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A Study of the Negative Consequences of the Role of the Media in Educating the critical Audience from the Viewpoint of Adorno and Horkheimer

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ABSTRACT

Critical theorists of the Frankfurt School intended to strengthen the wisdom and consciousness of the members of the society including students, teachers, and the audience of the mass media by expressing their critical viewpoints in the field of education. From among the experts of this field of thinking, some individuals such as Giroux, Apple and Freire developed theories in the field of critical education. Some of other thinkers of the field such as, Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse have reviewed and analyzed the state of the media in educating the audience. The present paper examines the viewpoints of Horkheimer and Adorno on the media and then, it examines the negative consequences of the media from the viewpoint of critical thinkers, in educating the critical audience. From the viewpoint of critical thinkers such as Horkheimer and Adorno, the media has had negative consequences including mesmerized thinking, making the critical audience passive and maintaining the status quo as well as reviving capitalism, and it plays a role in weakening the enlightened and critical mind of the members of the society, especially lower classes of the society, by conveying targeted, abusive and exploitative messages.

Keywords: the media, the critical audience, Horkheimer, Adorno, mesmerized thinking, critical pedagogy

Media's role in Culture-making and Education

Today, a great part of educations is represented to the addressees through mass communicational instruments such as radio, television, satellite, and internet. All of these communicational instruments -either traditional or modern- which contain some message, are called media. Therefore, the word media refer to all kinds of message transfer instruments between senders and receivers, including newspaper, book, television, satellite, modern communicational and informational technologies and internet, etc. These instruments have some common properties such as unknown receivers, high dispatch, and multiplication of message (Dadgaran, 1384, P: 6)

Media play an important role in culture-making and education of all classes of society. Also, today media are applied as a message transfer tool during teaching and education (Ahadian, 1389). Although media perse are totally neutral, those messages which are transferred through them play a vital role in culture making and creation of clichéd thinking in receivers. Generation Cleavage as a social phenomenon, is one of the media's effects on education which literally means "being separated from a friend or someone" (Mansournezhad, 1382, p: 191). Moreover, Generation Partition refers to gradual separation of two or three successive generations from each other regarding geographical, emotional, intellectual and value factors (Spock, 1364, p: 259)

which is another consequence of media. Generation Gap and Generation Cleavage are synonyms as well and generation gap refers to the main differences between two generations regarding their experiences, values, norms, and generally refers to significant cultural differences between two generations (Panahi, 1383, p: 4) and media's role in causing such consequences is clearly observable.

Therefore, we should pay attention to the important educational status of media in culture-making and socialization of individuals. Communicational media control their receivers' wisdom by means of value transfer and train them as they desire. According to some sociologists "newspapers, periodicals, journals and specially television and modern satellite, electronic and digital media, are applied by wide groups of society including children, teenagers, and youth, and influence their attitudes and beliefs (Giddens, 1377, p:88). So, taking into consideration the importance and the negative or positive role of media in the society, scholars of critical school have paid attention to this issue and some of them have concentrated on culture and media domain and critically evaluated media's status in education and infusion of clichéd thinking.

Analysis of media according to theoreticians of Frankfurt critical school

By appearance of critical school and its blossom after formation of Frankfurt school in Germany, some scholars such as Habermas, Horkheimer, Gramsci, Freire, Adorno and Giroux, posed their ideas about different cultural and educational backgrounds. Some of the critical school scholars like Horkheimer and Adorno criticized media. Therefore, cultural and communicational theories of Frankfurt school are rooted in their view points. In their article under the title of "cultural industries and mass culture", they argue that cultural industries are a new part of informational institutions such as radio, press and cinema which are working in favor of industry owners. Hence, these cultural industries lead to cultural products' narcotizing, creation of wider commercial markets and political compatibility (cited Saei, 1382, p: 8). There are three theories regarding analyses of modern mass media which are rooted in Marxism: political economy, Hegemony, and critical theory. Critical theory, the same as Hegemony theory, studies the superstructure which refers to study of culture and technology, especially media technologies; but political economy studies the substructure that is the economical dimension (Mcquail, 1383. p: 99). Those theoreticians who follow culture-oriented approach for analysis of media, are highly influenced by critical scholars of Frankfurt school especially Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. This theory which emphasizes on mass media as a powerful mechanism of control and change, has managed to influence mass society and hegemony theories and change them (Mcquail, 1383. p: 99).

