Global Communication and Cultural Desensitisation: Repackaging Western Values for Non-Western Markets

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Abstract: Global communication is widely perceived as an instrument to disseminate Western values in the developing world. The "Wheel of Fortune" and "Who Wants to be a Millionnaire" licensed to Malaysian Television stations, though the language and the word puzzles were localised, carried the same format of the original (American) show. They promote consumerism, gambling and the images of usury, the style of wealth accumulation forbidden in Islam. For the Malaysian audience whose priorities are those of contentment, modesty and humility, such emphasis on material desires breeds internal contradictions that may lead the audience to succumb to the new Western values.

Key words: globalisation, Western values, hegemony, desensitisation, Malaysia

Globalisation has brought back into focus the issue of Western hegemony (or imperialism) which dominated the intellectual scene in the 1970s. With the increasing dominance of global communication technology, the central issue of hegemony is not its political and economic aspects, but rather its cultural dimension.[1] Global media play the focal role in such cultural supremacy as they convey and disseminate Western values in all forms and shapes: news, feature programmes, entertainment and advertising. Increased awareness of this situation by Third World countries has led to various forms of regional and bilateral cooperation ventures. These ventures sought to limit Western cultural dominance by creating regional media

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markets of producers and consumers that would override the American dominance of the world media market. The West, particularly the United States, sought to fetter such resistance through a policy of rapprochement with the media organisations of the developing world in which the local media are allowed to "localise," produce and broadcast locally, global shows. Thus, major Western shows and entertainment programmes were granted access to Third World audiences with the consent of the policy makers in these countries, thus reducing, or even eliminating, national inhibitions against Western hegemony and domination.

This study underlines this growing trend of localisation of global media programmes, a trend in which local versions of famous and popular global entertainment programmes (especially game shows) are produced in different countries under specific agreements between the local and global media organisations. In this relationship, the media of the receiving countries agree to broadcast locally produced versions of the programmes owned and distributed by the global media organisation. The paper assesses the development of the trend, and explains its probable impact within the context of media effect theories. An analysis of two programmes that have been licensed to Malaysian television stations provides the substantive evaluation of that impact.

Globalisation and Hegemony: Past and Present

Globalisation was projected by such scholars like McLuhan, who saw in the rapid development of communication technology in the mid sixties, a trend toward transforming the world into a "global village."[2] When the global village became a reality in the 1970s, an imbalance in the flow of media messages between the West and the rest of the world was noticeable. The developing world protested against "Western media imperialism," the tendency to dominate the communication scene and project Western values to the Third World, thus resulting in the developing world being undermined and people being socialised by the foreign media.

This Western (or more accurately American) media hegemony was widely debated and protested against in the "New World Information and Communication Order" debates in the 70s. Though these debates reached to no concrete outcome, they created a state

of awareness among Third World countries, and resulted in the establishment of few forums of cooperation of the developing countries in the field of communication under the auspices of UNESCO. Such cooperation discussions aimed to limit Western and American dominance of the international communication scene through direct cooperation among countries of the Third World. A frustrated US finally withdrew from UNESCO under the pretext that the organisation had become a forum for upholding universal press controls and for curbing the global free flow of information. As the US withdrew, its scholars and professionals promised the world an increased freedom of information flow with the projected development of the information technology. They proclaimed that advances in technology would make the principle of free flow of communication pervade all over the globe despite resistance from the non-Western world.[3]

The assertion of Western scholars became a reality. The state of the imbalanced flow of information has been further aggravated by rapid advances in communication technology which guaranteed Western media the uncontrolled exposure of world audiences to their messages. Thus, movies, news, music, sports and other entertainment items have become easily accessible by all in most of the world. This unsurpassed Western media penetration of other cultures and communities, has become a dominant feature of the new technology of communication. The technology (satellite, cable and computer) has empowered the audiences by putting them, alone, in control of the received message. This meant that local authorities were no longer able to censor, obstruct or change the content of the Western media, thus making the relationship between the initiator of the message (the global media organisation) and the receiver (the local audience) a direct one. Under such a situation, the audiences gained total freedom in their choices of exposure to international messages as they decided, based on their values and tastes, what to see and what not to see.

