

**Goce Delcev University - Shtip, Faculty of Law**



# **BALKAN**

**SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW**



**Vol.12**

**2018**

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**ISSN 1857- 8799**

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## **FROM MASS MEDIA AND CULTURE TO MASS SOCIETY**

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### **Abstract**

Today we live and face a communication paradox: the world has never been richer with information, but unfortunately information with little authenticity and criticism. A great number of information storms create junk information, the purpose of which is not to present confront opinions, but to relativize, generalize, and thus put social criticism to sleep. Society is flooded with information coming from everywhere and most often in a disturbing, confusing way. Reality around us is strongly influenced by the mass media and it is very easily transformed into show the mass media offer. In addition, it seems that the values are being lost.

Culture is the highest expression of human creativity, which is conditioned by social and historical circumstances. It is a model of living common to all people and it includes values, norms, customs, rules of behavior, knowledge and technology, language and art. It exists to satisfy the basic biological, psychological and social needs of individuals.

The subject of this paper is the analysis of the relationship between the media and the culture.

**Keywords:** *culture, media, public, public opinion, mass society, communication, consumption.*

### **Introduction**

Attempts to create a symbiotic relationship between culture and media raise several questions: about the nature of their relationship, the function of the communication media, and what their role in the process of building culture is.

The process of globalization we are facing nowadays has led to an intensive mixing of peoples and cultures; it has triggered processes of mass migration, which in turn has led to the formation of societies with many different cultures. Cultural diversity

within a community often leads to conflicts arising from different values, convictions, and beliefs.

In theory, the view that the contemporary society with new technologies and new types of culture is interrupting the forms of life dominating the world prevails today. What is new in people's lives is mainly related to the new forms of activity that fill the time of an individual and are related to surfing cyber space on the Internet, playing video games, watching TV and the large selection of program content belonging to various genres. According to this view of the role of the media, the formation of a new era is occurring in which the media, technology, information processes and entertainment become the main principles of the organization of a society, in the place of economy. For Manuel Castells, (Castells, 2000: 400) reality is completely covered in the world of the "real virtuality" in which phenomena do not exist only on the screen through which they communicate, but rather they become experience. The media culture is at the same time a high technology culture and it is an important area of the economy, if not one of the most profitable segments of the economy which is gaining global significance. Media culture is becoming techno-culture that merges culture and technology into new configurations, creating new types of societies in which media and technology are transformed into principles of organization.

### **Mass media - communication**

The term medium in its etymological meaning (lat. Medius - means the one in the middle) denotes a certain mediator in communication. They are used to transmit and receive information. The media cannot be equated with technical or technological structures. Communication media are used to transmit and receive information. They have a powerful and convincing function and are an important stimulant in encouraging and developing of education and human behavior, culture and style of living. By means of the media we send and receive messages. Messages contain different information of scientific, technical, technological, social and cultural character. Through these messages people are introduced to new knowledge and achievements in medicine, biology, genetics and all other areas of human knowledge. The informative function is actually realized through the mediation of messages about relevant events, people, situations and phenomena in life that are distant from the recipient, either in space or in time. The educational function is fully realized with announcements, messages and planned influences of communication centers on respective circles of recipients. This is achieved by sending didactic content that has a target group, a customized presentation form and time of sending. The function of communication media to entertain is a prerequisite of their social meaning today. This function is accomplished with spectacularly formed messages that stimulate the affective and emotional side of a person during rest and recreation. Thus, with the

media, events and happenings in the field of music, artistic expression or literature are transferred. In fact, they offer various forms of entertainment thus satisfying the need for individual and social self-realization of a person. The effects and consequences of communication are determined by not only content and transmission, but by the recipient also (decoding a message). However, the kind of medium should always be taken into consideration. For example, the press and the civilization based on the culture of the written word provide people's direct contact with content, and reception is a modest influence on the elements of media structures such as format, scope, graphic and iconic features.

Mass media are a feature of the modern (mass) society. They are a consequence, but at the same time a cause of the changes occurring in the society since the beginnings of the industrial development up to date. Mass media refers to "institutions and techniques through which specialized groups, using technical means (press, radio, television, films) emit (disseminate) the symbolic content of many, heterogeneous and spatial, widespread recipients" (Janowitz, 1968, in Denis McQuail, 1992).