The common point between all Marxist views about culture and media is that all of them consider media to be a controlling tool in hands of capitalist dominant class of the society. Upper-class who is dominant over material devices and products, is dominant over immaterial and intellectual products as well and by means of their supervision over thoughts, opinions of the dominant class become dominant thoughts of the era.

Historians have provided lots of explanations about submission of working class and failure of Marx's prediction. Better payment, weak leadership of the party, changes of liberal governments, nationalism and so on, as well as globalization of the economy, appearance of "mass culture" by media, and commercialization of societies are mentioned as the main reasons which facilitated success of the capitalist regime (Poster, 1377. P: 174). In their analysis of this failure, Frankfurt scholars paid special attention to mass media's role in changing the natural rout of the history and distorting socialistic revolutions. They believe that capitalists have caused working class to yield by means of various devices such as media and these kinds of policies

have caused history to pass a false rout, because the ideology of the dominant class has managed to change economical conditions through a number of changes, especially attraction of working class.

In this way, production system, services and thoughts as a whole would be led by capitalist regime; even fine arts and opposition culture would be entangled in capitalism and would be represented as a commodity for attaining interest.

According to their media-oriented view which is associated with the notion of class-dominance, scholars of Frankfurt school consider media to be a powerful instrument which its function is to preserve existing condition, diffusion of ideology of dominant class and neutralization of workers' revolutionary activities. According to their point of view, media system is under the control of a few powerful groups and produce and diffuse contents which are adjusted with dominant-class interests and the receivers –who are mostly from lower classes of the society- are obliged to receive special kind of information and thoughts; dominant-class has monopolized media similar to a commercial firm, and deprives the receivers of access to alternative informational sources and its media consistently tries to prevent reflection of other voices and justify the dominant system by selection and filtering the information (Mcquail, 1983, p:126).

In one part of their theories, Frankfurt theoreticians pose important criticisms towards what is called industry of culture, which is a logical and official structure similar to television channels that control new culture. Cultural industry produces what it calls mass culture; a directed and fabricated culture which theoreticians are afraid of its two aspects: the first one is its fabricated nature; critical school calls this culture a pre-packed, mass-taker collection of thoughts which is diffused by mass media. The second aspect is its repressive effect on people (Ritzer, 1974, p: 204).

Critical School Theoreticians in Media and Culture Domain

Some scholars of critical school have focused on media and media culture and education which are represented for exploitation of underdog and feeble classes by dominant class, in order to analyze wisdom and awareness of individuals, including Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas. Their view points are briefly analyzed below.

Adorno and Horkheimer

As it was mentioned before, cultural and informational views of Frankfurt school are founded by Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Adorno (1903-1969). According to Horkheimer and Adorno, today and future's world is a totally controlled one and true freedom of human in this world is damaged because of logic developments. In today's world, individual's welfare and satisfaction do not realize, except in a historical procedure which is associated with decadence of subjectivity. This decadence causes assimilation of human awareness and understanding by means of directed information, and ignoring individual property and quality by means of evolution of production forms and changes of human mental construction because of equal socialization (Saei, 1982, p:8). Adorno and Horkheimer found out that capitalism has appropriated and industrialized all things that primary capitalism had left aside, namely hearth, spare time, entertainment and personal life. Capitalism is looking for new markets and penetrates in most private domains to expand the market. Capitalism in its early stages would benefit from mining and factory productions, but in present age and by leaving behind traditional communication methods, it has turned to electronic communication and its related consumer

commodities, and although lots of trains, cars and plains are produced yet, front edge of capitalism and its increasing interest consist of communicational methodology and its related materials (Englis, 1377, p: 189).

