Positive and Negative Effects of Postmodernism on the Mass Media: A Critical Review of Trends from an Islamic Perspective

[1]Yusuf Abdul Azeez, [1]Azmi Shah Bin Suratman, [1]Hussin Bin Salamon,
[1]Ramli Bin Awang and [2]Ziad Bin Abdul Awal
[1]Faculty of Islamic Civilization,
[2]Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract: Postmodernism may be viewed as an era in which the mass media was integral to an immense proliferation of artistic styles that projected the ideations of postmodernism and its several movements. This study examines the historical development of postmodernism as an imaginative intellectual interest group throughout the 1960 and 1970's. An attempt is made to critically assess both positive and negative effects of postmodernism on the mass media in addition to the latter's influence (s) on Islam within the context of postmodernism.

Key words: Postmodernism, mass media, technology, communication, Islam

INTRODUCTION

The term' postmodernism' describes a movement that is often associated with cultural trends (Potter, 2008). Generally, it describes the era that followed modernism and technically it describes numerous cultural expressions of literature, art, philosophy, economics, architecture and literary criticism (Giddens, 1991; Hossain and Karim, 2013; Potter, 2008). Specifically, it became a later 20th century departure from modernism characterized by a mixture of creative approaches to media and technological expressions. The concept of 'postmodernism' was first introduced by Hegel (1770-1831) (Hamid, 2006; Potter, 2008) who was influenced by the German Romantic Movement. He recognized a need to establish a system based on improved individualized perceptions as personalized expressions of instantiation that reflected extant social structures rather than the inverse where social structure mirrored the conglomeration of individuals. Hence, Hegel could perhaps be regarded as the first postmodernist. Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) (Potter, 2008; Albright, 2004) did not coin the term although, he was probably the first historian to bring the idea of postmodernism to the attention of the general public in the 1940s. After the second world war, postmodernism rapidly gained recognition in America where social breakdowns were analyzed by the sociologist, Wright Mills (1916-1962) (Azmi, 2013; Potter, 2008).

Mass media involves various technologies that project communications to a massive audience. This technology encompasses radio, recorded music, film and television among other means that electronically transmit information in addition to printed media comprising newspapers, books, pamphlets, comics, magazines, etc. Mass media also includes billboards, signs and placards placed within and without commercial buildings, sports stadiums, shops and buses. Flying billboards are now towed by airplanes and blimps and even skywriting is used among other types of outdoor media. The organizations controlling these technologies include television stations and publishing companies, etc. and are generically referred to as the "mass media" (Albright, 2004; Giddens, 1991).

Modernism is associated with expressionism, innovation, individualism, progress, purity, originality, seriousness, etc. while the postmodern condition is characterized by exhaustion, pluralism, pessimism, disillusionment and the negation of absolute knowledge as a concept. Modernism has expressed modern life in terms of technology, new materials, communication, swift travel and the dissemination of culture, etc. Nevertheless, the terms, "post-modernity" and "post-modernism" are often hard to distinguish, especially as the former led to the latter, so to speak. These periods bore sundry political ramifications including the "anti-ideological ideas" that appeared firmly associated with feminist, racial equality and gay rights movements, etc., factions that filled late 20th century with forms of anarchism and even peace movements in addition to various hybrids that currently attempt to counter globalization (Damean, 2006). Although, these social trends embraced many facets of postmodernism in its most robust sense, they also mirrored or fed from its core ideas (Burke, 2010; Nesbitt, 1996).

Corresponding Author: Yusuf Abdul Azeez, Faculty of Islamic Civilization, University Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia

POSTMODERNISM AND MASS MEDIA

Post-modernist expressions have clearly manifest in visual arts (Desmond, 2011), music (Albright, 2004), graphic design (Drucker and McVarish, 2009), literature (Hopper and Miller, 2009), cinema (Hayward, 1996), architecture (Nesbitt, 1996), planning and urban design (Harvey, 1991), digital communications (Stahlman, 1996), political science (Ashley and Walker, 1990), language and linguistics (Burke, 2010) and philosophy (Deely, 1992). Hence, "post-modernism" and "mass media" are deeply inter-woven contingencies. Current societies rely on mass media to such an extent that Marshall McLuhan called the media "extensions of man". Kreps and Thornton stated that the "media" extended "people's ability to communicate to speak to others far away to hear messages and to see images that would be unavailable without media" (Iuhas, 2012). Mass media is therefore, presently capable of facilitating short, intermediate and long-term effects on the audience (Iuhas, 2012; Schifirnet, 2009). Short-term objectives include exposing people to different concepts; creating awareness and knowledge; altering outdated or incorrect knowledge and enhancing audience recall of particular advertisements or Public Service Announcements (PSAs) including promotions and program names. Intermediate-term objectives include all of the above as well as changes in attitudes, behaviors and perceptions of social norms. Long-term objectives incorporate all of the aforementioned in addition to a focused restructuring of perceived social norms as well as the maintenance of behavioral changes. Evidence from the achievement of this three tiered manifest is then used to evaluate mass media effectiveness (Iuhas, 2012).