Impact of Global Media: A Theoretical Overview

Studies investigating the impact of exposure to media messages cover a wide range of issues. From changes in attitude, opinion and behaviour, to the effect on the social and political order of society,

these studies suggest several theoretical perspectives for understanding media effect.[4] One of these perspectives, the cultivation approach, stands as most appropriate for the explication of the desensitising effect of the media.[5]

The cultivation theory proposes that long-term exposure to a mass medium, particularly television, will cultivate for the audience a reality peculiar to the medium used. The theory proposes that media reality does not reflect the actual reality, and concludes that media reality shapes the attitude, opinion and behaviour of the public. The cultivation theorists found that "the assumptions, beliefs and values of heavy viewers differ systematically from those of comparable light viewers," and reflected "the dominant patterns of life in the televisions world." In other words, long-term public exposure to media shapes the attitudes and opinions of the audiences and, eventually, results in their adoption of behaviour communicated by the media.[6]

Cross national exposure to media messages has received increased attention from scholars and researchers. As the technology reduced the role of national governments in controlling the flow of global messages, studies probing the impact of such uncontrolled messages took the front seat in intercultural research.[7] Whereas some of these studies underline the total or partial Western/American takeover of the communication scene in some countries (e.g., India, Jamaica, Tobago and Barbados), others explicate the impact of such takeover on the cultural identity of the population, thus suggesting a cultivation effect of the global media on the local populations. One of these studies investigated the situation in the Caribbean Islands and reported on what the Caribbean population had cultivated from the global media as follows:

> ...Much of the massive cultural inflow is based on sheer media source dependency.... The growth of satellite transmissions, arriving direct to home or through cable, and videocassettes...along with media domination by advertisers and governments unable to directly fund public broadcasting, has tended to strengthen the forces of commercialism and dependency – even further integrating Caribbean upper class tastes into that of the dominant external culture.[8]

The Caribbean situation described in the above quotation is typical of the worries across the Third World. As more and more nations plug-in to communication technology and become receivers of uncontrolled Western messages, they risk the exposure to values and lifestyles that contradict their own value system. The cultivation theory aptly explains the dynamics of exposure of local audiences to global programming. Entertainment in international TV is culturally Western-oriented and, as the media reach of international TV is fast expanding to all corners of the globe, it is possible then to hypothesise that the "reality" cultivated by the audience of international television is shaped by Western images portrayed in these programmes. Though we may not draw definitive conclusions based on this hypothesis, we may however, underline the fact that several of the studies on cultural imperialism and dependency have asserted that Western media have diffused to non-western audiences' images and values consonant with those of the West, and that media dependency strengthens the supremacy of Western media images in local media.[9]

Scholarly research speaks on the preponderance of Western cultural genres in local media, and emphasises the negative impact of such penetration. Tehranian noticed, as he travelled across Asia in 1992, the ubiquity of CNN, BBC and Star TV, and did not fail to identify the impact of such ubiquitous symbols of Western consumerism like McDonald's, Madonna and Michael Jackson on the youths of several Asian countries well known for their firm traditionalism. The dangers of such cultural invasion were noticeable even in a country like Iran. According to Tehranian,

> In Tehran, in June 1994, courtesy of CNN and DBS, I witnessed O.J. Simpson on the run on the Los Angeles freeways. And despite Islamic edicts, MTV videos with their post-modern messages of sensuality, pluralism and scepticism were reaching into the sanctity of the Islamic living room. This was viewed by Iranian government authorities as a cultural invasion no less menacing than US armed fleet off the coasts of the Persian Gulf.[10]

These and similar worries have troubled many media scholars and sociologists. The late Professor Herbert Schiller, a prominent media scholar, dedicated most of his scholarly work to the criticism of the

dominance of corporate America over the world scene. In one of his widely acclaimed books, Schiller analysed the essence of American corporate dominance and manipulation and concluded that,

