

Media Influence and the Duality of "Soft Power" – "Cultural Hegemony": Interconnection and Similarity

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ABSTRACT

After the “information revolution” gave rise to numerous concepts, it also restructured many elements, including those of the communication process itself, as well as the mechanisms for addressing the public, influencing public opinion, and constructing mental images making media the ultimate “weapon” of the era. This, in turn, produced a new reality in the ways events are handled and in the relationships between societies, bringing forth concepts such as intellectual invasion, cultural domination, soft power, and others that fall within the realm of influence, persuasion, and change without the need for violence or its traditional manifestations. This research paper aims to delve into the convergence between the aforementioned concepts, focusing primarily on the notions of “**soft power**” and “**cultural hegemony**” through a theoretical approach that thoroughly examines each and identifies the epistemic points of intersection between them.

Keywords: Media Influence, soft power, cultural hegemony.

INTRODUCTION

The transition of states and societies in their dealings, as well as in the aims and objectives of their political, economic, cultural, or other strategies from the logic of “hard” power based on coercion and all forms of imposing opinions, choices, and decisions through various forms of violence, including military interventions, battles, wars, and economic aid through granting or withholding to a logic of influence based on persuasion and inducing “under-the-skin” change in attitudes and behaviors through specific methods and considering defined sources, is what is known as “**soft power.**”

Conversely, mass communication tools, under the pretext of transmitting media messages, have enabled the shaping of societal awareness and the construction of specific intellectual and moral systems aligned with the vision of the entities that dominate those tools, thus imposing the culture of the dominant over that of the subjugated peoples. This is what is referred to as “**cultural hegemony.**”

Until recently, media conceptual literature commonly defined media as the transmission of information and news and the description of events. However, due to the massive informational explosion and tremendous digital transformation, this field through all its manifestations has come to occupy the forefront as a penetrating force capable of embedding and disseminating values, shaping ideas, and forming beliefs through the systematic

presentation of content across its various tools and platforms, relying on multiple approaches that lead to the reproduction of dominant discourse with the aim of reinforcing ideologies and orientations, and thereby establishing the dominance and control of the party that possesses these tools and platforms.

As the media field is the sole space for embodying the aforementioned concepts being, on the one hand, a tool of soft power due to its reliance on influence and persuasion, and, on the other hand, a means of cultural hegemony by modeling and standardizing lifestyles and erasing the weaker ones through control over the perceptions and opinions of local societies, as well as over the broader meaning of culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, art, morals, beliefs, and all other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society” this leads us to pose the following main question: What are the points of convergence between soft power and cultural hegemony within the media field? This will be addressed through the following sub-questions:

- How does soft power rely on media?
- What are the media methods for entrenching cultural hegemony?
- What are the intersections between soft power and cultural hegemony?
- Are there opportunities for local communities to confront both soft power and cultural hegemony?

1. Influence:

During the first half of the twentieth century, the interpretation of media influence was limited to its effect on consumers according to a general and overly simplistic theoretical view, which held that the use of media influences everyone and that everyone is affected by media in roughly the same way. Media influence occupies a vital area within media and communication studies, where several theories have emerged and developed to explain and interpret this influence. These include: theories of direct influence, theories of selective influence, and theories of moderate influence.

A- Direct Influence:

This is one of the oldest theories that provided an explanation for the influence of mass communication on the audience. It emerged in the early 1920s and 1930s, when the power of these media became apparent. Proponents of these theories believe that mass communication has strong, direct, and immediate influence over individuals, as it possesses the ability to lead them toward changing their opinions and attitudes in the direction desired by the communicator.¹

B- Theories of Selective Influence:

These theories focus on the role of individual and social factors in determining how media affects individuals. Among the most prominent of these theories are:

- **Theory of Individual Differences:**

This theory holds that the impact and response of recipients to media message content vary according to their personal characteristics, such as values, beliefs, and past experiences.

- **Theory of Social Categories:**

This theory emphasizes the decisive role of social affiliations such as social class and reference groups in interpreting and accepting media messages.

C- Theories of Moderate (Indirect) Influence: Among the most prominent are:

- **Uses and Gratifications Theory:**

This theory is based on the assumption that the audience uses media to fulfill specific needs, and thus the influence depends on how individuals use these media.

- **Agenda-Setting Theory:**

This theory suggests that the media may not tell the audience what to think, but it influences what they think about by emphasizing certain issues.

