'Cyber- Colonialism': Ethical Solutions and Ethnographic Alternatives

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Abstract

Cyber-Colonialism denotes the aspect of imperialism on indigenous cultures, languages, lifestyle, politics, folk media and other native identities through cyber space. Corporates, and colonial capitalist forces retain the social, cultural and political cleavages in order to capture and control the global market for trade and tax. First portion of this particular paper centers all of its discourses mainly on 'Cyber-Colonialism' and its impact in online media. Various repercussions that the Cyber-Colonialism causes to indigenous and native people and to their culture are discussed and described in the second part of this paper. The third phase of this paper proposes ethnographic solutions for these online ethical considerations through an observational tool called virtual ethnography.

Key words: Cyber –Colonialism, Colonialism, Ethnography, Virtual Ethnography

Introduction

The recent decade has brought number of changes and challenges in the field of computer mediated communication channels. Today computer is not just a problem solving mathematical calculator but an interconnected web which connects and communicates with the entire world. On one side it witches the unfortunates to be its devote slaves and the other hand it liberates the technologically crippled to stand erect and upright. Natalia Rybas, while commenting on the development of online media platforms, would say that "this popular mythology of the digital boom promises a placeless, raceless, bodiless future enabled by technological progress" (Gajjala, 2009).

So far people had been introduced to broadcasting media which enthralled everyone as loyal consumers through various programs. But today due to the advent of online media, people get more space and opportunity to become not only as the media consumers but also as content contributors, not only as mute admirers but also as media participants. James Slevin argues that internet is presenting the individuals and organizations with new opportunities for dialogue and deliberation. He also reiterates

that it also empowers people to make things happen rather than have things happen to them, and facilitates new forms of solidarity and cooperation (Slevin, 2000). This particular paper centers all of its discourses mainly on the concept of colonialism and its impact in online media and it also discusses on various repercussions that the Cyber-colonialism causes to indigenous and native people and to their culture.

The modern online media has entirely changed the lifestyle itself.Whatever is widely spoken and spread over the cyber space is becoming popular and news worthy, but the remote and real people's issues are hardly noticed.Appathurai's writings focus on the processes of global cultural transmission wherein he enumerates five dimensions of global flows. '*Ethnoscape'* highlights the flow of people around the world, *'Technoscape'* ensures the flow of technological convergence, *'Financescape'*proposes the flow of capital on a global level, '*Mediascape'* makes way for the modes of mediated audio visual distribution and the '*Ideoscape'* portrays the images that are invested with political – ideological meaning (Wilson, 2009).The corporates and the colonial capitalists who try to dominate and control the entire world through online media employ these five dimensions of global flow in order to encaptivate the global market and to maintain the 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' paradigm.This dominantonline flow in cyber space influences each and every individual in such a way; what a person has to wear, whom to vote, what to think, what to buy, where to go and how to live. As a result personal intentions and thought process have been replaced by virtual space authorized and regularized by world cyber-power countries and superior ideologies.World Wide Web tries its level best to colonise every indigenous culture and every individual thought. Once the virtual colonialism has been systematically executed, an individual is forced to be in a situation where s/he cannot but consume the virtual reality as his or her own personality. As a consequence, fear of being exploited, the loss of identity and privacy concerns stand out as important ethical problems which have to be addressed immediately. The first part of my scientific paper aims to establish the invasion of online media into one's personal space and how does it lead an individual into anera of ethical exclusion.Various theories and models that uphold the colonial impact of online media are elaborately dealt in the second part. And the last portion of my paper aims to find out the ethical solutions and ethnographic alternatives to cope up and compete with the emerging online enforcement.

Research Problem

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse qualitatively the impact of 'Cyber-Colonialism'in Online Media Platforms.

This research is based on the qualitative approach and therefore it focuses on how and why, rather than where and when. It is subjective in nature and therefore I used method like observation as a tool to analyze and evaluate the colonial impact in cyber space.

