

DEPENDENCY THEORY: AN APPROPRIATE TOOL FOR INTERNET/WEB STUDIES

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Abstract—The internet, as a unique medium of communication and information, converges different media forms into networks and simultaneously, different modes of communications. This creates difficulty in choosing a theory when carrying out studies on the socio-economic, psychological and political basis of the internet. Selecting a theory that appropriately suit such studies will depend on the theory's potential to offer a view of a very powerful mass medium that ties its power to the audience members' dependency on the medium and its contents. This paper, enumerates several reasons why the Dependency Theory of mass communication is most aptly suited for Internet/Web studies. It also explains the stand of Defleur and Ball-Rokeach who offered this theory and some insights into some studies and opinions of media experts who support the application of this theory on internet studies.

Keywords—component, formatting, style, styling, insert (key words)

I. Introduction

Mass communication theories are explanations and predictions of social phenomena that attempt to relate mass communication to various aspects of people's lives. They are human constructs, often borrowed from other fields of science. The environments, in which these theories are created, change constantly, thus causing frequent recasting, acceptance and rejection of some of these theories. For example, theories that were developed before television and computer networks and the internet have to be reexamined and sometimes discarded in favour of these new media. Mass communication theories are dynamic, constantly passing through stages of development. However when carrying out internet/web studies, one central reality of the medium is that it converges different media forms into networks and simultaneously different modes of communication. Therefore selecting a theory that most appropriately suit such studies, must depend on the selected theory's potential to offer a view of a very powerful mass medium that ties its power to the audience members' dependency on the medium and its contents.

Each media theory has served as a guide to important researches in its time but most have not been able to explain the relationship between the mass media and the people who make up the society, some do not address the impact the media has on social and cultural changes while others ignore the fact that media consumption may be unintentional thus ignoring cultural roles that shape peoples' media choices and use. .

II. DEFINING DEPENDENCY THEORY

In 1975, Melvin Defleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach were motivated to offer a view of a potentially powerful media. Several reasons prompted them to make this move. According to them, Some theories openly contradict each other. Others say that there will be immediate universal, and direct influence

on the audience members from exposure to mass communications, another says that such influences will be long term, indirect, selective and limited (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989 p.291). They also claimed that the dissimilarity among contemporary theories of mass communication exists because each focuses on different configurations of independent and dependent variables and therefore each use different assumptions in unique ways to make prediction about influences on people and society. In line with this situation, they formulated a media system, 'dependency theory' which is a complex formulation that attempt to link into a single configuration a number of the ideas that have been explored in other mass communication theories. In doing this, their theory attribute more power to the media than do selective influence theories. Dependency theory argues that in our complex and changing society, people become increasingly dependent on media and media contents to understand what is going on around them, to learn how to behave meaningfully and to escape. Baran (2002), further pointed out that In a crises situation such as natural disaster, we immediately turn to the mass media. We are dependent on the media to understand what is going on around us, to learn what to do (how to behave) and even sometimes for escape from the reality of the situation. Now think of even personal crises like reaching puberty, attending school, dating or having a child etc. Dependency theory can explain or predict our media use and its impact in these situation as well (Baran, 2002, p.386). These factors have made the theory aptly suitable in carrying out media studies since people all over the world have increasingly become dependent on the Internet for virtually, every purpose that one can imagine. This theory is most suitable when discussing the extents of the Internet's impact on people and society. Media dependency relationship rests on goals on one hand and resources on the other They see the media system as an information system in control of three types of activities engendering information resources to which others have to have access in other to attain their goals. These include gathering and creating, processing and disseminating. The theory is composed of several assertions by Defleur and Ball-Rokeach. Stanley Baran (2002) summarized them as follows: (1) The basis of the media's influence resides in the relationship between the larger social system, the media's role in that system and audience relationship to the media. (2) The degree of our dependence on media and their content is the key variable in understanding when and why media messages alter audience beliefs, feelings and behaviors. (3) In our modern industrial society, we are increasingly dependent on media (a) to understand the social world (b) to act meaningfully and effectively in society and (c) to find fantasy and escape or diversion. (4) Our level of dependency is related to (a) the number and centrality (importance) of the specific information delivery function served by a medium; and (b) the degree of change and conflict present in society (Baran, 2002, p. 386).