- **Theory of Interdependence:**

This theory highlights the mutual relationship between media, the audience, and society, where each party depends on the others in different ways.

There are also modern theories of media influence, such as: ²

- **Framing Theory:**

This theory focuses on how the media presents events and issues, which affects how the audience interprets and understands them. Studies show that the framing of media messages can steer the audience toward specific interpretations and influence their attitudes and behaviors.

- **Technological Determinism Theory:**

The McLuhanian perspective suggests that technology, including new media, plays a decisive role in shaping identities and cultures. Studies indicate that digital media has brought about a qualitative shift in individuals' lifestyles, ways of thinking, and communication patterns.

2. Soft Power and the Media:

A- The Concept of Soft Power:

This concept emerged with the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci* in his work "Prison Notebooks" in the twentieth century, though its true roots go back to ancient political thought, particularly in the writings of Confucius and Socrates.

Gramsci explained that capitalist hegemony operates through institutions such as schools, churches, and newspapers, which work to create a positive image of capitalist society among the public in order to dominate their minds and ensure they remain within the framework and teachings of that society.

Joseph Nye*, a researcher at Harvard University, was the first to shape this term in the early 1990s through his book "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power", and elaborated further on it in his 2004 work "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics", in which he defined it as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment."³ This means that soft power stands in contrast to the traditional mechanisms of pressure, coercion, and force used to implement programs and plans.

The term "soft power" is a product of the interaction with the third wave (the electronic revolution or postmodernism), which contrasted it with hard power represented by military force associated with behaviors such as coercion, deterrence, protection, coercive diplomacy, war, and alliances as well as economic power, shown in behaviors such as bribery, aid, sanctions, coercion, and seduction. In contrast, soft power is represented by behaviors of attraction and agenda-setting, with its main currency being values,

political culture, public diplomacy institutions, both bilateral and multilateral. ⁴

According to Nye, soft power relies on identifying and exploring the aspirations of other parties and the ability to win them over through persuasion and allure rather than coercion and compulsion, in order to achieve desired goals. This power reaches its objectives by impressing the other party with the appeal of national culture and political principles to the extent that these are seen as legitimate and exemplary, thus achieving actual dominance.

In a related sense, it is the ability of states to employ elements of attraction such as arts, literature, and civilizational rituals and to invest in them through mechanisms of persuasion, propaganda, and the dissemination and promotion of national ideology, rather than through subjugation and coercion. This extends across various political (diplomacy), economic, social, and cultural fields.

The concept of soft power is no longer just a rhetorical luxury to interpret cultural and artistic exchange from its primitive forms to its most technological manifestations in the context of communication globalization and the permeability of borders. It has become integrated as a political dimension within the fundamentals of contemporary geopolitics. ⁵

B- Sources and Tools of Soft Power:

According to Nye, the sources of soft power are divided into three main resources⁶: culture, political values, and foreign policy.

- **Culture:**

This includes high culture, such as art, education, and literature, as well as popular culture, including folklore, music, and popular heritage. What can serve as a source of soft power are those values within culture that intersect with universal values.

- **Political Values:**

These are reflected in the establishment of a national governance model based on principles of transparency, democracy, respect for rights, and enabling full citizenship in a way that inspires admiration from others by upholding values of social justice and solidarity.

- **Foreign Policy:**

It becomes a source of soft power when it is perceived as legitimate and ethical, embracing values of peace, partnership, development, and support for just causes and constructive proposals that serve humanity. An example of this is the set of values underlying Algerian diplomacy, which is based on non-interference in the internal affairs of states and support for liberation movements values that are appealing and impactful among many peoples.

As for the **tools of soft power**, they are generally those means that provide the actor with the ability to attract others through constructive cooperation, persuasion, and positive appeal in order to achieve desired outcomes. These tools vary from one country to another depending on its capabilities and the internal and external context in which they are employed, and they are distributed across the fields of **culture, politics, diplomacy, and media**.