In media realm, Adorno analyzes technology limitations, especially media technologies and considers media's effect on people to be some kind of narcotization of noise and believes if one can name a positive aspect for new media, it is its ability to unify a society which rapidly goes towards dispersion and plurality; but this unity and unanimity are recurrent and banal and obviously without nobility. He argues that most of the current telecasts are aimed at production and are produced by cynical enlightenment and although they are seemingly against absolutism, they are based on authoritative and dictatorial beliefs of providers (Adorno, 1961, p: 22)

According to Adorno, the ideology of culture industry has such an ambient and extensive power that can easily substitute conformity for awareness. Anything is suitable for public consumption as long as it answers to minimum requirements. The purpose of standardization is to infer standard answers as cultural products which indicates a collection of responsive mechanisms that is aimed at decomposing reactions and debilitating individual resistance powers (Adorno, 1961, p: 22).

Adorno and Horkheimer, taking into consideration the relationship between culture and ideology, argue that technology, especially radio technology, itself decides about its affirmation and as radio is a sideways relationship agent with limited rebuttal possibility, takes an authoritative direction and its recommendations become a command or dictation and providers of its programs who consider themselves as missionaries of human freedom, change into mere dictators.

These two theoreticians analyze the step which was taken from telephone to radio. They believe that in a telephone communication, the audience is free and parties of the conversation are free to choose the subject of dialog themselves, but regarding radio all the users are auditors with similar conditions and they listen to what is broadcast (Poster, 1377, p: 20). Electronic media constantly repeat their despotic voice and message to be heard by mass; radio's mono-voice is a magic instrument which changes free and independent people into an aimless mass.

In one of their articles, Adorno and Horkheimer describe the culture industry to be one of the most important properties of instrumental rational dominion age and say that in modern capitalist age, combination of culture and entertainment has created a decadent mass culture. Consumers of this culture industry have no other choice, because they do not see anything beyond this tangible truth. The main function of cultural industry in advanced capitalist age is to abolish any possibility of essential opposition to the construction of established dominance. The society which is entangled in cultural industry, loses any redemptive power (Bashiriyeh, 1378, p: 185).

Herbert Marcuse

Thoughts of Marcuse (1895-1979) -Hegelian Marxist analyst and revolutionary German scholar- is an answer to failures of socialist and labor movements in Europe and victory of Fascism and lack of any social working and liberal power in capitalist society and also communist party's disability in "manifestation" of utopian picture which has remained in darkroom of Marxist and Idealist philosophy for a long time. Political theories of Marcuse entered policy realm and caused political university movements. He was looking for a new foundation for revolution by return to Hegel's philosophy. Departure point of his thought was a

dialectic representation of social life in an Hegelian way; one of them is at the level of pseudo-demands and the other one is at the level of true historic demands (Bashiryeh, 1380, p:195).

Marcuse used two concepts of "one dimensional man" and "packed culture" to criticize present condition of consciousness-raising represented by new mass communication instruments. He argues in current condition of the world, awareness is absorbed by social system and is formed by it from the beginning. So, what is manifested is not adaptation and consistency. Rather, all past cultural and moral heritage of human and methods of speech and thinking take an equal and consistent form as well (Mehdizadeh, 1380, p: 42).

Marcuse, in his "one dimensional man" book, suggests that current consumer and welfare society prevents criticism by answering to pseudo demands and pseudo desires which are imposed on people and creates a totalitarian environment regarding thoughts and values. Hence, thoughts and behaviors become one dimensional (cited in Bashiriyeh, 1378, p: 201).

Some of the important phenomena which cause one dimensional behavior are mass communication instruments and entertaining and also educational industries which eliminate individual creativity and thought. According to Marcuse consequences of such a situation are society's de-politicization and elimination of political and moral issues from social life.

Thus, in such a society public opinion and mass media are instruments of creating such an atmosphere. In this totalitarian system, one cannot naturally keep this delusion in mind that working class is a revolutionary one. Existing felicity, welfare and happiness are any way delusive and do not associate with true freedom. Rather it is rooted in realized capitalist government and economy (Bashiriyeh, 1378, p: 201).

Marcuse points to the concept of packed culture and in this regard emphasizes on resonant role of mass media and dissolution of cultural traditions of lower classes of the society in packed culture. Based on this theory, modern media has appeared in response to considerations of advertising industry and enhancement of consumption and has created some kind of pseudo understanding. In such a situation people have not understood their true interests and are accustomed to repressive, inept, integral social order.