Secondly, the dependency theory gives much room for expansion by relating to contemporary mass communication theory or cultural theory that sees potentially powerful media effects as either enhanced or thwarted by audience members involvement in the mass communication process. Both social cultural, and socio-psychological theories of mass communication can be applied to dependency theory in the study of the Internet. For example, the socio-psychological theory has to do with communication as an interpersonal influence. Scholars in this area believe that there are communication truths that can be discovered by careful systematic observation. They look for cause and effect relationships that will predict when a communication behaviour will fail or succeed. To do this researchers run series of controlled experiments. Psychologist Carl Harland was one of the founding fathers of experimental research on the effects of media communication. This is also related to the issue of powerful media effects of Defleur's and Ball-Rokeach's dependency theory. Top on the lists of effects of media or communication behaviours asserted by them is that (1) The media influence relationship in a social system and plays a role in that system and audience relationship to it. (2) The degree of dependence on media and their content is the key variable in understanding when and why media messages alter audience beliefs, feelings and behaviours. The Internet has been accused of negatively and positively influencing people's lives. Katz and Apsden (1997) express concern over some of these influences when they wrote: "That the most common fear has been that the more time spent online decreases the amount and quality time spent offline" (as cited by Burnett and Marshall, 2003, p.65) Putnam also agreed with Katz and Apsden when he argued that, we are increasingly becoming suburban hermits seldom leaving the comforts of our home or cyber cafe to engage in civic and social activities" (Putnam, 2000, p.10). In a related publicized study of the Internet, Nie and Erbring concluded that "The more hours people use the Internet, the less time they spend with real human beings" (Nie & Erbring, 2000, p.6).

Burnett and Marshall (2003) believe that the dominating position held by these researchers is that the Internet has negative effects on the offline real lives of those who use it. They noted that the well-known Home Net Study by Kraut et al (1998) and Nie and Erbring study (2000) can serve as examples of the concerns raised from this perspective. The Home Net Study follows 256 socially engaged members of ninety-three Pittsburgh families from their first introduction to the Internet through their first year online. Measures of Internet use were obtained through capture programmes on the subjects' computers. The Nie and Erbring study consists of a random sample survey of 4,112 people in 2,700 households. Together, these two studies argue that the use of the Internet challenge traditional relationships, lessens total social involvement, increases loneliness, and increase depression. Nie and Erbring found that people reported spending less time in social activities after going online, while Kraut et al, found that greater use of the Internet was associated with declines in the size of both local and distant social circles, increases in loneliness and depression (as cited by Burnett and Marshall 2003).

Kraut et al (1998) theorizes that those negative effects might be attributed to two processes: poorer quality, or weak tie, Internet social relationships were substituted for

Burnett and Marshall (2003) believe that face to face relationship, or time spent online is time in which people ought to be forming strong face to face ties were they offline. Thus the Internet is seen as either replacing existing strong ties or as interfering with the development of new strong ties. Nie and Erbring state that heavy Internet users, "lose touch with the social environment," and as more people go online, there are, "more people at home, alone, and anonymous" (Nie & Erbring, 2000). Both of these studies were headline news in both the New York Times and CNN which is indicative of the extent to which the findings struck a responsive chord in the media. However, Baym, Zhang and Lin, have argued the case that the influence of Internet on social lives is not all negative. According to them, Two major stances on the Internet social effects has revealed two quite distinctive interpretations of the Internet effect on one's identity and integration into the larger social world, one that the Internet is positive and the other that the Internet is harmful (Baym, Zhang & Lin, 2001, p.3).

Burnett and Marshall (2003) believe that this statement is confirmed by the UCLA's Center for Communication Policy (2000) when they surveyed 2,096 American households, comparing Internet users and non-users. The study, according to them, reports that 92 per cent of Internet users report spending the same amount or more time with family members since going online. The respondents reported no difference in their socializing with friends or on their children's time with friends since going online. They also reported that people are less likely to feel ignored because of a household member using the Internet than by one using the television. Internet users and non-users reported essentially the same amount of friends outside their household. An interesting finding was that compared to non-users, Internet users spend more time with clubs and volunteer organizations.

