MEDIA COMMUNICATION: UNIFORMITY OR CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

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Abstract: Thanks to the extent acquired in the recent decades, especially after the development of new communication technologies and the explosion of mass media such as press, radio, Internet and television, *media communication* is attaining the status of supreme power in the social hierarchy in Europe and worldwide, and its effects are felt widely by individuals.

Of all mass media, television is one that is individualized by its symbolic power, having a noticeable influence, direct and undisputed upon the masses. The society is invaded by television messages, and individuals show a growing independence from such enhanced communication media. We are thus entitled to wonder if television has its beneficial effects or rather negative ones on population, as a whole, and culture, in particular.

Keywords: media messages, new media, cultural diversity, cultural identity, the third culture, mass culture, consumer culture, symbolic violence, critical theory.

The extent to which it acquired in recent decades, especially from the development of new communication technologies and the explosion of mass media such as press, radio, Internet and television, media communication is attaining the status of supreme power in the social hierarchy, and its effects are felt widely by individuals.

Of all mass media, television is one that is individualized by its symbolic power, exerting a noticeable influence, direct and undisputed on the masses. The company is invaded by television messages, and individuals show a growing independence from such enhanced type of media communication. We are thus entitled to wonder if television is beneficial or rather negative on population as a whole and culture in particular.

Does this communication media leads to a smoothing or a cultural diversity? The problems of this kind regard the social structures from one national entity, as well as, the societies of different communities of Europe

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and of the entire world. These are questions that sociologists and experts in communication have been tried over time to provide a relevant response. Thus they emerged in a number of theories and concepts that are the core issues on the public effects of mass media communication: *the magic bullet theory, the agenda setting theory, the concept of "third culture" of public opinion formation theory, the modeling theory and cultivation theory*; these are just some basic landmarks in the study of mass communication.

Magic bullet theory, named for the first time by Melvin De Fleur in the early 1920s and then called by the political scientist Harold Lasswell Americas as the theory of "hypodermic injection", supports the argument that although members of a company taken as separate and distinct entities lead isolated lives from a social perspective, interact little with each other, are nevertheless endowed from birth with a uniform set of instinct that help them formulate views, opinions, value judgments on events in the reality that surrounds them. As w analyze and interpret these events in a similar manner and operate with similar instincts, media messages can be considered as some symbolic bullets, affecting directly identical individuals in a corporation.

Another reference theory study of media communication is that of training the citizen agenda is called ***the agenda setting theory***. The calendar was first studied systematically by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. According to the theory of agenda setting, media institutions are those that decide which messages to send, what facts and figures to report certain information, thus selecting only some of many events taking place in everyday life. In other words, the communication media is the result of some degree of selection, simplification of reality and intentional omission of certain messages for others, considered "important" or "public interest", the censure is carried mainly by media institutions. Individuals are required what to think, but they are not required to think. Walter Lippmann explains the phenomenon of the agenda effect by the fact that the real environment is too large and too complex to be known by all people directly, and to be able to interpret events around them, they need a simplification of reality, which is successful to media institutions. "*The press is like the light of torches, moving back and forth and throwing light on an episode or another*"[1].

Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang observed that "*Media forces attention to certain issues. They construct public images of politicians. The*

[1] W. Lippmann, in Paul Dobrescu, Alina Bargaoanu, *Media and Society*, p. 113.

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media constantly presents events, suggesting what would think most of the individuals on it, what they know about them and how they feel about them"[2].

Moreover, following the reception of media messages, receptors, members of the public mass considered distinct individuality, characterized by *distinct personalities*, level of education, knowledge, values, beliefs, etc. *Different thoughts* pass through filter the information received and, following their interaction in relation to certain issues "launched" by the media institutions come to some sort of compromise that can be translated by the term of *public opinion*. Herbert Blumer also defines the audience as a "*group of people facing a controversial subject, with a controversial issue arises, are divided in terms of solving this problem and discuss it*"[3].

On the formation of public opinion (the dominant opinion) lies, therefore, the struggle waged between current members of society to form a common opinion about a specific topic discussed. This process of networking and interaction leads to the phenomenon of uniformity of ideas and beliefs with profound implications in the sphere of cultural values of individuals. Quite apart is the formation of public opinion conducted intercultural communication between groups of individuals belonging to different cultures. Here appears the concept of "third culture", which is the result of the test individuals to overcome communication barriers caused by cultural differences between them. There is a process of "negotiation" of meanings, opinions, beliefs about the message the media who have suffered, and "***third culture***" is nothing but the common denominator which is get from this complex process of analysis and interpretation the information received. Thus, individuals who initially have different perceptions and behaviors related to the same event, can from this process of intercultural communication to form a shared view, a common frame of reference on the topic discussed. Thus is born the "third culture" that includes common elements of each culture in some groups of individuals involved in "negotiating" the media message. The third culture results, just as in training public previously, in a cultural uniformity.