C- The Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Embodying Soft Power:

The identity, culture, and social particularities of societies serve as safeguards for their survival and cohesion and are strongly linked in the “collective consciousness” of nations to sovereignty. Therefore, the topic of soft power is often associated with culture as one of its key resources, while “cultural penetration” is linked

to technology. Thus, the relationship between technology and culture in general can be summarized as follows:

- Culture intersects in many ways with modern technologies. For example, the exploration of cultural manifestations, traditions, and customs in a given geographical area relies on technology, considering that culture is a human phenomenon composed of a set of knowledge, behaviors, and values that distinguish one human group from another.
- It is difficult to determine the origin of a specific culture, as it is often the result of an overlap of several cultures. Naturally, differences and intersections exist between cultures. For instance, Western culture often seen as dominant is a blend of Arab, Chinese, and Indian cultures, in addition to the accumulated European heritage. Therefore, anthropologists and scholars of civilization and its political implications on the international stage attempt to integrate culture into the broader civilizational framework and distribute a single civilization across multiple cultural zones. This has led to various characterizations of the situation, ranging from “civilizational conflict” to “civilizational dialogue,” with religion being the primary differentiator among civilizations. In contrast, technology is universally used and contributes to shaping human culture. However, the issue of penetration lies in how it is used and applied.
- As a result of the transformations of the 20th and early 21st centuries, nations have found themselves struggling to preserve their identity components and the symbols of their national cultures. This is due to technological dominance and the ability to reinforce cultural globalization and impose a unified cultural model across the world. This has sparked wide debate based on the idea that culture transcends national borders. Elements of civilization are built on ideas and examples drawn from other cultures. Western civilization, for example, relied in its philosophical and technological development on Eastern civilization in general, and it was reshaped mostly within the nation-state. It was then expanded and adapted in North America, involving both material and intellectual restructuring.
- Technology facilitates the spread of culture through the unified culture shared by engineers and scientists around the world. Training a scientist or engineer in a technological field requires the accumulation of technical knowledge and experience, which originate from a specific language and society that possesses a particular culture such as Western culture. Mao Zedong realized this in the 1960s and persecuted engineers and scientists, forcing them into hard labor like harvesting crops, while politically ideologically aligned individuals were assigned to positions requiring technical expertise.⁷
- Technology has strengthened nations and allowed them to export their languages and lifestyles. For instance, France and Britain exported their cultures to their colonies during the 18th and 19th centuries, and their cultural impact remains to this day. Similarly, the United States and the Soviet Union spread liberal capitalist and communist socialist cultures, respectively, due to their technological superiority during the Cold War. After the U.S. emerged as the sole superpower, it began to exert influence through proxy cultural penetration.
- Technological development has influenced international relations and shifted the dynamics of interaction between states from "hard power" to "soft power," especially after advancements in electronics and the digital world, with influence becoming devoid of coercion or force.
- Technological progress has been closely linked to developments in the media and communication field, just as media and communication are tied to the cultural sovereignty of nations.

As for cultural penetration in the Islamic world, it has sparked much debate and controversy, bringing forth

many dualities such as “authenticity vs. modernity,” “renewal vs. modernism,” and “tradition vs. imitation,” along with various approaches to each issue. Ultimately, the current state is attributed to intellectual decline, the inability to rise, neglect of authentic scientific heritage, and fascination with everything imported from the West an inevitable result of technological underdevelopment. In this context, the West views Turkey as the ideal model for transferring Western culture, along with Lebanon and Indonesia, all of which are affected by cultural penetration. Migration, technology transfer, and social media play a leading role in the interaction of cultures, rapidly driving the world toward cultural globalization.

D- Examples of the Effectiveness of Soft Power in International Relations:

In recent years, the features of the geopolitical map, spheres of influence, and balances of power have become increasingly defined. Notably, some countries possess human, natural, geographical, scientific, and military capabilities that would allow them to impose themselves on others, yet they have not resorted to violence. On the other hand, there are countries that lack the components of what is known as “hard power” or the traditional qualifications for asserting influence, yet they have managed to penetrate and lead the diplomatic and economic scenes with strength. Both cases share the use of what is known as “soft power.”

In this context, many examples can be cited, including China in the first case, Qatar in the second, and Turkey as a country that combines elements of both types of power.

❖ The Chinese Model:

China’s presence in the African continent clearly reflects its use of soft power. In truth, the culture of “soft power” expresses a civilizational heritage in China, evident in its political tradition where rulers are expected to win the hearts of their people through values rather than violence, and also in the military realm through the art of war. China developed a strategic plan to disseminate its language and culture worldwide by opening a large number of Confucius Institutes dedicated to teaching Chinese. Chinese leaders recognized the importance of language in enhancing cultural appeal.

