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## New Media and Ideology: A Critical Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Media is considered as one of the ideological apparatuses. This research is based on the question in parallel of enhancing technology and the formation of new media, as well as change passive audience into the active user, can these media still be called ideological? If so, the question is that how does the new media, despite the adaptation of interaction from the internet, find the ideological function? This paper discusses the role of the concept of the ideology for understanding social media critically. This study based on Althusser's definition of ideology and Habermas's theory about the public sphere creates consultative democracy led it to evaluate new media, their behavior and practices. The paper was developed based on a qualitative approach and descriptive-analytical method. As a result, new media owners are looking to create a two-tier Internet in which commercial content is more important than public content. Commercial content is managed by the ruling power and is governed by an ideology, which is the ideology of the ruling class. On the contrary, public content is controlled by media owners and contains a variety of ideologies that carry different ideas and meanings. The contemporary media system, through its ownership has divided media audiences into smaller groups (specific audiences), and has severely restricted fair access and participation in the public sphere, so that the ideological aspect of new media remains unchanged, but it emerges in the new shapes.

**Keywords:** ideology, internet, new media, public sphere, social media.

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1. This article is adapted from the PhD thesis entitled "Theoretical and Aesthetic Foundations of Interactive Television".



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## **Introduction and Statement of the Problem**

### **New Media and New Technologies**

As parallel as science and technology have become the accelerating force for social development, society's attention and demand for information and technology have expanded so that it can be said that we are in the information age (also known as the Computer Age, Digital Age, or New Media Age). Some consider evolving information to include three periods: "first, the information age, including newspapers, radio and television, second, information period developed by the Internet, satellite television, and mobile phones, and third, information age, which was the result of the convergence of primary and secondary information age media led to emerging smart TVs, social media, web television and websites, Video hosts, etc." (Iranga, 2016: 20). The third information era can be equated with emerging new media and advances in new media technologies.

Many scholars believe that "Advances in new technologies related to new media have direct impact on the generation, place and time of media content consumption; They allow us, transform institutions, liberate and invade individuals' privacy" (Silverstone, 1999: 10). New media is comprised of websites, online video/audio streams, email, online social platforms, online communities, online forums, blogs, Internet telephony, Web advertisements, online education and many more.

For the sake of our discussion, we will subsume social media under the term new media.

With social media and the ability to transfer information over the Internet, the audience can use media content at any time and place and by any means. Digital technologies change all social practices and transform the communication field almost entirely. The number of people using social media increases every year.

Social media are different from traditional media in many ways. The number of activists in social media is unlimited, there is no geographical border, there is two-way communication, and the audience has a lot of power in how and when to use media content. In addition, the audience changes from a passive state to an active audience and is able to not only receive content in the communication cycle, but also the producer and sender of content. In general, anyone with Social Media Accounts- Social Media Accounts means any websites, applications and similar electronic means by which users are able to create and share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (including texts, photos and videos without limitation) or to participate in social networking- can have their own media and make their content available to the public of the world.

Social media is a collective term for websites and applications which focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Social media has become a key term in New Media and Communication Studies and public discourse for characterising websites and social media platforms - like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and more.

Despite the above changes, the principles governing these media are still the same as traditional media? Interaction as feature of Internet and social media stress new technologies' transformative power. Do interaction transfer power from up to down? The interaction in this paper challenges the ideological nature of the social media.

The aim of this study is to investigate the structure and function of social media in relation to ownership and content.

### **The Question That Arises Is:**

How do new media become ideological in nature, despite the possibility of audience interaction and agency? In fact, the media is an ideological apparatus that directs and controls public opinion towards dominating the ruling class by providing the consent of the dominated class. Meanwhile, the stability of capitalist society stems originated from the ideological dominance of the ruling class. This question examines, compares, and analyzes the structure of new media with an epistemological approach. What is important in the communication system and the communication cycle is formed in spite of these elements; it is the producer and distributor of content, and audience that these three elements should be considered in any study of media issues. Understanding the role of new technologies in shifting the field of activity of traditional media and their impact on those three elements is very important.

This paper tries to profoundly investigate social media based on the concept of the public sphere. The public sphere is just one way of achieving this aim, there is other social theory concept such as ideology that needs to be used in the field of Internet and social media.

It includes in three sections as followed: the first section is about media ownership and second section regarding content of social media and the third one is about ideology. The research method in this paper is based on practical evidence and descriptive arguments and is derived from the collected information, analytical, perceptual and classified descriptions. Finally, the results and inferences are extracted from the obtained data.

## Literature review

The research which has been conducted in the field of new media falls into two categories, which are: research that examines the functions, changes, and effects of new media in particular on social media (Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, etc.) and research that the cognition and the positive and negative consequences of these media are their main issue.

