

- Vol. VII, No. II (Spring 2022) ▪ p- ISSN: 2708-2091 ▪ e-ISSN: 2708-3586 ▪ L-ISSN: 2708-2091
- Pages: 217-222 ▪ DOI: [10.31703/gsr.2022\(VII-II\).23](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022(VII-II).23) ▪ URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022\(VII-II\).23](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022(VII-II).23)
- Citation: Shah, B., Riaz, S., & Khan, R. (2022). The Exploitation of Pakistani Social and Cultural Norms through Mass Media in the Context of Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony. *Global Sociological Review*, VII (II), 217-222. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022\(VII-II\).23](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022(VII-II).23)

The Exploitation of Pakistani Social and Cultural Norms through Mass Media in the Context of Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony

Bahramand Shah	Assistant Professor, Area Study Centre for Africa, North & South America, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Sana Riaz	Demonstrator, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.
Raees Khan	Lecturer, Department of English, University of Buner, KP, Pakistan. Email: raees.glaxy@gmail.com (<i>Corresponding Author</i>)

Abstract: *The current study examines Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony in Pakistani media. The study argues that Gramsci's theory of Cultural Hegemony is not limited to Italian or Western societies, but it has great relevance with Asian societies as well. Gramsci exposes the manipulation and exploitation of the working class, hegemonic forces use various sources such as media, money and politics. The study aims to investigate a theory of cultural hegemony presented in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks 1947 in Pakistani Media, cultural hegemony is used in the study as a theoretical framework. Media in Pakistan is used tactfully, to propagate the norms and culture of the status quo in Pakistan. The working class is in majority and their representation doesn't come into sight in almost all media forums. Pakistani status quo, including business tycoons, politicians, and other ruling elites collaboratively sustain the existing social and political mechanism in order to keep their supremacy lasting.*

Key Words: Propaganda, Exploitation, Hegemony, Culture, Class

Introduction

Antonio Francesco Gramsci (1891-1937) was a prolific writer of Italy. His writings deal with Marxism, sociology, philosophy and various political theories. He was an influential politician in Italy during Mussolini's (1883-1945) Fascist regime. Gramsci was one of the founding members of the communist party of Italy. Gramsci's *Prison Note Books* is a noteworthy contribution that he wrote during his imprisonment. His theory of cultural hegemony deals with the exposition of perpetual supremacy and dominance of the ruling class over the lower class in society. He identifies a constant war of cultures between the Bourgeoisie and Proletariats. Bourgeois use media most commonly, to prevail the fashion and culture they want to promote in society.

Media is one of the most powerful elements in any society which shape people's opinion towards any specific direction. The narrative of influential ones is forcefully injected through media, and it becomes the accepted norms and culture of the subaltern consequently. With the help of excessive media propaganda, they made common people believe that these ruling elites are the legitimate stakeholders, and the culture they prefer to impose on the common people, is the most appropriate one, that is how legal exploitation of culture takes place in Pakistani society. The ruling elites not only use mass media but also use religion as a tool to manipulate opinions, and they play with the sentiments of people to rule since Gramsci stated that; the rulers are differentiated from the previous (lower class) by being able to penetrate society with its culture and thoughts for the objective

of manipulating the same society into its own image and favour (Gramsci, Enrique, Ramirez, 2015). As is affirmed by Aaminah Hassan (2018); In his book, *Media Discourse*, Fairclough argues, that media reflects an agenda for the common people and thus reinforces its power. Media is powerful enough to mould peoples opinions and perceptions towards any direction, or beliefs. The values and social relations that media prevail among common people are undeniable (Fairclough, Hassan, 2018). With the advent of the industrial revolution in the 19th century, the dynamics of Western society changed immensely. The working class paid a heavy cost to the economic growth of society. The lower class was being used as other machinery or tool in industries. Antonio Gramsci sensed the legal atrocities of hegemonic forces. The ruling class started to use mass media to justify their decisions. Eugenio-Enrique Cortes-Ramirez state (2015); Gramsci believes that cultural hegemony is executed by the ruling class not only through force but also through mutual agreements with common people. The hegemonic forces manage to impose their point of view, they enforce a philosophy of traditions that favour the recognition of superiority by the upper classes (Enrique, Ramirez, 2015). Free and impartial media is imperative to flourish an appropriate worldview. Media is the eye and ear of any nation in the present-day world, the current study reveals that all of the media groups in Pakistan carry their specific agendas which are sponsored by the hegemonic groups of Pakistan.

