Mitigating Western media hegemony: Insights and pathways to African development

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Abstract

This study explores the pervasive hegemony of Western nations in global media and communication systems, with a specific focus on the role of International News Agencies (INAs) in perpetuating cultural imperialism against African countries. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research incorporates qualitative and quantitative analyses, utilising surveys, descriptive statistics, and inferential techniques such as variance analysis. Findings reveal that over 78% of global media infrastructure and content is controlled by Western countries, resulting in significant impediments to Africa's socioeconomic, cultural, and technological development. The study highlights the disproportionate representation and misrepresentation of African narratives, contributing to stereotypes and undermining the continent's developmental agenda. The research proposes strategic solutions, including establishing an African Continental Information Superhighway, Digital Africa, to facilitate modern broadcasting infrastructure, foster research collaboration, and enhance information exchange. The findings also emphasise the need for African nations to invest in indigenous media industries, strengthen policies promoting cultural autonomy, and counterbalance Western media dominance through collaborative efforts involving governments, financial institutions, and international networks. This paper contributes to the discourse on global media equity and development communication by presenting actionable pathways to mitigate the adverse effects of Western media hegemony and foster a self-reliant African media landscape.

Keywords: Media Hegemony, Cultural Imperialism, African Development, Global Media Equity

Introduction

The conclusion of the First and Second World Wars, followed by the onset of the Cold War era, marked the emergence of a distinctive epoch in the international system. This period witnessed the bipolar confrontation between the Western bloc, led by the United States and its NATO allies, and the Eastern bloc, represented by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact countries (Kennedy, 1988). Decades after the Cold War, the global order has transitioned from a US-dominated unipolar system to a multifaceted "new world order," characterised by Western and European struggles for hegemonic control over international media, economic resources, and information and communication technology (ICT) (McPhail, 2010). Despite the evolving dynamics of global power, the dominance of the United States and its Western allies has inspired the rise of regional and medium powers, including China, Japan, Brazil, and Canada. These nations have amplified their socio-cultural, political, and economic influence internationally. However, their engagement with Africa and other Third World nations has often fallen short of the anticipated transformative roles (Ogunnubi & Akinola, 2017). Consequently, African countries have faced persistent socioeconomic, cultural, and political upheavals since achieving political independence, including leadership crises, civil conflicts, economic instability, religious tensions, hunger, and disease (Ayittey, 2005).

Among the challenges confronting Africa's development, Western powers' monopolistic control of ICT, global media industries, and information flow remain significant. Scholars such as Thussu (2000) argue that Western media hegemony entrenches Africa's marginalisation by perpetuating neo-colonialism, media imperialism, and exploitative capitalist frameworks, distorting African realities and suppressing indigenous narratives. Boyd-Barrett (2015) emphasises that Western-dominated international news agencies (INAs) contribute significantly to the skewed global information flow, further reinforcing inequalities in the distribution of mass communication resources between industrialised and developing nations. This study critically examines the nature and impact of Western media hegemony on Africa's development. It explores how international news agencies contribute to the skewed global information flow and the unequal distribution of mass communication resources. Additionally, it aims to identify strategies for mitigating these challenges and fostering the growth of African media industries to counterbalance Western dominance. The study seeks to achieve the following objectives: 1. To investigate the strategies employed by Western media organisations in shaping African cultural identity and development; 2. To identify measures that African governments and institutions can adopt to develop indigenous media industries and counter Western media dominance; and 3. To propose recommendations for mitigating the adverse effects of Western media hegemony and promoting sustainable African development.

