

THE ENERGY OF THE PRESS-THE MOST SPECTACULAR DEVELOPMENT AFTER 1989

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„The press is the best instrument for enlightening the mind of man, and improving him as a rational, moral and social being.” (Thomas Jefferson)

I will proceed by quoting George Pruteanu: “Journalism is one the phenomena with the most spectacular development after 1989. „Spectacular” does not mean „perfect” as well. I would say that press and, generally speaking the media, have developed in a Romanian way, closely mirroring in their progress all the qualities and flaws of the boiling Romanian society, even with its peaks.”

In today’s society, mass media play a crucial role in the social life. Across the time, they became a growing and critical power and impacted the social segments heavily. Their active presence is felt in the financial-banking life, in the industrial development, in the technological progress, in politics and in everyday life. They arrived to a point where they have built an industry of their own.

In a democracy, media have an informative role; they produce comments and judgements to the extent of being considered the “core of the public life”.

The concept of mass communication can be defined as “any way of communication through which public messages refer to a large audience, indirectly and one-sided, using a dissemination technology”.

In present days, the one-sided feature is lessened as it tries to support an interactive relation between the two sides through feedback.

Media have multiple functions as they follow the diversified needs of the individuals. I will enumerate these functions without going further.

The informative function sustains the needs of the society, groups and individuals in order to control the environment. Based on the information they receive, people assess the importance of the event that could impact them directly, anticipate some tendencies and make some informed decisions.

The linking or communicative function is one of the results of mass media which helps developing interhuman and intercultural relations by creating connections between the members of the same community or between different communities.

The educational-cultural function implies that mass media have replaced the social role of the family and school when it comes to educating children. They transmit values and cultural patterns within the society and play an important role in framing thinking and individual behaviour, especially among teenagers.

Mass-media make possible the circulation of different patterns of behaviour, usually accepted by society. They meet the need of continuing the community values. From one generation to another, they transmit myths, customs and principles which give the man an ethnic and national identity. Through the transmission of values, “mass-media contribute to the achievement of social stability and the timely conservation of cultural structures”. Their role is

to transmit knowledge and to form educated people.

Unfortunately, cultural products represent a low percentage of TV shows, except the case in which the media channel is specialised in this field. Nor the broadcasting time is favourable due to the fact that TV shows are broadcasted outside the peak hours or late at night. Mass-media not only promote behaviour patterns, but also generate new ones, such as the consumerist one.

On the other hand, mass-media are accused of showing negative examples (false heroes, false stars), who have a negative influence. From early ages, young people especially tend to imitate film and cartoon characters or to adopt the behaviour of certain notable people or stars whom they worship. The constant presence of these false heroes and false stars in the world of media leads to an imitative behaviour. Young people desire to follow their examples, to be famous, to be in the centre of attention. Mass-media respond by saying that these antisocial examples are shown as negative ones and reflect the surrounding reality.

The function of interpretation - Due to the fact that the search for the spectacular and the immediate has prevailed over debates, specialised journalistic genres have developed, allowing the audience to be exposed to several opinions, often professional ones, in order to get the whole picture of things.

The entertaining function - In a world of speed and continuous challenges, mass-media meets the people's need to disconnect from the everyday life. When it comes to costs, media entertainment is less expensive, with immediate access, just a mouse click away.

The function of speech and language - While we are given constant media messages, we tend to borrow words and phrases from the media in our interpersonal communication. The consumption of the media products influences our speech and vocabulary. Therefore they create new terms, phrases, archetypes and extend the meanings of existing terms or substitute for new ones. In time, they come to construct a new symbolic vocabulary.

The new theories of mass communication present fundamental hypotheses about the

human behaviour. They originate in the basic cognitive psychological paradigm, developed in the field of psychology. They are called the theories of selective influence, but they consist of three distinct formulations: *the theory of individual differences, the theory of social differentiation and the theory of social relations.*

Their objective was the understanding of the reason behind the human interaction, behaviour and adjustment, according to patterns and stimuli of the mass communication.

The theory of individual differences was discovered through the psychological investigation of the behaviour. Each individual's personality was seen as unique, just as a fingerprint. "Although people had in common the behaviour patterns of their culture, each of them had a distinctive need-related cognitive structure, distinctive perception habits, beliefs, values, attitudes, abilities." Therefore, the beginning of the twentieth century saw the start of a dispute concerned with the nature-education opposition, originating from the individual differences.