> ...Today, control of human beings and of societies requires, before anything else, the manipulation of words and images. The methods and messages of communication, therefore, are the most significant and indispensable instruments of modern power wielders. The attitudinal state of a population helps to determine its political behaviour. And beliefs and opinions are remarkably vulnerable to the sort of mass manipulation that the American system of power practices with fantastic dexterity.[11]

Schiller believes that entertainment programmes produced and distributed worldwide by the US are the viruses that carry around the world Western values and lifestyles. He maintains that entertainment in American media reinforces the status quo, and ensures the supremacy of the values of consumerism and free enterprise that would enhance corporate America.[12]

An international TV station like National Geographic, which most people see as an excellent alternative for educational and entertainment purposes when compared to the blatantly Western MTV or HBO, highlights Schiller's contention. The main themes of the station's documentaries include the creation of global awareness about the importance of preservation of the natural environment and its habitat, especially endangered species. To this end, many of the station's documentaries are dedicated to the depiction of animals, their life and the way they contribute to the natural balance of the environment. Monkeys, apes and gorillas, for example, are closely followed in the wild and in captivity and, to bring these animals closer to human interest, arguments about, and proof of, the biological relationship of man to monkeys are made in terms of evolution.[13] These programmes directly contradic the basic beliefs of, for example, Muslims who contend that human beings are superior to all other animals and they are created by Allah (SWT), the Creator, Cherisher and Sustainer of the Universe.

Entertainment, including game shows, sitcoms and soap operas, carries within its genres elements of the culture to which it belongs.

From Dallas to Dynasty soap operas, from Mickey Mouse to Superman cartoons, and from "Wheel of Fortune" to "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" game shows, American entertainment diffuses values, mores and lifestyles. Taken within the context of the cultivation theory, the continued exposure of a non-American audience to such values and mores may impact the tastes, preferences and behaviour of that audience. It may numb the audience to the extent that they become desensitised against their own basic values.

Cultural Desensitisation, Hybridisation and Homogenisation

Cultural desensitisation is a term that describes the cumulative impact of heavy media use on peoples' sensitivity (or insensitivity) to social and political issues. The concept has a psychological underpinning as it refers to the gradual change in a person's attitude as a result of the accumulated exposure to messages contradictory to that person's original attitude. Therapeutically, psychologists use systematic desensitisation to eliminate phobias and unrealistic anxiety through cognitive stimulation and behavioural processes that lead to control of the unpleasant effects of a situation.[14] In the case of cultural desensitisation, the continuous exposure to, say, violence, results in people becoming less sensitive, and more tolerant, to violent behaviour. Such changes in attitude could have further consequences on behaviour as one becomes more prone to behave violently.

The media desensitisation effect has been researched under several contexts, the disinhibitory effect of the media for example. A researcher who thoroughly investigated this type of media effect, George Comstock, maintains that media concentration on violence reduces the audience reluctance to engage in violence.[15] The modelling approach, another research area similar to desensitisation, applies the principle of learning to social situations. In this approach, three steps of modelling are identified: attention, retention and production. Attention and retention refer to the audience's awareness and recording of the behaviour, whereas production refers to the engagement in the activity as a result of the two previous steps.[16] Though different in orientation, Gerbner's concept of "mainstreaming" also refers to a similar effect of television as it underlines TV role in eliminating deviant opinions and making TV views dominant in society. The concept is close to desensitisation in

that it underlines the impact of accumulated exposure in creating consonance in attitudes of society members, thus mainstreaming society toward a desensitised position with respect to values and social beliefs. Indifference to anti-social behaviour has been underlined by many studies as resulting from excessive exposure to portrayal of such behaviour in the mass media.[17]

Desensitisation is a multistage process. The first stage is similar to that of the Pavlovian classical conditioning, seeing a negative situation in TV evokes negative emotional responses. In the subsequent stages, the repeated viewing of the situation in a relaxed environment makes that negative situation "entertaining, pleasant, and even relaxing."[18] As a result, the association of the situation with negative emotions is gradually weakened while its association with entertainment and pleasure is strengthened. The long term consequences of such replacement of association on behaviour are very serious. Studies have shown that desensitisation to violence leads to tolerance of violence and results in less empathy toward victims of violence.[19]