The mass media audience is a collective characterized by a common field of interest, behavior and activities aimed at common goals. The significance of the media is contained in their role in shaping public opinion, informing the population, but also in their convincing role for various political parties and various interest groups. Their role in the education processes (especially of television through different educational programs where contents that are in the function of familiarizing the interested parties with various contents are broadcast) is also great. Three views are commonly related to the mutual meaning of mass media: a) positive understanding that points to their integrative function; b) negative understanding directing criticism toward their influence and role in the breakdown of primary bonds, and isolation of an individual, especially in urban areas; and c) as an industry of consciousness, the media are a means of supporting a form of totalitarianism, where false needs, as well as entertainment needs, personal consumption, and similar are manipulated. This critical concept actually indicates the fact that all needs are false and are in the function of absorbing and anesthetizing potential clashes of classes. Thus, the critical instinct of thinking and the perception of the media-mediated content transforms into uncritical acceptance of the *status quo*. The research of the mass media is associated with the processes of industrialization and urbanization, mass production, the phenomenon of leisure time, and the creation of mass society in general. The interest of sociological research on the influence of mass media in society is connected with the organization of the mass media as well; more specifically, with the system of controlling what will be published, the way it is done, the attitude towards authorities, especially the state and suchlike.

The debate on mass communications is inevitably related to the phenomenon of the public. When we say that something is public, we think of something that is general and accessible to all, such as "public space" or "public school" or "public debate", something that anyone can access if he/she wants to and cannot be restricted.

The term public refers to something that is popular or folk. Namely, as a political-legal category, the public denotes the external sphere of social life; it becomes the bearer of the criteria for evaluating everything related to the interests of all members of the society. But, instead of gaining a critical function, the public turns into a manipulation polygon, or, with the development of means of mass communication, the public turns into a sphere in which a demonstration of power relations in the society comes to the fore. Hence, the control of the institution of the public, especially the control of the mass media, turns into the most important means of social domination, because it provides the possibility for managing, structuring and controlling public opinion. As Supek says, (Supek, R., 1981) in the conditions of a strong development of modern bureaucracy and modern means of information, news, television, and radio, which presupposes passive exposure of a person to someone else's voice, public opinion got the meaning of something more than just passive, exposed to the influence of organized social media through propaganda and publicity. Public opinion has lost the meaning of "the people's will" because of the fact that among it and the people many "mediators" appeared in the form of means of mass communication, political parties and other mediators, with whom individuals, who in the beginning may have an opinion on things that are in the focus of interest, but who later usually "align their opinion with the opinion and attitudes of the group with which they are most equated." In sociology and political science today, there is much talk about manipulation with the public opinion. In the "society of communication", manipulation is not reduced; on the contrary, there are objective indicators that the influence of techniques of manipulation even increases. But, is the public aware of the numerous attempts for its manipulation?

### **From mass media to mass society**

The word "mass society" refers to "size, homogeneity, lack, diversity or individuality and reckless, even incalculable reaction". Mass society consists of "clerks of organizations", for whom a single culture is sufficient and whose cultural needs are met by using technical means. In conditions of a mass society, mass communication simply means the transmission of information by one individual or group to another individual, with the help of speech or some other means of mass media. The character of the medium acts on the organization of society. The medium is the "message." Namely, the message of any medium or technology is the change of the boundaries, the speed or the reasons it causes in human relations.

There are numerous theories that explain the relationship between society and mass media. Here we will focus on pluralistic, Marxist, and neo-Marxist theories.

These theories arise from the view that "society is composed of a multitude of interactive but competitive segments" that have equal access to resources and are controlled by a benevolent and neutral state acting in the public interest. What is important to emphasize is the conviction that different media essentially meet the

needs of different segments of society. Namely, the media are the mirror of society and because it is composed of various parts (interests, groups, needs), the media only reflect that diversity. The criticism of this understanding of the role of the media and, secondly, their attitude to politics, more specifically to the ruling groups and politicians as the most exposed representatives of those directly fighting for power; more concretely, what the relationship is between the media (journalists) and politicians is.

The second group of theories is related to the Marxist understanding of society and ideology; namely, the medium is understood as a means by which the ideas of the ruling class are displayed and how they persist as "ruling ideas". According to this theory, the capitalist system has enough resources to present (impose) its ideas as "normal" to the rest of the world. The monopolization process seems to have come to the fore in the industry of mass communications. Profit and interests are most often related to the level of production and the level of information distribution. As most research shows, great power of public communications has been concentrated in the hands of a small number of corporations; then the same individuals appear in the governing boards of various corporations, both in the media and in the economic sectors. This is not unusual, because various economic activities that are usually not connected with the media activity are included in media corporations' frameworks. The main objection to this view comes from underestimating the role of the state in the regulation of the media sphere. Of course, the sphere of the media is also governed by the laws of market economy, and in this context, managers/owners are interested in profit, and less in "social or political influence", while ignoring the market can prove to be disastrous for their work. However, according to the postmodernist conception of the role of the media, their influence on social developments and power is not concentrated only in the hands of few, but it circulates in a very adaptable way.