Mass media performs three key functions: education, the shaping of public relations and the promotion of a particular policy or perspective. As an educational tool, the media not only imparts knowledge but also places even greater efforts on the advocacy of social utilitarian activities. As a public relations tool, the media aids in the organization of programs that achieve credibility and diversity for leaders, stakeholders and the general public by aiding leadership's establishment of policy agendas, allowing for debates on controversial issues and the gaining of support for particular viewpoints. As a tool for promoting a particular policy, the media propagates and projects the ideas and programs of leaders of thought and policy makers to the respondents and it guides them towards knowing the necessary decisions that may have to be taken on a particular matter or on the basis of the responses that may be received from the targeted audience (Berry, 2010; Kastlez, 2011).

Radio and television: Radio was the first and perhaps most important mass media tool used to expand communication globally and played a decisively effective role in information dissemination and enhancement of public culture and knowledge (Drucker and McVarish, 2009). Television proved an even more potent medium of reaching the masses and is capable of influencing people irrespective of age, sex, status or educational background by offering both sight and sound with dramatic lifelike representations of people and products. Hence, television had an even greater impact on post-modernism and vice versa (Hayward, 1996).

For some, the invention of television announced an end of radio applications as obsolete. But, radio survived due to frequency, accessibility, velocity and affordable prices compared to other devices; aided by the fact that it was powered by electricity and small portable battery operated devices. Since, placement and production costs were cheaper for radio compared to TV, radio often conveyed messages in greater detail. Thus, radio is sometimes considered more efficient and remains the most widely spread public media among undeveloped and developing countries, even if a majority of listeners are illiterate (Kastlez, 2011; Martinez, 1972).

Being a device transmitting sound and images, television was/is deemed the media's apex and attracts massive audiences despite its deficiencies and even detrimental influences and persists as one of the major media's most efficient information dissemination and communication tools (Drucker and McVarish, 2009). Castlez believed that the real power of television is that it sets the scene for all procedures in a society from politics to commerce (Nesbitt, 1996). It also determines the language of social communication. Companies spend huge amounts of money on TV advertisement because not doing, so would amount to surrendering their market share to rivals who will automatically launch their products using the same media. As for politics and elections, politicians who do not access TV most likely will not win the support of the people because TV powerfully affects voter perceptions on certain issues. Furthermore, television can also change habits among family members as some adjust domestic routines to view certain programming (Harvey, 1991). Now a days, television is a household item and most children have been exposed to it from birth; sometimes referred to as an "electronic nanny" as it keeps children busy watching its programming, especially when parents are absent (Martinez, 1972).

Newspapers: Newspapers allow for consumer flexibility irrespective of what is read and even when. In many

households, newspapers rarely survive longer than 1 or 2 days. Newspapers are available daily or weekly and target local, national, regional or international audiences as well as ethnic groups with product advertisements and also focus on special interest groups such as feminists, human rights, freedom fighters, religious and others (Damean, 2006; Hamid, 2006).

Magazines: Contemporary communication analysts classify magazine into three:

- Consumer (reader's digest, newsweek, people, etc.)
- Agricultural (farm journal, national hog farmer, beef, etc.)
- Business (professional, industrial, trade, general business publications, etc.)

Magazines have certain characteristics such as audience selectivity, reproduction quality, prestige, reader loyalty and a long shelf life. They are often saved for weeks or months and are frequently reread and passed on to others. Furthermore, they are convenient and quickly surveyed and/or read compared to time consumed reading newspapers (Iuhas, 2012; Schifirnet, 2009).