Christian Fuchs (2014) in her book "Social Media: A Critical Introduction" proposes a theoretical framework for a critical understanding of social media, based on which the social media context has been criticized and challenged. The book *New Media Monopoly* by Ben Bagdikian (2004) shows that with the expansion of the media, ownership is still in the hands of the five major media companies. Barry Schwartz (2004), author of *The paradox of choice: Why more is less*, argues that too many choices lead to less choice and confusion. He seems to view the process of transmitting information as ideological. Neil Postman (2011) in *Technoplay* in Chapter Seven of this book, "Machine Ideology: Computer Technology", believes that our thoughts are guided by this device and that it dominates all aspects of our lives. Aghili (2018), in his article "The role of new media in the political development of third world countries" has dealt with the effects of the Internet in the field of political development. Yazdani's article (2017) "Beneficial and Harmful Effects of Using New Communication Media (Internet, Satellite and Mobile Phone) from the perspective of Bahar High School Female Students" deals with a comparison between the harms and benefits of social media. Khaniki and Barakat (2015) in the article "Representation of cultural ideologies in computer games" have analyzed the content of games by semiotic method and shown that the content of games has an essential role in the transmission of cultural ideologies. The article by Fathi and Mokhtarpour (2014) "Examines the role and impact of new visual media in changing the lifestyle of students" and concludes that new visual media (Facebook and Instagram) lead to the formation of a special lifestyle. In an article entitled "Analyzing ideological discourse on social media: A case study of the abortion debate" the authors address the issue of abortion on social media. This article analyzes the public discourse on the subject with more than 700,000 tweets and categorizes it into different ideologies (Sharma et al., 2017). Wendy Chun (2005) mentions in the article "On software, or the persistence of visual knowledge", software is a functional analog to ideology but does not target social media. Cherribi (2006) in "From Baghdad to Paris: Al-Jazeera and the Veil" shows that the more powerful a media outlet is in attracting audiences and gaining credibility, the more it will apply to the other sides of the triangle, namely power, and ideology.

Reviewing earlier studies, what is emphasized in this article is the study of the structure and characteristics of new media with an ideological approach that has not been studied and researched in the above-mentioned literature.

### **Theoretical Framework and Research Concepts**

To answer the research questions, two theoretical approaches of Jürgen Habermas's (1929) "public sphere" and Louis Althusser's (1918-1990) theory of ideology have been used. From the first approach to the study of whether the "public sphere" applies to new media and has created a space for democracy; and the second approach has been used to study and analyze ideology in new media. The concepts that should be researched conceptually are the term new media and its characteristics and the concept of interaction in new media to determine the extent of the authority given to the audience.

### **Habermas and the Public Sphere**

Habermas, a German sociologist affiliated with the Frankfurt School of Criticism, seeks to examine the relationship between popular culture and capitalism and authoritarianism in the twentieth century. In his view, in the public sphere, individuals interact with each other by observing preconditions for achieving awareness, free dialogue in discussions about the structure and organization of society, which oppose to public opinion resulting from political, economic, or media control (Habermas, 2008: 20-36). Habermas considers the formation of public opinion through free logical discourse to be a key element of consultative democracy. This public sphere in which such discourse takes place is based on free access, freedom, equality, legitimacy and the excellent participation of citizens. Garnham argues that "the concept of the public sphere emerges as the central center of media institutions in creating a space for discourse to determine the way the country is governed, the participation of community members, and the discussion of current issues" (Garnham, 2020: 361). In the public sphere, the ideas presented form the basis of political discourse, consensus, and democratic decision-making. With a view to the democratic dimension of the public sphere, democracy needs informed citizens; therefore, the media should provide them with the necessary sources of news and information to identify common issues. In contrast, this necessity creates many problems regarding the nature and direction of public discourse in a mobile and homogeneous society (Crossley & Roberts, 2004). According to Habermas's description of the public sphere, we can place the focus of the public sphere on contemporary

media studies in its role in informing and awareness the audience. This requires that the media not be dominated by the ruling class, which will be explored later.

### **Ideology**

The term of ideology was first used in 1796 by Destute De Tracy (1836-1754) (Aqabakhshi & Afshari Rad, 2008: 92). For the early Marxists, ideology was originally a false and distorted consciousness of a particular class about social issues, but over time its negative connotations diminished. Then Ideology found a sociological concept that was called a set of thoughts and ideas that the masses have about society (Sabila, 1993: 122-123). According to Althusser, ideology is a system (with its own logic and precision) of representations (images, myths, ideas, or concepts in any particular case) that have a historical existence and a special role in a given society ... Ideology differs from science in a set of representations; because in ideology, the practical-social function is more important than the theoretical function (function as knowledge). Althusser (2006: 57) proposes two views on ideology. In the first view, he states that ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence (ibid.); but “what human beings represent for themselves in ideology is not the real conditions of their being and the real world but beyond their relation to these conditions of their existence which are represented in ideology” (ibid: 60) In fact, in Althusser’s definition, ideology is a set of imaginary representations of individuals in relation to their real-world conditions. Thus the function of ideology is to replace imaginary representation with reality. Ideology is a colorful and imaginary mask that is put on reality.

According to the second view, Althusser’s ideology has a material existence and every ideology has an existence in actions and deeds (ibid: 62-61). Althusser believes that ideology is tied to material reality as an imaginary representation of the relationship between the individual and the world, so the ideas of the subject are his material action, which is contained in material action. According to this view, Althusser, as an example of the consumption of a commodity, which is a material act, expresses the ideas of the consumer subject, which Althusser considers to be tainted with ideology. All human actions, behaviors and rituals are ideological. In fact, culture is ideological from Althusser’s point of view.

