Whether We Live in a Society Without Opposition? Observation and Reflection on Social Media Based on Frankfurt School Theory

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Abstract. Frankfurt school is the most important school of cultural critical theory since the 20th century. It is deeply influenced by Marxism, but it shows different research orientations and understanding of the real society. This paper combs and summarizes the views of the three most influential thinkers of Frankfurt school on how treats modernity, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse. Their representative works are Culture Industry, One Dimension of Man, and Authoritarian Personality. Through the observation and analysis of modern social media, this paper is committed to discussing a topic, that is, whether we live in a society without opposition. This paper holds that although the Frankfurt School believes that the ideology of society and people is mainly controlled by rulers, the development and popularization of modern social media have not dispelled the opposition of society, and many people are still taking action to solve social problems. The lack of opposition in modern society is also related to people's definition and understanding of "opposition". This paper will be beneficial to provide new thinking for the current modernity research.

Keywords: Social Culture · Frankfurt School · Modernity

1 Introduction

Influenced by Marxism, founded by Carl Grunberg in 1923, the Frankfurt School was an institute of critical philosophy and social theory associated with the Institute of Social Research located in the Weimar Republic of Germany. Compromised with intellectuals, academics, and critical philosophers, the Frankfurt School tried to critique every department within society. Moving from Germany to the USA, the Frankfurt School further developed their understanding of society through observing societies under different forms of regimes. Among all the intellectuals, three directors are the most influential, namely Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. They not only believe that modernity has many dark sides, but also that people cannot really have free thoughts because they are largely influenced by the ideology of the rulers, and therefore the society is not antagonistic [1]. Three main works of the Frankfurt School related to the development of modernity: Culture Industry, One Dimension of Man, and Authoritarian Personality.

First of all, Adorno and Horkheimer argue in the Book Culture Industry that in a capitalist society, popular culture act as industries, producing standardized products and standardized people. Meaning that works of art are designed on the basis of standardization, reflecting the dominant ideologies, such works are no longer interest-motivated and self-directed but depend on the economy and industry, focus more on the impact of money and power. TV lifestyle, for example, the characters often create an Utopian style of living, with people wearing fancy clothes and living in luxurious houses. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that these shows not only present an idealized style of living but also create a consumerist ideology that tells people what the good life should look like, thereby making them passively follow the logic of capitalism. Thus, human consciousness is commodified through the commodification of culture. Moreover, they argued that simple entertainment was created by rulers to distract people from the problems of the ruling order. In order to satisfy workers, Adorno and Horkheimer said "Amusement has become an extension of labor under late capitalism" [2], meaning that entertainment has gradually become the relaxation shelter for busy workers, they can feel relaxed inside, but the fact is that they are further subordinate consumerism and the capitalist ideology, So they cannot really realize the nature of the capitalist system. As a result, the truly democratic society of freedom of thought envisioned during the Enlightenment has not been realized, and instead, recent rulers have abandoned autonomy and criticism, using meaningless and empty entertainment to manipulate the public. People gradually become passive members of the capitalist society, following the values, principles, and logic of the industrial capitalist society, and breeding the behavior corresponding to it.

Secondly, the one Dimension of Man stated a critical analysis of modern society. According to Marcuse, dominated by consumerism and technology, the recent capitalist society is also a totalitarian state. Reason in modern societies plays an oppressive role in preventing people from changing. This means that when the ruler of the capitalist system for the public to provide comfort and entertainment, the public is injected with false needs and desires, and their ability to think independently could be eliminated, so people gradually become "one dimensional" with no signs of any conflict. Moreover, the institutions become instruments of domination, making individuals slaves to the institutions they reinforce and sustain. For example, with the false needs and desires created by the dominators, workers in the society cannot clearly see the exploitative nature of capitalism and are easily manipulated. Marcuse argued that "Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves" and that we should adopt a "Great Refusal" to create our own needs and values, to act and think differently and critically [3].

Thirdly, Adorno further criticizes society in the work Authoritarian Personality. The book aimed to discover how Nazism, Fascism, and Anti-Semitism happened in the 1900s, and why the racism and psychological influences had led to the Holocaust. They found out that the culture of false needs has effects on people's personalities and psyche. The characteristics of the authoritarian personality were also developed, for, Adorno argued that people with the personality usually blindly follow the conventional beliefs of what is right and wrong, take aggressive attitudes towards those who are not in line with the conventional beliefs, and respect for submission to acknowledged authority and resist creative and dangerous ideas. The real needs and desires of the people are oppressed and

replaced by the ideology of the rulers. In short, the Frankfurt School believes that with the implication of the "cultural industry", individuals are not encouraged to think, but be distracted by emptiness, nonsense entertainment, which provide people with a view of the world, reinforces recent situations, make them conform, so that they will gradually become passive and easy to be manipulated, and turn into what Marcuse mentioned as one-dimensional in the society. As a result, the modern society is on the dark side, for, people could not freely think for themselves, and society could hardly achieve democracy as the ideologies and beliefs are shadowed by the dominants, and such manipulation and domination in thinking and psychology will lead to social disasters like the Holocaust as well as a new form of totalitarian states.

