

MEDIA AND CULTURE

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Abstract

The author addresses the importance of culture and mutual relationship between culture and media, stressing the fact that media themselves have become an integral part of the culture of modern society. He also deals with the important role of culture in the media and analyzes the factors which mainly influence the quality of media culture. Specifically, he highlights the aspect of commercialization of media, which results mainly from the dual nature of the media market. Besides, he refers to the impact of the factor of globalization and concentration of media ownership. Consequently, public-service media have been gradually landing up in a difficult position. In conclusion, he points out the need of optimal accomplishment of all the basic functions of media regardless the form of ownership.

Keywords: functions of media, manipulation, ideologies, media systems, rationality

1. Introduction

In current times, which are characteristic by difficult process of globalization, but also development of information-communication technologies, there often comes to underestimation of culture, mainly from the reason that it can hardly influence the above mentioned processes. Therefore, in everyday life it is necessary to acknowledge the culture its all-society importance; and what is important from our viewpoint – also to evaluate its impact on the media and adherence to cultural values. Media themselves have become an integral part of the culture of modern society.

2. Media culture

However, within this process we have to state that media culture, or culture in media, is in a jam; especially in its gradual loss of cultural and educational functions. It is more alarming owing to the fact that media are currently an important and everyday part of present-day society. If we had to briefly characterize media culture, it includes a group of media products and activities related to the usage of mass media and media [1]. Media culture always arouses in a wide range of topics, but also theoretical issues; actually,

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many authors are of opinion that media culture is a tool of media imperialism [2]. Here, we take into account the fact that media culture is a term of wide comprehension and it does not include only art, but a wide set of e.g. radio and TV programmes, which are not always necessarily of artistic character. As an example we may mention various publicistic programmes on culture, or political programmes with a touch of entertainment, which represent a kind of cultural code being outside the scope of art [3]. Here, we may also include a way of performance, language, style of individual programmes, but also an amount of other issues which regard media production [4].

When talking about media culture and needs of adhering to all of its fundamental principles in media, we need to realize their importance especially from the following viewpoints that are typical for the media:

- they have a strong impact on the whole complex of matters forming human life;
- they reshape, cultivate – however in many cases they also derogate and devastate cultures, cultural values;
- they manipulate by the solution of sometimes even difficult all-society problems of recipients while receiving media messages.

In the modern world, where it is media which hold rule, cultural identity [5] of a nation and people may lose its value and slowly deform [6]. A modern human being placed media on the pedestal – they are an idol or a god, who rules everything, who knows our needs and wants to meet them at any cost [7]. Media culture, as well as its quality is influenced by various factors, mainly the following ones:

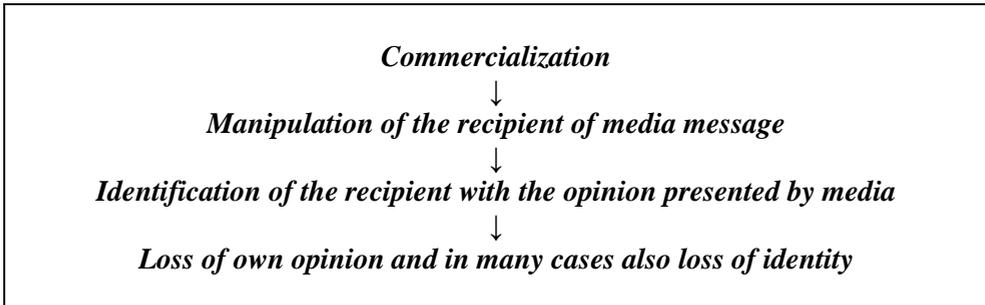
- more dynamic continuation of value criteria crisis;
- battle for the recipient of media messages through rating indicators;
- commercialization of media.

3. Globalization and commercialization of the media

Impact of these factors causes that in many cases there comes not only to the change of own opinion, but also to the loss of cultural identity. The individual loses own identity and relies on the identity of others [8]. This process may also be shown by Scheme 1.

As we have already stated above, among the factors influencing the level of media culture we may include commercialisation and due to the process of globalization also its impact on the concentration of ownership. In this context, it is vital to be aware of the fact that media market is of dual character. On the one side there are media products which are sold to customers and on the other side there is advertising market, where media sell advertising space. Out of this character of media market there appears a certain discrepancy, when taking into account the fact that advertising market has a dominant position in commercial media due to the funding. We may also point out – on the basis of analysis of market mechanism influence – that there is no difference between commercial

media and other entrepreneurial subjects – the basic task is to produce profit even at a cost of low quality of media products.



Scheme 1. The process of losing own identity.

Globalization of media makes them on the one side much stronger mainly because it enables them a larger impact, but on the other side globalization also means increased competition. The process of globalization also influences the concentration of media ownership. Concentration of ownership deepens the dependence of media workers on the owners; it significantly decreases its matter-of-factness. As an example of concentration of media ownership we may mention corporation Axel Springer Verlag, which publishes more than 120 magazines and dailies.

Commercialization represents a serious problem owing to the fact that it represents a diversion off the valuable to commercial art and often to B-programmes. In this context, there comes to a steep shift from politicization of media to commercialization. As an example of a technical conquest, which apart from a shift to commercial art also helps and influences programme structures of media is people metres. The media owners are increasingly more convinced of the fact that only commercial art can provide them with high figures rating, only commercial art can provide them with profit as entrepreneurial subjects. Similarly, valuable art has been moving into minor position also in our media. On the basis of executed analysis, we may generalize several negative manifestations caused by means of media culture decrease of values (quality) [9]. Currently, it is strengthened – primarily in commercial media – that we should think primarily of ourselves and our main goal should be how to become rich, to carve-out a career and to consume without limits. Majority of population take it for granted - as a fact, as the truth, as something absolutely natural. It is an ideology which makes out of us an artificial society of ambitious self-seekers, whose only value is the so-called pleonexia; it means: to have as much money, power, sex, food, admiration, etc. as possible.