Another large scale survey study from the Pew Project on the Internet and American Life (2000) found that Internet users are more socially active than non- users. The study also suggests that the Internet is enhancing traditional relationships, and that the specific application of e-mail has increased contact and improved relationships. The Pew Study (2002:20) states that, "Significant majorities of online Americans say their use of e-mail has increased the amount of contact they have with key family members and friends." The study found that women, and men in lesser numbers, "have used e-mail to enrich their important relationships and enlarge their networks." In the same vein, the UCLA study found that Internet use slightly increased the number of people with whom subjects stayed in contact, especially family, friends, and professional colleagues. (as cited by Burnett and Marshall 2003)

Dimmick (2000) found that among the appeals of e-mail are that it takes so little time, is inexpensive, easy to fit into one's schedule, and that it minimizes the communicative relevance of time zones. Similarly, Stafford (1999) concluded that e-mail is being used to support and maintain meaningful

relationships. Some studies have argued that Internet use may improve emotional wellbeing rather than creating loneliness and depression. La Rose (2001) argue that Internet communication with people we know can alleviate depression, at least among socially isolated and moderately depressed populations such as college students, who may tend to rely on social technologies to obtain social support" (La Rose, 2001, p.5) White (1999) found that those who used the Internet in a retirement community tended towards decreased loneliness. This view is supported by the UCLA Internet Report (2000) which found that Internet users reported slightly lower levels of life dissatisfaction, interaction anxiety, powerlessness and loneliness than non-users.

The reviewed researches share a series of issues such as the way in which the Internet affects our daily affairs, our relationships with others, our engagement in social activities, as well as our psychological health. The negative view argues that the Internet threatens traditional relationships, lessens social involvement and has negative psychological effects on its users. The positive view sees the Internet as rather integrated into daily social life instead of being an opposition to it. Instead of threatening traditional relationships, the Internet is seen to simply extend and often enhance them. Burnett and Marshall (2003) however claim that comparing these studies is problematic as they almost use different questions, measures and are most often based on large scale survey research in the U.S, lacking in actual social Internet use as it occur in the context of daily activity. For them, There is need to know more about how the Internet is used across the full range of social interactions, how it fits and compares to these interaction and ultimately what meanings and significance are generated by these new configuration. (Burnett & Marshall, 2003, p. 40) To understand fully the point made by Burnett and Marshall, we need to consider the nature of the Internet and how that applies to the audience's use of it. This brings us back to the earlier mentioned assertions of Defleur and Ballkoreach (1975) that understanding the nature of media content is the key to understanding why it alters the beliefs, feelings and behaviour of its audience. The fact that Internet use leads to change in behaviour has long been established by Internet media researches, most especially those dealing on the psychology of the medium. This branch of study examines how people behave when they act and interact on-line and why the characteristics of the medium affect behaviour in positive and negative ways. Adam Joinson (2003) pointed out the importance of socio-psychology in the study of Internet behaviour by saying that, "the increased use of technology in everyday life has increased the need for psychology to recognize its role in shaping social behaviours well as simply mediating this same behavior" (Joinson, 2003, p. 72).

Patricia Wallace is of the same view when she described how the medium can have potent effects on our behaviour. According to her. Internet is a place where humans are acting and interacting rather strangely at times. Sometimes, its effects seem to be quite positive but sometimes we do things online that we might never do in any other environment and that we regret later. At times it is an environment that we as Internet users can affect and mold, provided we have some inkling of

how, and why, it can change actions and behaviour (Wallace, 2001, p. 1). As far as human environments go, the Internet is relatively new. However, researchers have identified "anonymity" as one of the characteristics of the medium. Patricia Wallace went on to explain further that, "Anonymity is a key ingredient of the Internet environment for human interaction and it affects our behaviour in predictable ways" (Wallace, 2001, p.27). This is because when people believe that their actions cannot be attributed directly to them personally, they tend to become less inhibited by social conventions and restraints. This can either be negative or positive. This fact is expressed illustratively by Burnett and Marshall as follows: The pleasure of anonymity on the web can be compared to the seductive qualities of the Modem big city where one can enjoy what is on offer without being identified or at least without having one's identify completely revealed (Burnett & Marshall, 2003, p.78).