2 Are We Living in a Society Without Opposition?

Social media can be defined as online platforms that enable users to create, share and exchange their ideas, content, information, videos or photos among computer-mediated groups and communities. With the rapid development of technology, social media gradually become one of the main sources for people to get information and cognize, communicate and co-operate with others, as the notion of social media has been associated with multiple concepts including the corporate media favorite user-generated content, the participatory media infused by politics, and advertisement media which focuses on the profits created by the public audience.

The World Bank shows that more than half of the world population were using social media in 2021, with increasing participation and global influence, it is essential to discover the intentions of the media by finding out answers to questions like which groups are controlling the social media? What aims do they have through controlling? How the general public are affected by the media? And Whether the theory of Culture industry; One-Dimensional of Man and Authoritarian Personality can be applied and create Society Without Opposition in modern society.

According to Karl Marx, in the capitalist society, the relations to the means of production divided people into two groups: those who own the means of production can be seen as the dominant class namely the bourgeoise while those who are alienated from the production are those who work for or controlled by the dominants called the proletariat. In recent capitalist societies, three major institutions function as domination: corporations, government, and media companies, as they have the power, wealth, and capital to control the means of production. The three institutions have similar interests within the society, they not only desire to control their workers or citizens to ensure their power and status are stabilized, but also seek to accumulate and maintain their wealth. To achieve such aims, just like the Frankfurt School argued, they have to ensure that people are distracted from the truth and inject false consciousness and false values into people's minds so that they have no wiliness to against the dominant classes.

Associated with social media, three methods are used. Firstly, applications are used to distract people from social and political problems. Thousands of standardized videos, games, and messages are customized and presented to different people every day, while it increases sociality through online communication and provides entertainment, more and more people become addicted to online applications, and think much less of the modern

social world. For example, according to Tristan Harris, the Former Design Ethicist of Google and Co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology, there are three general aims of the applicational companies: the engagement goal, which is designed to attract people to participate and download their application; the growth goal, which seeks to persuade the existing participants to get more friends to use it and the advertisement goal which is used to make as much money as possible. With profits obtained from the advertisement as motivation, all related companies are competing with each other to attract people's attention, they try to predict people's perspectives by detecting what image a particular person prefers, and how much time they spent to look at the page [4]. Through analysis, these companies are able to build a model of each person and predict their actions and thoughts, so that the person could hardly live without the application since it knows all the person wants and keep on sending related pages or images. So, it could argue that the theory of Culture Industry can be applied, since the standardized applications are able to create standardized people through prediction and surveillance while distracting people from discovering social and political problems by offering entertainment customized by the establishment of personal models. Thus, the dominant class will be better off as government will stabilize its power with fewer or no opposition; corporations and media companies will all get higher profits from advertisements and personal information generated from the analysis.

Secondly, the dominant groups co-operate with each other to protect or increase their wealth, reputation, and interests. Naturally, the relationship among corporations, government, and individuals should act as a trigonometry model, for, the government implies policies to the corporations, and the companies respond to the directions through changing their strategies which affect both their workers and the public who buy their products, and the government will make further decisions by discovering how the general public react to the policies. However, when the corporations and government co-operate, the government seeks to use the influence of the corporations to further control the public, while corporations desire to use the power of the government to get higher profits. Considering that corporations will become better off in the forms of more welfare or lower taxation when supporting the government to get more power and higher recognition, they will act on behalf of the government, inject workers and the public with false values and consciousness through social media, which dominate people's thinking about the world, telling the citizens that capitalist society is the right way, that we are free, contented, and could not change things anyway so that the public become more easily manipulated, exploited and less likely to opposite the dominants. One example is how communist and capitalist countries release information to each other, because both ideologies want to show the public how superior they are to the other. During the COVID-19 situation, the US media blamed China for the outbreak and China's vaccination was not an effective response to the epidemic [5]; China, on the other hand, issued a statement saying that the outbreak of the crisis was an American plot, that the virus was manufactured in an American laboratory, and outlined cases of Pfizer harming human bodies [6].The media companies do not care what the truth is, what they care about is how to protect their interests in the face of the public. People in different regimes could not see the truth of the other country behind the reports as the access is restricted, so

passively followed the content of the news and become One-Dimensional, believing in what the media corporations offered them.

