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THE SECRET GAME: MEDIA AND POWER

Abstract: The Internet and global media become an integral part of social and individual life. Mass communication is the dominant mode of information exchange as media provide information that is not available in interpersonal communication. On the other side, the media has the power to model human society and to create 'our understanding of reality', without our knowledge. Information technology has enabled continuous access to information, but at least three-quarters of 'significant news' is totally irrelevant to the life of an 'ordinary' man.

Commercialization and the concentration of media ownership allow the manipulative use of media in order to provide power in the society or a group. The elite that controls the media, controls the audience as well. Media and journalists who are serving their owners are representing their interests to sell their ideas, opinions, and attitudes. In this way, the elite affects the public; as editorial policy depends solely on the owner's interests.

Media and information scheme are the reflection of the game between the power and the media. The media serving elite, and editors and journalists are not interested in dealing with issues irrelevant to the centers of power.

How is it possible? The media audience is still asleep and unable to defend itself.

Key words: *media, information, society, game, power, ownership*

1. INTRODUCTION

New technologies and global media have already established themselves as the key social factors that shape modern society. Mass communication has become the dominant mode of information exchange and the inevitable fact of life for the modern man. People are increasingly turning to media trying to address the problem of alienation and growing social dysfunction.

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They expect that the media will feel the gap it contributed to in first place. Within the system of general globalization, the systems for mass distribution of information are also becoming increasingly globalized so that emitted information becomes ubiquitous. The media gained a crucial role in creating the layout for the disposition of public opinion. Through the abolition of 'borders' in the media space, global media have 'outgrown' the basic informative role, as they are becoming more involved in the fabrication of 'reality'.

The audience is formed by the media. "Their worries and fears are created by the newspapers and broadcasts. Reporters and editors may think that they, themselves reflect their audience, but they are actually imagining and creating them" [1], as in the modern world "information is regarded as any goods" [2] and has its owners whose basic motto is "If we want to control our society, we have to control information" [3].

In the background of media ownership is a secret game between the freedom of the media and the power of capital. However, as capital belongs to elite editors and journalists are not interested in dealing with issues irrelevant to the centers of power.

2. GLOBAL MEDIA SCENE

On the topic of globalization McLuhan and Fiore introduced the term 'a global village' [4], while Giddens sees globalization as "the development of social and economic relationships stretching worldwide" [5].

In such a global environment communications networks are enabling access to information around the world. Media approach to reporting depends on the position of media and journalists' ability to respond to the professional requirements of the journalistic profession. The freedom of media cannot exist without responsibility. But, at the moment when the importance of the media and their influence on the formation of attitudes of society were recognized, states are trying to put the media under control.

The media that are yielding to pressures giving their freedom away because they are entering into a vicious circle orchestrated to create 'reality' according to the requirements of the hidden centers of power which have control over the means of mass communication and privileged access to information. The justification for this behavior lays in the claim that "power can convince anyone to think and do anything" [6].

Journalists thus become a medium for shaping the public. They are a part of the puzzle moving from the power centers. Power of media ownership disobedient journalists can get away from their jobs, put them in jail, as well as endanger their lives. They are only wooden puppets run by those who define the truth, which, as a rule, cannot be in the public interest.

According to the latest The Reporters Without Borders annual world-wide round-up of deadly violence and abusive treatment of journalists for the 2018 year confronts us with scary details: a total of 80 journalists (63 professional journalists, 13 non-professional journalists and 4 media workers) were killed during 2018; 348 are currently in prison (179 professional journalists, 150 nonprofessional journalists and 19 media workers), and 60 are being held hostage (45 professional journalists, 9 nonprofessional journalists and 6 media workers), which shows an unprecedented level of hostility towards media personnel [7].

The concentration of power necessarily includes the concentration of media ownership, because it allows the manipulative use of media in order to provide power in the society or a group. The effects on media audiences are becoming a privilege of the elite that controls the media manages to sell its ideas, opinions and attitudes. In this way, the elite influences the public, which imperceptibly leads to the desired and planned responses.

“The term ‘Media poodle’ is referring to the obedient media and journalists who are serving its owners for fun and are representing their interests. They are strictly following the owner’s orders and their editorial policy depends solely on owner’s desires and interests” [8] and often forgot that “serving means a loss of freedom” [9].