Taken to global dimensions, cultural desensitisation impacts global audiences in the same way. As international audiences are persistently exposed to social and cultural situations that contradict their own beliefs and value systems, they gradually shed their inhibition and accept the culturally unacceptable. A conservative audience in whose culture the overt display of sexual behaviour is taboo may begin a gradual descent toward indifference and insensitivity to the subject if consistently exposed to sexually explicit images. In many developing countries behaviours like dating, kissing, gambling, premarital sex, and alcohol drinking are antisocial and extremely unacceptable. When these same behaviours are showered through the global media as acceptable and, in some cases, reward earning behaviours, such constant portrayal may culturally numb the members of society, gradually desensitise them to shed their social inhibition and, finally, lead them to accept and indulge in the behaviour.

Some scholars underline hybridisation as a consequence of cultural desensitisation to global media messages.[20] Hybridisation refers to the integration of the local and the global in reality construction and is defined as "a process and a product of symbolic

practices acted out by communities consuming national and transnational media and popular culture."[21] Based on this definition, hybridisation describes an advanced stage of the process of cultural desensitisation.

The continued exposure to TV images results in the desensitisation of audience members towards local cultural constructs. This audience then develops a new (hybrid) construct in which both the local and the global images are present. Hybridisation is, therefore, a process of rejection of both the global and the local in an attempt to construct a new reality which provides a separate identity to the community.

As a product of global cultural desensitisation, hybridisation is the means by which communities metamorphose into a "cultural mulatto."[22] Such cultural hybridity represents, to some scholars, a positive development as it reflects society's rejection of both the local and the foreign, and its development of a new alternative.[23] But what is most dangerous is the situation in which the community experiences the dynamics of the cultivation process. Under such a situation, a gradual and subtle cultural transformation of society takes place, the values, traditions and customs of society are shed out, and the values and mores of the dominant culture as portrayed by the media take over. In a nutshell, desensitisation leads to hybridisation, which leads to homogenisation. Cultural homogenisation is the complete shedding of the values of one culture and the adoption of the values of the dominant culture. It is the state of total surrender to the invading culture; the ultimate Western cultural takeover.

The New Order: Repackaging the Message

Many of the debates of the 1980s on media imperialism reflected awareness of such possible consequences of Western media penetration of non-Western communities. Such awareness led, since the days of the New World Information and Communication Order, to several bilateral, trilateral and regional cooperation agreements, among Third World countries, which aimed at evading the imminent global dominance of the American culture. These cooperation ventures included, among other things, news agencies pooling, media training, and joint programme production. A famous venture in this respect is "The Joint Programs Production Corporation" of the Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC)."[24] The corporation is famous in (though no confined to) the area of children programme production, especially its "Open Sesame" programme series which have been geared towards Arab and Muslim values and traditions. With the help of the American Children Television Workshop of New York, the Corporation's authorities fund and produce children programmes that follow closely the steps of the renowned "Sesame Street" programme, but the content of these programmes is closely tailored to the values of a Muslim audience. Such adaptation of Western media genres to suit the local Arab and Muslim values proves that cooperation can, at least, reduce dependency on Western media, a step that may be seen as a necessary prerequisite for salvation from the prevailing Western media hegemony.

Despite such efforts of cooperation, the Third World has generally found it difficult to compete with the highly sophisticated production of Western programmes beamed directly to the homes of the local audience. Technological advances like miniaturisation, digitisation, and compression have elevated the quality of Western TV programmes to a standard with which no developing country could compete and, with the growing privatisation and commercialisation of Third World media, the penetration of their media markets by the global media seems inescapable.

The global media are motivated, in their desire to penetrate Third World markets, by the currently omnipresent free global trade and communication principles. Under these principles, the media are not only proponents of the global corporate ideology, but also a basic component of the global economic system. Opening new markets in East Europe, Asia and the Middle East is central to global media plans of expansion because European markets have almost reached the saturation point. In such a situation, collective media production efforts of the developing world, and joint ventures like those of the GCC, are not welcomed by Western media conglomerates as they hinder their efforts of penetration.

