DEMASSED SOCIETY, NEW NARRATIVES AND MULTIMEDIA

Zoran JEVTOVIĆ[1], Tatjana VULIĆ[2], Maja ANĐELKOVIĆ[3]

1. Assoc. Prof., Dept of Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia.
2. Assist. Prof., Dept. of Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia.
3. Assist. Prof., Dept. of Philology, Faculty of Philology and Arts, University of Kragujevac, Serbia.
Corresponding author: zmajce7@yahoo.com

Abstract

The authors of the paper seek to explore the identity, strength and specific aspects of new media, observing the reaffirmed position of a citizen as the one being subject to the informational process. The power of designing and controlling information is becoming the preferable communicative discipline of postmodern society, since media discourse is constituting democratic capacity of the national communities. New media in interrelation with digital platforms abolish the classical journalistic patterns, distinctly articulating new social relations and communication paradigms. The study is particularly oriented toward the investigation of the condition to be found in Eastern European countries, for which minimal degree of media freedom and the necessity for redefining media matrix represent distinct features.

Keywords: *Civic Society, New Narratives, Multimedia, Internet, Information, Public Discourse*

The beginning of the new millennium is marked by technological discoveries, thus media studies have rapidly taken the course which is leading toward the new mainstream communication, toward the new historical and institutional context. (Dervin & Huesca, 1997; Carpentier et al., 2003; Downing, 2004). Diverse studies discovered mainstream media transformations and the hegemony of the economic Neoliberal Paradigm (Habermas, 2005; Õầäë, 2008), yet, there were only a few communicologists set about to provide an explanation for the transformation of small narratives and media content interpretation (Quinn, 2005; Zadrayec, 2008; Powers, 2009). Henceforth, the aim of this paper is to explicate the trends incorporated into the public sphere with the emergence of new media, by employing the method of highlighting the latter's modes of application and their positioning within the post-social environment.

Democratic society functions on condition that there are free citizens sharing equal rights, equivalently receiving and providing information, while the public sphere exists as an intermediary zone between the authorities and the state. The circulation of media messages has a high level of impact on designing social reality, while media power is becoming more and more articulate. For building a civic society, the accessibility of informational and communication systems is of strategic importance, while the events in a public space are observed due to the existence of information regarding them, and the understanding of the events depends upon the way they presented, upon the way the narrative modes are constructed and manipulation (Jevtoviæ, 2007, 102). Democratic culture implies the right to the diversity of cultural values and models, the legitimacy of national institutions and the specific cultural identity convergent with the political notions of a free and open society. The aforementioned suggests that the state, centers of political power and economic oligarchy are gradually giving over communicative sphere to the citizens as to rapidly incorporate themselves into the democratic milieu. In practice, the changes are very slow and mild, thus it is by no means accidental that Eastern European countries occupy the bottom of the list when exploring the issue of media freedom.[4] Political parties, public relations agencies, government and its institutions, leaders and elite are in control of public space, by employing classical media patterns, launching concepts akin to their agendas: from spreading the climate of having trust in European integration processes to creating an atmosphere of fear and the feeling of being endangered.

A great number of politicologists observed The Fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the

Cold War as a great triumph of liberalism and unlimited market, looking at the media as technological channels for the propaganda of the new order structure. A decade that was to follow was marked by a series of democratic revolutions in Eastern European countries which removed authoritarian socialism from the political scene, illuminating the new spiritual strength and new ideas. Some ten of the former socialist countries became the members of the European Union. At the same time, Serbia had doubled its external debt, and the unemployment rate (30%) was among the high ranked ones in Europe.

As an alternative to the totalitarian and anachronic communist establishment under the influence of the political milieu, there emerged a concept of the civic society.[5] The process of restructuring the post-communist media systems in Eastern European states implied that the constitution of the private media sector enabled the functioning of all the media emitters meeting the requirements set by national and international legal framework, as well as the building of public media sectors, which were operationally independent from the state. The revolution is not only a technological one; instead of foreign opinions, positions, agendas and concepts, now the citizenship is to make its choice, sorting and analyzing only those news and data convenient for the their corpus of interests. Within the empire of images, reality wins over, the surface wins over the depth and style wins over the content, while media language, with its numerous codes, renders multidimensional and metaphysical interpretations. Public space framework had been imperceptibly changing. There emerged the new *micro public spheres* constituting a vital characteristic of all the social movements (Kin, 2003, 209). With globalization process under way, *mid public sphere* encompassed the space with millions of people watching, listening or reading from a great distance. The issue of (re)distribution became more open and accessible than ever, since civic society insists on public and absolute information accessibility.