Research Objectives

1. to analyse qualitatively the impact of 'Cyber-Colonialism'in Online Media Platforms.

2. topropose the ethical and ethnographic alternatives to 'Cyber-Colonialism' in order to enable a democratic cyber space which is free of cultural hegemony and political vendetta.

Research Questions

1. How Cyber-Colonialism impactsOnline Media Platforms?

2. What are the ethical and ethnographic solutionsto enable a democratic cyber space which is free of cultural hegemony and political vendetta?

Theoretical Framework

McLuhan's Global Village Theory

Marshall McLuhan's concept of 'global village' in 1960 gives space for various interpretations and clarifications. From the interpretation of Elissavet Georgiadou, in her thesis on 'Marshall McLuhan's 'global village' and the Internet', we could understand clearly that Mc Lucan's epitome of 'global village' doesn't indicate the hegemonic principle of monopolizing the entire world as one whole. But he intended that the information will flow to every corner of the world in high speed and consequently there will be total involvement of each of us in the lives and actions of all (Georgiadou, 1995). Based on this particular interpretation of global village theory, we shall analyze the cyber space and how far the content generated in WWW is contributing for the lives and actions of all.

Electronic Colonialism Theory

E-Colonialism theory explains how electronic media sustains and substantiate a digital dynasty of 'the few' at the expense of 'the other'. According to Suja, this digital dynasty is not based on military power or land acquisition but based on conquering minds through electronic media. She argues that E-Colonialism systematically influences the minds, attitudes, values and languages of individuals around the globe (Suja, 2015). In this paper, the theory of E-colonialism is used as a parameter to observe the elements of electronic colonialism in online media.

Said's Theory of Orientalism

Edward W. Said define Orientalism as"a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction madebetween "the Orient" and "the Occident" (Said, 1978). Orientalism is an oppressive theory which justifies dominating, restructuring and having authority over the orient who are considered as the subordinates of the society. In this paper, the theory of orientalism has been

adopted in order to monitor the oppressive nature of internet content waged against the subordinates of the cyber society.

Methodology

According to Tylor (1871), "ethnography is the study of individual cultures"(Mahendrakumar, 2013). We cannot simply confine ethnography into the capsule of cultural studies alone but it has broader scope and territories."Ethnography is steeped in the language of ethics"(Koehler, 2012). Ethical perspective of ethnography carefully concerns on misinformation, privacy, and confidentiality of the people. It projects the facts and figures in the best authentic manner without altering or manipulating the core subject of study.

Virtual Ethnography is the field of study which revolves around cultural and social anthropology in the cyber environment. Rohit Raj proposes "Cyber Ethnography as the necessity of involvement in multifaceted social settings where the internet is a part of everyday life" (Mathur, 2009). Virtual Ethnography in online media analyses media text, online media content generators, online media industries and the social contexts within which they exist.

Research Design

Virtual Ethnographic Approach

This paper studies the behaviour of people on the internet from a virtual ethnographical perspective. This is a paradigm shift from observation of social space to observation of cyber space. Brain Wilson says that "the role of the ethnographer is to uncover contradictions that emerge when comparing the ideological fronts presented by power groups and the actual practices of these groups" (Wilson, 2009). Therefore taking the spirit of a virtual ethnographer, I try to analyse the colonial impacts and implications from various political, social, religious and economic power structures in the online media platforms.

Descriptive and narrative presentation

As this paper is based on qualitative methodology, the observationon various virtual spaces will be presented in descriptive and narrative form. The impact of Cyber-colonialism on online media platforms, the hegemonic ideological strategies meticulously maintained and managed by power centers, the annihilation of cultural and linguistic environment and other ethical problems in virtual space are elaborately discussed and described in this paper.