Internet: The internet is the most prominent technology that has transformed the world to a global village because it is an international informative and communicative resource that is not bound by time or space no matter where a person may be (Ashley and Walker, 1990). It is therefore, evident that the internet greatly affects an individual's social life, private or public. In today's world, the internet has become a household appliance. Its users include government agencies, organizations, corporate bodies and other institutions. An advantage of the internet is that its search engines direct users to tens of thousands of web sites by using one or more keywords. But, unlike TV or radio (also available in most every household), internet access requires technical skill and resources to purchase hardware and subscription services. Despite its numerous advantages, some people still fear its impact, especially on children in the sense that that it may affect output performance, especially if addicted to it. The internet also exposes people to pornography, violence and other vices as well as dangerous activities (Rajani and Chandio, 2004).

Cell phone: The cell phone has brought the greatest revolution in the communication industry and has become a necessary personal and professional device for millions of people the world over (Kastlez, 2011; McGuigan, 2005). It has various advantages and is far from being an ordinary telephone. As a multimedia device, information transmission through text, sound and picture by phone has side effects on health and people are often annoyed or disturbed when aroused by cell phone noise. Hidden information exchange mechanisms also make cell phone use more riskier than telephones, especially for children in that they often exchange much information without sufficient insight. In practical life, less personal communication with family often occurs because of preoccupation with the cell phone (McGuigan, 2005). This persistent posture invariable affects the culture of learning and human relationships, often reflected by behavioral dysfunction and ignorance. Several reports also indicate that it is a growing cause of divorce and family dissolution (Hossain and Karim, 2013; Ramli, 2013).

Electronic entertainment devices: Millions engage in online gaming and other forms of entertainments. Statistics indicate that >90% of players are adults and that most prefer to play online rather than face the presence of a real opponent. However, the majority usually lose the game because computerized robotic opponents are programmed to win. This motivates human players to repeatedly challenge and play more often as electronic games are made so attractive they often become addictive. On the other hand, more appropriate computer games can raise the level of awareness and enhance thought processes for children (Martinez, 1972; Schifirnet, 2009). Mention must also be made, however that the introduction of online entertainment and gaming has contributed to the disappearance of traditional games which in turn, tends to degrade culture and tradition. According to Walter Park, the major problem of computer games is that they distance individuals from the real world in favor of a virtual world (Rajani and Chandio, 2004; Potter, 2008). In addition, electronic gaming arrests individual development and cause job loss due to a player's inattention to duty and also adds to family dysfunction (Hayward, 1996; Potter, 2008).

POSTMODERNISM: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

According to Kamaruddin (2012), postmodernism is not a new term as it has been in common use in general fields of scientific disciplines and has also penetrated the Islamic narrative. Islam holds a supra-postmodernism concept by the manner in which its doctrines envelope adherents. Islam believes in religious and cultural pluralism but while it accepts the importance of reason, it also accepts supra-rational forces (Kamaruddin, 2012). According to the Quran, Allah created several religions and cultures, though he could have created only one if he

so desired (Qur'an 5: 48). Thus, pluralism is the basis of the Quran. This is demonstrated in the Qur'an which states that the world was created in plurality not only in matters of religion but also by way of ethnicity, nations and tribes as essential human qualities described as 'signs' of Allah (Qur'an 30: 22 and 49: 13). The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of pluralism to such an extent that even when one is convinced that the gods of other religions are false, a Muslim believer is prohibited from abusing them. The Quran says: "And abuse not those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest, exceeding the limits they abuse Allah through ignorance", thus to every people, We have made their deeds fair-seeming" (Qur'an 6: 109). In addition to that the Qur'an says that every place of worship in which the name of Allah is remembered should be respected. Thus, the Quran also says: "And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah`s name is much remembered, would have been pulled down" (22: 40). Hence, there is no place for inter-religious conflict in Islam. The Quran also subscribes to the doctrine of what Shah Waliullah and Maulana Azad called the Wahdat Al-Din, i.e., unity of religion which means all religions are the same in essence and core teachings (Kamaruddin, 2012).

As far as multi-culturalism is concerned, the West accepted this only towards the latter part of the 20th century (Kamaruddin, 2012). Previously, the West had long been a mono-religious and mono-cultural society as the Christian Church rejected the validity of all other religions. Presently, the Church believes in inter-religious dialogue and has issued instructions to its organizations to that effect. It is therefore, of note that the Qur'an had long ago accepted all Biblical prophets from the beginning of its revelation (Ashley and Walker, 1990; Azmi, 2013; Shaikh, 2009).