### **What Are the New Media?**

The development of new media began in the early 1980s with the combination of new technologies and old technologies. The differences

between the media are disappearing. That is, newspapers, television, radio, and the Internet are alike: they all contain text, photos, videos, audio files, and links. New media is a catch-all term used for various kinds of electronic communications that are conceivable due to innovation in computer technology. In news coverage and academic scholarship, you will see several different terms used when discussing new media. Other terms used include digital media, online media, social media, and personal media.

New media typically provide access to content over the Internet, through any digital device, along with feedback from user interaction and creative participation. They enable fast, interactive, targeted communication through social media, social platforms, blogs, and websites. “Increasingly, the general public is getting information from websites, blogs, video sharing sites, such as YouTube, and social networking platforms such as Facebook, podcasts, and Twitter” (Paletz et al., 2013: 45). It should be emphasized that the new media is characterized by Two-way communication. New media has introduced user interaction, rather than simply consuming media. New media can be customized to the users’ preferences and it can selectively link from one form of content to another.

For the sake of our discussion, we will subsume social media like social media platforms and websites under the term new media.

### **Interaction in New Media**

Interaction is one of the main characteristics that distinguish new media from our traditional media. The spread of interaction in these media is such that some people think that the ideological nature of the old media has been questioned and that the new media are completely free and democratic, is that really the case?

There are two approaches to understanding interaction or interactive communication in new media technologies: the communication approach and the media environment approach. The communication approach considers the sharing and exchange of information as key elements in interaction or interactive communication. Sheizaf Rafaeli (1955) and Raymond Williams (1921-1988) define two important theorists in this field as interaction: Rafaeli (1988: 120) considers interaction to be “feedback that relates both to previous messages and how previous messages relate to subsequent messages”. Williams (1974: 10) defines interaction as “the extent to which participants’ control over communication processes and the role they play in communication processes”. In this type of interaction, the user can freely comment on



the previous message. This type of interaction is open interaction. This means that the communication cycle is open and the active user can freely enter their desired content into the communication cycle and establish two-way communication.

The media environment approach defines interaction as media experiences provided through technologies where “users can simultaneously contribute to the modification of the form and content of the interface (mediator)” (Steur, 1995: 46). Interaction in this approach involves “empowering users”. “The greater the number of parameters that can be modified, the greater the scope of the interaction of that particular interface” (ibid: 48). In this type of interaction, the user cannot enter anything other than the options provided by the environmental interface into the communication cycle and has to choose between the options provided by the interface, so this type of interaction is closed interaction. In fact, the “media environment” approach is based on the technical capacity of interactive media, and in this approach, the issue of interaction with the technical agency created in the media is integrated. The feature of interaction integrated into technology cannot have the richness of a “communication approach” because communication interaction is spontaneous and cannot be reduced to elements that can be calculated by artificial intelligence, and this is the difference between spontaneous interaction and fusion interaction in technology (Wegner, 1997).

## Findings

### The Media Is Ideological

According to Habermas (2008), the “public sphere” is the space in which individuals participate freely in discussions about the structure and organization of society in order to gain awareness. Hence, the three sections of production and distribution of media content and text are effective in determining whether the media is ideological or not. It should be peruse, who controls the production and distribution tools? With the addition of interaction to media and the conversion of the Passive audience into an active audience, has this area become a space for consultative democracy? And as a result, the ideological nature of these media has disappeared? Or the reality is something else.

Media expansion in industrialized countries, and especially in the United States, has led to the formation of a kind of media imperialism. Media monopoly imperialism is the transmission of a nation’s worldview (fundamental ideas) through the media by maximum production of content (Schiller, 1969; Postman, 2011). “The views of the ruling

class in every age are the views of the ruling class, because this class is the ruling material force in society, and at the same time it is the ruling thinking force. The class that possesses the means of material production also controls the means of mental production, so in general, it follows the views of those who do not have the and dominates the means of production in the mass media. In media such as television, this is done with the personal involvement of wealthy media giants such as Ted Turner and Rupert Murdoch. As a result, the ruling class effectively dominates the production, regulation and dissemination of ideas. "Instead of protesting against power and monopoly patterns, the media become agencies that affirm the ideas and values of the ruling class" (Miliband, 1979).