Thirdly, consumerism and capitalism ideologies are spread through social media. Intermediary objectified social processes is used by Adorno to show that we do not use traditional community ways to communicate with others, instead, intermediaries are used to connecting people. Famous stars produced by Star Industries like Hollywood cooperate with other corporations, using their reputations to attract people to purchase products. For instance, TV plays like the Penthouse (Korea 2020) are presented, and all the actors who symbolize the upper-class dress in luxury clothes. The information about what kind of behavior and dressing is most acceptable by society is spread to the public. People unintentionally follow the ideologies of consumerism, and contempt for those who are not in line with their dressing and behaving style, which intern, similar to the authoritarian personality described by Adorno. Thus, consumers will spend money on purchasing the same style of clothes which benefits the corporations and the rich as a whole. In these situations, social media will make people One-Dimensional, and bring Authoritarian Personality by using the Culture Industry.

On the other hand, society is not entirely free of opposition in some cases. Representation refers to the generation of meaning through language. By distinguishing objects, people, or events by similar or different features, each object will acquire its conceptual meaning, and people belonging to the same cultural background will have similar conceptual maps in their minds, which will help them better understand each other. With language as a tool, the connections between objects, concepts, and symbols create representations. It is also important to note the relationship between power and knowledge. According to the philosopher Paul-Michel Foucault, knowledge does not operate in a void. It plays a role in specific situations, historical backgrounds, and institutional systems through certain technologies and application strategies [7]. Therefore, knowledge has a meaningful and real impact on human beings when it is associated with the power to use or impose it. In the same way, power needs the knowledge to rationalize it, to build an institution of truth that can regulate people's behavior and enable citizens to distinguish between true and false statements. Knowledge has no final truth; it is subjective and social. In modern society, therefore, in order to create a stereotypical idea, media can be used as a tool by those who had the power to express signs in the same cultural and social background, and connect people with the knowledge or truth in their conceptual maps, so that people will produce similar reaction and view to the same event or object. For example, in the scramble for Africa, the slave trade, and discrimination against blacks periods, racist regimes were used to create representation through the media. The otherness theory contributed to racist views of black people. As Stuart Hall has mentioned, "We know what black means not because it is black, but because it is different from white" [8]. Therefore, "the other" is relative, it should be different from the general or most, and then be classified as the other. During this period, the otherness group, the blacks were described as inferior, childish, uncivilized black character that excels at and loves serving white people through the usage of media by the white middle class. Images like a lady riding a horse and a black slave holding an umbrella for her were used to represent how black people were good at service, how white people were more advanced than black people, and how black people were naive and natural.

In Africa, newspapers published pictures of white people helping black people build houses, and black people wearing Western clothes, showing how advanced the white culture was. Through such media representations, most western citizens in the late 19th and 20th centuries viewed black people as subhuman.Thus, the discriminative stereotype was established, and black people were forced to have an identity in the society that is inappropriately created. From the slavery era to modern society, many actions had been taken to against this idea. They try to oppose the stereotypical identities in three ways in general, the first one is through using social media. For example, In addition to the revolution and Martin Luther King's anti-racist speeches, they also changed stereotypes and rethought black identity through the release of their own films, such as the Shaft. The second method they used is through movement, the Black lives Matter movement is a good example to show how the black attacked unequal and inhumane treatment. Finally, they act in the opposite way to the stereotypical views. Meaning that they showed the public that they, as black people, are as good as the white in the case of learning, sporting, and so on. In this case, people are not passively following the beliefs of their leaders but opposing the internal problems within the society, finding out the loopholes of the domination, and using several methods to reverse such issues.

3   Discussion

Whether a society is free of opposition in its evaluation depends on our understanding of the word "opposition". If this means that the whole social system is like capitalist or communist societies, then big changes seem unlikely in this century. If it includes opposition from all sections of society, then it can be said that there is opposition in society like the anti-racist movement. It also depends on how we treat "culture". In contrast to the cultural value of false consciousness put forward by the Frankfurt school, Talcott Parsons believed that culture brought about social order. Parsons, in his "Voluntary Action" [9], reiterates Weber's view that human behavior is voluntary, but that such behavior is far from individualistic because it is determined by the social environment acquired by primary and secondary socialization. The main socialization occurs during childhood, families teach their children who they are, what standards they should follow in different environments, what rules they should follow. This feeling is further developed in secondary socialization, when people are more easily influenced by different institutions, including schools, workplaces, and religious communities [10]. Therefore, the existing cultural background teaches people how to behave in different situations and how to abide by social norms and laws. In this way, social order is achieved. Thus, the way we understand opposition and culture can change our view of society.

4   Conclusion

In short, the Frankfurt School held that the ideology of society and people was controlled by rulers, and therefore the beliefs of true democracy and enlightenment were not achieved. Although society without opposition has the potential to further develop with the expanded access to modern social media, there are still many people who are taking action against the problems of society. So, the absence of opposition in modern society depends on the understanding of "opposition" and attitude to culture.

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