In Eastern Europe, there first emerged the perceivable transformation in the sphere of political publicity, since media content agenda gave preference to new beliefs, norms, values and opinions. The power of the elites was concealing itself in the information which were influencing the world of mass audience by means of mass media tools, thus yielding new value patterns. The initial thrill over the European integration process and the process of entering the family of democratically developed countries was soon to be replaced by the wave of skepticism and disappointment, all of which could but barely be perceived in media. The revolutionary internet capacities (web-camera, blogs, social networks, interactive television, video games) also offered new narratives and new types of information management, spreading the interactivity between the sender and the receiver, as well as structuring the communication environment. Cyberchat and listserv mailing automatically allied people into new groups gathered around the same fields of interest, simultaneously abolishing the classical media monopoly and demanding new territorial type of conceptualization.

Demassing of the auditorium represents the consequence of the new media technologies, yet what is often overlooked is the way informationalization of the entire process of sign and signification modeling results in the change of the user's opinion. The function and purpose of medial contents is no longer the same (let's remember the recent Velvet Revolutions in the Arab world, first in Egypt and Tunis, and subsequently in the neighbouring countries, including Libya, where the masses, gathered via internet and social networks, set about down the *Arabian Street* to change the current ruling establishment), since the freedom of choice is much more potent now. It has been clear so far that, in practice, new media do not override their forerunners, but absorb them, including the expressive potentials, thus spreading them together with the new paradigms of guality. Hence, in theory there arose the hypothesis that multimedia[6] in its onsets suggested a tendency of absorbing all other previous media forms and their expressive potentials, due to which, within

a new mode of communication practice, all of the four patterns of information flow: registration, consultation, allocution and conversation, are possible (McQuail, 1994).

However, due to information reception overload, man is becoming less and less capable of critically comrpehending the reality he is living in, seduced by a series of the new small narratives and an abundance of symbols which, by means of manipulative meaning, construct different kind of atmosphere – simulacrum (Bodrijar, 1991, 10).[7] The space of manipulation is getting larger since the audience, which gradually becomes devoid of the capacity to critically rationalize, lightly accepts the images that are imposed upon it in a spin-like manner.

In communication processes, a new media Babylon has been constructed, comprehensive, hyper-fast and incredibly powerful. Media tools, having netted the Planet, abolished the traditional apprehension of geography, space and time, by means of which communication came to receive re-designed forms that are in concordance with the spirit of the New Order. Due to the aforementioned, it is possible to reduce the most complex processes and notions to the simplest expressions, by means of which the traditional subject– object relationship is lost. The power of the elites is partially transferred onto the auditorium, which means that individuals are becoming the creators of the information intended and designed for the planetary audience. The McDonaldization of society, as the omnipresent theoretical concept (Špehar, 2010, 118-130), bearing huge significance for future explorations of social relations, is evident in the sphere of mass communication which, as the time goes by, gains on the features typical for the value patterns established by the Western societies (efficiency, benefit, predictability and control).

Internet is a new category of the public, a community in a network gathered around the topic that it considers interesting and, which, at a specific point of time, is going to construe mutual positions and values. It is an era of civic political culture implying different values and virtues.[8] Internet brings about changes into the

sphere of communication, as no other media before it did that, since, at the same time, it represents technology, culture and a tool. Analyzed from the perspective of the political science, the fact that technological revolution was to overlap with the departure of socialism and communism is but a sheer coincidence. Yet, if we are to perceive the changes from the perspective of communicology, we shall witness the traditional media becoming the bearers of the digitalized, decentralized and less monitored information flow. New technologies are adjusting themselves to the social context, liberal market and interface which significantly changes the modes of information flow. The number of those who are the users of these new modes of communication is rapidly increasing, which is partly the consequence of the powerful entertainment and commercial movement evident on networks, but also of information multiplication that is changing the classical notions of the public.

