

PROBLEM-REACTION-SOLUTION THESIS AND COVID-19: THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC OPINION FORMATION ON GLOBAL POWER, ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

Biriowu C. S & Chris-Biriowu T. B

Research Scholar, Department of Management, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper sought to discuss the power of the economically dominant societies, who create and impose public opinion (dominant ideology), and who are also in control of information dissemination on a global level on the rest of the world. Using Icke's (2007) Problem-Reaction-Solution thesis as an analytical method, the classic way in which the ruling few (also known as the one percent) exercise control over the world systems with the use of public opinion formation was deduced. The Coronavirus 2019 was analyzed to reflect the Problem-Solution-Reaction thesis, and how the unfoldment of events is the expected reactions of the situation. The paper also discussed the impact of the public opinion formed by the advanced economies on global power, economic and employment relations. This paper concludes that with the much information that the one percent of the world population (the dominant class) hold, they would rule the world and only their ideas would matter with consequences on global power, economic and employment relations.

KEYWORDS: *Problem-Reaction-Solution, Covid-19, Ruling Minority, Employment Relations, Power Relations, Economic Relations*

INTRODUCTION

A look at the world from an academic critical telescope reveals evidence of the cyclical way events unfold. In recognizing the similarities between the subtle flux in rotational occurrences and alleged happenstance of situations that eventually lead to crises, which inevitably take a toll on the planet, Icke (2007) describes the situation as a classic case that falls within the purview of the problem-reaction-solution (PRS) conspiracy "theory". According to him, the world has grown economically, technologically and spiritually to the point where everything is known such that there are hardly any incidences that could be filed under "coincidence". In an attempt to explain the thesis of problem-reaction-solution, Icke (2007) likens the structure of the world to a pyramid. For him, the rulers of the world are the elitists, who control the world's means of production (known as the one percent) who are at the tiny top of the metaphorical pyramid. For Icke therefore, these individuals are those whom Karl Marx referred to as the bourgeoisie who decide how the world works through the formation of policies; who determine the amount of information that the aggregate public of the world is exposed to; and whose opinion form the public opinion. This one percent of the world's population are those whose opinion or ideology is referred to as the dominant ideology.

In Marxist phraseology, the term dominant ideology denotes the attitudes, beliefs, values, and morals shared by the social minority (the dominant class) in a given society. As a mechanism of social control, this ideology invented by the dominant minority is used to frame how the majority of the population thinks about the nature of society, their place in society, and their connection to a social class. This serves the interests of the ruling class.

Icke's thesis may have been inspired by the works authored by Marx and Engels (1845) cited in Abercrombie and Turner (1978, p.152), where they posit that: The ideas of the ruling class are, in any age, the ruling ideas applied to every social class in service to the interests of the ruling class. Hence, in the revolutionary practice, the slogan: 'The dominant ideology is the ideology of the dominant class'.

The implication of the above is that the dominant class exercise social control by means of the ideological manipulation of aspects of the common culture of a society—religion and politics, culture and economy. Through this means, they are able to explain and justify the status quo to the political advantage of the dominant (ruling) class.

The thesis put forward by Icke (2007) therefore imports the deduction that, at a common sneeze of the dominant one percent, ninety-nine percent of the world's population catches a cold. This is literally the situation of the world today. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to discuss the relationship between the theories of opinion formation and the power of control, which the dominant ideology uses to rule over the world by concocting a situation that would ultimately lead to a predetermined resolution.

Public Opinion Formation Typologies

In explaining public opinion formation process in society, Laswell (1948) makes a clear distinction between the ideal public and the perceived public. For Laswell therefore, while every individual is a member of the world, not every member of the world is a part of the public of public opinion. As a matter of fact, most individuals are mere residents of the world or members of the public but are not necessarily part of the opinion of the public instead, a tiny few who are capable of making demands for public action that could change a situation and affect public policies are the members of the world public—the ideal members of public opinion. These individuals who are also the ruling class express their opinion (often after much debate) and their ideas become the acceptable way of reasoning by the ninety-nine percent majority. This they propagate by using the disseminating powers of the mass media, since they mostly own and control the media. Following from Laswell's theory on public opinion formation process, we are to put forward the following typologies of public opinion formation:

The Interventionist Public Opinion Formation Process

This process of public opinion formation is referred to as an imposed opinion formation model. This is said to be imposed, because it is invented by the ruling class but forced on the masses for acceptance as public opinion. In this model, the elitist class or the owners of the world's productive resources which form the dominant ideology of society and which are imposed on the world as public opinion invent an idea system. This powerful societal elites deploy public opinion through the instrumentality of the state ideological apparatus (mainstream media), which is predominantly owned and controlled by them. Also, Deployed for the purpose of propagating the dominant idea system as the opinion of the public is the State's instrument of coercion (law enforcement agents and all levels of Government regulations). Supporting this model, Lippmann (1922) points out that, public opinion is the irrational and often self-serving social perceptions of the ruling class

(emphasis added) that influence individual and collective behavior (emphasis added) and prevents optimal societal cohesion. The interventionist public opinion formation model therefore is drawn from the works of Abercrombie and Turner (1978) with inspiration from the works of Marx and Engels and their dominant ideology thesis.

The Voluntaristic Public Opinion Formation Process

This model denotes the public opinion formation processes voluntarily invented through the collation of well-articulated opinion of the masses by the use of opinion collation mechanisms such as opinion polls, road shows, open houses, consultative machineries and public hearings instituted by the law-making arm of the ruling class. In this sense, the term dominant ideology denotes the attitudes, beliefs, values, and morals shared by the majority of the people (the masses) in a given society. As a mechanism of social control, the dominant ideology frames how the majority of the population thinks about the nature of society, their place in society, and their connection to a social class.

The significance of the public opinion typologies is dominant in the fact that the study of any social aspect of a phenomenon, such as the opinion of the public on the COVID-19 pandemic is the study of the dominant opinion of either the ruling class (interventionist public opinion) or the dominant opinion of the masses (voluntaristic public opinion).

Following from this typology of public opinion formation process and the understanding of the social aspect of the covid-19 pandemic, the thrust of this paper aligns with the works of Abercrombie and Turner (1978) and Icke (2007), that the idea system behind this social phenomenon is the idea of the world's dominant societies (the world powers) referred to by developmental Sociologists as the metropolists, who have chosen to impose their views on the dominated societies (the satellite countries of the world).

Understanding the Public Opinion Formation Process of the Corona Virus Pandemic

The problem-reaction-solution thesis and how the ruling few use their powers of opinion formation to rule and dominate the world can be linked to the Coronavirus 2019 (also known as CoVID-19) that surfaced in Wuhan China in December 2019. The cause of the virus is largely unknown beyond the fact that it could have been passed from animals to humans. Since its spread from China to other parts of the world, the pandemic has since created fear, anxiety and panic to the members of the world, who are semi-handicapped in curtailing the contagion. On the mainstream media and the social media is news on the perceived patterns of the virus and ideas on how individual members of the world may “stay safe” and prevent its eminent infection. This vital information which is geared towards protecting the world from self-alienation, is couched and modified for the benefit of the world population by the ruling class, who not only determine what is diffused in the form of news but also the amount and nature of news that the world is privy to. Since the said news emanate from the mass media, it becomes legitimized and known as truth and even worse, the way of life (Gouldner, 1976). The public's statistical analysis of the outbreak of CoVID-19 and the elucidations of the algorithmic spread of the pandemic result in the mass reaction of individuals, who not only depend on the instructions of the few yet highly powerful individuals who are knowledgeable of the phenomenon, but take these words at face value. As every human's basic instinct is to stay alive, warnings and restrictions would be adhered to when the fear of death is implanted in their subconscious. According to the World Health Organization (2020), the basic steps that must be taken in order to prevent the spread of the pandemic include:

- Regular cleaning of the hands with alcohol-based sanitizer or washing hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20seconds. This is to kill viruses that may be on the hands.

- Keep at least three feet away from anyone who is sneezing or coughing, because they may release liquid droplets that carry the virus, which an individual then breathes in.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth, because at some point one's hands may have touched a surface and the virus is known to stay alive on any hard surface for more than 35 minutes.
- Cover the nose with bent elbow when sneezing so as not to get other people sick.
- Avoid social gatherings and stay at home, because some people are asymptomatic carriers and some others only show mild symptoms and eventually get better yet, they may infect the susceptible population.