Wallace also noted that this factor of anonymity brings forth lies and excitement on the Internet. The characteristics of role-playing, deception, half-truths and exaggeration, exist on the Internet partly because of anonymity and the absence of visual and auditory cues which allow them, and at the same time insulate users from the consequences. Even when users are not exactly anonymous on the net, the physical distance and low social presence make users feel less inhibited. Lying and deception come in various form on the Internet. There are harmless lies, deceptions, and harmful ones. The medium make people engage in role-laying that otherwise would not work well in real life. Many swap gender that is pretending to be either a male or female when they are not. Internet anonymity has given rise to a lot of fraudulent antisocial activities. It is what gives impetus to pedophiles and pornographers to carry out their nefarious activities on the web, pouncing on unsuspecting and gullible victims who fall for their scams. Patricia Wallace has noted that anonymity, physical distance and perceived lack of accountability in cyberspace may contribute to some difference in the nature of pornography and its effect on behaviour: The nature of the Internet is likely to trigger disinhibition we see so often in other aspect of online behaviour. People feel freer to read erotic stories and view explicit image on line, when they might never have entered an adult movies theatre or visited a live sex show (Wallace, 2001, p. 80).

However, anonymity can be positive especially when people are offered the opportunity to discuss personal issues, under conditions which they feel safer. There are also many online support groups that are flourishing partly because many of the participants feel freer to discuss concerns in the relatively anonymity of the Internet environment than they might in face to face support group within their communities. Another clear defining characteristics of the Internet is that it is much as about looking, reading, observing and browsing as it is about a kind of empowerment to produce. This characteristics of the medium makes it highly irresistible to users. Patricia Wallace has acknowledged this quality as follows: That some people appear to be entering into a pattern of Internet use that resembles a pathological behavioural disorder, in some ways similar to other compulsive behaviours. They spend hour after hour, day after

day, online, unable to log off, unwilling to leave their computers, while their former real live activities and social relationship deteriorates (Wallace, 2001, p. 172).

This behaviour is what researchers have termed Internet addiction disorder. It was initially proposed by psychologist Ivan Goldberg as a joke, but as more and more evidence of the patterns of excessive use began to emerge, people began to wonder if Internet users can really become addicted to it. This notion intrigued researchers and studies were conducted. Kimberly Young (1996) was among the first to conduct study on Internet addiction. She discovered three aspects of the medium that makes it potentially addictive. Anonymity, convenience and escape (ACE). On the other hand, Davis (2001) proposed a user-centred view of Internet addiction. He argued that the behaviour and symptom led models of addiction to ignore cognitive symptoms. To him, depression, loneliness and low esteem make users of Internets addicts because it provides an escape from everyday problems. The entertainment found on it help them escape from the real world into one fantasy as supported by Defleur and Ball-Rokeach in one of their dependency theory assertions that people are increasingly dependent on the media to find fantasy and escape diversion. Another assertion made by Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975) under dependency theory is that the media create new forms of actions and interactions thereby reordering the way in which people interpret and respond to the social world. Hence dependency theory can also be applied to socio- cultural theory of communication, which sees communication as the creation and enactment of social realities. It is based on the premise that as people communicate, they produce and reproduce culture. Contemporary socio-cultural theorists claim that it is through the process of communication that reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed, or as Em Griffin (2000) puts it, when these perceptual worlds collide, the socio-cultural tradition offers help in bridging the culture gap that exists between them." In a related statement, Burnett and Marshall (2003) wrote that Information and communication technologies shape our perception, distributes our pictures of the world to one another and constructs different form of control over the cultural stories that shape our sense of who we are and our world (Burnett & Marshall, 2003, p.63).

This is to say that new inventions cause cultural changes. Hence to examine the Internet under dependency theory one must also apply McLuhan's theory of technological determinism. McLuhan regarded communication invention as pivotal because every new form of media innovation became an extension of the human faculty, thereby changing human perception. According to him, The new electronic media have radically changed and altered the way people think, feel and act. We are in the midst of a revolution, yet most of us have yet to understand that the world will never be the same (McLuhan, 1964, p. 569).