Literature Review

Media hegemony refers to dominant nations' monopolistic control of global media hardware and software, which harms the values, norms, and cultures of less privileged countries. Boyd-Barrett (2015) posits that this hegemony is an extension of Western neo-colonialism, mobilising capitalist exploitation to sustain the underdevelopment of Third World nations. Thussu (2000) similarly highlights that the flow of global communication is disproportionately controlled by a few Western media conglomerates, perpetuating stereotypes and misrepresentations of African cultures. Scholars have argued that this hegemony not only entrenches global inequalities but also actively marginalises indigenous voices, thereby exacerbating cultural and developmental stagnation in African nations (Ayittey, 2005; McPhail, 2010). As Rodney (1972) conceptualised, development is an individual and collective phenomenon. Individually, it entails "increased skill, capacity, freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material wellbeing" (p. 9). It represents a group's capacity

to regulate internal and external relationships, often framed as a struggle against natural hazards and adversaries. Expanding on this, Todaro and Smith (2007) define development as a multidimensional process involving reorganising social and economic systems to sustain human advancement. They emphasise key variables, including improved income, institutional reforms, and societal norms and belief systems, as essential development components. These developmental benchmarks remain elusive for Africa due to systemic global inequalities and exploitative international practices (Rodney, 1972; Todaro & Smith, 2007).

Hegemony originates from the Greek term hegemony, meaning the dominance of one entity over others in a system. Yilmaz (2010) conceptualises it as the power to influence international norms and rules to align with one's interests. However, Destradi (2010) argues that hegemony often manifests as coercive power by advanced capitalist nations, such as the US and its allies, against developing countries, particularly in Africa. This "imperial leadership" is characterised by exploitative practices that undermine the developmental agenda of peripheral nations. Webb and Krasner (1989) posit that hegemonic stability theory explains international economic liberalisation as most viable under the dominance of a single power. Similarly, Ravenhill (2008) notes that hegemonic states, driven by their financial interests, leverage their dominance to promote a liberal global economy while exerting undue influence over weaker states. This dominance in the international media landscape translates to the monopolisation of communication channels and ICT infrastructure, perpetuating Africa's dependency and marginalisation (McPhail, 2010; Thussu, 2000).

Hegemonic stability theory is applied here to elucidate the monopolistic dominance of Western industrialised powers—primarily the US and its allies—over global media and communication systems. By integrating Gramscian perspectives on hegemony, the study examines how these powers mobilise ICT and international news agencies (INAs) to control the global flow of information. This dominance perpetuates cultural imperialism and impedes Africa's sociocultural and economic development. For instance, Boyd-Barrett (2015) and Thussu (2000) highlight how Western media corporations manipulate global narratives to marginalise Africa and reinforce dependency structures. The theory underscores how hegemonic powers destabilise African development through media propaganda, economic subjugation, and ICT monopolisation. This systematic examination aligns with Rodney's (1972) argument that external exploitative forces significantly hinder the progress of African nations.

Understanding the structure and dynamics of international news flow is crucial, as it directly impacts global development, politics, and diplomacy. At the core of this issue lies the imbalance in disseminating news and information between developed and developing nations, which has long been a contentious topic in international communication. Okigbo (1998) states that the call for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) echoes the demand for a New World Economic Order, highlighting grievances from Third World countries about the inequities in global news flow. These inequities are symptomatic of broader structural imbalances between developed and developing regions, where industrialised nations dominate the control of communication technologies and infrastructures. Okigbo (1998) argues that the monopolistic dominance of industrialised nations such as the USA, Britain, France, and Germany perpetuates the underdevelopment of Third World nations. This dominance is exercised through control over critical ICT infrastructure, international broadcasting, and the allocation of radio frequency spectrums, leaving Africa and much of the Global South unable to assert agency in the global communication landscape. Even when such facilities exist in developing nations like South Africa, ownership and control often remain under Western influence. As a result, media content predominantly reflects Western cultural values, including nudity, hip-hop music, and pornography, which may conflict with African cultural norms.