In 2004, China established its first model Confucius Institute in Uzbekistan, followed by a second in Seoul seven years later. The network of these Chinese cultural centers has grown to include 300 institutes across 88 countries, with more than 20 located in Africa, reflecting African leaders' belief that cultural engagement goes hand in hand with strengthening economic cooperation.⁸

Additional initiatives by China include:

- Launching a radio station in Nairobi, Kenya in 2006, broadcasting in Chinese, English, and Swahili.
- Opening educational institutes and centers in many African countries.
- Providing scholarships for African students.
- Launching a program to train 15,000 African specialists.
- Signing 156 cultural cooperation agreements with African nations.

All of this has enabled China to secure numerous entry points across the African continent. Even within African public opinion and popular circles, there have been several instances of protest and rejection directed toward the presence of countries like the United States and France most recently with the obstruction of French military convoys in Burkina Faso. However, not once has such opposition been directed at the Chinese presence, represented by its economic companies and various missions. This suggests the “positive image” enjoyed by the “sleeping giant” on the African continent.

❖ **The Qatari Model:**

It is widely recognized that Qatar holds influence and ambition far exceeding its geographical size, despite lacking the components of “hard power.” The country has succeeded in building a solid infrastructure, including **Doha Port**, which cost **\$7.4 billion**, and **Hamad International Airport**, which cost **\$15.5 billion**. In addition, it invested **\$200 billion** in infrastructure projects related to hosting the **2022 FIFA World Cup**. By 2019, the assets of Qatar’s sovereign wealth fund had reached **\$335 billion**, and these assets have been strategically invested in major global companies in the fields of commodities, services, and technology.⁹

Qatar’s most prominent instrument in implementing soft power is its media apparatus. In 1995, the country launched a television channel to rival the world’s leading media outlets at the time, such as the BBC and CNN. A decree was issued in November 1996 establishing the channel under the name “Al Jazeera,” which attracted prominent media figures from across the Arab world. This marked a significant media breakthrough, especially considering the prevailing political conditions in Arab countries and the dominance of state-controlled media. Al Jazeera offered a vibrant outlet and an appealing platform for freedom of expression.

In 2006, the network expanded with the launch of Al Jazeera English, aiming to counter the negative portrayals of Arabs by Western media and to reshape that image in global public opinion. It further solidified its position by entering the world of sports broadcasting through beIN SPORTS, which acquired rights to broadcast major international competitions across various sports.

Qatar’s dominance in the media field and its exceptional coverage of events such as the Israeli assault on Gaza in 2008 and the Arab uprisings in 2011 so impactful that Al Jazeera was even accused of playing a role in toppling regimes, especially through its channels Al Jazeera Mubasher and Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr—elevated the country’s status in the diplomatic arena. This media superiority gave a strong boost to Qatar’s foreign policy, making it a key player and mediator in various global conflicts, including the negotiations between the Taliban and the United States in February 2020, earlier mediation efforts in Lebanon and Darfur (Sudan), and the temporary reconciliation between Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas.

Qatar also managed to overcome the blockade imposed on it in 2017 by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, and more recently played a mediation role between Hamas and Israel following October 2023.

Beyond the political and economic spheres, Qatar has also invested heavily in the cultural domain by using its media arms to craft an appealing external image of itself as a center of knowledge and academic excellence in the region. This is reflected in its hosting of branches of top global universities and its investment in research institutions such as the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

These efforts are part of broader strategies to enhance Qatar’s scientific reputation, supported by extensive media coverage, including in the sports sector. A clear example of this is the favorable image Qatar gained both regionally and globally after its exceptional organization of the FIFA Arab Cup 2021 not to mention its broader sports investments, such as the acquisition of Paris Saint-Germain (PSG).

❖ **The Turkish Model:**

A notable feature of Turkey’s recent foreign policy is its pragmatic nature, with a clear strategy of leveraging religion and culture to reap economic and political gains. Turkey has become involved in several complex international files, including the Libyan file, the Syrian file, the Palestinian issue, and the Iraqi situation,

among others. This prominent role was not achieved by chance. The increase in Turkish investments in several countries, including Algeria, and its transformation into a major tourist destination are part of a broader, deliberate process. Turkey's international positioning is the result of well-managed image promotion that attracted both investors and regional populations. This was supported by multiple factors, such as economic strength, as Turkey rose to the 20th position in the global economy based on its gross national product.