Global media institutions are owned and controlled by large corporations that are associated with the social elite and with other corporations and political officials. Such their position leads to self-censorship of media entities because they depend on the income from the advertising and their sponsors. The media are not able to position themselves independently, due to their dependence on the mix of economic, political and social relations [10].

The struggle for control of the mass media is concentrated on the behavior control of the individuals and mass as well. The power of the media is created on the powerlessness of the audience to take a critical stance towards the information broadcasted by media. Subtle media methods with ‘beautifully wrapped’ disinformation are often imperceptible are accepted without any doubt. Such social perception allows the media to keep the public trust. Otherwise, their influence on public opinion would be negligible. In this sense, the media constantly balance between the real and the constructed representation of reality “more by instinct than intellect” [11].

In the contemporary world oligopoly controls news and information, thus reaching the public with the help of government policies and corporate maneuvering, primarily due to socio-economic reasons [12].

Behind the scenes remain the journalists who are often forced to obey the dictates of the powerful, having to play imposed, puppet-on-the-string

roles. They remain on the margins of the professional challenges and investigative journalism, fighting the inherent odds of their chosen profession, often faced with the threats when they try to tell the truth [13].

In such a way journalists are only a part of the puzzle which pieces are moved by the power centers. They are faced with the existential problems and can easily slip into the area of working according to the dictates and ordered ‘truth’. How many among them are ready to confront these pressures and to fight for their profession and for the truth, remains an unresolved dilemma.

“The six corporations that own the media — also known colloquially as “the Big 6” — are:

- GE
- Disney
- Time Warner
- Viacom
- CBS
- News Corp

These corporations control as much as 90 percent of all the media in the United States. Consequently, this creates a sort of echo chamber in the media world, from television to radio to news” [14].

Such companies as dominate at the information market create a media oligopoly [16] Disney Corporation, for instance, holds ownership in “television

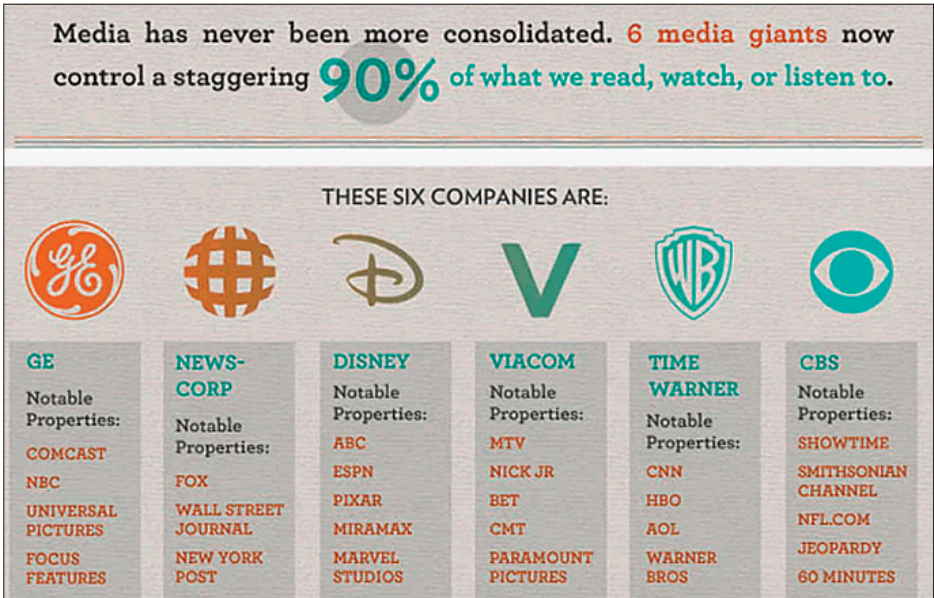


Fig. 1. Six media giants [15].

stations that reach 25 percent of U. S. households; twenty-one radio stations; three music studios; five motion picture studios; and the ABC television network" [17]. Ward pointed out that Foucault views society as a complex operation of power and "this power is exercised through surveillance, monitoring and other forms of regulation of people's lives" [18].

3. MEDIA AUDIENCE

Mass should not be playing with important things. Of course, serious things are for big boys [19].