The Evolutionary Process of Colonialism

1. Colonialism: A Strategy for the Destruction of Pluralism

The historical traces of colonialism in India had been sensed at the arrival of the Portuguese, Vasco da Gama, in 1498. In the beginning this invasion was regarded as a pathway for a tie-relationship for trade between Indian-subcontinent and the European establishments. The Portuguese could monopoly the spice trade only till thearrival of north European nations such as English *East India Company* (EIC) and the Dutch *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) in the 17th century (Kansal, March, 2017). In order to trade their products all around Indian subcontinent, the British regime planned to annex all weak and fragmented princely states as one. As a result the Doctrine of SubsidiaryAlliance was introduced(Kansal, March, 2017). According to this doctrine, the British would provide some financial and military assistance to the weak princely states for protecting themselves from rival internal fringe elements and from other neighboring states. Whenever the princely states failed to pay back the due to the British, then they annexed every state with the other for easy control and administration. When we analyse the strategy of British's market expansion in India, it had used a strategic principle called Annexation, which means capturing and wrapping everything in one bundle. This annexation strategy of British had thus paved way for colonialization so as to establish their political monopoly in India for few decades.

The Indian society had never been aware of its slavery and the impact of colonialism for centuries as it comfortably accommodated itself with the comfortability of British colonialism. Hegal poses it as the paradigm of the master- slave relationship which highlights that the weak-willed slave preferring life to liberty, accepts his subjection to the victorious master (Ghandi, 1998). The people of India thus became as the sincere and silent spectators of slavery for years until the feeble voice of Indian Independence roared in high volume.

2. Colonialism and its Oppressive Educational Policies

In 1830s when Macaulay arrived India, oriental learning schemes were in practice. Students learned in their own vernacular languages and other major languages like Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. Macaulay having very much rooted in the spirit of western

culture and heritage believed that making native Indians learning English could make them more 'civilized'. And therefore Macaulay wrote a Minute on Education dated February 2, 1835 to the Governor General William Bentick asking him to teach European literature and science among the native Indians as the source of education (Thirumalai, 2003). On March 7, 1835, the Governor General agreed with Macaulay's Minute andwrote, "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of Europeanliterature and science among the natives of India," thus Macaulay promoted and established the use of English language in Indian educational system (Thirumalai, 2003). The British education system designed by Lord Macaulay thoroughly has been yielding to the need of the western world till today. Edward W Said would term it as Orientalism which is dominating, restructuring and having authority over the orient cultures (Desai, 2005). The powerful impact made by Lord Macaulay's education policy helped the western world to continue colonizing India by imposing their culture and creed as supreme and subtle. It brought everyone under one umbrella which consequently made the indigenous, native and orient cultures to fade away.

Though India got independence, the face of colonialism and the imperial monopoly of the west had not changed. The continuous colonial war against the very cultural establishment of the country push the native and indigenous identities to the verge of elimination. K.N. Panikkar in his book, 'Colonialism, Culture and Resistance' quotes Ngaugi Wa Thiongo, an African novelist who identifies the cultural bomb as the biggest weapon of colonialism. He reiterates that, "The effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves"(Panikkar, 2007). The colonial forces today use various means like broadcasting and new media platforms to annihilate the plurality of cultural richness and essences of a country to conquer and colonize and thus to remain one supreme power.

Impact of 'Cyber- Colonialism'

1. Hegemonic Dominance on the Indigenous People through Online Space

During the period of colonialization, before independence, enforcement was imposed based on the muscle power of military forces. Once colonized nations got independence, colonization has still remained active with different name and nature. According to the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony, mass media are tools that ruling elites useto "perpetuate their power, wealth, and status by popularizing their own philosophy, culture and morality"(Lull, 1995). People those who have been subjugated for centuries remain receptive to all the dominant ideologies and create within themselves a false consciousness. Media industries which have been called as the manufactures of hegemonic ideologies play a vital role in creating such false consciousness by frequent dissemination of fake and paid news contents through online platforms.