At its core, McLuhan's theory of technological determinism is that inventions in technology invariably cause cultural changes. In fact, he concluded that it is changes in modes of communication that shape human existence. That was why he wrote that "Family life; the workplace, schools, healthcare, friendship, religion, and recreation, politics,

nothing remains untouched by communication technology" (McLuhan, 1964, p.570). The above statement, when related to the Internet, is absolutely true. The medium has virtually changed every aspect of peoples' lives all over the world. It has developed its own culture that is virtually practiced and accepted throughout the world. Dubin notes that the Internet, Is influencing the language we speak. Terms like "mouse" and 'virus' have taken on new meanings; new terms like 'firewalls and RAM now enter our vocabulary, when talking about topics other than computers (Dubin, 2001, p.7). Also, noted cultural critic, Neil Postman, has argued that "the digital culture perpetuated through the Internet and television has caused our society to emphasize glitz and entertainment rather than rational thought" (as cited in Pearson, Nelson, Harter, 2003, p.320). Such an effect according to Postman influences everything, from the way we learn to politics. This harmonizes with McLuhan's view that the way we live is largely a function of the way we process information. Tom Wolfe, an analyst of popular culture is of this same view when he also wrote that "new Technologies ... radically alter the entire way people use their five senses, the way they react to things and therefore their entire lives and society ... " (Wolfe, 1967, p. 167). The Internet has confirmed these statements to be true because it embraces all forms of communication models. Oral, written, print, television, e- mail, radio, video and group discussion. It has equally shaped social and individual consciousness along specific lines by creating unique networks of perception and experiences that help to shape the social construction of reality. Turkle (1996) and Stone (1990) also argued that the web led to a radical deconstructive effect on both identity and culture. Their arguments were also closely linked to the socio-cultural theory, though they linked it to the post- modern theory of cyber culture. According to Stone, The identities that emerge from these (Internet) interaction is fragmented, complex, diffracted through the lenses of technology. Culture and new techno cultural formation, seem to be more visible as the critters, we ourselves are in the process of becoming, here at the close of the mechanical age (Stone, 1990, p. 36).

The emphasis of Stone's argument is that the Internet leads to a change in identity. He is strongly supported by Turkle (1995), whose work is mainly concerned with the "virtual persona". She arrived at her conclusion through researches she conducted on on-line subcultures in multi-user domains (MUDS). She observed that In the story of constructing identity in the culture of simulation, experiences on the Internet figure prominently but these experiences can only be understood as part of a larger cultural context ... it is on the Internet that our confrontation with technology as it collides with our sense of human identity are free even raw. In the real time communities of "Cyberspace" we are dwellers in the threshold between the real and the virtual, unsure of our footing, inventing ourselves as we go along (Turkle, 1995, p.10).

Stone and Turkle, from their statements, claim that the Internet provide people with opportunity to abandon the confines of limiting self, thus having a liberating effect on the user and making more freedom available to generate interpretations that suit the user. This liberating effect is observed in some countries considered to be 'much closed',

adapting to the rapid world-wide rise in Internet usage. Moore observes that Iran once a closed society is seeing a rapid growth in Internet use amongst its youth. This rise in Internet use is however generating a lot of concern amongst religious and political leaders who see the Internet as being foreign to the Iranian culture (Moore, 2001, p. A1). These leaders believe that through its interchange of ideas, it has caused a clash of culture and negative values. Since the Internet is not used to spread only beneficial information. Some websites promote pornography, gambling, racism and even terrorism. Others give out specific instruction on how to make homemade bombs. As Friedman points out, On the Internet, trouble is just a few mouse clicks away. You wander into virtual neo-Nazi beer hall or pornographers' library and no one is there to stop or direct you (Friedman, 1999, p. 7).