The much that is known about the virus is a characterization of the opinion of the dominant ideology of the ruling class formed through the public opinion interventionist model. This is the much that the ruling class and experts in the field share with the world. The opinion of these few individuals therefore is the public opinion. This public opinion directs the course of action, which the mass public takes, yet it is interesting to note that the reaction of the mass public is precisely the opinion or ideology of the dominant few as espoused in the works of Marx and Engels (1845).

In examining the situation, Kardas and Balci (2020) point out that when events such as the CoVID-19 occurs, it usually takes a predictable and expected turn and yields the anticipated result. This they describe as a method of overwhelming the lives of the masses such that they become distracted and occupied with events that they can barely handle let alone control, while policymakers swoop in and transform the political and socio-economic settings. While it is alleged that the origin of the CoVID-19 is not known, in fighting against the further spread of the disease that has infected nearly 600,000 people in more than 150 countries and claimed the lives of at least 26,700 persons (Abadi, Cooper & Teckman-Fullard, 2020), the world's economy has taken a drastic plunge because businesses are forced to shut down and employers are "letting staff go". Granted, countries such as the United States of America have put a plan in place to give money to individuals to help sustain them during this period, but it further strengthens the theory of the ruling class "owning" and controlling the world and the minds of the people in it. Also, since the world is forced to exercise social distancing, production is at a pause, which implies that the reserve would be evaded. Eventually, it will all crumble because the stocks will crash and transformation under the guise of a rebuild will be eminent. According to Gouldner (1976) and Icke (2020), the ruling few who are also the inventors of the dominant ideology are in fact the technocrats, who decide how the world works. They are the public with the opinion.

The CoVID-19 is termed the 'novel' coronavirus because there has been a similar outbreak in the not-so-distant past. In November 2002, an epidemic known as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) emerged with an even deadlier force and claimed the lives of about 10 percent (774) of the 8,098 confirmed cases that were recorded (Abadi, Cooper & Teckman-Fullard, 2020). The SARS, which was first identified in Guangdong, China and spread through 26 countries albeit the severest of cases were concentrated in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Canada was finally contained in July 2003. At the time when the SARS was spreading and killing people, the world experienced a global anxiety but most importantly, China experienced an economic downturn because, like the compelling measures that are implemented to curb the further spread of the CoVID-19, there were compulsory shutdowns and quarantines to contain the SARS in 2003. Also, worthy of recognition is the fact that at the end of the economic teardown that was caused by the SARS, the world (especially China which experienced a slow growth rate of 9.1% from the 11.1% that it was used to accomplishing year after year) had to rebuild and revitalize (Lee, 2020).

The situation is the same even on a local scale. When governments within nations sometimes find themselves overwhelmed with resistance from citizens who want the status quo to be maintained, having the power of public opinion, the government are sometimes forced to think outside of the box or allow events to play out such that they (the members of public opinion) is looked upon to proffer solution to arising crises. In 2019, a popular market in Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria, known as the Fruit Garden Market went up in flames. Prior to the unfortunate incident, which claimed large investments of traders; the government had tried and failed to get the market women to temporarily vacate the premises for a rebuild of an ultra-modern and befitting market. After the fire (of which causes are yet unknown) ravaged the livestock of the traders (problem), the pain and shock of the traders led to the cries and pleas (reaction) to the Rivers State government who empathized with the traders' plight and commenced building the earlier proposed market (solution). The conditions of the world may have members of public opinion at different levels, depending on their scope of domination, but they rotate within the same narrative. This is because the world is intertwined.

Marshall McLuhan predicted that the world would be a "global village" and that extrapolation superseded the forecast of bringing the world under one communicative umbrella. Politically, religiously, socially, economically and even ideologically the world would integrate and the change or lack thereof of a country would cause a ripple effect on others. Consequently, the individuals who sit at the helm of global affairs would gain and wield control of the entire human society regardless of geographical boundaries and class systems, especially when situations such as the COVID-19, which affects the majority of countries in the world, arise. The decisions concocted by the 1% whose ideas are the ruling ideas and whose opinion would determine the world's political and economic modus operandi after the problem has been solved.