"90% of the international news in the world media from the four major Western news organizations, United Press International (UPI) The Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse (AFP) are published, two of which are American, one British, and one French, and their news is complemented by multinational giants" (McQueen, 1998: 362). Media monopoly has been around since the 1920s when most countries complained about the influence of Hollywood on their culture. Since then, governments, especially Western governments, have seen the importance of the media in conveying their worldview by conveying ideological messages to other countries. Thus, in such media, the ownership of the means of production and distribution of content (news, images, and commentaries, etc.) by the rulers of the capitalist system is to strengthen the power of the Western empire. Today, most of the world's media is monopolized by large media companies, led by the founders of American companies. The media follow the goals of these companies. These companies have several TV channels that penetrate the depths of society with controlled audio and means of mental production" (Marx & Engels, 1970). In the age of capitalism, the capitalist class controls video, and ordinary people are informed about their community through them. These top media companies did not limit the people's choices in the channels to cover their dominance over the media, and with the advancement of communication technology, they formed two-way communication in these media (Abbasi, 2019) to create the illusion of a democratic public sphere while bombarding people with ideas and inaccurate or one-sided self-propagating information (Havens & Lotz, 2017: 62). The above was a brief description of the one-way flow of information from powerful countries to Third World countries, which has led to the ideologicalization of the media. So the non-ideological nature of the media is just a myth. But the main question is whether the

emergence of the Internet in new media and the increasing agency of audiences/users in the production and transmission of messages have led to the elimination or decline of ideological media? Or that, despite these developments, the ideological nature of the media remains stable, with only the more sophisticated media techniques and tricks and the true nature of the media hidden in the face of false democracy.

### **Have the Liberation of the Media From State Domination and the Emergence of the Private Media Distorted Their Ideological Nature?**

Given that in some countries the media is private and not state-owned, does this mean freedom from state domination? Or that the government still maintains its dominance in other ways, and if so, how does the ruling system or government control these media? Free media theory has been popular in the United States since the 1930s. Liberal theorists believed that they promoted uncensored, privately-owned media with political and economic freedom and that democracy existed through media freedom. But that was the appearance of the story because media freedom theory shows that privately-owned media is a very important part of a pluralistic government. Thus, experts emphasized the relationship between the media and the ruling class. They believe that trust in diversity and balance in the free media is superficial and misleading, and in fact, the public media is a vital element in legitimizing capitalist society by expressing opposing views, albeit in trivial matters and not in the real economic and political affairs of society. Freedom of expression in the real political and economic affairs of society is, in fact, the expression of views and ideas that are useful to the ruling system (McQueen, 1998: 343; Miliband, 1979). The media, on the other hand, needs the support of the government, and the government is involved in regulating and granting special ownership to media companies as controllers and censors. Thus, the freedom of the private media does not become a reality in practice. The government is, therefore, able to censor content by restricting what it deems inappropriate or punishing the media for producing such content. There is even government policy on the content of television programs, including news, talk shows, and TV shows (Paletz et al., 2013: 17; Liebling, 1975: 7; Bimber, 2003). So, the private media is still ideological.

Therefor movements, groups and individuals such as WikiLeaks, Edward Snowden, privacy advocates, media reform movements such as Free Press in the USA and the Media Reform Coalition in the UK, data protection organisations and so on, the point out the limits of the public sphere: the actual practices of data commodification, corporate media

control, as well as corporate and state surveillance limit the freedoms of thought, opinion, expression, assembly and association. These movements and groups are the negative dialectics of the enlightenment of 21st century informational capitalism. Social movements usually do not simply demand privacy rights for citizens or freedom of speech, but rather also stress that socio-economic inequality, the contradiction between the 99% and the 1%, limits freedom (Fuchs, 2014: 35). These movements call for the realisation of social rights together with individual rights in a realm of social and individual freedom that can best be described as participatory democracy.

### **Will the Advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web Change That Equation?**

With the advent of the Internet around 1990, one-way communication became two-way communication, and thus interactive media was formed. The Internet is available to the public through connected computer networks around the world and transmits data using the standard Internet protocol. In addition to transmitting information, the Internet has also provided various services such as email, online chat, web pages, and so on. The spread of the Internet as a global medium challenges even authoritarian regimes and paves the way for freedom of expression. From this perspective, the Internet as a global medium is the agent of consultative democracy and the free market and consumer power. With digital technology, content production software, and mobile cameras, webcams, and social networks, the general public has taken advantage of technology and can produce, display and share digital content. People can become citizen journalists and create content by reporting on topics that are overlooked in the news media. The old meaning of the audience has changed through cyberspace and they are no longer passive recipients and have achieved a kind of relative autonomy. Blogging is one of the examples of autonomy that technology has provided to users to turn one-way messaging and communication into two-way. "When everyone has a blog, a Facebook profile and an Instagram account, everyone is a publisher, when everyone has a cell phone with a camera, everyone is a reporter. When everyone can upload a video to YouTube, everyone is a filmmaker" says journalist Thomas L. Friedman (2007: 6). Bloggers can challenge media coverage, especially when many bloggers cover an issue, a phenomenon called "Blogswarm" that forces the news media to react and correct the news. Thus, new media offer people potential and real opportunities beyond the (traditional) mass media. Hence, innovation in media technologies can

change the relationship with politicians and the government and the political content of the media and challenge the ideology of the media.

One of the capabilities of the Internet is to make the latest research available to millions of its users. Some see this feature as a factor in the survival of democracy and as a social weapon to destroy hegemony. One of the claims is that the Internet can be a new and powerful voice for people (Dahlberg, 2001). What shapes the nature of the ideal Internet is to create a public sphere that is not dominated by large multinational corporations as creators of commercial content. The free nature of the Internet has made it a popular medium for bloggers, as it is easy to set up and maintain and can easily reach potential audiences. So what matters in this type of media is the user's major role. Interaction in this type of media is communication interaction. Social media and websites can be placed in this category of media. Social networks are online services that allow people to have a personal profile, introduce themselves to others, share their information, connect with others, and form new social connections in a specific system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007: 212).