4. Media and consumer society

Media support consuming market society and all political ideologies, which help to maintain it [10]. The aim is to indoctrinate educated layers and to

befool the masses. It is desired for everyone who expresses a different opinion to be immediately apprehended as someone 'strange'. I am afraid that changing such thinking is still only a marginal matter. There may be a bit more 'strangers', who refuse to play media games, but media still have enough power to present them to the rest of the public as fools and outcasts. You may simply look at how they interpret thousands of people who during anti-globalization marches protest against poverty in the world, for mitigation the debts of developing countries, for protection of environment or for the peace. There are hundreds of professors, scholars, experts and sincere activists. Electronic media broadcast footages of a couple of aggressive youngsters, who throw various objects into shop windows and stain a well meant and aimed movement or demonstration. It is a strong everyday media manipulation.

Let us get rid of an illusion that media are institutions, whose aim is to protect democracy and to keep people informed [11]. Or even truly reflect and present the world the way it is. On the contrary, they have created their own world, a kind of 'matrix', in which they keep people. Everything moral and positive is boring and we will not broadcast it. What can attract is evil, perversion, we need to shock.... [12]; people are ready to expect this from our broadcasting. The sin of our times is not to be immoral, but to be boring.

In the battle for the viewer or reader they would be ready - without any hesitation - to broadcast hard porn at noon, if there was not any control or state regulation. The state has currently become increasingly weaker, as it has been 'privatized' by means of political parties by multinational corporations and the most riches parts of the society. Therefore, the same media owners who are in a hurry to make profit, de facto control state institutions, which should regulate them. There disappears any educational or cultural function. I am seriously concerned of the generation which grow up in this environment. They can become a generation of outrageous sociopaths without whatever values and moral principles [13]. But who cares? The most important is that they buy. In our times, even public-service media are forced to compete with commercial media (at the expense of quality), whose main objective is not quality and independence from external impacts. The fact is that the development and impact of individual media systems focuses mainly on the profit and does not take into account social, cultural and economic processes, or even all-society values.

To expect from current media which are controlled by the biggest corporations that they would support impersonal information on, for example economic blunders in which they themselves participate, is naive in the same way as to expect from the media, which were controlled by the communist party in the former regime, the intention to impersonally inform on the hideous aspects of the former regime. A man does not have to be a media specialist to understand that in the very core of the system there is anchored that media serve to somebody and it is not the citizens who they serve to. They are sometimes called watchdogs of democracy. However, it is necessary to add that watchdogs do not bite their owners. Apart from that, the comparison to watchdogs is

relatively well-taken. Media really watch the system not to be threatened by the abundance of thinking [5].

What are the real reasons of well-considered media manipulation? At present, the strategy in media is similar. In the information times, the most important for the elites is to turn attention of the masses off of real problems and to overwhelm them by entertainment industry. The point is the same – people should not think, but conform to ‘certain interests’ and buy. Obviously, elites need people to be able to think technically, but what is important – people should use their brains in an instrumental, not in a value-system way. They are not supposed to consider the basis, but only the solution of technical problems. They are not supposed to speculate over the absurdity of the system, only efficiently solve everyday situations.

The highest social aim has become empty rationality and content-free efficiency. People have turned into kinds of robots, whose basic aim is to ‘work properly’, to adjust, and to behave market-led, flexibly, purposefully and opportunistically. And for all that to smile affectedly; we like it, don’t we? As Herbert Marcuse once said: „We live and die rationally and productively“. And why? Simply due to the fact that system needs us to be like that. Disciplined masses of consumers, whose only task is to make it somehow effectively at work, not to revolt under any circumstances and to think about buying a mobile of one or another brand. The aim of a man is to ‘snag’ as many women as possible. How can it be obtained? Only with the haircut of Brad Pitt. The objective of a woman is to look like a Hollywood celebrity and it would be ideal for her to use her brain as rarely as many of them do. Not to think, only to buy - the system needs us to behave in this way. It is all about that. Media are only useful tools how to accomplish this target. There comes not only to the change of opinion, but to the loss of own cultural identity [9].

Chomsky concisely says that the purpose of media is „to get them (people) to watch National Football League. And to worry about ‘Mother With Child With Six Heads’, or whatever you pick up on the supermarket stands and so on.“ [9, p. 73] All of that with only one purpose – to come to a state, where it is practically not possible to think, not possible to consider anything. If a viewer comes across a discussion on important matters in the media, it is mostly reduced by the anchorperson to 15 seconds time limits, into which a disputant has to squeeze his own opinion on important social problems. Currently, this is called ‘thinking’, this is called social discussion. Finally, we are forced to accept a game, in which frontiers of social discussion are provided by people, who do not only have any idea of social problems, but who often do not have necessary education. These are the ‘celebrities’, articles and programmes about them.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion we may say that regardless the media ownership, these should present their fundamental functions: informational, educational, entertaining, cultural one, etc. in a balanced way. With their impact and

activities they should keep and disseminate basic cultural values. It presupposes that the process of globalization will not be focused only on economic side, but mainly on the field of culture, which makes a fundamental basis of human existence.

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