Turkish drama and the activation of cultural influence played a significant role in this strategy. Turkish television series boosted Ankara's exports of accessories, jewelry, clothing, fashion arts, and interior decoration by 8.92%, making drama a genuine channel of soft power. Turkish values increasingly permeated Arab societies, influencing their lifestyles, speech, home decoration, and use of furniture and tools. These series also revealed Ottoman history and drew the admiration of Arab audiences. Their treatment of historical issues relevant to the Arab and Muslim world while adapting them to Arab cultural sensitivities created a deep fascination. Historical Turkish leaders were transformed into legendary role models, and Turkey's current image was viewed as a refined model that promises a bright and hopeful future. Through this media and technological machinery, Turkish leaders most notably Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gained iconic status outside their country, perceived by many in the Arab and Muslim world as bearers of the hopes and concerns of the ummah and defenders of its causes.

Turkey also established cultural centers across many Arab countries, supported university departments for Turkish language studies, and provided scholarships for Arab students. It hosted conferences and forums focused on Arab-Turkish cooperation and dialogue and expressed support for the demands of Arab peoples. Turkey's soft power in the Arab world in general, and in Algeria in particular, is rooted in promoting a model of democratic Islam, drawn from its Islamic civilizational past. This is an investment in cultural and religious values that align with the soft power resources outlined by Joseph Nye. However, Turkey has recently faced resistance from major regional actors, prompting the need to reassess its approach to soft power an approach that has so far proven highly successful.

Thus, it can be concluded that technological transformations and the massive flow of information have coincided with a significant shift in the international arena. Mechanisms of exerting influence and imposing preferences have evolved from coercion and force to persuasion and promotion, replacing hard power with soft power defined as the ability of one nation to influence others and shape their choices through the appeal of its social and cultural system and the promotion of values, especially those that align with global norms due to their attractiveness and ease of reception. This also includes internal governance values and consistent diplomatic principles that captivate and impress other nations. These resources and tools, when activated through information and communication technologies, enhance opportunities for ideological penetration, the spread of local culture, and the improvement of a nation's global image. This, in turn, opens doors for diplomatic presence and economic positioning, especially in the context of the knowledge economy, which adds a powerful dimension to these efforts. Altogether, the strategic use of technological, media, and communication tools, in alignment with a soft power approach, is not only compatible but essential making media technologies a necessary foundation for achieving the objectives of soft power.

3. Media and "Cultural Hegemony"

A- Cultural Hegemony – Theoretical Interconnection

Before delving into the issue of cultural hegemony, it is essential to elaborate on the topic of "mass culture," which gained significant importance in the United States during the 1950s due to the rising prominence of television following radio. This concept is closely linked to that of "cultural industry," through the

transformation of its content into a material force once received by the masses.

The concept of mass culture is strongly associated with three major ideas, as it is formulated within them: the concept of "commodity fetishism," the concept of "reification" as introduced by Georg Lukács, and the concept of "instrumental reason" as formulated by German philosopher Max Weber. The Frankfurt School gained traction in the U.S. largely due to its emphasis on instrumental rationality in analyzing the capitalist system. "Instrumental reason" is one of the most prominent criticisms leveled by the Frankfurt School against the Enlightenment movement or modernity, which flourished during the 18th century Enlightenment era. It argued that the myth of theology, superstition, and metaphysics, which previously dominated, had been replaced by the myth of reason, which was then harnessed to serve economic interests and treat human beings as mere tools for achieving objectives, ultimately leading to a dehumanized world dominated by wild capitalism.

The formulation of the concept of cultural industry aimed to emphasize the characteristics of mass cultural products, particularly homogenization and standardization. These two intertwined concepts refer firstly to mass cultural production itself and secondly to the mechanisms and methods by which mass culture is produced and marketed. Through these processes, cultural hegemony can be achieved not merely through direct force but also via cultural, media, religious, and educational institutions.

Cultural hegemony relies on examining how the intelligentsia, in the classical paradigm, or what we may now call "influencers," exert their impact indirectly on recipients of their content, imposing their values, ideas, and orientations by portraying them as natural and self-evident.