Whereas the global media sought a strategy to counter the Third World's attempts at cooperation, the developing countries were eager to find a formula that would make their local media competitive and as interesting as the global media and yet preserve indigenous cultures and values. The two, the global media and some of the

developing countries, rested on a formula which would allow both to benefit from a strategy of cooperation. The strategy guaranteed the Third World media entertaining, and hence popular, programming while it secured for the Western media a good share of the media markets of these countries. The strategy also guaranteed the passage of the ultimate message of Western programmes, with little or no objection from governments, to the audiences of these countries.

To implement this strategy, the global media reorganised their international broadcasting and programming services. Regional headquarters for most of the international media were opened in several regions of the world, and regional programming became the dominant trend, with more focus on regional issues, often presented and tackled by broadcasters from the same region. MTV pioneered in this respect by establishing its Asian branches and programmes, followed by Asian Star Television, Disney and later HBO. "As US-based media giants earn(ed) a larger share of revenues abroad, they increasingly target(ed) different regions and nations of the world, and they enter(ed) joint ventures with local producers."[25] Such strategies have led, in the final analysis, to a situation in which the content of the domestic production around the world carried a distinct Hollywood flavour.

By entering into joint ventures with local producers, global media giants widened their scope of regionalisation to "localisation." Localisation refers to the focus of global media on a specific audience by providing entertainment programs in a local format. To do so, media giants licensed entertainment programmes to be produced by local TV stations, often in the local language, but under conditions set by the owners of the show.

Localisation of American entertainment programmes and game shows is a well-established practice in Europe, some parts of Latin America and elsewhere in the Western world. In Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, for example, several agreements among the American and the local media have made possible the production of popular entertainment programmes locally.[26] Licensing of popular entertainment and game shows has lately become a feature of media relations in some regions of the developing world especially in Asia. In South-East Asian countries like Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore, where the shift toward the market economy has led

to a clear trend of commercialisation of media systems, the trend of localisation has become common place. Japan pioneered the trend in the 1980s when several American TV programmes and game shows were locally produced under agreements among television stations in both countries. The term "glocalisation" was specifically coined to denote this trend of local production of game and entertainment shows in the local environment and with local actors in Japan and other Asian countries.[27] An Arab media organisation, the Dubai-based Middle East Broadcasting Company (MBC) has recently licensed the American game show, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," which is now being shown in an Arabic version all over the Middle East and the Arab World.

Many of the developing countries engaged in localisation of international media programmes welcomed this policy because they thought that some control over the in-flowing media messages might finally be regained. As communication technology reinforced Western media hegemony, localisation seemed a helpful policy for the curtailment of the negative socio-cultural impact of the Western programmes on the audiences of the Third World countries.

"Glocalisation" in Malaysia

Though its media are not fully privatised and commercialised, Malaysia has caught up with the trend of "glocalisation" of American entertainment and game shows. The trend began in the 1990s with the localisation of the two famous game shows: "Wheel of Fortune" and "Family Feud" and later extended to "Hollywood Squares" and, the most popular game show on earth, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" These game shows were localised in orientation of content, production and language, but the genres of the show are kept close to the original show.

Two of these shows stand as most popular: "Wheel of Fortune" and "Who Wants to be a Millionaire"[28] The former began running in Malaysia in the 1990s on Channel 3, Malaysia's first free-to-air television network wholly owned by Media Prima Berhad. The show features the same format of the original (American) show, but the language and the word puzzles were local. The latter, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" has been shown on NTV7, another non-government station, since June 2000. The show carried the same

format of the original American show, with the contestants answering questions and winning money in the process. The amount of money they win increases exponentially as they answer correctly multiple choice questions on a variety of issues. A maximum of one million Malaysian Ringgit is the ultimate prize on the show.