UNESCO statistics further illustrate this disparity: industrialised countries account for 87.1% of the world's computers, which are pivotal tools for data communication systems (Okigbo, 1998). Moreover, while developing nations comprise approximately 75% of the global population, they receive less than 30% of global news coverage. This disproportionate coverage not only marginalises Africa but also perpetuates stereotypes and misconceptions about the continent, impeding international cooperation and understanding. Okigbo also underscores the qualitative imbalance in news flow, noting that Western media's portrayal of the Global South overwhelmingly focuses on adverse events, such as coups, natural disasters, famine, and wars. This biased representation further alienates Africa from the global stage, fostering an environment unconducive to development.

The Role of International News Agencies

International news agencies like the Associated Press (AP), Reuters, and TASS dominate global news dissemination, accounting for over 80% of international news content (Okigbo, 1998). These agencies heavily influence how stories about Africa and the Global South are framed, often perpetuating stereotypes and limiting narratives to conflict, poverty, and instability. Furthermore, Western media outlets such as CNN, BBC, and Fox News flood African airwaves with anti-development content, overshadowing indigenous perspectives and developmental priorities. The dominance of Western cultural exports extends beyond news agencies to entertainment industries. The United States remains the largest distributor of motion pictures globally, with Hollywood influencing cultural narratives worldwide, followed by China and India. However, the emergence of Nigeria's Nollywood has provided a counter-narrative, offering African perspectives and cultural representation on the global stage. Despite this, the radio and television programming traffic imbalance remains heavily skewed in favour of Western content, perpetuating hegemonic control over global communication channels (McPhail, 2010). This systemic imbalance in global news flow marginalises Africa and hampers its ability to shape its narrative and developmental trajectory. Addressing this imbalance requires rethinking the structures and mechanisms of international communication to foster a more equitable distribution of resources, representation, and agency.

Shrivastava (2007) thoroughly examines International News Agencies (INAs), transnational corporations responsible for collecting, processing, and distributing news and images globally. Examples include the Associated Press (AP) in the USA, Reuters in Britain, TASS in Russia, and Agence France-Presse (AFP) in France. These agencies dominate global news dissemination, distributing content to various subscribing media organisations such as newspapers, television networks, and digital platforms. The global interdependence fostered by these agencies has significantly contributed to creating a "global village" through rapid information exchange. However, this dominance also perpetuates structural imbalances in the news flow, favouring Western industrialised nations' narratives. According to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the USA alone produces and distributes approximately 1.2 million films and videos annually, with Europe contributing an additional 2 million movies and thousands of television programmes (Variety, 2021). Platforms like YouTube, Netflix, and Amazon Prime amplify this disparity by hosting billions of hours of predominantly Western content. Critics argue that INAs propagate Western-centric narratives while under-reporting or misrepresenting developments in Africa, reinforcing stereotypes and marginalising African voices. Galtung (1979), as cited in Ndolo (2005), describes this dynamic as a "disguised form of cultural imperialism," creating a state of dependency that undermines Africa's cultural identity and fosters psychological subjugation.

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Effects of Western Media Hegemony

Western media hegemony significantly impacts African cultural identity, eroding traditional values and promoting cultural imperialism. Schiller (1992), Tomlinson (1991), and McQuail (2005) concur that Western media distort indigenous cultural content, undermining African sovereignty and autonomy. Dasylva (2006) emphasises that culture defines a people's civilisation and identity; thus, cultural institutions face extinction when external media influences erode societal values. This phenomenon has led to the dominance of Western norms, languages, and practices, marginalising indigenous cultures in Africa. The dominance of Western media also has profound economic implications for African development. Oshikoya (2008) argues that globalisation, underpinned by Western media dominance, perpetuates economic interdependency, often to the detriment of African nations. Devereux (2003) highlights how Western media giants localise products to secure market control, marginalising African businesses. This economic imbalance limits African entrepreneurs' ability to compete globally, as they lack the resources to effectively establish competitive media platforms for advertising and marketing their products.