According to Antonio Gramsci, power is not merely direct repression or economic control, but also depends on ideological domination, whereby the ruling class persuades the subordinate classes to accept the existing order without the need for coercion.¹⁰ In his view, ruling classes do not rely solely on military or economic power but also strive to dominate the cultural and ideological sphere in order to maintain their authority.

The concept of cultural hegemony intersects with the following theoretical approaches:

❖ **Cultural Industry:**

This theoretical approach was introduced by the leading figures of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. The notion of the cultural industry emerged when capitalists began producing cultural artifacts according to carefully standardized and programmed plans. Under the cultural industry, Enlightenment turned into ideology. Unlike in the past, culture was no longer independent of authority or ideology. As Adorno puts it, culture now "feeds off the economic structure"¹¹. According to the founders of the Frankfurt School, modern media tools are instruments for disseminating mass culture that facilitates compliance and obedience within society. The content focuses on entertainment and consumerism to distract individuals from criticism and reflection on political and social realities.

Moreover, this hegemony is not achieved through violence or coercion, but rather by producing and shaping an ideological discourse that promotes acceptance of capitalism and its values, presenting it as a natural and integral part of society. The tools used to disseminate and shape "consciousness" and embed it in the collective imagination include media, educational, and religious content disseminated through specialized institutions, such as social institutions.

❖ **Cultural Colonialism:**

This concept emerged within postcolonial studies, with Edward Said being one of its most renowned theorists. It refers to the dominance exerted by one society or state over another by imposing its identity

language, culture, thought, heritage, and values through media and “fabricated awareness campaigns,” leading to the erosion of local cultures and the decline in their practice and transmission. Antonio Gramsci also affirmed this by highlighting how ruling classes impose their culture on subordinate societies. Edward Said tackled this notion in his book *Orientalism* in a way that aligns with cultural hegemony, stating: “Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”¹², adding that “Hegemony or rather the result of cultural hegemony was what gave Orientalism its durability and strength”¹³.

He explains how Orientalism relies on controlling methods and manufacturing mental images in a consistent manner to consolidate this flexible form of dominance. This involves positioning the Westerner in a complete web of relationships with the East, where in every detail of those relationships he maintains the upper hand. Under the umbrella of Western hegemony over the East, which began in the late 18th century, a composite image of the Orient was created one that became suitable for academic studies, museum exhibitions, and even economic, social, and cultural theories.

❖ **Symbolic Violence:**

Introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic violence is presented as a fundamental tool of cultural and social hegemony. It refers to an indirect form of violence that seeks to impose beliefs, values, and social norms and gain their acceptance among individuals without their conscious awareness or realization.

Pierre Bourdieu shows that symbolic violence operates through various legitimate social and educational institutions, such as television, newspapers, cinema, and places of worship. Television, for instance, imposes a system of perceptions presented as legitimate and widely accepted. This implies that the greatest threat to any institution lies in losing its legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of those who are subject to its constructed perceptions.¹⁴

The mechanisms of symbolic violence include:

- **The Educational System:**

Educational systems and the curricula they offer reflect the values of the dominant and ruling classes within society. As a result, they reinforce social inequalities without the awareness of students and pupils.

- **Language and Dialects:**

The superiority of one dialect over another forces individuals to adopt the dominant language in order to secure social acceptance.

- **Media and Communication Technologies:**

These platforms reinforce dominant ideas and values through media content and products such as films and advertisements which shape specific attitudes toward objects and issues, again without conscious awareness.

B- Tools of Empowerment for Cultural Hegemony

❖ **Media:**

Media is the most prominent arm of hegemony, and its role is reflected in the following functions:

- Constructing mental images and steering public opinion toward issues of public concern by controlling and aligning the agendas of media institutions with desired objectives.

- Producing and recycling hegemonic discourse in line with predefined agendas.
- Covering events and presenting news from the perspective of the dominant narrative.
- Employing the symbolic power of media, with its ability to influence, persuade, and direct, through the use of image, sound, color, and meaning, reinforcing certain ideas at the expense of others and encouraging adherence to specific positions.
- Shaping the world and reinforcing the essence of “universality,” globalizing media by standardizing its content, and enforcing the dependency of weaker outlets on dominant global media powers.
- Using cinematic and media production to extend the influence and dominance of specific values and worldviews.
- Employing advertisements and television commercials to promote consumerist values and support the "consumer society" in alignment with economic hegemony.