These two game shows have been chosen for analysis and comment because they were the most popular among the local population. Such popularity was demonstrated by the fact that versions of the two programmes in Malay, Mandarin and Tamil, the three main languages of the population, were often broadcast. This analysis explores the main genres and cultural constructs that were manifest in the local versions of the two shows, with the aim of evaluating whether localisation of the international game shows has achieved its purpose and eliminated the possible cultural contradictions.

Positive Themes: Socialisation, Ethnic Diversity and Cultural Tolerance

The analysis of the content of the two shows reveals a clear trend of projection of positive images of Malaysian culture.[29] Almost all of the puzzle words in the "Wheel of Fortune" and the question items in "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" reflected items related to Islamic, Malaysian or regional constructs. Historical sites, religious occasions, political and social figures were dominant. Cultural diversity and cultural tolerance were very prominent as themes in many of the episodes of the two programmes. Local traditions, local festivals, ethnic food and dress were some of the items that portrayed Malaysia's ethnic diversity in both programmes. In both shows a very clever blend of politics, ethnicity and traditionalism geared toward the needs of social harmony was noticed. Thus, the promotion of local tourism was carefully meshed into knowledge about regions and spots of popular international attraction, while religious tolerance was upheld in items and questions related to names and details about practices and celebrations.

"Wheel of Fortune" went beyond the local to a regional dimension in its promotion of social and cultural values. Some episodes were dedicated to neighbouring countries like Brunei when the show confined several episodes to a Brunei audience and focused entirely

on its culture and history; indeed the whole show was taken to Brunei where several episodes were shot in the local setting. "Who wants to be a Millionaire" had a more "outward" outlook as it gave great attention to regional and international issues. Islamic occasions and personalities, regional historic incidents, indeed international personalities, organisations and incidents like the world wars, the UN, world civilisations and people of the world gave the show another dimension of interest.

Negative Themes: Consumerism, Gambling and Wealth

The negative themes of the two shows did not involve their content, as much as they related to their genres and overall philosophy. These were rather subtle and indirect codes that were enmeshed in the emblematic presentation of ideas and issues. As such, the analyses were basically qualitative in nature, with much emphasis on the thematic orientation of the shows.

The qualitative analysis of the two programmes revealed the presence of three major themes: consumerism as a value, gambling and risk-taking as fun, entertainment as an end, and material wealth as an ultimate social value. Some of these values and themes were promoted directly through the activities and behaviours of the show players, while some of them ran subtly along the theme of the programme, or were indirectly emphasised in style and comportment. The following paragraphs highlight these detected themes and qualify their presence in the local versions of the international shows.

Wheel of Fortune: Vehicle of Consumerism

"Wheel of Fortune" in Malaysia was given a local name "Roda Impian," a term that does not exactly reflect the "fortune" part of the name of the show.[30] But the genres of the game are the same; the spinning wheel, the puzzle board, the lofty prizes, the theme, style and mannerism of the show were all well preserved. Even the dress style of the two presenters and their behaviour resembled very much that of the original show's hosts Pat Sajak and Vanna White. Just like in the American version, the contestants in the Malaysian version spin the wheel and clap nervously as they wish the amount of money at which they want the wheel to stop. Then they try to solve the word puzzle by figuring out the hidden letters of the puzzle. At the

end of the programme, money is loudly counted as it is being handed to winners, while the audience listen to the details of the other lofty prizes, which often include lavish trips to exotic destinations, expensive fashion modes, dazzling jewellery or expensive consumer goods provided by companies sponsoring the show.

As the case of the American version, the Malaysian version of "Wheel of Fortune" was very attractive to advertisers. This fact was shown by the number of co-sponsors, and by the time-slot devoted to commercials during the programme. In the closing minutes of the show, the screen ran with a long list of sponsors and contributors to the programme, including the providers of the elegant attire, the suits and dresses, the two local presenters keep changing into during the commercial slots.[31] Promotion of consumerism is the single most obvious value of the game show. Such a value is not-in itself a vice, but when it is taken within the context of the culture and values of the society under focus, one may see the perilous effect of such emphasis on consumerism and its offshoot mores of affluence and wealth-seeking. Such values and mores negate those of a religiously conscious society that aspires to diffuse, among its members, qualities of contentment, moderation, sharing and caring.