Also, the values that the entertainment web sites promote or reflect are often materialistic, violent or immoral. They may be totally alien to the local culture of many countries of the world. Diets too are changing, as western culture advertisements on foods, promote fast foods and soft drinks, to the extent that a Malaysian businessman, quoted by Awake Magazine of may 2002 as saying, "Anything western, especially American, my people love it. They want to eat it, live it and be it." The Human Development Report, 1998, also explains how the invasive western culture depicted on the Internet affects peoples' hopes and desires as they try to pursue the life styles of the famous and the rich they read about on the Internet. The obvious and observable impact that the medium has on our culture, is the increased sophistication of its various networks and users, the problem it has created such as the religious, political and racial strife, has made communication theorists to consider the Internet as having a powerful media effect, a potential that is either enhanced or thwarted by the users involved in the communication process. Stanley Baran and Dennis Davis who support cultural media theories further explained the importance of these theories on Internet uses and media interactions by saying that The underlying assumption that our experience of reality is an ongoing social construction, not something that is only sent, delivered or otherwise transmitted to docile pupils.... Audience members do not just passively take in and store bits of information in mental filing cabinets. They actively process this information, reshape it and store only what serves cultural needs. (Baran & Davis, 2000, p.74) It is therefore evident that the Internet creates and produces culture and also bridges the cultural gap that exists between us through its various forms of interactions, entertainment and news. Cultural exchanges also take place between audience, participant, and users of Internet. Truly, the Internet has power as a medium of cultural transmission.

Defleur and Ballrokeach also states that our level of dependency on the media, is related to the number and centrality (importance) of the specific information delivery system served by the medium and also the degree of change and conflict present in the society due to the medium. The importance of the Internet as an information delivery medium cannot be overemphasized as virtually individuals, groups, organizations, educational sectors, businesses, etc, make use of it to carry out their various activities. The impact of the

Internet has grown at a phenomenal rate, integrating various modes of communication into a vast network of interactive activities, thus making it one of the most important information delivery system, in the world. Slevin, acknowledges this fact when he wrote, that the Internet; has reshaped the conditions of mediated experience for many millions of individuals and many thousands of organization round the world. (Slevin 2000 p.1). The impact of the internet on modern life is tremendous and the reason why many " people depend on the Internet so much is as a result of the various form of information delivery system found on it, and as further asserted by Defleur and Ballrokeach, "the degree of dependence will depend on the importance of the delivery functions served by the mediums". Therefore given its enormity, it is difficult to imagine that such an important technological transformation will have anything other than a profound impact as a mean of cultural transmission. That is why Manuel Castells (1998) argued that the Internet have a cultural dimension of its own, while David Porter observes that The culture that the Internet embodies, is a product of the peculiar condition of virtual acquaintances that prevail online, a collective adaptation to the high frequency of anonymous, experimental and even fleeting encounters (Porter,1997, p. 11)

The Internet, going by Defleur and Ball-Rokeach's assertion, actually create changes and conflict in society. A new focus however is needed on how the use of the Internet is contributing to the rise of new form of human association and the way it is affecting all firms or organization and the daily lives of individuals. Slevin noted how the Internet is relating to the issue of globalization of communication when he admitted, as follows: That the Internet is challenging the ways we seek to manage openness and visibility in modern culture, it has its consequences as a new modality of cultural transmission, increasing the mediation of culture in modern and visibility in modern culture, it has its consequences as a modality of cultural transmission, increasing the mediation of culture in modern society (Slevin, 2000, p.56) Thomson noted three aspects of such transmissions; namely (a) Technical medium of transmission. (b) Instituted apparatus of transmission. (c) Space time distancing involved in transmission. He noted that as a modality of cultural transmission, the Internet combines these three aspects in unique ways and agrees with Thompsons arguments. According to him, the technical medium of transmission consist of materials components by virtue of which information and other symbolic content are produced, transmitted and received. These aspects are important when considering the cultural impact of any medium. Thompson's components are actually attributes of any technical media which are (1) Fixation, (2) Reproduction and Participation. Thus agreeing with Thompson that the Internet has a degree of fixation because it has the capacity to store information and this information can be used by individuals and organizations in the pursuits of their various activities. In this way the Internet can be seen as a power container. This brings us to another assertion of Defleur and Ball- Rokeach that the dependency on a medium is related to "the importance of the specific information delivery served by the medium. The degree of fixation conferred on the Internet is, however to some extent complicated by comparison with single media

such as the newspaper, film or television because the Internet integrates various modes of communication. This degree of fixation by the Internet is of central importance in understanding its international impact. Slevin gave us three reasons for this:-