It is believed that a contemporary individual receives the most of the information through the media, which is the most powerful industry that produces and transmits information. Information in modern society has become a commodity. 'New media' refer to media which use computer technology in the production process, distribution and presentation of media content. *Sensationalism* is taken from the pages of tabloids and usually selling irrelevant news as vitally important. In order to provoke a reaction from the public and direct its attention, journalists deviate from the value judgments and offer unsubstantiated or deliberately suggestive information that are generally stored on the front page [20].

Misleading the audience, the media are diverting attention from the real social problems, while not imposing the final conclusions, but merely driving the audience to a discussion with a known outcome. Commercialization and commodity character of the media turn them into prisoners of profits and subjects of the influence of political parties. This fact was pointed out even by Habermas far in 1969: "Newspapers are the institutions for the publication of news and turned bearers and leaders of public opinion, as well as the weapon of political parties" [21].

The media are always torn between the public and the state, and they are expected to have a control function. But the media fare frequently balancing; sometimes they are closer to the one, and sometimes to the other side [22], but mostly they protect the interests of powerful sections of society (the elite), not the readers.

John Street is convinced that the audience is formed by amenities that media offer. Most often it is the 'ordinary' man who is faced with daily accumulated existential challenges. "Reporters and editors may think that they reflect their audience, but they are actually imagining and creating their audience" [23].

Essentially, all the hidden things in the world are divided into two classes: the first and the others. 'The first' layer is the one that plays an active role in society. This is a special elite layer. These are the people who analyze,

execute, make decisions and manage all political, economic and ideological groups. It is a small percentage of the population. 'The others', who are outside of the elite group, belong to the 'bewildered herd' as they were labeled by Lipmann [24]. "Media hype hysteria and polarization in society between us (good, innocent) and them (evil, guilt)" [25]. "The question that arises is not whether or not the media have an effect; the question is how much effect the media have on the consciousness and such behavior?" [26]

There is no area of life of modern man which is not covered by the media. Thanks to the computers and the Internet, our secrets, our work, our communications in a matter of seconds are becoming a 'public good'. However, we must not forget that technology manages people and that society would become increasingly controlled by itself. But any restriction of the freedom of expression and information on the Internet must have a legitimate justification in a democratic framework [27].

Regardless of all the dangers present we still need the media. The social interactions of millions of people around the world, belonging to social relationships and communities, and the media contribute to easier integration and inclusion in social groups. Internet communication and the whole cyber-culture show an inherent connection between technology and society but "As with everything else, it is impossible to understand something, until you have experienced it" [28]. Belonging to the group, in this case — the mass media audience brings a certain sense of self-evaluation. But people are often unaware that the computer technology and digital communication are actually forming the parallel society and the new media cultural space. In an environment characterized by a high percentage of globalization, the population is over-burdened psychologically, so demand to provide security within the group becomes even more pronounced. Le Bon indicates an important feature of the masses that within the framework of a social group can easily affect the individual, invoking the authority, prestige or charisma of the leaders [29]. Visitors of the virtual media space claim for the virtual communities and that real life is just one of the 'windows' and not necessarily a place in which a person feels better [30].

4. CONCLUSION

The issue of the impact on the media actually boils down to the question: who owns the media. Everything that is happening within the media is, in fact, a reflection of the game between the power and the media. It is, of course, a game which is extremely detrimental to the media. The media are in the hands of the ruling elite, influenced by the government and not interested in dealing with issues irrelevant to the centers of power. In such

cases, the media are in a constant discrepancy which is reflected in “the pressure of competition among the big media groups, treatment of information as ordinary goods and constant testing of the audience ...” [31].

The answer to the question who owns the media is also the answer to the question: who controls media, who creates the editorial policy in the direction in which the interest is carried out through the deception of the audience. Everything that happens in the media is the consequence of the cohesion between the media and social elite. The media are in the hands of the ruling elite and are influenced by the government. The power residing in media networks is stronger than that residing in states [32].

The media have long outgrown their primary informative role, in the sense that they are engaged in the creation of reality and directing the masses to accept the reality orchestrated by the owners of information. This action of the media leads us to an extensive psychological manipulation because the impacts are increasingly oriented not only to the conscious but also the unconscious part of a person that they are ‘more real than their real-life’.

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