Exposure to predominantly negative portrayals of Africa in Western media exacerbates feelings of inferiority among African audiences. Galtung (1979), as cited in Ndolo (2005), notes that persistent negative news about Africa—such as coups, conflicts, and famine—diminishes self-perception and fosters a psychological dependency on Western narratives. This skewed representation undermines efforts to build positive African identities and histories. One of the profound impacts of Western media hegemony on African development is the erosion of political sovereignty in many African states. McQuail (2005) emphasises the critical role of mass media in shaping contemporary politics, noting that:

> Whatever changes are underway, there is no doubting the significance of mass media in contemporary society, politics, culture, everyday social life and economics. In respect of politics, the mass media provide an arena of debate and a set of channels for making policies, candidates, relevant facts, and ideas more widely known, as well as providing politicians, interest groups and agents of government with a means of publicity and influence for distributing diverse information and opinion (p. 4).

Based on McQuail's views, it can be inferred that Western media's global dominance significantly influences the framing and reporting of political news about Africa. These media outlets often represent the views and interests of their owners, which frequently align with Western powers' political and economic goals. Consequently, Western media narratives usually stifle political development in Africa, promoting Western-centric perspectives while marginalising African agencies. The technological dimensions of Western media hegemony are equally significant. MacBride et al. (1980) observe that:

> New technologies have ambiguous consequences as they make communication systems more rigid and exaggerated in their functions and dysfunctions. (p. 32).

The proliferation of media technologies controlled by industrialised nations has led to a monopolisation of global news flow and the standardisation of media content. This standardisation fosters cultural dependency in African countries, as their media industries rely heavily on imported films, documentaries, and other media products. These dynamics limit the growth of indigenous media industries and perpetuate Western cultural dominance.

Several factors contribute to the perpetuation of imbalances in global news flow: 1. Third-world nations lack competitive advantages in communication technologies,

exacerbating their dependence on Western platforms. Limited access to global information further marginalises these countries. 2. The pervasive effects of globalisation and economic marginalisation have entrenched dependency on the West. This dependency is further compounded by debt burdens imposed by stringent conditions from international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank. 3. Poor governance and corruption in many African states have hindered the development of robust media infrastructures. As a result, these nations struggle to counteract Western media hegemony effectively. 4. Africa's media landscape is characterised by small, fragile outlets with limited reach and inadequate internal networks for news dissemination. This fragmentation forces reliance on international news agencies such as Reuters and AP. 5. Rodney (1972), Ake (1996), and Fanon (1961) highlight the colonial and imperialistic exploitation of Africa, which established the foundation for its current underdevelopment. The European slave trade, as noted by Rodney, significantly disrupted Africa's economic and social systems, leaving long-lasting effects on its ability to compete in global media and financial systems.

Methodology and Results

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to address the research problem. The quantitative method focused on the collection and analysis of empirical data. A total population of 3,000 media professionals—including journalists, advertising professionals, and PR practitioners—was studied in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. A proportionate allocation technique was used to derive a sample size of 300 respondents (10% of the total population). The qualitative component involved secondary data collection through literature reviews, interviews, and case studies. This approach facilitated understanding the research problem and informed sustainable solutions aligned with the study's objectives. The study was confined to the Federal Capital City (FCC), Abuja, due to its residents' demographic and psychographic diversity. This focus ensured the validity and reliability of the data, as respondents represented a range of professional and educational backgrounds.

The study revealed significant findings on the role of Western media hegemony in perpetuating imbalances in global news flow, particularly its impact on African political, economic, and cultural development. The quantitative data underscored a strong correlation between Western media dominance and Africa's dependency on external narratives. Meanwhile, the qualitative data highlighted the systemic challenges—such as technological gaps, governance issues, and historical exploitation—that hinder Africa's ability to challenge Western media hegemony. By triangulating data from both methodologies, the research provided an understanding of the problem and potential strategies for mitigating Western media hegemony in Africa. Table 1 below shows the distribution of the study population of 3000 people working in the various organisations in which the research instrument was proportionately distributed.