The question is, whether this is the whole reality of the Internet? It is certain that this is only one aspect of the story and it should be noted that the economy, government and technology interact. The extent to which a technology influences policy depends on how the technology is used. Who and for what purpose can use a medium is formed based on the economic realities of the market and government policies (Paletz et al., 2013: 12-13). Nearly few Internet users are interested in political issues (Hindman, 2008), while there are sites with a variety of political content affiliated with the government and political parties that can encourage political debate, stimulate political participation, raise capital and mobilize voters. New media allow politicians, political parties, and their supporters to make their voices heard and to manage and control society by disseminating information in their favor, but not necessarily for enlightenment. Large media companies, which are generally affiliated with political forces, have the capacity to intervene through political propaganda for candidates or specific policies and distorting the news or attacking competitors. Hence, the media industry as an influential and pervasive force in society has a hegemonic and ideological impact on the behavior and attitudes of individuals.

In addition, it should not be overlooked that the analysis of social networks in the commercial and political dimension is done by governments and media powers such as Google and Facebook in order to more accurately understand the environment and dominate society and the market. Governments and institutions related to these areas

use the results of social media analysis in the political, economic and security fields to analyze social flows.

### **Social Media Conglomerate and Creating Social Media Monopolies**

We live in an unequal capitalist society, in which profit and competition are the main drivers, and on the other hand, this society is strongly influenced by the media and there are different ideas and identities in it. These two points have led to changes in the structure of the media industry. These structural changes, known as Media conglomerates, are the “Concentration of media ownership” in which large media companies grow, consolidate, and have a global presence through conglomerates to implement large business strategies. e.g., Facebook bought Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014. YouTube was acquired by Google in 2006. 1.6% of Facebook shares were acquired by Microsoft in 2006. LinkedIn was acquired by Microsoft in 2016. Creating a monolithic community is one of the dangerous consequences of this action (Andersen & Gray, 2008; Holt & Perren, 2009). Bagdikian (2004) says in his book *The New Media Monopoly*: In 2003, five men controlled a range of media that was run by 50 men only 20 years ago.

Dal Yong Jin (2013) conducted an analysis of the most used Internet platforms and found that 98% of them were run by for-profit organisations, 88% used targeted advertising, 72% had their home base in the USA, 17% in China, 3% in Japan, 4% in Russia, 2% in the UK, 1% in Brazil, and 1% in France. He concluded that there is a “platform imperialism”, in which “the current state of platform development implies a technological domination of U.S.-based companies that have greatly influenced the majority of people and countries” (Jin, 2013: 154). Therefore we face to the colonised Internet for instance:

- “Today, pursuant to court orders, the United States seized 33 websites used by the Iranian Islamic Radio and Television Union (IRTVU) and three websites operated by Kata’ib Hizballah (KH), in violation of U.S. sanctions,” the department said in a statement (Reuters, 2021). The sites seized included Press TV, the Iranian government’s main English-language satellite television channel, and Al Alam, its Arabic-language equivalent.
- Senators Joe Lieberman, Susan Collins, and Tom Carper introduced a 200-page cyber security bill in Congress in 2012. The exact title of the bill is “To enhance the security and resilience of the cyber and communications infrastructure of the United States.” “National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center” in the Office of the President and “The National Cyber Policy Office” is one

of the clauses in the bill. The task of this department is to control all inputs and outputs of the Internet portal through Internet service providers (Cybersecurity, 2012).

One of the most important and controversial parts of the cyber security bill is the Internet Kill Switch. According to this section of the bill, the President of the United States can block part of the global Internet access to the United States in emergencies such as cyber-attacks on facilities and infrastructure, and generally by notifying the world's major Internet service providers – Yahoo, Google, etc. - stop serving them.

This section of the law has provoked much criticism, as critics and cyberspace experts consider the US move to seize and control the Internet, and the law makes the global Internet the national property of the United States.

So, it can be said that the Internet and social media are shaped by the logic of capitalism, public service and civil society. However, the power of such new media is asymmetrical and heavily skewed in favour of a capitalist Internet and capitalist social media.

### **The Dominance of Journalism over Cyberspace and Business Goals**

One of the serious criticisms of cyberspace is the abuse of the journalistic nature of this space and the conversion of the citizen into a customer. Therefore, the cultural and scientific goals of cyberspace, through monopoly ownership, become a space for profiteering and thus ideologicalization of this space. According to Habermas's normative ideal, journalism should be at the service of the public, providing them with participation in public policy debates and creating opportunities and resources for citizens to identify and address these issues and concerns. There is evidence to suggest that contemporary journalism does not play such a role, but rather, in a highly competitive media environment and market pressure, determines the trajectory of news performance.

As a result, media organizations assume their audiences as customers, not citizens of a democratic society. There is a great deal of concern that this large industry be run for profit, and that money be the first and last word, and that it controls the Internet. Such a change is not in the interest of social equality, and the Internet cannot pave the way for democracy and increase access to marginal voices, and it does not add to the quality of the news and it does not benefit society. On the other hand, this process strengthens large media companies and allows capital to be the driving force of the Internet, silencing marginal voices, reducing public debate, accelerating the emergence of money-driven media, and creating social inequalities around the world.