Review of the Related Literature

The present study analyzes the mainstream media and its functions in the Pakistani context. Mass media in Pakistan is super active to build a narrative which suits the culture of the dominating class. Gramsci has made a clear distinction between the struggle of the working class and hegemonic forces. Steve Jones (2006) rightly stated in an extract from Gramsci's writings; The common people must perceive themselves as workers, who are a part of a class which tends to lead the farmers and intelligent people of their class. A class which can succeed and build a socialist community only if it is helped and followed by the majority of these social classes. (Gramsci, Jones, 1994, 2006). The study reveals that Mass Media is used to pollute the minds of the

majority of the common people not only in Pakistan but also in other parts of the world. Tolson (1991) states; that the information and news reports on the media outputs are often manipulated and shaped towards a specific direction and Ideology. The very objective behind this ideologically driven content is to reproduce and reinforce the social relations of suppression and deprivation of the common people (Tolson, Hassan, 2018). It is investigated in the study that the approach of media persons is subjective and biased. All mainstream media channels in Pakistan have become the political party of one side or the other. Neutral and unbiased reporting lacks in all media forums including Pakistan Television. The news content covered by GEO News is pro-Nawaz Shareef and anti-Imran Khan. likewise, anti-judiciary reporting is limited to the coverage of the case against Meer Shakeel, who is the owner of the GEO News network (Hassan, 2018). ARY has its own subjective way of depicting things. Talk shows of journalists and other programs of ARY seem to be PTI-centric, and they try to justify the stance of their favourite political leader. Common minds are scattered in the middle of a dilemma that where to turn, and how to raise voices for their fundamental rights. The study explores that, Pakistani people aren't even ready to stand for their survival and social identity even in the current brutal wave of inflation. According to Gramsci, we all are conformists (*Prison Notebooks, 1947*). very few people dare to stand against the hegemonic culture in our society due to the constant threats of fatal consequences. It is examined in the current research that Pakistani citizens are convinced through mass media that, they live in a democratic country, they have a right to choose their rulers after every five years through a vote in elections. But in reality, the same faces of our political representatives are seen, who keep changing their parties, and they are always elected to rule the country. most of the representatives have their own businesses and they remain in power to secure and flourish their personal interests. Jones stated Gramsci's assertion; the culture of the common masses is evidence of both the power of capitalists and of people's conformist bent of mind, Gramsci placed the anti-elitist case for everyone being part of a society of common people Gramsci claims that We believe in conformity, he asserts; man in-the-mass or collective man (Gramsci, Jones, 1971: 324, 2006).

Gramsci argues that if we all are conformists to the workings of hegemonic forces, then our numbers don't matter to the capitalists, they can easily flock to us together wherever they want. Influential state institutions also play a vital role to make and break any regime in Pakistani politics. The term "electable" is being used in the current political scenario, most of these electable candidates are from hegemonic forces, they are placed in the party which is likely to win the upcoming election. Gramsci unfolds two ways to manipulate people politically, consent and coercion. Dissenting opinions are manipulated politically or simply crushed by force. Thinking differently than hegemonic forces, is always a threat to their monopoly therefore, the ruling elites use mass media to give various types of labels to those who hold different perspectives, such as extremists, pessimists etc. The study proves that the loyalty of those active masses against the hegemonic forces is questioned. Steve Jones (2006) rightly highlighted an incident reported in a newspaper in his book; the *Daily Mirror* is a British newspaper, that reported an incident in 2004, that showed British troops using highly offensive language with the Iraqi prisoners of war. The news went viral and it resulted in the termination of the editor of the newspaper (Jones, 2006).

The study explores that, there has been complexity in giving a precise direction to the people, right after the creation of Pakistan. Quid e Azam (Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) wanted to separate a piece of land in the sub-continent from the Hindu majority as a secular state. On the other hand, some political leaders had an entirely Islamic vision of the state, given by Allama Iqbal (1877-1938). Iqbal gives a message of Umma or Millat which can be a unifying force of different races, ethnic groups and cultures. Common people are still in dilemma what are the very objectives and destination of the state. Pakistan saw three military regimes, which causes discontinuation in democratic norms to flourish. It is argued that media was used to propagate Iqbal's version of the state at the time of late General Zia ul Had, but Zia failed to enforce the true principle of Islam. Military and civil Hegemonic forces have used Islam several times in the history of Pakistan to keep their influence lasting over the subjects of the state. A true essence of Islam always lacks in society, such as equality, justice, tolerance, fair dealing in business,

and respect for the working class. John Kerry and Chuck Hagel, Atlantic Council affirm Pakistani society; The political leaders of the country are strongly affiliated with the traditional feudal power system of Pakistani society, less privileged people of the country are not able to rise to power in the current political set up (Kerry, Hagel, 2009). Establishment manipulates and manoeuvres the states affairs, it is a global phenomenon in the present-day world. Political and strategic settlements are executed with the consent of military leadership in developing countries. Eugenio-Enrique Cortes-Ramirez argues (2015); experts from the establishment were in favour of war characterized by advances and step back. But they believe, that the war of manipulation should be eliminated from the science of military (Gruppi, 1972, p. 128, Ramirez, 2015).

