural changes are based on the development and diffusion of technology. His argument in this theory is based on the need draw the attention of media audience to the hidden effects of communications technologies, especially with regard to culture, leading to his now famous phrase "global village". This theory in Griffins (1991:289) understanding, regards our present cultural challenges as a direct result of the information explosion engineered by the television,



computer and the Internet. The theory, therefore, ultimately linked the historical, economic, and cultural changes in the world to the invention, development and diffusion of ICT.

While some social scientists are busy trying to understand the potential impact of the nature of ICT on audiences and society, few people would accept the proposition that technology alone determines how a society encounters and responds to the media. According to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982:185), most people would reject McLuhan's claim that the content of media messages has no impact on audiences. Essentially, media theorists reject the extreme form of technological determinism put forth by McLuhan for two reasons. These reasons are summarized by DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982:185) below:

Social scientists generally reject the idea that any single factor - be it technology, the economy, or chromosomes - can be the single cause of social behaviour. This distrust of single-factor theories is buttressed by theory and research developments that demonstrate the influence of both psychological and social factors on the individual's or group's

encounters with the mass media. This is not to say that Innis's thesis need be rejected out of hand; most media theorists would accept the proposition that the technological characteristics of a mass medium may be one of many factors that should be taken into account.

But others like Baran (2002) see technology as more or less neutral and claim that the way people use technology is what gives it significance and meaning. His school of thought accepts technology as one of the many factors that shape economic and cultural changes. This school of thought also concludes that technology's influence is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people and cultures that use it. Baran (2002:22) further captures the ultimate belief of the present author in the use of this theory as a theoretical support for his argument in favour of cultural development hypothesis thus:

This disagreement about the power of technology is at the heart of the controversy surrounding the new communication technologies. Are we more or less powerless in the wake of



advances like the Internet, the World Wide Web, instant global audio and visual communication? If we are at the mercy of technology, the culture that surrounds us will not be of our making, and the best we can hope to do is to make our way reasonably well in a world outside our own control. But if these technologies are indeed neutral and their power resides in how we choose to use them, we can utilize them responsively and thoughtfully to construct and maintain whatever kind of culture we want.

In his analysis of this theory in a recent study, Ekeanyanwu (2008: 115) says:

The accusation leveled against new communication technologies that it is leading to cultural imperialism is both misleading and unintelligent. The power of technology is in the use to which it is put, not in its very

nature. Therefore, we can apply it to suit our cultural needs; not it compelling us to follow its own dictates or the dictates of the owners of such technology as suggested by some anti-western media scholars who always argue in favour of cultural imperialism as the main result of the influence of globalization and the role of new communication technologies.

The second theory is the Information Diffusion theory. This theory is an offshoot of the Information Flow Theory. The theory explains how innovations are introduced and adopted by various societies. Everett Rogers (1962 cited in Baran and Davies, 2003) developed this theory and it could be seen as an extension of Lazarsfeld's original idea of the Two-Step flow. Rogers (1962) assembled empirical data to show that when new technological innovations are introduced, they will pass through a series of stages before being widely adopted. These series of stages include:

1. Most people will become aware of them, often through the news media.
2. The innovations will be adopted



- by a very small group of innovators or early adopters.
3. Opinion leaders learn from the early adopters and try the innovation themselves.
  4. If the opinion leaders find the innovation useful, they encourage their friends and opinion followers to adopt it.
  5. After most people have adopted the innovation, a group of laggards or late adopters make the change (Baran and Davies, 2002).

The theory postulates that the media or technology has no inherent powers to cause a major and dramatic influence on society or on indigenous culture of local peoples. When it causes some influences, some mediating factors as stated above may have taken place. This is the major idea that influenced the adoption of this theory in this current study; and here also lies its relationship with the other theory earlier cited. The emphasis here is that globalization and ICT on their own cannot cause societal changes especially in the area of culture without the aid of the intervening variables. These variables could come in different forms. What is important, if the arguments of the two theories discussed so far are considered, is that globalization and ICT cannot influence indigenous cultures positively or negatively without the support of the people. If this conclusion is further analyzed, then, the argument for cultural

development hypothesis to help address the indigenous cultural challenges of developing societies may have been addressed and justified.