Given that users are the producers and distributors of content on social media, are social media still ideological? Of course, it should be noted that the content of social media is controlled by media owners. For instance, YouTube and Instagram have a series of rules, including copyright, non-publication of obscene and violent content, etc., which will be removed if published.

To study and analyze the ideology of social media, we examine and analyze the important keywords in Althusser's definition of ideology in these media.

### **Ideology and Subjectivization**

Althusser (2006: 67) believes that "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, therefore the main purpose of ideology is to constituting concrete individuals as subjects"; Now the question arises as to how is ideology constituting subjects? In response, Althusser states that ideology hails individuals as subjects and after this hailed, turns concrete individuals into subjects. Althusser also mentions the mechanism of interpellation in expressing how does ideology subjectivization? In such a way that ideology interrogates us as individuals and questions us.

He/she asks "Hey, you there!" And after answering this question, the individual becomes the subject.

As for social media, it can be said that subjectivization can be considered in the process of becoming a user on social media. Social media with slogans, a way to help the user find new audiences and interact with the community on a larger scale, encourages the user to create Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube accounts, and more. Before entering the field of social media, everyone must first create a profile for themselves. In fact, it is interpellated by that social network. They choose a username and password to create their account. So any social media software interpellates the "user": it hails she/he by the name or images it provides for identification. The main function of interpellation (in Althusser's definition of ideology) is to recognize the ideological subject and ultimately to reproduce the ideology. For example: acting in the context of this software makes a person feel in control and agency. "Users" feel empowered and autonomous in the device by directly manipulating the subject of interest, such as moving and creating a new folder or dragging photos into the trash and deleting and adding contacts, while it is the ideology that leads to this process. for instance, in an advertisement, a person thinks that he/she is the one who has chosen the product, but in reality, it is the ideology that has



forced her/him to choose and consume. By creating profiles and taking user profiles, the software actually seeks to categorize the audience for business purposes. According to Althusser, the ideology of a society is primarily the ideology of the ruling class, but in social media, the ideology is associated with the market and the government only has the role of securing the market. Next, the subject begins to share, upload, and interact. On the other hand, because the structure of these social media is centralized and top-down and leaves no possibility for reprogramming the user communication space, the use of the term ideology is justified. A profile is a gateway to becoming a subject. In the age of capitalism, platforms and targeted advertising do not work without profiles.

### **Ideology and Materialism**

Ideology is more in one's actions than in one's beliefs. The illusion of ideology exists not at the level of knowledge but at the level of practice. So Ideology always manifests itself through actions, which are "inserted into practices" (Althusser, 1971: 114).

The software transforms objective processes into abstract and seemingly immaterial forms. Social media software metaphors for users, for instance, Facebook group of friends has become a metaphor or even easier to create a folder. There is no folder materially, but it is immaterial. In fact, the immaterial transformation of matter is one of the main functions of social media. For Louis Althusser, this logic is very important for ideology.

"What are you doing?" The main phrase is Twitter. This question identifies the material roots of social media. Social media platforms have never asked, "What do you think?" In the age of social media, we seem to be less likely to admit what we think, and that's very dangerous. We share what we do and see, and that is endangering privacy. We share judgments and opinions, but not our own thoughts. We are always busy sharing content, so we are very busy and always ready to connect and express.

Social media activity is 7/24. This means that there is no distance between man and technology, and technology is intertwined with man, and this is exactly the opposite of what McLuhan (1994: 137) said, "Technology is the continuation of the human senses." What attracts us is not the software, the platform, and the social interface, but the social flow that surrounds us.

### **Ideology and Representation**

Bruce Bimber (2003: 12) believes that the advancement of technology is in the direction of the evolution of political power. This power

does not happen by force, but by representation, which results in the satisfaction of society. Stuart Hall (1932-2014) believes that ideology and especially hegemony are a component of power that is not from the top-down but is created through a level of dialogue (discourse) with the consent and acceptance of individuals. According to theories, post colonialism is related to the processes of media and cultural imperialism. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and Althusser argue that gaining the public satisfaction of powerless people does not happen by itself, but that satisfaction in society is generally achieved through influential tools such as the media. This satisfaction is achieved through relative agreement with the views and demands of ordinary people and ultimately leads to their acceptance of the prevailing ideology and the legitimacy of the position of those in power. In this regard, the view of Stuart Hall, which is reflected in "Representation" (Hall, 1997), is that the media, by producing a preferred reading of various events, has caused the "social construction of reality", and as an ideological tool in It works in the interests of those in power. In general, mass media is the most important part of ideological tools in the capitalist system.