The effect of the CoVID-19, in juxtaposition to how the one percent minority becomes more powerful at the end of the uprising is better understood by reviewing the conditionality that the members of the world public put forward as a way to halt the pandemic. Because the disease is transmitted from person to person, and mostly by individuals who have been in China or have had contact with someone who may have either been in China, or had contracted it from someone who had been in China, the best way, every country, out of fear of putting an end to the untraceable link is advised by public opinion to shut its borders and refuse entries into its territory. This is only a macro restriction. Within itself, nations are advised by public opinion to do a micro shutdown and enforce restrictive measures as well so that local bars, recreation centers, other small scale businesses, schools, holidays, ceremonies, tourism centers, public gatherings, conferences, market places, religious activities and even some work environments are shut down to limit or stop the flow of human traffic. The health sector and in fact the hospitals are overwhelmed, because the sick people are priority and the free medical treatments would certainly take its toll on an already crashing system. Lee and McKibbin (2019, p.1) pinpoint the likely level of pinch that a pandemic could result in:

Just calculating the number of canceled tourist trips, declines in retail trade, and similar factors is not sufficient to get a full picture of the impact of (a pandemic) because there are linkages within economies, across sectors, and across economies in both international trade and international capital flows. The economic costs from a global disease incurred in the affected sectors of disease-inflicted countries. This is not just because the disease spreads quickly to other countries through the increased trade and financial linkages associated with globalization.

The power of information, which is wielded under the instrumentality of public opinion, as simplified by the propounder of the knowledge-gap theory, Tichenor (1970), postulates that using the mass media, information infused into

the social system would increase the socio-economic status of individuals who become armed with the knowledge. This means that being in the know is for the privileged few (the one percent technocrats), who control the means of production and by extension, the means of information dissemination. They decide, using their wealth of knowledge how ‘much’ the ninety-nine percent gets, knowing fully well the effect of too much or too little information. The knowledge gap theory describes how the gap of knowledge between the one percent and the ninety-nine percent tends to increase because in a bid to control the world, the dominant ideology would always hold back information and usurp the means of information diffusion so that power is retained and status quo is maintained. In explaining the “problem” of the CoVID-19, the dominant ideology created a “reaction” which was fuelled by fear, panic and anxiety and like the SARS, the “solution” would be proffered by public opinion, which would not only put an end to the pandemic but give the one percent the power to fix the aftermath of a world political and economic crash, which would further strengthen their positions and places. Icke (2007) describes it as a cyclical but obvious way of reinforcing control.

The Impact of Public Opinion Formation

The intent of this section of the discourse is to bring to the fore, the various ways in which the public opinion formation pattern based on the dominant ideology of those who control the means of production (the metropolis -the more developed economies) impact on global power, economic and employment relations. This has to do with the strategies and tactics deployed by the more developed economies to use the imposed or interventionist public opinion formation process to control global Power Relations (supply restriction and pricing determination); Economic Relations (investment decisions) and Employment Relations (workplace employment relations).

Impact of Public Opinion Formation of the Dominant Class on Global Power Relations

This has to do with the strategies and tactics, deployed by the economically more advanced countries after causing a global distraction to competing advanced economies and the less developed economies, so as to boost the recovery of their countries’ economic fortune, and in consequence pull themselves to a position where other countries would call for their help. This will tend to increase their control of the global power relations.

The dominant public opinion formation on the Covid-19 pandemic is said to have been described as a conspiracy theory introduced by the largest world economies to bring down stock prizes world-wide such that the “creator” of the Covid-19 pandemic has successfully used it to respond to the loss of the trade war with an equally large world economically strong country. The aim is said to throw the world into recession. The creator of the pandemic (and its public opinion) brought almost everything it devalued on the stock exchanges around the world, and consequently became the owners of the global companies that it had sold during its economic misfortune. Funakoshi and Hartman(2020, p.1) contends that:

The stock market has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with worrying volatility, as traders have panic-sold out of fear. As a result of the recent turmoil, the market-wide circuit-breakers that attempt to prevent panic-trading, have been triggered four times alone in March. The market has reacted to recent unpredictability with large drops, triggering a market wide circuit breaker four times in March. The safeguard pauses trading for 15 minutes in hopes the market will calm.