❖ **Educational Institutions:**

Their role goes beyond imparting knowledge and sciences; rather, it is a directive role that serves to enforce cultural hegemony by implementing curricula that benefit dominant classes and groups. Until recently, under the label of the “Greater Middle East Project,” Arab and Islamic countries were pressured to reform their educational systems, including adding or removing specific subjects from the curricula of many Arab and Muslim states.

❖ **Religion and Language:**

This includes the exploitation of religious discourse to influence people, instill values in them, or compel them to accept the status quo under the pretext of religious justification a scenario reminiscent of ancient theological dominance. It also involves controlling the collective thinking of society by imposing a particular language and promoting the perception of it as the language of science, such as the current status of the English language, despite the fact that Arabic was once the dominant and universal language during the dark ages that engulfed Europe in the Middle Ages.

❖ **Modern Technologies:**

The dominant party’s control over the content of social media platforms, their software, and algorithms along with the illusion of choice has led to the dominance of specific corporations on the global stage. These entities have gained control over the production of images and opinions, shaping public perceptions and directing behavior. Furthermore, they control global taste in terms of consumption, thought, and literature, through specific techniques that have reinforced Western hegemony.

C- The Overlap Between Soft Power and Cultural Hegemony from a Media Perspective

❖ **Soft Power as a Tool for Reinforcing Cultural Hegemony:**

The dissemination of ideas without the use of force represents one of the clearest forms of consolidating cultural hegemony, and this is achieved through:

- **Mobilizing global media, with its advanced technologies and modern tools, to manipulate minds and influence people without any visible use of violence.**
- **Utilizing methods and strategies aimed at convincing people that newly introduced ideas and constructed values are natural, thereby leading to their acceptance without resistance.**

This includes manipulating minds by convincing individuals through media production, television, and the film industry of a specific lifestyle and mode of living, presenting it as the ideal model of civilization, modernity, and sophistication. This paves the way for its global spread and the adoption of its details by societies around the world. One of the most prominent examples of this is the Hollywood production model.

❖ **Media as an Intermediary Between Soft Power and Cultural Hegemony**

This role is achieved through:

- **Reshaping events and imposing a specific reality using all available technical, emotional, and affective tools to serve dominant powers. Everything portrayed in cinema originates from a particular social, economic, and political environment with its own characteristics. However, it does not represent the full reality with all its details. Rather, it involves the selection of a subject that reflects certain elements, which are then reorganized and restructured through various influences such as ideology and the content creator's subjective artistic vision.**¹⁵
- **Producing hegemonic content: Western media outlets generate widespread media content that reinforces dominant values and erases the original values of local societies.**

❖ **Media as a Weapon for the Distortion of Local Cultures**

- **Replacing local cultures with media content imported from dominant countries.**
- **Pushing individuals to adopt foreign values instead of holding onto their own cultural heritage, leading to the formation of identities in an imbalanced manner.**
- **Reinforcing the digital and media gap by keeping developing countries in the position of passive recipients, while major powers monopolize media production and distribution.**

An example of this is the decline of Arab and African film production in contrast to the dominance of European and American media, which has enabled Korean, Turkish, and American films and series to take over the global media landscape in recent years.

Accordingly, the overlap between soft power and cultural hegemony is an undeniable reality one characterized by complexity and layered dynamics. However, it should not be viewed as an unavoidable fate for vulnerable nations and peoples. Rather, it can be overcome or its effects mitigated by leveraging opportunities for resistance and by reinforcing local culture. This resistance can take various forms, including:

- **Strengthening local and community-based media, which plays a vital role in protecting national identity and preserving cultural specificity. Many countries adopt this approach under what is known as "public service broadcasting", which aims to guarantee citizens their right to information and knowledge while safeguarding their cultural and religious values.**
- **Supporting and relying on alternative media spaces, independent platforms, and free media outlets, while tasking them with the responsibility of promoting and embedding authentic values and local cultural heritage.**
- **Encouraging local media production by adopting effective policies and clear plans that protect cultural diversity and seek to break the Western monopoly in the media sector.**

General Conclusions:

- **There is no disagreement on the strong influence of media, despite the multiplicity of interpretations,**

explanations, and ways to measure and understand the scope of this influence.