In his 1961 article under the title of "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology", Marcuse argues that in current age, technology is organizing and changing social relations and represents behavioral and instrumental thoughts and patterns with the purpose of control and dominance. In the realm of culture, technology leads to creation of mass culture which entangles people in behavioral and intellectual dominant patterns. Thus, this becomes a powerful instrument for social control and dominance (Marcuse, 1961).

Jurgen Habermas

Jurgen Habermas is one of the other thinkers of critical school in culture and media realm. In his studies regarding formation of bourgeois general domain, he pays much attention to publication of periodicals. Critical press and moral periodicals which was published in 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, opened a new ground for public conversation and debates, and although they were related to literary and cultural criticism, their main concern were socio-political issues (Thompson, 1380, p: 88).

He argues that critical debates of such periodicals, had a changing and double effect on intrinsic form of modern dominions and in later periods communication again became the superior power because of emerging electronic new media.

Habermas believes the potential liberator power of media is based on their ability to aware their audience and he criticizes media because they do not permit to authentic and true

claims to appear and only suffice to yes/no answers. Habermas makes use of Adorno and Horkheimer's theories and argues that receivers are captives of media providers and are under constant bombardment of predetermined thought and admen who had dominance over media, do not leave them alone for a moment and consumers of media are generally receiving repeated debates.

Habermas considers two stages for creation of current mass media instruments. The first stage starts from 17th century till 18th, during which public domain consisted of bars and galleries and in this stage public opinion and eventually free newspaper were emerged by means of free discussions. The second stage includes late 19th till today. In this stage with appearance of syndicate, unions and political parties which had an essentially economic nature, public domain changed into leverage domain of coercion groups. Hence, the realm of public free opinions and debates, became an instrument for imposition, manipulation and directing of opinions by mass media (Mehdizadeh, 1380, p: 62).

Negative Consequences of the Role of the Media in Educating the critical Audience from the Viewpoint of Adorno and Horkheimer

According to some scholars of critical school like Adorno and Horkheimer, such an attitude towards industry of culture and media education may have negative consequences in Educating the critical Audience. Some of the most important negative consequences of media education in Educating the critical Audience are mentioned below, according to before mentioned sections.

Mesmerized Thinking

One of the most important negative consequences of culture industry and media education which is under dominance of exploiter-class, is creation of mesmerized thinking. An enlightenment thinking instrument –which was based on assimilation and identity- although was supposed to preserve freedom from fear of mythological references, now turned into a totalitarian socio-political dominance which deprives individuals of their personal freedom and creativity and changes both society and individuals into objects. In posterior capitalism, culture-making media make use of mass technical reproduction and help to predetermined production of all cultural products. This function standardizes all diversities and pluralities in a way that obedience and freedom cannot be distinguished any more. Hence, in a system which is based on exchange value, industry of culture changes any object into a commodity; no matter the object is economical or cultural (Adorno, 1991, p: 99).

This negative consequence is resulted from those who –similar to minor children- are captives of media and therefore captives of capitalist ideology, just as the children who do not possess critical mind and so do not choose their life style. Industry of culture destroys revolutionary orientations. In this arena one kind of human is generated which has lost his noble identity and has become bondman of consumer goods. Such an identity-less and self-alien human is called one dimensional man by Frankfurt school, Marcuse's one-dimensional man is representative of disappointment climax caused by modern industrial society conditions, in which redemptive powers are increasingly being collapsed; individuals have lost the ability to distinguish their true prudence and they are metamorphosed and a kind of pseudo welfare answers to the pseudo demands (Marcuse, 1961). According to theoreticians of Frankfurt school, the logic which was once enlightenment, changes into an Mesmerized thinking in modern world and following increasing loss of subjectivity during industrialization of society and in a world

with increasing organizational-administrative processes, humans change into instruments for scientific-technical predominance over nature (Adorno and Horkheimer, translator Farhad poor 1384, p: 210-221).

A Mesmerized thinking person gives up his freedom because of material interest, welfare and commodity and is disturbed by pseudo demands which are created during these processes (Marcuse, 1961).