Journalism is a way of expressing public opinion, and it is precisely by moving into the online space that a citizen obtains an opportunity to present his/her personal opinion via blogs or writings on social networks, regarding his/her personal contemplations on a certain issue, phenomenon, individual or process. *An ideal is an open space of communication and democratic pluralism, being open instead of being closed, decentralization instead of centralization, an opportunity for everybody to participate* (Turêilo, 2005, 9). Using contemporary media, first and foremost the internet, in promoting of the, so called, *civic journalism*, was originally initiated by a South Korean, Oh Yeon Ho in 2000. He launched a web page "OhmyNews" which, with four employees and 700 citizen-reporters, attained worldwide acclamation with more than two million visitors. He was among the first to realize, unlike television, that network's demand is not aimed at the target audience, since a whole lot of small groups yields effects the same way mass auditorium does. The users themselves come to recognize the pros and cons of media, in accordance with their psychological profiles, demographic attributes and environmental

factors. Tweeter, Facebook, blogosphere and suchlike open and accessible communication tools provide the illusion of mass, forgotten dialogue and victory waged over the world of universal notions and ideological silence dictated by the mainstream media. Communication via networks is a new generation trend, with tendency to publicly display its social identity and demonstrate its opinion, the process which was not possible to take place via classical media. However, the quality of communication is determined by the quality of the community attained by the forum, so the concept of digital community is to be employed as a sociological metaphor. Cable television, satellites and computer networks have segmented mass audience into a number of smaller communities, the power of which is by no means to be underestimated. While nowadays a man is determined by his social status and social role, within the network communication there are no social conventions, thus the overall relations are subject to the process of remodeling. The problem rests in the fact that new media are developing new forms of speech, specific genres and patterns of communication which are unique for a particular community. Therefore, by negating their existence we are isolating ourselves, as well as neglecting the fact regarding the convergences of communication tools. On the basis of the aforementioned we may assert that new media are working for the specialized and fragmentary audience, offering each individual an abundance of information, analyses, projections, so that the temporal cycle of the information flow itself is significantly reduced. The same way, one is to observe that the abundance of data reduces their value, that social engagement of media is being transformed, while digitalization is creating a "Know How" user who is, at the same time, developing and endangering the public sphere. New media make it possible for the users to create virtual social roles, significantly different from the reality: the new kind of digital public barely interested in propaganda effects of the classical media. The network is incessantly spreading, redesigning, enriching itself, as well

as improving and transforming, while information are being exchanged, immediately and free of charge. The structure and the topics are subject to drastic shifts and changes, as well as the modes of consummation, and, as the result of the overall transformations, we are faced with the media metamorphosis that is gradually, yet surely, radicalizing the matrix of the civic way of thinking.

Media discourse keeps resisting standardization due to the increasing number of those who are using interactive communication technologies, trying to participate in their own way, incorporating into the field of their engagement those values which they themselves represent. We are dealing with the new form of Media Activism, promoting alternative and radical media that are ready to develop critical thinking in regard to the, so called, mainstream media. That way, the influence of the official hierarchy and controlled media channels is being reduced, since the government meticulously monitors the message content in public space, but is also monitors the feedback influence of scattered audience so at to react on the basis of the public majority's will.

While classical media functioned within the framework of the following levels: *one toward many*, the internet in combination with the hybrid media offers an optimal model: *one toward one*, but also *one toward many*. There is no absolute matching in reality, thus media narrative represents only a counterfeit interpreted by the judgments and positions of those who take participation in media chain. The strength of contemporary societies lies within the conceptualization, the latter being a futile effort without the aid of global networks. For a society in the process of transition the latter implies a redirection from the traditional media to the media literacy, which is to enable the citizens to become the creators, as well as the lords of their own information. However, it is at this juncture that the problem arises, since there is only a small number of Eastern European governments willing to inspect the credibility in a society which is informed and digitally netted. The statistical data showing that Serbia,

Romania and Bulgaria occupy the end of the list of European countries when speaking of media freedom, represents a signal that the existing values and media matrix are urgently to be redefined, since the civic thinking on new media are easily to be radicalized.