It is explored that the class system is reinforced by the traditional Feudal system in Pakistani society. Similar to the British Raj, the feudal lords believe that they are the legitimate masters in this country, only they are capable to rule the country. Mainstream media give coverage to them 24/7. The study expresses that the genuine issues of the common masses are not addressed in a considerable way. Mass media is less attracted towards the problems of common people, such as rotten education policies, rampant corruption, discrimination, and bad governance. Children of the ruling elites have different cultures and they have their own separate educational institutions in Pakistani society. The research reveals that the massive gap created by industrialists, landlords and establishments among classes of Pakistani society triggers the nation towards desperation and uncertainty. Feudal families such as the Bhuttos have dominated the political scenario in Pakistan for decades. Capitalist families like the Nawas are comparatively newcomers, but their political support is from feudal families (Kerry, Hagel, 2009). Asif Zardari launches his son Bilawal Bhutto and the Shareef family has prepared Maryam Nawaz and Hamza Shehbaz to rule the country onwards. The study explores that people are made to believe through mass media, that funds from International Monetary Fund (IMF) are the only way out to move forward. No laws are being passed or executed in a real sense, to penalize corrupt bureaucrats, politicians and other stakeholders,

moreover, a huge amount of money is spent on the privileges and protocols of hegemonic forces which are being legalized and increased from time to time, and that is how the country's survival is endangered. Gramsci has rightly exposed such kind of dishonesty and frivolity which is normally hidden under the fabricated carpet of nationalism and patriotism. Gramsci faces around 8 years of imprisonment for going against the hegemonic norms and culture of his country. As Edward Said has argued in his book *Orientalism*; the hardships of the common people are the direct repercussion of the exchange of culture between partners (rulers) who are aware of the inequality of this exchange (Said, 1978, p. 95, Ramirez, 2015). The study expresses that the ruling elites are aware of the prevailing inequalities, which is due to their injected culture and norms in Pakistani society through mass media, but they are reluctant to be a part of any positive change because their superiority is endangered in that way. Said argues that inequalities between the upper class with the subjugated ones in a universal phenomenon. All of the developing worlds such as Pakistan, Africa, and some gulf countries have mass media, which constantly show the legitimacy of the superiority of hegemonic forces over common people. manipulating and shaping the opinion of the common masses through conventional media forums don't last longer; therefore, objective reporting is needed in Pakistani society to show the exact face of the social and cultural aspects of society. Traditional mass media is losing its grasp over common people due to their subjective reporting, consequently, unconventional media is taking a dominating position in Pakistani society. The number of social media users are increasing from 2010 to early 2011 and onward. From late 2010 to early 2011 tremendous increase in observed in social media users. Facebook users multiply over a short period of time, they increased from 1.8 to 3.6 million (Kugelman, 2012). Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and numerous other social media are influential platforms which give access to objective and miscellaneous events and reports (Kugelman, 2012). Social media is an effective exponent of the positive face of Pakistan. Various welfare organizations encourage common people to offer to help hands to the needy ones. Video clips of social activities on social media promote the better side of

Pakistani society. Common people take a firm stance on social media against any inequalities in the country, which are not highlighted in traditional media. It is investigated that current Pakistani society shows resistance to the culture of the hegemonic class, which causes uneasiness among the ruling elites. Traditional media outlets had been used as an effective tool to divert or manipulate people's perspectives easily in the past, but the study reveals that it is not easier to divert people towards a hegemonic worldview, because of the existence of numerous social media forums.

Methodology

The current study is developed through a qualitative sampling technique, because the study is descriptive in nature, the study is not likely to be computed or statistically analyzed. Initially, the research study is selected through a purposive sampling technique. Research instruments for the work are primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of the current research work are Pakistani media and Antonio Gramsci's book *The Prison Notebooks* in which a theory of cultural hegemony is specifically used as a framework to develop the study. Secondary sources such as research articles, newspaper reports, videos and other related books are used to proceed with the research further in a scientific way. The complete process of the study takes place by following various steps according to a standard writing style, (American Psychological Association), firstly the researcher has gone through Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* in detail. the theory of cultural hegemony is found highly pertinent to the current Pakistani social and political system. Pakistani media reporting is examined minutely and it is investigated that the hegemonic class of Pakistani society use media to meet their ends at the cost of working-class exploitation.