Table 1: Population of the Study Showing Characteristics of Respondents Comprising Workers in Various Organizations in which the Research Questionnaire were Administered

S/No.	Characteristics of the Respondents	Population Frequency	Proportionate Allocation Technique (10%)	Sample Size (Percentage)
1.	Journalists in Govt./Private Media Organizations	1500	150	50.00
2.	Politicians, government officials, communication aides, etc.	700	70	33.33

3.	Media Practitioners in Embassies, UN Agencies, NGOs, etc.	500	50	16.67
4.	Professional Bodies, i.e., the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) and the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON).	300	30	10.00
	Total	3000	300	100.00

Source: Field survey data, Okafor, 2024.

A combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques was employed to select the sample population to ensure fairness and objectivity. Respondents possessing the necessary characteristics to address the research objectives were deliberately chosen for the investigation. The purposive sampling ensured that participants met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the study, while the convenience sampling facilitated accessibility to respondents. This approach ensured that every individual in the target population had an equal chance of inclusion in the sample, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research findings. This methodology aligns with the postulations of Kerlinger and Babie (2013, p. 62) and Silverman (2001, p. 250), who advocate for structured sampling techniques to achieve fair representation and reliable outcomes. To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, the study employed Cronbach's Alpha reliability test alongside pre-test and test-retest methods. These techniques measured the consistency of results obtained from the questionnaire. According to Asika (2008, p. 105), "An instrument is reliable if it consistently gives the same or similar results." All questions were carefully designed to ensure clarity, conciseness, and simplicity, with stringent controls applied to eliminate ambiguities and extraneous variables that could compromise the validity of the findings.

The collected data, both primary and secondary, were systematically analysed and presented in tabular formats. Percentages were used to determine the frequency of responses to key questions related to the research problem, objectives, and hypotheses. The data were further analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Relevant qualitative data from interviews and secondary sources were edited, analysed, and interpreted to eliminate errors and inconsistencies, ensuring robust and comprehensive results. The total number of questionnaires printed and administered to the respondents was 325, while 300 questionnaires were returned for analysis, representing 90.23 per cent, whereas 25 questionnaires were not returned, representing 9.77 per cent. Section A of the questionnaire represents the respondents' demographic characteristics, while Section B represents the study's objectives and hypotheses.

Table 2: Questionnaire Distributed and Sample Size Determined

Groups	Questionnaire Distributed	Questionnaire Returned	Questionnaire Not Returned
1.	325 Questionnaire	300 (90.23%)	25 (9.77%)

Source: Field survey data, Okafor, 2024.

Table 3: Effects of Western Media Hegemony on African Development

Response Category	Level of Agreement	Frequency	Fx	Percentage

	(x)	(f)		
Strongly Agree	5	145	725	48.33
Agree	4	41	164	13.67
Strongly Disagree	2	45	90	15.00
Disagree	1	39	39	13.00
Undecided	3	30	90	10.00
Total	15	300	1,108	100.00

Source: Field survey data, Okafor, 2024.

In Table 3 above, the researcher sought to ascertain the effects of Western media hegemony on African development. The data interpretation reveals that 145 and 41 respondents of the population strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, in favour of the fact that Western media hegemony affects African development as it impedes the socio-economic and technological development of most African nations. The total number of respondents is 48.33 per cent and 13.67 per cent, respectively. However, 45 and 39 respondents, representing 15.00 per cent and 13.00 per cent, say they strongly disagree and disagree, respectively. However, 10 per cent of the respondents said they were undecided in their views. Therefore, the mean calculation of 3.69 signifies a dominant socioeconomic effect of Western media hegemony.