In conclusion, we can state that the power of designing and controlling information is becoming a desirable communicative discipline of the postmodern society, since media discourse constitututes the democratic capacity of the national communities. New media together with the digital platforms abolish the classical journalistic patterns, acutely articulating the new social relations and communication paradigms.

References

1. Bodrijar, Ž.Бодријар, Ж (1991): *Simulakrumi i simulacija*, Svetovi, Novi Sad.
2. Carpentier, N & Servaes, J. (2003): *Making Community Media Work*. In Jas Servaes (Ed.) Approaches to Development, Chapter 15. Paris: UNESCO.
3. Dervin, B. & Huesca, R. (1997): *Reaching for the Communicating in Participatory Communication*, Journal of International Communication 44 (4).
4. Downing, J. (2004): *The SAGE Handbook of Media Studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
5. Habermas, J. (2005): *Concluding comments on empirical approaches to deliberative politics*, Acta Politica, 40.
6. Hadl, G., Хадл, Г. (2008): *Mediji zajednice? Alternativni mediji? Analiza koncepta medija naroda i za narod*, CM Časopis za upravljanje komuniciranjem, br. 6, Protokol, Novi Sad i Fakultet političkih nauka, Beograd.
7. Jevtoviæ, Z.(2007): *Masmedijski preobražaj i terorizam i religije u globalnom* poretku, Politikologija religije, Centar za proučavanje religije i versku toleranciju, br. 1., Beograd.
8. Quinn S.(2005): Convergent Journalism – The Fundamentals od Multimedia Reporting, Peter Lang, New York
9. McQuail D (1994): The Mass Communication Theory, SAGE Publicationes, London.
10. Miroviæ, A. (2010): *O građanskoj neposlušnosti kao elementu civilne političke kulture*, Politička revija, br. 2, Beograd.
11. Powers W. (2009): *Hamlets Blackberry,* Executive Summary of Project Shaping the Future of the Newspaper, New York
12. Špeher, P. (2010): *Mekdonalizovana religija. Prilog mekdonalizacije u politikologiji religije*, Politikologija religije, Centar za prouĉavanje religije i versku toleranciju, br. 1., God. IV, Beograd.
13. Turêilo, L. (2005): *On-line komunikacija i off-line politika u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Internews BiH, Sarajevo.
14. Zadrayec, A. E. (2008): *Fight for Your Life: Newspapers and Digital Storytelling, Research Paper*, Reuters Institute for Study of Journalism, Oxford University.

Endnotes

1 In the report "Media freedom 2011: Global research of media independence", which included 196 countries of the previous year, it was established that only 15% of the citizenship on the Planet lives in the countries that have free media. In the section devoted to the media in Central and Eastern Europe, Serbia is ranked 72, Bulgaria 77 and Romania 87. Thus, according to the criteria of the American non-governmental Freedom House organization, these countries only selectively possess free media.

2 The concept originates from the Anglo-American (civic society), while in our country it originates from the German language (burgerliche Gesellschaft). In terminology, it is used as a *civic society* concept, bearing Marxist connotations, since in times of socialism it designated the synonym for the *bourgeois society*. The authors shall coequally use both of the concepts throughout the rest of the paper.

3 By using this concept, the authors wish to imply any form of media, within which two or more communication modes are included, thus emerging as a convergence platform of the media industry and digital technologies. Multimedia, metamedia and mixed media make possible the functioning of all four patterns of information flow.

4 Ecclesiastes asserts that simulacrum never conceals the truth, but that the truth conceals itself as the non-existent. Baudrillard further explicates it by interpreting those signs that are concealing something, transferring the process onto the signs concealing that there is nothing.

5 Civic political culture implies additional civic orientations, values and principles, such as: lack of sociability, solidarity, interpersonal trust, cooperation, civic public, voluntarism, etc., while among the traits of civic virtue that are inherent to the latter, the following are to be noted: resolution, courage, auto-reflexivity, capability, and readiness to take part in public debates, that is to say the feeling of being politically competent and possessing the will to participate (Mirović, 2010, 7-8).