The impact of the online media on the very essence of indigenous cultures and folk artifacts prompts to analyze the prominent and dominant corporations which control the entire structure and functioning of online media. Graham Murdock in his article, *Large corporations and the control of the communicationsindustries* emphasizes the role of capitalism in capturing and controlling the media corporations. He points out that "the owners of the new communications companies weremembers of the general capitalist class and they used their control over culturalproduction to ensure that the dominant images and representations supported the existing social arrangements"(Michael Gurevitch, 1982). Online social network platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Netflix, Amazon prime and WhatsApp can directly or indirectly disseminate agenda setting propaganda of what the capitalist class wants the indigenous or the orient to think and do. Recently Cambridge Analytica, the controversial UK political consultancy, is one of those many attempts made by the hegemonic corporate media world on the common folk of various countries. Facebook was directly blamed for data breach and accused for letting private firms to analyze the likes and dislikes of the users and the priority of the content generators. Cambridge Analytica was accused of using data of millions of Facebook usersto influence Indian elections through targetedadvertising. One of the online portals, *The Print*, claims on its website that

Cambridge Analytica worked on the Bihar assembly elections in 2010, and its clients won a landslide victory(Vij, 2018). And thus it is very evident to claim that internal and external capitalist forces encaptivate the cultural and ideological priorities of the indigenous and enforce their cultural and ideological priorities on the colonized societies as submissive subordinates.

2. Online Global Market and its Effect on Offline Local Markets

Liberalization, privatization and globalization facilitated and introduced the paradigm of Neo-Colonialism in India. Oxford Reference Dictionary defines Neo-Colonialism as the control of the economic and political systems of one state by a more powerful state, usually the control of a developing country by a developed one.Period of colonialism experienced invasion through trades and invasion through military powers, whereas Cyber- Colonialism emphasizes and primarily aims at investing capital in the developing countries and makes them ever dependent to the colonizers through online platforms.Their key is to trade, not give aid(Parenti, 2011). Frankly speaking, the spirit of colonialism has been the same but the platform of trade is different, non-territorial and virtual.

Online marketing made life easier today. One click of the button would bring groceries to furniture at our door steps. Top multinational companies invest millions of dollars to grab the online market in India. Online marketing giants like Amazon, Flipkart, Jabong, Snapdeal, etc., use creative and integrative marketing strategies to woo the online consumers. Advertising has been heavily aimed at the target market through various media vehicles. Ahrabie Kirubasuthan and Niranjan in their article "*the effects of international marketing environment on domestic markets*" reiterate that "online global market affects the infant industry, small scale industry and medium scaleindustry in the way of invasion of cultural sovereignty, imported goods available in the market at the price equivalent to the domesticprice, decrease in the external value of the currency, accumulation of resources and out flow of the goods and services" (Niranjan).

Due to the wide expansion of the online global market, local market gets diminished and fades away without any trace. The monopoly of the online global market precipitates financial loss to thousands of farmers and other domestic merchants. And again as a result, indigenous and native farmers remain submissive to the hegemonic lordship of

online global marketers. Thus colonialism through online media continues to maintain the cleavage of division between the oppressor and the oppressed.

3. Mediacracy – Ruling over Media Independency

John Mutukat defines Mediacracy as "a situation where the mainstream mass media effectively has control over the voting public" (Mutukat, 2016). More over mainstream online media-campaigns are systematically designed as powerful agenda setting vehicles. Today Online Media determines the public opinion and influences the public whom to vote and what to discuss and what to decide. And thus they decide what is right and wrong in the society. As the pattern of colonialism bundled all the different and diverse kingdoms together as one unified country in order to easily trade and tax, corporate media agencies in align with government machinery coercively and conditionally disseminate news and propagate paid views.

Mutukat deliberately reiterates that a handful of giant global media corporations that owns and operates almost 90% mainstream media and that cater to almost 95% people in the world. They monopolize and own the infosphere (which is the online environment or the cyber space with a lot of information) and thus colonize the deprived class easily through online media vehicles (Mutukat, 2016). The colonial corporates employ full time IT wings and do timely propaganda so as to reinforce hegemonic ideologies and colonial narratives. In the world of Mediacracy, media will be in a position of making and unmaking leaders. Media trails and mediated discourses uphold the power principles of the colonial corporates and propagate political agendas and proliferate huge businesses.