Islam also accepted multi-culturalism by saying that all believers are one ummah regardless of ethnicity, language, tribe or nationality. Islam admonishes believers not to discriminate between Arabs and non-Arabs, especially as Arabs were/are extremely proud of their ethnic origin. Although, Islam spread far and wide among peoples of different cultures, the Shariah fully respected the 'adat (customs) of different peoples. Local customs and traditions have been integrated within the framework of Shari'ah from its inception (Azmi, 2013; Giddens, 1991; Nesbitt, 1996).

EFFECTS OF POSTMODERNISM AND MASS MEDIA

Over the last 500 years, the influence of the mass media has grown exponentially with the advance of technology. First came books, then newspapers, magazines, photography, sound recordings, films, radio, television followed by the so-called new media of the internet and now social media. Today, a majority of the elite class depends on information sharing as does just about everyone to keep apace of daily activities, work, education, health care, leisure activities, entertainment, traveling, personal relationships, etc. All of these mass media inventions have had a great effect on postmodernism and these effects continue to modify postmodernism's ideology and theories. Hence, one should not be surprised when Chase Clow said:

> "The theory and ideology of postmodernism has changed the world and very few areas of existence have been spared. Postmodernism (and the pluralism, skepticism and relativism it produces) has altered how individuals create and perceive art, read and report the news, ponder and produce philosophical arguments and perhaps most importantly, interpret and venerate spiritual texts, religion and God"

The first way in which postmodernism has influenced Islam is by altering the ways in which Muslims and non-Muslims view each other. First, postmodernism influenced the media and as a result, it has also affected how Muslims and non-Muslims view each other. Ahmed (2004) noted:

> "Postmodernism coexists and coincides with the age of the media; in many profound ways the media are the central dynamic and the defining feature of postmodernism"

The neutral media greatly influences how Muslims and non-Muslims see each other as the media gives both groups a great deal of exposure. For example, non-Muslim westerners living in America can turn on CNN and hear the voices of prominent Muslim leaders and scholars as well as the voices of less prominent Muslims throughout the world (Ahmed, 2004). Likewise, Muslims living in the Middle East can turn on Al-Jazeera and hear the voices of prominent Western leaders and scholars as well as the voices of the less prominent (Ahmed, 2004). Secondly, postmodernism also influenced the concept of feminism and as a result, how feminists view Muslims and their practices (Damean, 2006). For example, Hamid (2006) explained that postmodernism has been very positive towards the spread of feminist ideals. Thirdly, postmodernism changed how some countries view their laws (Hamid, 2006). For example, Yilmaz (2002) discussed the postmodern legal system of England and is of the

view that in England there are both British and Muslim laws (Yilmaz, 2002). Since, England recognizes and respects views from its Muslim population (a form of postmodernism), it allows Muslims to manage their affairs according to these prescribed laws. Furthermore in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, national laws recognize the existence of religious minorities in their midst and therefore accord rights and freedom to manage their affairs likewise (Bayat, 2007; Hamid, 2006; Yilmaz, 2002).

ISLAM AND MASS MEDIA: ASSESSMENT AND REVIEW OF TRENDS

According to Berry (2010), the 20th century shifted from a society "built around and dependent upon mechanical technology" to one that is engrossed in electronically informed media. In societies with consolidated modernity, mass media is now essential as a means for the preservation of social cohesion (Hossain and Karim, 2013; Iuhas, 2012). The importance of new media (You tube, etc.), social networks (Face book, Twitter, etc.) does not need to be emphasized. Since, 2011 for example the entire world has seen the effectiveness and impact of these tools in various events and revolutions (Hossain and Karim, 2013). Also, a number of institutions have taken steps to investigate the use and effects of these tools in matters such as religious discussions and interfaith dialogue. Hence, religious leaders and scholars have had access and opportunity to discuss matters of respective import that might otherwise not have been possible in other forums. Also, the modern media vis-a-vis the internet has greatly aided open discussions on contributions made by Islam's earlier scholars to scientific discoveries and technological innovations as well as other contributions to the mankind's development in the annals of human civilization (Iuhas, 2012).

CONCLUSION

We have shown that postmodernism has advantages and disadvantages by demonstrating the crucial role of mass media in reshaping the postmodernist ethos. The origins of post-modernism and postmodern theory also reflect the hefty contributions of mass media. However, mass media can be counterproductive when its contents are not audience-appropriate or if messages delivered are too poignant or divisive. Detrimental side effects emanating from the use of current mass media tools can be avoided, however, through appropriate formative research, knowledge of the audience and experience in linking media channels to audiences.

We therefore, suggest that mass media's positive import and effects from disseminating diverse information are better centered on the projection of core values that benefit human existence.

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