Statistics from the above indicate the following percentage losses in stock of the competing world economies as shown in figure 1:

Coronavirus impact on global stock markets since the start of the outbreak

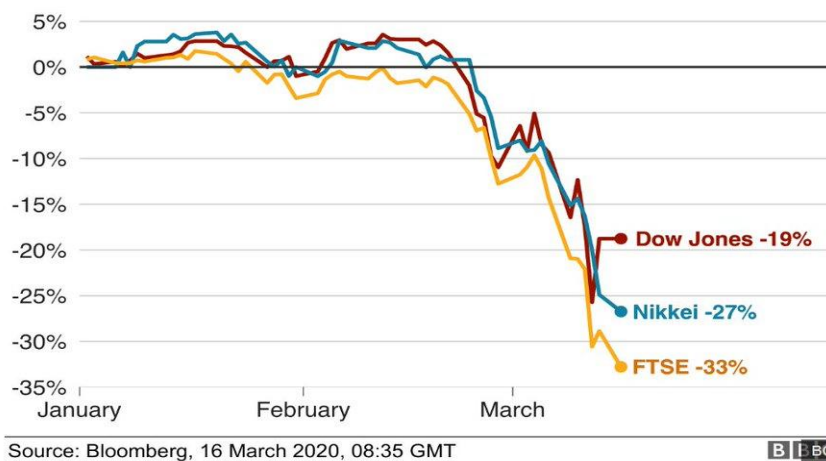


Figure 1: Corona Virus Impact on Global Stock Market.

Impact of Public Opinion Formation of the Dominant Class on Global Economic Relations

This has to do with how strategies and tactics are deployed by the economically more advanced countries, with the aim of impacting on the decisions of global investors to direct or re-direct their investments to other businesses. As pointed out by Walsh (2020), the only effective response to the Covid-19 virus was to shut down society and turn off the Assembly line of global capitalism. For Walsh therefore, the end solution would be to emancipate the world from its self-incubation and turn things around in such a way that public opinion would not only be accepted with immense gratitude but would be anticipated. The global economy is not spared as it has been exposed and made vulnerable to the vagaries of the public opinion (dominant ideology) of the competing advanced economies of the world. For the less developed economies of the world, it has led to severe cuts in Program Budgets, Operations and investments by local and international investors.

Impact of Public Opinion Formation of the Dominant Class on Employment Relations

This has to do with how severe cuts in Program Budgets, Operations and investments by local and international investors due to the impact of the imposed or interventionist public opinion, have led to a paradigm shift in their employment Relations strategies. Budgetary cuts brought about by the consequences of business disruptions led to some unanticipated consequences, including deep cuts into revenue projections and big losses. These deep revenue cuts have also led to rounds of business restructuring, divestments, redundancies and heavy job losses with its implications in the practice of employment Relations. This will certainly have grave consequences for jobs and employment relations in the global economy. Scott (2020, p.1) contends that:

The era of the Covid-19 has seen the significant economic impact of the coronavirus on financial markets and vulnerable industries such as manufacturing, tourism, hospitality and travel. Travel and tourism account for 10% of the global GDP and 50 million jobs are at risk worldwide. Global tourism, travel and hospitality companies closing down affect SMEs globally. This, in turn, affects many people, typically the least well-paid and those self-employed or working in informal environments in the gig economy or in part-time work with zero-hours contracts. Some governments have announced economic measures to safeguard jobs guarantee wages and support the self-employed, but there is a lack of clarity in many countries about how these measures will be implemented and how people will manage a loss of income in the short-term.

CONCLUSIONS

The power to conjure thesis, antithesis and synthesis lies within the knowledge and understanding how the system works and who holds the power to tumble the system. Since the world is not capable of changing overnight, except in cases where the situation affects inhabitants on a global scale, public opinion formation on a viral disease like the CoVID-19 is apt, because it takes the anxious minds away from the impending effects of a global economic regress long enough for the dominant public opinion formed by the powerful one percent to make all modifications and transformations. The Co-VID-19 has crashed the stock market, which is a clear indication that those who would be capable of buying fallen stocks at a critical situation like this would find themselves in control of the world economy at the end of the crisis. These are the members of the world with an opinion, because their opinion at the end of the day is all that counts.

The paper concludes that the public opinion created by this one percent, who constitute the most powerful economies has consequences on global power, economic and employment relations.

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