Findings and Contributions to Knowledge

The data collected from the field were analysed with the appropriate statistical tools, and the results show that over 78 per cent of respondents agree that there are specific measures African countries can adopt to develop their media industries and counter Western global media dominance. Drawing factual inferences from the preceding data analyses, extensive literature reviews, face-to-face interviews, and other empirical research pieces of evidence, it is apparent that Western media messages were so alarming that they created a preponderance of socioeconomic, technological and political effects on African development. Lastly, the third hypothesis attests to the fact that there are sustainable strategies that can be adopted to counter the negative influence of Western media propaganda messages. The study found the need for the media, political communicators, politicians, political gladiators and officeholders to be free to report all sides of events, but not to the detriment of national interest, reputation, security, public opinion and societal norms and values.

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in international and development communication by providing strategic and sustainable solutions to the complex problems of Western media hegemony and African development. While providing the intellectual framework for interpreting and analysing certain concepts, principles, and theories, it is also expected to give a research guide for future researchers in related studies. It would serve as a policy framework for governments and other policymakers to draft development-oriented communication policies for functional national communication strategies for developing African nations. The study contributes to knowledge by serving as a strategic performance evaluation framework for media practitioners in discharging their social responsibility functions creditably. The research also provides an understanding of the ideological and philosophical leanings of Western media organisations and journalists and how these leanings and biases negatively affect human development. The study provides resource material for communication and development scholars, serving as a policy framework for governments and other policymakers in drafting development-oriented communication policies and strategies for African countries. Development partners and donor

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agencies would find the research report a good peer review template for formulating African development policies and programmes. The study also provides more insights into emerging concepts, ideas, principles, and theories and an understanding of the current dynamics in global news and information order.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the study critically examined the pervasive influence of Western media hegemony on African development. From the research analysis and findings, it is evident that one of the major causes of African underdevelopment stems from the hegemonic influence of the Western media arising from absolute comparative scientific, technological and economic advantages enjoyed by the Western World and other industrialised nations over the developing countries. Arising from the findings, it is indisputable that Western media misrepresentations, misinformation and stereotypes about Africa often undermine the continent's socioeconomic transformation by reinforcing Eurocentrism and hindering the positive representation of African voices and narratives. This prevailing situation may not be reversed unless a comprehensive remedy is taken towards African development and general emancipation.

Though the clamour for a new World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) is not new, the study underscores the critical need for a paradigm shift in international and intercultural communication towards a more equitable global media landscape that fosters diversity, mutual understanding, cooperation and global interconnectedness. The study concludes that African leaders can foster a deeper understanding of their traditional identities, cultures, norms, and values through sustainable investment and promoting indigenous African media content, education, and media literacy. Exploring these factors will create more insights and pathways to Africa's technological and socioeconomic development. Finally, the aim and objectives of this study cannot be attained without proffering sustainable solutions to the problems posed by Western media hegemony on African development. Hence, the following recommendations have been proffered to achieve them:

1) African governments, media organisations, and scholars should collaborate and develop policies and strategies to check Western media hegemony and media content and promote African development. To mitigate the effects of Western media hegemony, African journalists should counterbalance adverse propagandist news reports on Western countries' issues to deter their journalists from being cautious in their investigations and reportage of Africa.

2) The African governments must collaborate with financial institutions and international media networks and mobilise resources to build an African Continental Information Superhighway called Digital Africa. It can help provide a continental broadcasting infrastructure network for development-oriented news and information in Africa.

3) There is a strong need to establish an Africa Media Development Bank (AMDB) exclusively devoted to financing and developing African media and ICT infrastructure in the broadcast industry. The AMDB would grant broadcast media organisations access to credit facilities to sponsor media projects to checkmate the Western press.

4) African countries must develop their global communications capabilities by combining their traditional rural communication channels with modern communication systems at their disposal and trained professionals worldwide.

5) Western media organisations, journalists, and other media practitioners must

strictly comply with the ethics, laws, rules, and regulations governing the global media and communication industry. At the same time, they must refrain from communicating falsehoods, non-evidence-based information, and propagandistic information dissemination.

6) African Heads of State and Governments and other Third World nations must collaborate with their Western allies to embark on aggressive mass media and cultural reforms in the African media and film industry to screen out the negative influences of foreign news and programmes.

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