(1) The exploitation of digital technology has vastly increased the capacity for storage. (2) The Internet provides us with a greater choice of form in which to do so. (3) The Internet extends scope for surveillance and expands ways in which we can generate control over processes of storing, accessing and mobilizing information in pursuit of particular aim (Slevin, 2000, p.63). Slevin cited Thompson's second attributes of a technical medium of transmission as 'production'. According to him, The storing of information in digital forms, coupled with the emergence of a vast interactive network and universal interfaces such as browsers and other program.... The hardware inform of computers, monitors and printers have made the reproduction of information transmitted over the Internet limited. Slevin (2000) also added that the way in which information and other symbolic content can be reproduced by using the Internet is heightening what some theorist call collage effect . He described the words 'collage effect' as a Consequence of the intensity with which and the scale at which the Internet act as a disembodied mechanism, prizing information and other symbolic content, free from the hold of specific locales and allowing for its recombination across wide space distances (Slevin, 2000 p.65) He further goes on to explain that these collage extends even to individual web pages which though appear as one is made up of various elements such as texts, images and possibly sounds and videos which can be stored in one site and may still be stored at various sites in the world in separate elements and be called on to slot into the collage of a variety of web pages. This information can be retrieved by a user browser no matter where it is stored and still be reproduced as a seamless whole with its own internal referentiality. Collage effect also extends to the computer screen itself because the user may have a wide range of applications running at the same time. The screen is thus a patch work of various information flows. The Internet as a medium of transmission also involves participation. This Slevin noted is the third attribute of Thompsons components. It refers to the nature and degree of participation that a medium grants or requires from those who use it. Slevin acknowledges that all media require skills one way or the other. Therefore using the internet is thus a skilled performance and its successful use is an accomplishment demanding particular capabilities, resources and attention ness, that is why those visiting website and users of the Internet have to be literate and need a basic understanding of how to use computers. Using the Internet requires more skill than other communication media. There are also special skills required to negotiate the cyber world. This also involves getting familiar with the terminologies of the Internet such as digital cities, virtual world, mouse, upload, download etc. (as cited by Slevin 2000). Thompson noted that the Internet also act as an institutional apparatus of transmission due to the exchange of information and other symbolic contents on the net. He defines this term as being a determinate set of Institutional arrangements within which the technical medium

is deployed by individuals involved in encoding and decoding symbolic forms embedded in it. (Thompson, 1990, p. 167)

Thompson identified two forms of institutional apparatus of diffusion (1) Channel of selective diffusion (2) Mechanism for restricted implementation. These two aspects are institutionally involved in the enabling and the constraining of certain forms of media use and encompass users in asymmetric relations of autonomy and independence. Thompson (1990) claims that the channels of selective diffusion consist of institutional framework controlling access to a technical medium and the opportunities for using it to circulate and exchange information and other symbolic form. Therefore if we are to understand the impact of the Internet on modern culture, we need to understand and identify these sources of constraints and opportunities which follow from the situatedness of its use in time space. Slevin (2000) cited an example of this when he explained the pattern used by a website called DDS, Digital city Amsterdam. According to him, the site is run by a foundation and is supported by Amsterdam city council, the Dutch ministry for economic affairs and ministry for internal affairs and various other sponsors. It was started in 1994 as an experiment to promote private and public awareness of the Internet and is now one of the largest online communities. This example shows that pattern of Internet access are typically tied to the properties of the Internet as a technical medium and to the ways in which these properties interact with the constraints and capabilities afforded by the institutional arrangements within which its uses are embedded. Moreover, this condition can vary when individuals going about their activities, move in time space. Slevin also noted that the Internet also act as a mechanism for restricted implementation because the diffusion of the information process can be controlled and regulated in various ways. Many websites have rules governing their use. Secondly people are refused access to websites or files because of not registering properly or being identified. Finally, Thompson's third aspects of cultural transmission are time space distanciation in transmission. This generally refers to the degree of temporal and spatial spacing involved in the circulation in information and other symbolic contents. Thompson argues that this factor is dependent or both the technical medium and on the institutional apparatus discussed earlier. He supported Innis (1951) in this regard because in his book the Bias of communication (1951) Innis stresses the importance of the form of the technical medium by calling attention to the centrality of time and space in the analysis of system of communication. According to him, A medium of communication has an important influence on the dissemination of knowledge over time and space and it becomes necessary to study it's characteristics in order to appraise its influence in its cultural setting. According to its characteristics, it may be better suited to the dissemination of knowledge over time than over space, particularly if the medium is heavy and durable and not suited for transportation or to the dissemination of knowledge over space than time particularly. If the medium is light and transportable. The relative emphasis on time and space will imply a bias of significance to the culture in which it is embedded. Innis's idea about time-space distanciation highlight in an elemental way that individuals and organization do not just use media in