Gambling and Risk-Taking

Both shows promote in their format some form of gambling, but "Roda Impian" stands out as a downright gambling show. The huge wheel is a replica of the roulette machine of gambling casinos. The major activity, which the contestant must perform, is spinning the huge roulette wheel and securing a high figure in the spin, such a spin might win for the contestant a good sum or, like in all gambling games, might lead to loss. As all gambling games, "Roda Impian" is a luck-based game. The hidden block words and the contestants' wealth of vocabulary are only subsidiary qualifications; the real talent of the game is LUCK.

"Who Wants to be a Millionaire": Risk-Taking and Usury

"Who Wants to be a Millionaire" was produced locally under the same name. As a quiz show, it focused on the scope of knowledge and wealth of information of the contestant, but it also had some essence of gambling built into it. As one of the fans of the game

wrote in a website dedicated to the game "the real excitement of the
game is in the gambling involved, the risk-taking that one must
enter into to decide whether to continue or to stop, whether to accept
or reject an answer."[32] Gambling is also present in the game's rule
which stipulates that you lose the money you have accumulated if
you answer the next question incorrectly, thus making risk-taking,
the essence of all gambling, central to the game.

An interesting feature of "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," for a
Muslim community in particular, is the game's rule that makes the
amount of money won increase exponentially. This rule, which is
the essence of the whole excitement of the game, also invokes images
of usury, the style of wealth accumulation forbidden by Islam.
Though usury relates to money lending, the concept of "doubling
profits" in a single transaction summons to the mind the picture of
usury where profits fast accumulate in the same manner; indeed the
very name of usury in Arabic, *ribā* means something that grows
suddenly upward.

Corporatism is very prominent in the philosophy of this game
show. Under the corporate system, the ultimate goal of every one is
to achieve the "American dream," being rich and famous. "Who
Wants to be a Millionaire" helps ordinary Americans, who lack the
material component necessary to achieve the dream, aspire to be
millionaires. This fact explains the extreme popularity of the show
in America, where the dream is both legitimate and realistic. But for
a society whose cultural priorities are strikingly different, the
philosophical underpinnings of the show may not be suitable. As
greater emphasis is placed on materialism and acquisitiveness, the
show seems far distanced from Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, the
three dominant religions of the country which value much spiritual
content and satisfaction. As these religions teach their followers to
be content and happy with reasonable levels of wealth and sow in
their followers the seeds of humbleness and humility, they contradict
the materialistic assertions of the capitalist philosophy, thus putting
the show in direct confrontation with the values of the host society.

It is these contradictions that underline as the essence of the
desensitisation process on the cultural dimension. For an audience
whose priorities are those of contentment, modesty and humility,
such emphasis on material desires breeds internal contradictions as

these two competing forces pull the audience in two opposite directions. The pull of the media-generated images of materialism is both intense and persistent, thus resulting in the process of desensitisation of the audience members and the cultivation of corporatism as a dominant and permanent style of life.

Conclusion

This study has underlined the seriousness of the impact of the process of cultural desensitisation which the current global television is posing on Muslims and others in Third World countries. As the process develops, a cultural homogenisation effect may take place, thus threatening cultures of the other world with eminent extinction. The localisation of global show has not in any way lessened the danger of cultural desensitisation. The localised shows have simply looked at their content, but the danger emanates from their genres and overall philosophy. The impact of this process is grave enough that calls for a collaborative action at political, cultural, academic and other levels.

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Notes

1. In earlier debates, economic and political exploitations were seen as an extension of the imperialist era, with concepts of modernisation and democratisation being the centre of the issue.

2. Marshall McLuhan used the term for the first time in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). Since then the term has gained popularity in political and cultural studies.

3. For details of the debate, consult UNESCO's publications, especially the McBride report, *Many Voices, One World: Towards a New, More Just, and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order* (Paris: Unesco, 1980).

4. A classical but comprehensive study of media impact theories is D. Robert & C. Bachen, "Mass Communication Effect," *Annual Review of Psychology*, 32 (1984): 307-56.