Scientists influenced by Charles Darwin's evolutionist perspective considered the human beings to be an animal species and animal behaviour to be necessary for the understanding of the human behaviour. The types of human behaviours were biologically and instinctively determined. The abilities and tendencies were inherited and passed on to the modern man through a long process of evolution.

Those who put emphasis on education believed that the individual cognitive structure was learned and learning occurs following social experience. They considered that the human beings gain their individual features and abilities from their own experiences in their own environment through a learning process. The educational perspective becomes a starting point for the study of the effects of mass communication because it is obvious that the transmission of information by the mass media will lead to major changes not only to the human thinking at a personal level, but also to the cultural development at a collective level.

Therefore I believe that the press should offer the individual a set of tools for the establishment

of a positive thinking at a personal and collective level.

The cultural press should assume this type of role.

If we were to take Gabriel Liiceanu for granted, with his explanation of why the Romanian intellectual reaches the public with great difficulty, the drama of the levels of circulation for the cultural press would apply to three obstacles related to our intelligence. The handicap of the isolated elite is generated by the absence of the middle class and „the terror of history”, due to the biases related to a new work, and the linguistic handicap is due to the lack of international interest in East European writers. For the direct critics of the Romanian media, it is a distinct discussion about the lack of journalistic motivation which related to the attention of the readers and the supremacy of the inflamed rhetoric. These make the cultural journalists to be their own readers.

“The cultural controversies are too often very inflamed and targeting persons, reasons are replaced by a struggle of egos. On one hand, this a general issue of the public discourse and public media: many «political analysts» write pamphlets and the parliamentary debates consist of sessions of quarrels which have nothing to do with the political debate. On the other hand, intellectuals are strong personalities with matching egos. This leads to a temptation to carry attacks of explicit nature”, points out Mircea Vasilescu, chief-editor at “Dilema Veche”, separating his magazine from the general tendency. Carmen Musat, chief-editor at “Observatorul Cultural” says that the reasons of reduced circulations lie behind the vendors’ prejudices that magazines don’t have readers.

„On the other hand, many of those who would like to buy cultural magazines don’t have the resources”, adds Musat.

Returning to what George Pruteanu said, it’s hard not to agree with what he used to say not a very long while ago: “A first level of cultural and behaviour as well is speech. A great part of the contemporary Romanian mass-media (especially TV channels and newspapers) promotes a speech which is excessively colloquial, leading to an attitude and a vocabulary which are unpolished, shrewd and thug-like. (Those who are being

asked and interviewed are to be blamed as well because they don’t fight back, aggressively and openly. Many, too many, politicians are passive in front of the TV hosts who are impertinent-this is the right word-in an obscene way.) On the other hand, language is badly spoken, even miserably. Accents are random (I am sick of misplaced accents in “déja”, “aidóma”, “prevéderi”). Foreign names are rarely pronounced correctly (most often, due to an obsession of Americans, purely Russian or French names are spelt and read using English: Youryi” instead of “Iuri” or “Silain” instead of “Selin” (Céline), just to mention only two examples). Foreign phrases proliferate, untranslated, as if everyone knows what “lohn”, “stand-by”, “holding”, “briefing” mean. Many Romanian words fall victim to basic confusions (beyond the known examples of *fortuit* or *specios*)-some media give “troita” as a sort of chariot, “pertinent” is the opposite of “impertinent”, meaning “polite” and so on. When it comes to the register seen in some magazines, it’s not accurate to label it just as trivial, dollars have become “lettuce”, a Prime-Minister does not “admonish” a subordinate, he “takes him down a peg or two” or “fucks him”, couples don’t make love any more, they „shag”. A certain big shot did not buy a Mercedes car; he „won a Merz”. Even quality newspapers follow hybrid solutions, placing colloquial headlines above serious news, only to get more readers.

We live in a media-led society. It is necessary to work to regain the people’s trust, to normalise the state of affairs.

Professional media, responsible and independent, is essential for the development of the healthy democracy. The media stand for the eyes and the ears of the public. Media collect information on the government’s activities, business, academic, cultural, sports and local leaders and inform the public. Media evaluate the government’s spending. They put us on alert when they discover cases of high level corruption. They inform us about the debates on public policies and offer us the chance of making known our perspective in the fields of policies, regulations, laws and decisions which we consider to be the best or not deserving public

attention. The independent media allow the readers to assess the ideas.

Therefore, mass-media impact not only individuals, offering examples of behaviours which can be learned, but also culture, knowledge,

social values and norms, as well as human relations.

I think it is appropriate to conclude by quoting Octavian Paler: „Our press is a whirlpool of opinions!“.

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