time-space, they use it to organize time-space. (as cited by Slevin 2000 p68-69) When examining the Internet under the light of Innis statement, Giddens (1984) Slevin acknowledges that we can begin to make an effort at grasping its impact on the volume of time- space available to individuals and organization in the pursuance of their projects. We can study for example how the Internet is affecting individuals and organizations in their ability to mobilize space and, by using the Internet to facilitate the routinized specification and allocation of tasks to coordinate the time- space trajectories of their projects (as cited by Slevin 2000. p.70) This statement proves that the Internet use always involves asymmetries of power and each communicative act has to be successfully brought off by those using it. Slevin also agrees that the transformative capacity of Internet use, that is the way it can be deployed to make a difference, is dependent on the characteristics of the individuals and organizations involved their location in time- space, the institutional arrangement within which they act and the mean which they have at their disposal. Slevin also goes further to explain this with an example from an Internet relay chat room. He notes; That it can happen that a user receives a message telling them that they are barred from using a channel they wish to join even though they are unaware of any legitimate reason for it to be the case. This usually means that all users accessing the channel from a particular host have been barred. Channel operators take this drastic measure because an individual who is barred for causing a nuisance can simply rejoin the channel under a different name but cannot easily change their host. An individual unfairly barred because of the bad behaviours of someone else will often send messages to the channel operators pleading to have the ban lifted. If the user is known to the operators or can somehow display their good intention by rallying others to their defense then the ban may be lifted. It also helps if there are operators present who know the circumstance behind the ban (Slevin, 2000, pp.70 - 71). These examples of a routine occurrence on Internet relay chat room shows how users can have a differing volume of time-space available to them and that their ability to use the Internet to organize time-space is always a matter of potential contestation. However many believe that Internet use give people unlimited access to time-space. Barrie Sherman and Phil Judkim are of such view. According to them, on the Internet, we can make water solid and solid fluids, we can imbue inanimate objects (chairs, lamps engines) with an intelligent life of their own. We can invent criminals signing textures, clever colours of fairies.... We can make our real World whatever we wish to make it, Virtual reality may turn out to be a great deal comfortable than our own imperfect reality (as cited by Slevin, 2000, p. 71).

Sadie Plant (1993) also sees virtual reality Internet as a zone of unfettered freedom. She describes it as, "Grid reference for free experimentation, an atmosphere in which there are no barriers, no restriction on how far it is possible to go" (Plant, 1993, p. 14). Slevin however argues that virtual reality time and space are not dimensions that can be folded away because the time-spacing patterning of information and other symbolic content made available over the Internet are always in some ways the expression of the activities of real individuals or organizations who are all engaged in projects

involving the negotiation of constraints and opportunities of the varied environments and regions of Internet use. Nonetheless, it is observable that there are aspects of the Internet that encourages or motivate users into entering fantasy worlds where they adopt any kind of identity and pretend to be what they are not. This is often the case with MUDDS (Multi User Domain) where it is made clear to users that they are expected to behave in this way but even at that, their communication is examined and understood as meaningful expression of real individuals who are using the medium in a complex way to bind time-space and communicate with others.

Conclusion

Although media research scholars and experts have not yet reached a full understanding of the impact that mass media are having on the Psychological, social, economic, political creative, cultural and educational aspects of the ordinary individual's life, this study has however proved that rather than using all form of assertions, theories and hypotheses raised by different media experts to carry out such studies, the dependency theory singularly encompasses all these details and can be used as a tool in successfully carrying out studies that will greatly enhance the understanding of these issues; studies and researches discussed in this paper have, in one way or the other supported the dependency theory, advocated by Defleur and Ball- Rokeach..

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[Rather than using all form of assertions, theories and hypotheses raised by different media experts to carry out studies on the impact of mass media on the Psychological, social, economic, political, creative, cultural and educational aspects of life, the dependency theory singularly encompasses all the details necessary for such a study and can be used as a tool in successfully carrying out studies that will greatly enhance the understanding of these issues]