The main idea in the concept of representation is the gap between reality and what is reflected through different media. In defining representation, it is important to pay attention to the concept of discourse and ideology. In the process of representation, external realities are reproduced based on a specific type of power and discourse relationship. Meaningfulness of the elements produced occurs through the representation of the media in a discourse context. On the relationship between discourse and representation, Hall states: "There is nothing meaningful outside of discourse, and it is not the task of media studies to measure the gap between reality and representation but to try to understand how meanings are produced through discourse procedures and formulations". In his view, reality does not exist in a meaningful way and representation is one of the key methods of producing meaning (Mehdizadeh, 2008: 17). The importance of media representation states, "People's awareness of the world depends on the content they receive from the media; because the media are the mediators between individual consciousness and social structures, as well as constructing meaning. Representation is the media construction of reality. Representation is not the reflection of the meaning of phenomena in the outside world, but the production and construction of meaning based on conceptual and discourse frameworks" (ibid: 15).

In the age of information and the dominance of new media, people who share pictures and videos of themselves on their personal social media

pages such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are not “out there” in the outside world. In other words, in the age of social platforms, human beings deal with each other’s image, not with themselves. According to Althusser, there is no objective existence as a world outside the subject, and the world arises from the relation of the subject to the world and the ideological representations in which the subject (user) makes relations. Imaginations and fantasies that the user makes come true through their content or messages; That is, the symbolic realm gives way to the imaginary realm to which the subject is caught by it. Social media platforms and software have a similar function to ideology. In fact, on social media, the subject’s imaginary relationship to the real situation corresponds with the “representation” in Louis Althusser’s definition of ideology.

### **Ideology and Awareness**

New media technologies with global access and instant reliance on information allow us to witness world-historical events objectively. The question that remains is whether all this data and information is accurate and useful? Information involves the transfer and receipt of consciousness, so it is the basis for deciding and selecting options using information. Consciousness is the opposite of ideology. In ideology, according to Marx, there is false consciousness or, in Althusser’s words, Unconsciousness. The power of a country in political, economic, and social-cultural developments is influenced by the rule of information (consciousness). The concentration of power and political influence, and social developments caused by information is a clear reason for the benefits of creating an information pole (Davaranah & Armideh, 2012: 103). After the Second World War, the superpowers, especially the United States, gave a new cover to their domination and influence around the world and placed the issue of information and communication in all their economic, political, cultural and military policies (Mowlana, 1986: 9-10). The media through representation, in addition to shaping our consciousness, also dictates how Flow of affairs for us. A clear example of this can be seen in the way Muslims are represented in the Western media; When the widespread cultural and religious diversity among them is ignored and the entire Islamic Ummah (community) is reduced to a few reactionary and stereotyped behaviors, terrorism and fundamentalism are introduced as the main symbol of Islam in the Western world (Hosseini Faeq, 2012). The use of the media to exercise power and control behaviors and social relations has now become so widespread in modern societies that the media is mentioned as one of the main components of political power (De Benoist, 1995).

Hilbert believes in the transformation of information in the contemporary period, and this began with the expansion of communications and stored data (Hilbert, 2020). One of the criticisms that can be made of new media and the formation of the information society is that the more information, the less meaning and the deeper content should no longer be sought. On the other hand, new media are full of rumors, distortions, and lies, and by facilitating more communication and increasing access to information creates a society that is qualitatively different and with new problems, Such as over-accumulation of information and the need for new forms of regulation to control the flow of information between individuals, companies, and countries (Scott & Marshall, 2009: 567).

### **Code as Ideology**

Althusser (2006: 57) believes that “ideology has no history and is eternal” and although it is eternal in form, it is diverse in content. It can be concluded from Althusser’s statement that there is essentially no non-ideological issue, and that is why the content of the ideology is historically variable because the critique or the overthrow of the ruling ideology is historically carried out by another ideology.

The ideological studies of the media are divided into two parts: the content and the study of the media themselves. So there are two approaches to ideology in the media: ideological content and ideological media. Websites and applications are the main features of the capitalist system, which targeted the values of their users. Social media in the sense of “consumer choice” is not a matter of taste or lifestyle. Social media is a form of technology in our social relationships. In the last century, with the advent of social media for the purpose of advertising and their online services, they have become the basic communication infrastructure, just like mail, telegraph and telephone. It is precisely at this point in the “transformation of infrastructure” that we need to study the ideology of these media.

In his paper (Language wants to be overlooked: On software and ideology), Galloway argues that software is modular in nature and that this fragmentation is hidden in information. He argues while the software is clear but inherently contradictory: “This contradiction is the basis of software: what you see is not what you get. Code is media that is not media. Software is never displayed as it is, instead of being assembled, interpreted, decomposed; it is pushed into hiding by a larger code. Hence the principle of ambiguity arises” (Galloway, 2006: 325). Galloway argues that just as software is obscure, so does ideology. Thus,

in its modularity, code seeks to be invisible and to efficiently manage and produce functions in ways similar to ideology for the purposes of production and control, which implicitly work and are not seen.

For instance Social media (websites and applications) call to action (CTA) verbiage that instructs a reader on what you want them to do and what to do next. Such as: Creating an account, sign up, like, share or comment, requesting a quote, entering a contest, signing a petition and more.

Encourage user to action with a few words, or a sentence or two and the button or link and more. Whatever it takes to instruct the reader to do what's next... and, importantly, motivates them to do it. The key to a good call to action isn't just to tell them what to do, but why they should do it.