Maintaining the Status Quo as well as Reviving Capitalism

As it was mentioned, the purpose of culture industry is to realize imperious goals. Exploiter groups continue their dominance over working class through these media in order to gain their capitalistic interests. Therefore, main structural work of culture industry is based on entertainment which is conjunction point between capitalism and culture. Because culture industry moderates the aggression resulted from capitalism by presentation of entertainment which contains everything from immediate reactions of receivers to coordination of all the elements. In contrast to classic arts which contain an intrinsic tension between form and content, culture industry does not imply such tension, so it facilitates capitalism purpose which is to gain benefit (Adorno and Horkheimer, translator Farhad poor 1375, p: 190).

Media which are serving for dominant-class interests, create entertaining programs appropriate for every class of the society in any age and impose predetermined and planned beliefs to the feeble-class to persuade them that existing situation is the most ideal one and this can stabilize overbearing.

Acquiescence of Worker Class and their Non-Improvement

Adorno and Horkheimer write "the basic function of culture industry in advanced capitalist age is to eliminate any possibility of essential opposition against dominance construction. A society which is entangled in cultural industry will lose any emancipation ". From Frankfurt school point of view, culture can be considered as a true one to the extent that it is not associated with the repressive and dominant system of everyday life and beyond this extent it is not culture any more, it rather will be "industry of culture". Industry of culture, by elimination of minimal tensions between opposite poles, shunts any contribution of intrinsic and meaningful content to the style. Final compatible and concordant poles are sorrowfully equal and identical; total issue can be substituted for partial one and vice versa (Adorno and Horkheimer, translator Farhad poor, 1384, p: 66).

According to Adorno, ideology of culture industry possesses such an extensive and comprehensive power that it easily substitutes conformity for awareness. Everything is suitable for public consumption to the extent which it satisfies minimum demands. The purpose of standardization is inference of standard responses as cultural products which indicate a collection of responsive mechanisms to decompose reactions and debilitate individual resistance powers (Adorno, 1961, p: 22).

According to what was said, reproduction of power which is easily established for dominant group by means of media, can have destructive effects on other classes of the society, especially worker class and the most important effect can be acquiescence of worker class as a subaltern one. This can gradually cause other classes –except middle class- of the society to believe that this power is completely legitimate and there is no right for opposition and it will cause more and more reproduction of power.

Socialization of Individuals in Favor of Dominant Power

In previous sections, the media's role in creation of new culture and generation gap or cleavage was mentioned. According to critical theoreticians, these consequences will be challenging when authoritarians are behind them. Critical theoreticians believe that in western countries mass media are often under control or possession of dominant class and therefore cultural forms and fabrications are in hands of them and they can make use of public media to produce mass culture. Hence, there is a relationship (although indirect) between possession of culture-creating media (that is class-power) and content of the media (that is mass culture) and in other words, mass culture is the culture of capitalism age which by suppression of true demands and substitution of pseudo and routine demands, creates a decadent consumerist culture to insure capitalism's profitability in the best way (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1980, p: 69).

Since dominant class can facilitate gaining more power through power control instruments such as media, it represents a definitive and dominant culture in the community by means of some instruments, and by more repetition this culture gradually becomes dominant culture of the society and its violation will be against the law. In this kind of purposive socialization which aims at exploitation of feeble groups, the main role of the media in capitalist system is inflammation and then sideways gratification of pseudo and fabricated demands. One tangible example can be extensive advertisements of television with the purpose of making individuals socialized, silent and associated with policies of the dominant system.

Conclusion

Today, media are so extensive all over the society that no audience/ receivers can be found who is intentionally or unintentionally not exposed to direct or indirect media messages. In the present paper some of the intentional or unintentional consequences of media regarding culture making –as the main factor of cultural diversity and change- were mentioned. Also because of the importance of the media in current world, some viewpoints of Frankfurt critical school thinkers were introduced. Scholars such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas beside criticizing negative role of media in debilitation of receivers ' wisdom and awareness and diffusion of imperious thinking, believe that beyond media education, some capitalist self-keepers make use of feeble groups and exploiting thoughts in order to reach their exploitative goals. Some of the negative consequences of the role of the media in educating the critical audience, according to Adorno and Horkheimer were mentioned in final section of the paper, including mesmerized thinking, maintaining the status quo as well as reviving capitalism, and socialization of feeble groups in favor of dominant class and making grounds for acquiescence of worker class.

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