Information Diffusion theory is a good example of the power and limitations of a middle-range theory. The theory assigns a very limited role to mass media creating awareness of new innovations. Media content directly influences only the early adopters; others adopt innovations only after being influenced by other people. This scenario further questions the arguments put forward by the early mass society and magic bullet theorists, which have long been discredited in media circles. However, the arguments of cultural imperialism theorists seem to suggest that such theories have resurrected back to life.

#### CULTURAL IMPERIALISM THEORY RECONSIDERED

Critical theorists, according to White (2001), have coined various phrases in reference to notions of "cultural imperialism." An examination of the international communication literature will reveal several different terms such as "media imperialism" (Boyd-Barrett, 1977); "structural imperialism" (Galtung, 1979); "cultural synchronization" (Hamelink, 1983); "cultural dependency and domination" (Link, 1984; Mohammadi, 1995);



"electronic colonialism" (McPhail, 1987); "communication imperialism" (Sui-Nam Lee, 1988); "ideological imperialism", and "economic imperialism" (Mattleart, 1994) - all relating to the same basic notion of cultural imperialism. Different media scholars who have at one time or the other written on the subject of cultural imperialism attribute its beginnings to different sources as well (All references cited in White, 2001).

The theory of cultural imperialism was developed in the 1970s to explain the media situation as it existed at that time. The nature of media (i.e., print, radio and television), at that time, promoted a one-way, top-down transmission system from dominant country to dominated country that theoretically gave rise to a passive audience and powerful media (Sengupta and Frith, 1997 cited in White, 2001). Cultural imperialism is therefore defined as the subtle manipulation of the mass media of underdeveloped or developing countries by the developed western capitalist nations of Europe and North American, using their advanced and well-developed mass media to control the behaviour, lifestyles, morals, mores, arts, and values of the undeveloped or developing nations through the production and massive exportation of media software to the developing nations (Boyd-Barrett, 1979 cited in White, 2001). Cultural imperialism is also the subjugation of a local

culture and the imposition of an alien culture on the local culture (Ekeanyanwu, 1998:11).

Cultural imperialism became an issue in international media circles and one of the core debates in the controversy over the New World Information and Communication Order after the MacBride Commission published its findings which states that "the media of communication are cultural instruments which serve to promote or influence attitudes, motivation, foster the spread of behavior patterns and bring about social integration" (MacBride et al, 1980).

#### The Main Argument of Cultural Imperialism Theory

After a critical analysis of the arguments put forward by most of the theorists and other scholars who have written on the subject of cultural imperialism, the major proposition could be summarized in the work of Schiller (1976). From his thinking, cultural imperialism proposes that a society is brought into the modern world system when its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping its social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system (Schiller, 1976 cited in White, 2001).



The Major Weaknesses of Cultural Imperialism Theory

Many weaknesses have been identified by scholars who are opposed to the major arguments of the cultural imperialism theory. Their views are summarized below:

1. The advocates of cultural imperialism led by Herbert Schiller developed their arguments in the 1960s and 70s when US economic dominance in the global system seemed secure and unchallengeable. This situation has since changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the emergence of other economic and political superpowers like China, Japan etc.
2. The theory lacks explanatory power and needs to be advanced beyond the level of pure description (Ogan, 1988 cited in White, 2001).
3. The economic component of media imperialism may be expressed in statistics, but the cultural component is much more difficult to measure (Ogan, 1988 cited in White, 2001)
4. The cultural imperialism arguments also imply that before the arrival of US media, developing nations were enjoying cozy golden age of indigenous, authentic traditions and cultural heritage, untainted by values and orientations imposed from outside. This argument risks being patronizing to what are seen as 'weaker' nations and of romanticizing as 'indigenous' those cultures whose traditions and heritages have been shaped by very long and brutal processes of cultural conflict, often involving the imposition of external values from centuries back, resulting in rich hybridities (Negus and Roman-Velasquez, 2000).
5. The theory lacks conceptual precision (Lee, 1988 cited in White, 2001).
6. The theory does not hold true in all ramifications of the phenomenon that it attempts to explain (Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham, 1996 cited in White, 2001).
7. Twentieth century scholars like Uche (1996) have also drawn clear and distinct lines between cultural imperialism, cultural synchronization and cultural juxtaposition. He argues that what most persons call cultural imperialism may actually be regarded as cultural synchronization. According to him, cultural imperialism means an external culture that is imposed upon another culture against its will, cultural synchronization means an external culture that is welcomed and imitated by



another culture which the external eventually supersedes in an evolutionary fashion, and cultural juxtaposition means the placing together of locally produced cultural elements with the externally produced (or as the opposition and coexistence) of distinct types of cultural productivity within late capitalism.

8. The theory does not acknowledge an audience's ability to process information and interpret messages differently based on their individual background, and as suggested by Individual Differences theory (Liebes & Katz, 1990 cited in White, 2001).
9. The theory builds on mass society and magic bullet submissions which have long been discredited in media practice and scholarship.

In summary, White (2001) notes that the advanced media, which are becoming widely available in the form of telecommunications, computers, internet, and satellite technology, provide for greater interaction between sender and receiver than has ever before been possible. Therefore, the cultural imperialism argument that has been framed in terms of centre nations with power over disempowered periphery nations must be reconsidered as the new

media slowly but steadily penetrate into developing nations and societies.

### **CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT HYPOTHESIS ADVOCATED**

The crux of this paper is to highlight the inherent weaknesses in the cultural imperialism theory so as to put forward the argument for a cultural development hypothesis to help address developing nations' cultural needs. The first part of this has been done. The second part follows from empirical analysis of a recent study by Ekeanyanwu (2008:181) in which he notes thus:

On the aspect of the potential threat posed by globalization trends and ICT application on indigenous societies and cultures, this study has shown that the impact might be exaggerated. It is true that communication is a major carrier of culture. In other words, the technologies of communication are potential carriers of cultural products. True also that the technologies carry with them the cultural values of their producing nations to the consumer societies. However, that these always lead to only cultural imperialism has been put to question with regard to the results of this investigation.

Media professionals, who we have justified earlier as professionals who have direct contact with the variables under investigation, perceive the impact of globalization



trends and ICT application on local cultures differently. They are of the opinion that even though media globalization through massive application of ICT in developing nations has the potential of impacting negatively on indigenous cultural development, it could also help to enrich and develop local cultural values and contents. This negates the issues raised in the cultural imperialism theory and reinforces the views of the proponents of technological determinism theory and the phenomenistic perspective to media effects.

From available literature on this subject, the western technologies carry western cultural values that are both capable of eroding as well as enriching local cultural values of developing nations like Nigeria. If so, it is therefore expected that developing societies should maximize the inherent enriching capabilities in western technologies and then try to minimize the potential threats by the way or the use to which these technologies will be put to. This may be a moral issue but if the views of media professionals are worth considering, then developing societies have little options here. Former consumer societies that chose to fully and deeply understand the issues involved in globalization are better off today. Singapore is a recent case in point.

Such societies are no longer wallowing in self-pity or afraid over their local cultural values. They are exploiting the potentials of globalization and ICT to improve their cultures. But first, they chose to appreciate the issues globalization and ICT raise and then go deep into them and finally see the issues as challenges that can be positively exploited. If the developing societies follow same procedure or processes adopted by Singapore, there is a likelihood of socio-cultural and economic turnaround in the developing societies.