- Media has a profound impact on shaping collective perception, public awareness, the dissemination of values, and the reproduction of dominant discourses.
- The media context enables soft power to play a fundamental role in shaping the image of nations, peoples, and their cultures in the eyes of others within a dynamic of dominance and subordination.
- The entertainment industry is one of the most powerful tools of soft power, as evidenced by the strong influence of films and TV series in embedding certain cultural values while erasing others.
- Soft power transforms into a tool of cultural hegemony, as the dissemination of cultures through soft means soon becomes an imposition that displaces the recipient's native culture.
- Cultural hegemony is also a consequence of the media gap between countries.
- The dominance of cultural forms such as language on a global scale compels other societies to adopt and consume their content, as is the case with the English language.
- Cultural hegemony is an inevitable and natural result of globalization, and a deliberate strategy by major powers to impose their logic and values on the world, leading the public in other nations to adopt specific patterns of behavior and thought.
- There is a clear interdependence between soft power and cultural hegemony, as the former relies on media tools that become indirect means for reinforcing the latter.
- Digital media platforms and tools actively contribute to implementing strategies for spreading the dominant Western cultural discourse and reinforcing Western values over those of other nations.

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that media due to its persuasive power and its features that eliminate geographical barriers and override value-based and ideological considerations to reach individuals regardless of their intellectual frameworks or ideological orientations is a natural outcome of the immense informational explosion humanity has witnessed. These features have made media a powerful channel for executing both overt and covert strategies of states in their relations with one another, enabling the extension of influence and the dissemination of identity models through non-traditional means, particularly by adopting the policy of soft power. This approach has, in turn, paved the way for deeper dynamics in the context of ideological contestation and global expansion.

Through the strategic use of fabricated media content, stylized images, cultural products, and cultural diplomacy, soft power has laid the groundwork for what is known as cultural hegemony, blending these tools in a harmonious way that has led to the standardization of people's thinking and consumption patterns. This has resulted in the formation of a "packaged consciousness", as Herbert Schiller described it one that has drained the mental and intellectual capacities of vulnerable populations and cemented the culture and discourse of dominant powers. This reality makes the search for effective methods to support local cultures and strengthen their resilience more urgent than ever.

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¹ Hassan Emad Mekawy & Laila Hussein El-Sayed, *Communication and Its Contemporary Theories*, Egyptian-Lebanese Publishing House, Cairo, 6th Edition, 2006.

² Mohammed bin Saud Al-Besher, *Theories of Media Influence*, Chapter Four: "Theories of Selective Influence", p. 95.

- Antonio Gramsci was a Marxist thinker and politician, born on January 22, 1891, in Italy. He studied philosophy and history and worked as a theater critic in 1916. He played a significant role in founding the

Italian Communist Party. In 1926, he was imprisoned by Mussolini's regime, during which he wrote many of his letters and intellectual works, including the Prison Notebooks. He passed away on April 27, 1937.

- Joseph Nye is an American thinker, born in 1937. He is a professor of political science and served as Assistant Secretary of Defense in the 1990s. He is the originator of the theory of soft power.

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⁶ Joseph Nye, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

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- Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno was a German philosopher and musician, born in Frankfurt on September 11, 1903, into a Jewish family. Among his notable works are *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Negative Dialectics*.

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- Max Horkheimer was a German philosopher and sociologist, born on February 14, 1895. He was one of the leading figures of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Among his most important works is *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-authored with his friend Theodor Adorno. He passed away on July 7, 1973.

- Edward Said was a Palestinian-American thinker, critic, and writer, born in 1935. He is considered one of the pioneers of postcolonial studies. Among his most important works is *Orientalism*. He passed away in 2003.

¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the East*, trans. by Mohamed Enani, Penguin International, Cairo, 2008, pp. 46–47.

¹³ Edward Said, *ibid.*, p. 51.

- Pierre Bourdieu was a French sociologist, born in 1930. He introduced several key concepts such as symbolic violence, cultural capital, social field, and social reproduction. He passed away in 2002.

¹⁴ Miloud Kina and Bachir Ghania, *Symbolic Violence – A Theoretical Study on Its Concept and Mechanisms*, Shaamel Journal for Educational and Social Sciences, Vol. 5, Issue 2, December 2022, p. 195.

¹⁵ Zarari Awatif, *The Image of Women in Algerian Cinema*, Fikr wa Mujtama' Journal, Issue 10, Algeria, p. 13.