That action (CTA) has a meaning that is formed by the codes. That meaning is the intended purpose of the owner of the platform, website and blog which is executed by coding.

Here, "interactive" slogans are more about how users interact with interfaces. Because the computational mechanisms and controls of the interfaces are hidden, users cannot technically interact with them directly to understand them.

Ideology like dominating the public sphere in which ideas are at war also emerges in software. So social media platforms do the same thing as ideology and are even more powerful. As Manovich puts it, the software is the "language of new media" so it is ideological in itself.

## Conclusion

New technologies have had a profound effect on producing and transmitting messages and have shaped a particular type of communication. According to the findings, it is concluded that the structure of media was vertical in the past, and the content was transferred from top to bottom which gives a kind of ideological feature to traditional media. In this way, the audience in the communication cycle was the only recipient of the content.

Now With the growth of new technologies and the addition of interaction, it is given more credibility to the audience. It is interesting that despite the increasing role of the audience in the new media and changing the structure of the media from vertical to horizontal, but the ownership of new media in cyberspace and the Internet continues.

There are two types of content in cyberspace:

1. Commercial content including Internet radio and television and video-on-demand services produced and presented to a specific audience by media owners. Such content, which conveys different ideas and meanings are controlled by a dominant ideology, so

these media remain ideological. These innovations and technical developments can be considered a revising of past perspectives and a complement to past technologies that only offer newer possibilities to the user/audience in choosing content and viewing time, and so on.

Social media might have offered a solution, as an open digital space where anyone could join, contribute, share information, and learn new ideas and skills. But they are not a public sphere—a space to discuss social problems, debate solutions, and form agreements about collective ideals and goals—they are just a place to have fun and make money. Habermas argued, public sphere, exists on the basis of inclusivity, a commitment to good faith argument, and a collective willingness to cooperate in the search for meaningful agreement on how the world is and should be, but in reality, Social media are ostensibly inclusive but not dedicated to good faith argumentation; they make no commitment toward constructive discussion. They are even now reluctant to use those powers to create a healthy public sphere. They tend to Commercial and entertainment content due to the need to monetize data, deliver targeted ads, and evade serious legal liability that the result is a lack of commitment to the values of the public sphere and free speech.

2. Public and personal content on social media and websites is produced and shared by the user. Through this type of social media, the Internet has provided a new capacity to convey the voice of different segments of society to share their information and messages on common issues to have power in the public and political spheres. The discourse in these media is free. In free discourse, public opinion is not dominated by the ruling system or power, and there are massive ideas with the possibility of personalizing texts in line with the user's goals and meanings. In other words, we are faced with a multitude of ideologies in this discourse. But it should not be overlooked that ultimately the control of social media content is in the hands of its rulers. For example, if the message published in the public aspect of social media is contrary to the policies of the owners of such media, the message, deletion or user account will be closed. Content control in this section is done with the approval of media owners and rulers. A clear example of this content control can be related to the closure of the page attributed to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the deletion of messages related to the condemnation of the assassination of Martyr Sardar Soleimani on Instagram. Thus, although social media and some websites initially create a

set of multiple public spaces with free discourse, the concentration of media ownership ultimately limits people's participation in the communication system and limits discourse activities. Therefore, the ideology that is still meant in the connection between the media and power still exists in these media despite the social aspect and user interaction. The hegemonic dimension of the Internet, which is held by large corporations, controls the content of this part of the Internet, which is often news. This process has led to the commodification of news, which reflects the prevailing commercial interests.

In summary, the contemporary social media world is shaped by three antagonism: a) the economic antagonism between users' data and social media corporations' Commercial interests, b) the political antagonism between users' privacy and the state surveillance, c) the civil society antagonism between the creation of public spheres and the corporate and state colonization of these spheres. In Habermas' terms, we can say that social media has a potential to be a public sphere, but that this sphere is limited by the steering media of political power and money so that corporations own and control and the state monitors users' data on social media. Contemporary social media as a whole do not form a public sphere, but are in a particularistic manner controlled by corporations and the state that colonise and thereby destroy the public sphere potentials of social media.

In addition, according to Althusser's factors in terms of ideology, the social media platforms are essentially ideological and have ideological goals hidden behind their apparent performance. Social media platforms through a "call to action" forced the audience to do specific something. It includes from creating a user account to working with the application.

That action is to implement the meaning that is hidden behind the codes, as a result of that Social media platforms are a functional aspect of ideology.

The mechanism of social media functions as an ideology searching how social media shape culture, and identity into a growing cultural function framework, including lifestyle, fashion, brands, celebrities, and radio, television, magazines, and web news.

In general, it can be concluded that each media is divided into two parts: Flexible and inflexible section. The flexible part can be dedicated to technical issues. As we see in new media, with the advancement of technology, the technical part of these media also improves and offers countless possibilities and capabilities to the user/audience, but the inflexible part is related to the cultural and ideological issues of the

media. The findings of the research show, the ideology of the new media are in line with the ideology of the traditional media and hence this part of the media remains inflexible.

### **Ethical considerations**

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

### **Conflicts of interests**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

### **Data availability**

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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