Due to the impact of the mighty media corporates with celebrity appeal, orient and indigenous cultural artifacts and folklores have less access to online media vehicles. Cultural arts which voiced the voice of the oppressed have been systematically silenced. Folk medium is no longer attractive to the large sectors today. Sensational, superstitious, cheap and cine themes attract the viewers more than ever. Mediacracy thus curtails the free mediated expressions of social, political and cultural elements and ultimately aims to make money through media businesses.

Ethical Solutions and Ethnographic Alternatives

1. Promoting Participatory Online Communication from Grass Root Level

We live in a land of multifaceted cultures and customs. Each indigenous culture is unique and special. Cultural monopoly is entirely a sign of hegemony. Promoting and protecting indigenous cultural plurality is only feasible when the consumers become the content generators, spectators as sponsors, passive receivers as active participants. The grass root level participation in planning, producing and disseminating ideas and issues relevant to the context could be a right alternative to other mainstream media.

Paulo Freire insists this down top approach as democratic participatory communication which emancipates and empowers the culture and people of the context.We could very well understand these in the words of Paulo Freire, "Liberatory dialogue is a democratic communication which disconfirms domination and illuminates while affirming the freedom of the participants to remake their culture"(Mefalopulous, 2004).

Those who talk about participatory communication today in fact got influenced from the very concept of Paulo Freire. He tries to explain the impact of hegemonic communicationrelating it with school education. In Schools, the language of the teachers is mostly monologue. Here the teacher is acting like a source of knowledge who deposits knowledge to students who are considered to be empty vessels. In this approach, the student has nothing to do with the process of education. Here he/she is just a passive recipient who has nothing to do with the context and the text(Mefalopulous, 2004). Paulo Freire strongly condemns this model of communication and he stresses on the dialogical and democratic model of communication.

Online media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Online Community Radios, Web Portals etc.,can act as explicit medium for indigenous cultural expressions. It should emerge as a strong force from the grass root level wherein participation and decision making are more democratic and emancipatory. Ethnographic creative heads and IT experts should evolve with social media platforms which exclusively propose and portray handles with ethnic values and ethnographic views.

2. Ethnic Minority Online Media Platforms against Digital Dynasty

Most of the online webpages and web contents generated in World Wide Web platforms are majority centered. The voice and views of the many cannot always be considered as the voice and views of all. The most trending handles in social media may be liked and shared by a few. It doesn't mean whatever is said and upheld in the trending handle is assented and acknowledged by all. The concept of majoritarianism in online media manipulates the reality and wages conceptual war against minority communities living in the social and cultural peripheries of our country.

Fake and paid news generated by the creative minds, accepting the concept of majoritarianism, deliberately target to tarnish the existential rights of the minority communities. The study that has been released by the Observer Research Foundation in March 2018 is quite astounding. Maya Mirchandani, a senior fellow at the Observer ResearchFoundation quotes this study report and comments that fake news and hatred views on religion and 'religio-cultural' practices related to food and dresswere the most explicit basis for hate as expressed in Indian social media.Most of the comments were all about incited bodily harm orviolence against people belonging to India's Muslim community whocomprise about 180 million of the country's 1.2-billion-strongpopulation (Mirchandani, August, 2018).

The wild and wide concept of centralizing majoritarianism is not only prevalent in India but also across the world. This digital dynasty centers not only on religions for its personal embodiment. It explicitly functions and systematically fabricates its version of oppressive vendetta all across the world through fake and hate filled views on areas like culture, language, caste, creed, race and nationality.