Media communication has visible and long-term effects on attitudes and human behavior. They can be easily observed in tendency of imitation

[2] K. Lang, G.E. Lang, in Severin, Werner J., Tankard, James W, *Perspectives on theories of mass communication*, p. 238.
[3] H. Blumer, in Paul Dobrescu , Alina Bargaoanu, *Media and Society*, p. 114

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of individuals: a person adopts certain forms of reaction and behavior in the face of certain problems faced in everyday life, leaving to influence the behavior of others in similar situations (modeling theory). Television promotes this type of imitative behavior, following the widespread dissemination of issues of type reality show, in which are present in most cases ordinary people who face common problems of everyday life. The proliferation of such issues has made at the moment almost every television station's general format to include the program schedule shows the type reality show and their theme covers almost all aspects of social life: infidelity in couples (*Translated in love*, Prima TV, *Reliability test* Antena 1), emotional problems (*Forbidden love*, National TV), family conflict (*Emergency Adviser*, National TV), medical problems such as aesthetics (*Beauty on a cutting edge*, Pro TV), social / meetings and communication between generations (*My mother's daughter in law*, Kanal D, *Exchange of mothers*, Prima TV, *Girl's father*, Kanal D, *Children against parents*, National TV, *Parental Control*, *Next and Room Riders*, *Date My Mom*, MTV Romania), cooking (*Icing on the cake*, Prima TV), fashion and style (*The Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, Antena 1, *Geta Voinea Hair & Style*, Euforia Lifestyle TV), interior (*SOS - Save my house*, Prima TV) or fulfillment of some desires on TV (*Dancing for you*, Pro TV), scenes from real life of a star (*By Monica Columbeanu*, B1TV). At these issues presented in the schedule of Romanian television programs when writing this article (May 2009), we can add other reality shows success as: *Summer Temptations*, Pro TV (2001), *Big Brother*, Prima TV (2003 and 2004), *Supernanny*, Prima TV (2006-2008), etc.. Although we have achieved a fuller listing of these types of programs because they enjoy substantial audience among viewers, it was pointed out that the other broadcast formats tend to standardize public opinion: news shows the type talk show, entertainment shows, etc.

Modeling for uniform behavior of individuals from the reception of media messages, has repercussions in terms of cultural values shared by them. ***Cultivation theory (cultural theory)***, developed by researcher George Gerbner since 1967, is suggestively described by Ioan Dragan "*growing media opinions, concepts, beliefs, just as a farmer or farm just as the gardener cultivates his garden*"[4]. Gerbner believes that mass media exert a profound influence on long-term perceptions, values and behaviors of

[4] I. Dragan, *Paradigms of mass communication*, p. 216.

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individuals[5]. Television influences not only and may, opinions, beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors of people. Clearly these also flow on the cultural influences.

Cultivation theory offers a more nuanced phenomenon influencing and shaping human behavior by the media. We consider not only the influence exercised by one-way media communication on the receptor, but also the influence resulting from the process of networking among individuals, as a result of exposure to media messages. So, this growing phenomenon occurs both at each individual and society as a whole. It is a phenomenon that causes the masses in a process of smoothing, to form a dominant current of opinion on a subject spread through the media. Growing is aligning individuals to the dominant view, adaptation to the generally accepted rules of behavior as "good" or "appropriate" sharing opinions, beliefs, values, similar attitudes among members of society.

In conclusion, communication media - and we mean in particular the communication achieved through television because the popularity it enjoyed among the public, compared with other mass media: press, radio or Internet - leads to uniformity, mixing and cultural leveling, despite the growing number of TV channels and programs to diversify their scales. Television dominates the cultural and symbolic of individuals, and often directs their thinking and their reaction to the daily problems. The influence of individuals on media messages can be felt in the competition between media institutions to gain market share as large. But ultimately, amid an apparent "choice", individuals are victims of selection and censorship by the theory outlined above agenda setting.

"*Mass culture was sometimes assessed as a global consumer culture, being associated with commercial and pragmatic spirit, with hedonism and pleasure seeking, with uniformity and standardization in living, following the extension of commercial principles and the cultural universe*"[6]. Mass culture standardizes people's thinking, lead to stereotypes and lack of critical apparatus of the individuals on the messages received through media.

[5] G. Gerbner, in: Tran, *Communication theory*, p. 135.
[6] Grigore, Georgiu, *Culture and Communication*, p. 217.

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