Analysis

Gramsci reflected on the workings of Bourgeoisie to dominate Proletariats, in his *Prison Notebooks*. His distinction between Political society and Civil society makes it meticulously clear, that how the capitalist state is maintained. Political society includes police, army, judiciary and other law enforcement agencies, which coercively inject the ideas of hegemony, and

Civil society means schools, education system, family and trade unions etc. these institutions are used to rule by consent of common people. It is examined in the process of analyzing Pakistani mass media that, Pakistani current society faces the same situation which is presented in the *Prison Notebooks*. The efforts and services of hegemonic forces for the country have been gloried in the media in such a way that, people make strong affiliations with the notion of hegemony. The story of Pakistani capitalist Malik Riaz's planned interview was leaked on social media, which reveals the true face of our traditional media, Michael Kugelman (2012) asserts, that Dunya News television channel showed an interview with Malik Riaz, he is a real estate businessman who claims to have given money to the chief justice's son as a bribe, leaked video footage appeared on YouTube (Kugelman, 2012). Mass media is an effective weapon in Pakistan to justify illegitimate actions and official works as a need of the day. Malik Riaz asserted in an interview with Saleem Saafi (a senior anchor person) that business in Pakistan is not possible without distributing bribes to the officials in government offices (*Geo News*, 2020). It is investigated that from the advent of the Islamic state mass media highlight a hegemonic version of the whole story of Pakistan. Common and poor individuals and their massive contributions are scarcely seen in institutions' books. Bourgeois exploit not only the culture of common people but also manipulates history to strengthen their dominance, according to Gramsci's cultural hegemony. Political figures from various parties are invited to TV programs most frequently, they reflect the hegemonic cultural worldview.

Discussion

In light of the above study, it can be argued that Gramsci's cultural hegemony has great relevance to the current Pakistani social and cultural happenings all around. The excessive use of traditional media to propagate a cultural version of the hegemonic forces is examined in detail in the current work. Gramsci gives a way to move forward by drawing an idea from Machiavelli's "The Modern Prince". The working class can develop their force of intellectuals which

will replace the hegemonic force within civil society. The intellectuals from proletariats will form a revolutionary movement which would undermine the bourgeoisie in a war of positions to make the establishment of a socialist state possible (*Prison Notebooks* 1947). The study investigated that various forces within civil society in Pakistan raise voices against the inequalities and discrimination in society, which may lead to a gradual positive change in the framework of society. Mainstream media is used frequently to undermine dissenting opinions. The dynamics of the present-day world are different. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and various voice apps are comparatively impartial and independent mass media forums, which give equal opportunity to everyone for the expression of opinions. Citizens of Pakistan use social networks as a platform to acquire knowledge and increase political awareness. According to Strandberg (2011), the use of Facebook and Twitter causes great results to absorb (common people) within politics (Muzaffar, Chodhry, Afzal, 2019). Social media has changed the dynamics of the media world. People express themselves and their opinions freely. Although social media has a negative impact on common people as well, it is analyzed in the study that various positive things also take place in Pakistani society because of social media. Pakistani citizen is more aware of the happenings all around them than the previous times. It is examined that common people had no access to truthful and objective news reports because only PTV had been the only source of information. Presently, Pakistan has entered a digital phase, and almost every individual has acquired access to the internet and social media, where one can find objective analysis and news reporting. Traditional hegemonic tools to manipulate and rule the working class, are gradually exposed through social media. Now the vacuum for a just governing system is acutely felt by the common masses. The research reveals that traditional mass media is failed to satisfy their common audience due to their subjective approach, and sponsorship of hegemonic forces. The researcher concludes that Pakistani society looks for an appropriate alternative which may revive the true essence and culture of society.

References

- Eugenio, E. C. R. (2015). Cultural hegemony today. From cultural studies to critical pedagogy. *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, 4(2), 116-139.
- Hassan, A. (2018). Language, Media, and Ideology: Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani News Bulletin Headlines and Its Impact on Viewers. *SAGE Open*, 8(3), 215824401879261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018792612>
- Marcus, M. (2011). *The Internet, Social Media, and Democratization in Pakistan, 2011* Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).
- Michael, K. (2012). *Social media in Pakistan: catalyst for communication, not change*, NOREF.
- Muzaffar, M. (2019). Social Media and Political Awareness in Pakistan: A Case Study of Youth. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3(II), 141-153. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2019\(3-ii\)01](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2019(3-ii)01)
- Stephen, P. C. (January 2011). THE FUTURE OF PAKISTAN, The Brookings Institution Washington, D.C.
- Steve, J. Antonio, G. (2006). *By Routledge 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon.*