Stephen Harold in his book 'Ethnic Minority Media', reiterates that "if minority media did not contribute to ethnic cohesion and cultural maintenance to some extent, there would be little justification for their existence except as a marketing tool and an instrument of social control"(Riggins, 1992).This majoritarian oppressive social media handle heads have to be constructively challenged by 'minoritarian ethnic' solidity through alternative online media platforms. Narratives of cultural expression and ethnic dimensions have to be disseminated without ostracizing or affecting the sentiments of the other.

3. Validating Folk Languages and Artifacts in Online Media

There is a systematic gap between online and offline population. Those dominant groups thoroughly engage themselves in online platforms and conveniently create virtual space which supports their languages and web modules. Consequently other local and tribal languages have no space in virtual environment. Our globe is a mother of various landscapes and language ethnic groups. Presently around 180 countries are members of the United Nations wherein people speak between 3000 to 4000 languages. And the painful truth is that half of these languages are about to disappear as the colonial dominance on these indigenous languages are heavy and drastic on these days. Stephen Harold opines that the restrictions of languages favour the cultural practices, institutions and history of one or two dominant groups to the disadvantages of the other(Riggins, 1992). As the result of Macleay's educational policy in India, the British colonialism established English language as supreme over the other native languages. In the same manner the digital dynasty also tries to construct a virtual platform that supports only the dominant languages at the expense of the other native and indigenous languages.

It was estimated that in 2001, 429 million people around the world are online, which implies 6 percent of the total world population. Surprisingly from these 429 million people, 41 percent of people are from North America, 27 percent from Europe and only 20 percent of the online population from the Asia Pacific (Hartley, 2002).It is the high time for the indigenous intellectuals to wake up and realize the impressive need of the hour to compete with the 'digital dynasty'.In spite of this digital divide, ethnic languages, folk dance, street plays, puppet show, folk music, poetries, instrumentals, cultural nuances, native medical details, folk marshal art forms, artifacts etc., are to be preserved, promoted and propagated in the virtual space digitally.

4. Celebrating Pluralistic Principles in Online Spaces

India is a pluralistic country composed of various linguistic, cultural, religious and social elements. Indians throughout historic evolution have learned to cohabit with one another in spite of cultural, religious, social fusions. This rich tradition and life style have taught them to accept and respect the individuality of every community in particular and the plurality of the nation in general. Once Mahatma Gandhi said, "I don't want my house to be walled on all sides and the windows stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be

blown about my house as freely as possible, but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any one of them" (Real, 1989). Though our Indian secular lifestyle teaches us the principles of plurality to cohabit with the other and inhibit the principles of polarity, oppressive and paid online media houses colonize the young minds through 'WWW' for the sake of exploitive political and derogative communal interest. Michael proposes alternative solutions in his book, 'Super Media - A Cultural Studies approach', "The media are not someone else's cultural instruments: they are ours. Critical research seeks to empower individuals to criticize and resist all that is inadequate in media and yet to do so without losing the ability to appreciate, express and celebrate through media"(Real, 1989).Online Media are supposed to be the mirror of society and expression of different social and cultural narratives without wounding the other. Online media techies should celebrate the cultural differences of the country. Media houses and content generators should come forward to annihilate paid news and appreciate people's views that celebrate pluralism.

Conclusion

Thus today online web based environment leads to deregulating market economy, expanding global capitalism, blurring borders, transforming everyday life and reconfiguring social relations (Gajjala, 2009). Having known the wide-reach and power of online media, corporates and other colonial forces make use of this particular platforms to influence the masses. These influencing strategies are systematically launched in order to ensure three different purposes. The first one is to place the oppressive and dominant cultural components on the online pedestal as supreme. The second purpose of the corporates being active in the online space is to colonise the entire web space especially for trade and tax. And the third purpose is to launch a campaign politically or socially in order to gain power and privilege. In brief, 'Cyber-Colonialism' and its strategies maintain the components of colonialism and thus push the other indigenous and native cultural components to the periphery. And therefore the ethnographic alternatives mentioned above have to be seriously considered and widely discussed.

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