To support this position, we are therefore, tempted to ask questions at this stage. The western educational curriculum that the developing societies have continued to implement has it not brought out the best in some individuals in the developing societies? If it has not, why have they not discarded it a long time before now? Is the socio-political ideologies borrowed from Europe and other western societies not the same ones shaping societies in the developing world? If not, why are they still clamouring for democracy, freedom, capitalism etc? Are these philosophies indigenous to these developing societies? I am sure an attempt to answer these questions and many more raised in the literature and theoretical analyses will obviously bring us to the stark reality that



globalization and ICT have not totally imperialized the values and cultures of developing nations. This is the major reason why the studies carried out by Reich (1992), Wang (1996), Wilson (1998), Zwizwai (1999), and the Pew Research Centre (2002) are cited here for further studies. The findings of these studies confirm the opinion that globalization and ICT could actually enrich local cultural values.

Globalization trends and the application of ICT carry with them positive values that have changed media/cultural related studies and issues. Therefore, the positive values should be further re-evaluated to make more meaning to the developing societies. Discarding aspects of one's indigenous cultural values that are no longer supportive of one's current aspirations should not be regarded as cultural imperialism. Imperialism connotes some form of force, which is not the case in this cultural displacement. The displacement or loss is as a result of interaction between the local and alien values. These values come face to face and the ones that are no longer current with contemporary ideas die naturally. So, the disappearance or displacement of local values to more enduring foreign cultural values and norms is leading to cultural development. There is a gradual movement from local norms to global norms especially in this era of global village. The worry here

should not actually be about the displacement of local cultural values but that the right kind of foreign norms or values should be imbibed or copied so as to better our society and make it appeal to the greater percentage of the global citizenship.

The major argument here is to get every reader of this paper to accept cultural development that comes through globalization and communication as a realistic way out of the Nigerian indigenous cultural development challenges. There is therefore the need to encourage the Nigerian media industry to become truly, an agent of socialization, with regards to the transmission of global cultural values, orientations and traditions. This will lead to the synchronization of the Nigerian cultural values and norms with that of the global community for the benefit of the Nigerian society. This will also in the long run, close the unimaginable gap in the socio-cultural cum economic lives of Nigerians and their Western and European counterparts.

There is also the issue of technology transfer. This is one sure aspect of the cultural transfer through ICT. Information and Communication Technology is a major content of western media culture, so when this is transferred to developing nations, the technology may also be transferred but in a much more subtle way. And better and more



sophisticated technology could give better and more sophisticated expression to indigenous cultural values, which may help sustain them in the global market place of cultural fare.

In summary, the content of the proposed cultural development hypothesis should focus, but not limited to the following:

1. The development of a sound explanatory mechanism and conceptual precision to address the inadequacies identified in the cultural imperialism theory.
2. A reevaluation of the limited effects theories that argue the selective processes so as to tap into the inherent capabilities which support cultural development arguments. In essence, the proposed hypothesis must build on such theories like the attitude change theory which recognizes the place of intervening variables and the active media audience frame of analysis, in media effect.
3. How to encourage developing societies to integrate into the global community and become major participants in all global processes.
4. Getting developing societies to freely and competitively come to the global cultural fare as producer-societies.
5. A reevaluation of the parameters of cultural growth.

## CONCLUSION

It is our view that advocates of cultural imperialism theory who are still not convinced about the need for cultural development thinking in this era of globalization powered by improvements in ICT, should not forget that our cultural values have long merged with Western/European values since the days of imperialism/colonialism. There is therefore dysfunctionality in our cultural values and orientations as a result of these anti-global dispositions. The solution therefore lies in further spread and acceptance of the global culture and deeper and more committed integration into the global village. The fear that individual cultures and national identities will disappear should not be entertained because the world's great diversity will ensure that culture-specific, special interest fare remains in demand. Local societies and individual identities will never become American or western because of the globalization phenomenon, rather, we see a world of cultural pluralism, a one-world community inhabited by global citizens driven by the desire to live together in a spirit of global cooperation yet retaining their distinct features which make them who they are.

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