5. For detailed explication of the theory and the research, consult Singnorielli & Morgan eds., *Cultivation Analysis: New Directions in Media Effect Research* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990).

6. Ibid., 23.

7. Though many studies are present, we particularly draw attention to J. Straubhaar, "Cultural Imperialism: a Media Effects Approach," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8 (1991): 39-59; and H. Dunn, "A One-way Street off the global Digital Superhighway," in *Globalization, Communication and Caribbean Identity*, ed. S. Hopeton Dunn (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994).

8. Ed Herman and Robert Waterman McChesney, *The Global Media: The Missionaries of Global Capitalism* (New York: Cassell, 1997), 178.

9. For an interesting analysis of such impact see G. Sussman & J. Lent eds., *Transnational Communication: Wiring the Third World* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991). See also J. Lent, *Mass Communication in the Caribbean* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990).

10. M. Tehranian, *Global Communication and World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Riener, 1999), 68.

11. H. Schiller, *The Mind Managers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 143.

12. Ibid., 79-104, the whole chapter is devoted to the explication of this idea.

13. A series in National Geographic TV station, titled "Monkey Business," continuously emphasises this relationship. Another programme of this sort "Monkeys, Apes and Man" was devoted to defending the idea of evolution.

14. C.B. Taylor & B. Arnow, *The Nature and Treatment of Anxiety Disorders* (New York: The Free Press, 1988). See also Raymond Lloyd Richmond, "Systematic Desensitization," [online] available from http://www.guidetopsychology.com/sysden.htm, accessed on February 11, 2007.

15. G. Comstock, S. Chaffee, N. Katzman & D. Roberts, *Television and Human Behavior* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

16. R. Harris, *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*, 3rd ed. (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Ass, 1999).

17. For example Zillman & Bryant, "Pornography, Sexual Callousness and the Trivialization of Rape," *Journal of Communication*, 32 (1982): 10-21. Also L. Berkowitz & Karen Rogers, "A Priming Effect Analysis," in *Perspectives on Media Effect*, eds. J. Bryant and D. Zillman (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1986).

18. Ibid., 201.

19. R. Drabman, & M. Thomas, "Does Media Violence Increase Toleration of Real Life Aggression?" *Developmental Psychology*, 10 (1974): 419-421. For further account of the impact of viewing violence see D. Linz, E. Donnerstein & S. Penrod, "The Effects of Multiple Exposures to Filmed Violence Against Women," *Journal of Communication* 34, no. 3 (1984): 130-147.

20. M. Kraidy, "The Global, the Local, and the Hybrid: A Native Ethnography of Glocalization," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 16 no. 4 (1999).

21. Ibid.

22. I am using this term rather loosely to reflect the uncelebrated outcome of the amalgamation of the two values.

23. Kraidy (1999), op. cit. treats the case of Lebanese Christian Maronites who showed strong tendencies of hybridisation of Western and Arab values as a result of exposure to Western TV programmes.

24. This is one of the executive bodies established by the GCC. Its main concern is the area of production of media-related material including short movies, children's cartoons and the famous "Open Sesame" children's programme.

25. Ed Herman and Robert Waterman McChesney, *The Global Media: The Missionaries of Global Capitalism,* 43.

26. Ibid., 156-188.

27. R. Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity" in *Global Modernities*, eds. M. Featherstone, S. Lash, & R. Robertson (London: Sage, 1995).

28. For further information on these two game shows please refer to their home pages on the Internet.

29. A qualitative content analysis of a random sample from the two programmes was used. The total number of programmes analysed was 12, 6 for each, for a period of six months (N=72). The analysis focused on themes as the content categories. Three positive themes and three negative themes were underlined in the programmes.

30. The dictionary translation of the word "impian" is "dream" or "vision," a concept that drives in the appropriate image of the "dream of wealth."

31. Watching the local and the American shows, one does not fail to notice the identical style of the pair of co-hosts, in attire, programme modalities and style of presentation.

32. http://www.everwonder.com/david/millionaire, accessed March 18, 2006.