Bodrijar, (Bodrijar, 1991) is one of the most famous media theorists in the last decades of the twentieth century. In this contemporary society that he calls a postmodern society, we are entering into a state of reality simulation, and as a result, we get a state of hyper reality. Namely, this simulation is not a representation of an object from the real world, of a being or a substance, but it is a product of something not originating from the real world. With this process of transition into the "new space that belongs neither to reality nor to the truth", the era of simulation starts with the removal of all references their imitation with a system of non-existent signs. It is about replacing reality with its characters. The reality finds itself in the situation never to be produced, and this "production" is transferred to the sphere of media images and it turns into a system that leads to the death of reality. In a period dominated by mass media, a new reality, hyper reality, is created, which is formed from a mixture of the reality of human behavior and media images. Hyperrealism is formed by a simulacrum, images that get meaning only from other images and have no objective reality of their own.



Thompson's and Habermas's (Habermas, 2002.) analyses are focused on the attitude of the media and the development of industrial society. From the very beginning, from their perspective, we can permanently notice the influence on the establishment of modern institutions. Habermas's research is devoted to the emergence of public space, its development and, finally, its disappearance. Public space is understood as an area where issues of general interest are discussed and where an opinion on various issues of an individual's life is formed. Public space, which initially developed in the restaurants and lounges of the great metropolises of Europe, where people discussed various topics present in the daily newspapers that began to appear at that time. For Habermas, the restaurants and lounges where those debates took place were very important for the development of the democracy of the Western societies; they were a kind of public space where there was a real opportunity to discuss political issues freely and equally. In modern society, the cultural industry has crushed democratic debates. Public opinion is formed in the institutions; there are no open and public disputes, but manipulation and control.

Thomson is of similar opinion, but unlike Habermas, for him mass media do not disable critical thinking; in fact, they supply us with a lot of information, which we comment on, we argue about, we embed in our own lives and in this way, we continually shape and re-create skills and knowledge reserves. Mass media practice interaction that Thompson calls mediated quasi-interaction; its characteristic is that of not linking individuals, it is monological, such as television program, a one-sided form of communication in which the individual has no influence, he/she is only a recipient, not a producer, and the interaction is false.

For Jameson, (Jameson, F., 2007, 1991) media and technology have no positive role in the world today. He, similarly as Baudrillard, develops the theory of simulation, which is a key term for understanding the postmodern media culture. Jameson speaks about the contemporary state of culture, where there is a loss of historicity - a situation where the system is unable to recall its own past. Human existence is found in the situation of a permanent present, where there is no place for the tradition that existed in the past. The media have a key role in the formation of this state that allows us to forget "i.e. they are mechanisms for the realization of human amnesia". It is a process that has transformed reality into images and fragmented the time into a series of the present. The media are the ones through which the state of "superficiality and shallowness" is formed. Today the developed capitalist countries find themselves in a state of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without norms. "

For McQuail, the information society is vulnerable in relation to the unequal chances of realizing the communication potential, which leads to the stratification of information welfare, and which further divides the inequality between social groups. As a result, the formation of an "information subclass, which is little capable of acting independently and making a political choice", is in sight (Dennis McQuail, 1994). This class/group is excluded from the system; it is unable to create and is outside the

"information society". It is no less important that the information society becomes more and more a one-dimensional society, in which a state of "culture of the poor" is realistically formed. For the majority of the population, the differences in each aspect gradually disappears and the monopoly of the media is strengthened. Finally, as McQueil says, an "information chaos" which questions the role of the media as the means of learning, the sense of a reliable source of information is lost and the manipulation with the feelings of individuals overcomes. "The logic of the market caused abundance and shattered the basics of that reliable communication system, and not all people have equal ability to face the new situation."

There is no doubt that the new media also change the context of the work of the cultural sector and that virtuality introduces new problems into the organization of meaning. The structure of the Internet (network) and digitization alter the way of production, distribution and use of cultural goods. The simple access to cultural goods on the Internet is appealing to users; there are different types of information - text, picture, video and audio recordings, multimedia, etc. The problem is how to effectively find the information requested, how to archive it and create easier access to online content, considering the fact associated with their dynamic change. New technology presents us with new opportunities and challenges.

### **Mass media consumption culture - What is culture?**

Culture is one of the basic concepts of contemporary social and human sciences. The term culture comes from the Latin term "*cultis*", which means nourishing, processing. Many authors of textbooks on sociology and sociology of culture cite the data of Kreber-Klukhom ( Petrovski, V., 2006), who established the existence of over two hundred different definitions of culture, which points to the fact that sociological and anthropological literature encounters a multitude of definitions of culture. In its essence, culture is a social phenomenon, because it is born, it functions and affects other social phenomena.

Social-anthropological ideas about culture are largely based on the definition given by Edward Taylor in 1871, (Petrovski, V., 2006) where he refers to the complex of learned knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law and customs. This definition holds that culture and civilization are one and the same.

Archaeological use, although recognizing the entirety of human societies, distinguishes between material culture or artifacts and practices and beliefs, i.e. a non-material or adaptive culture that is transmitted through education and tradition. Only material culture is accessible to archeology, since adaptive culture is the subject of history, sociology and anthropology.

In this context, Ante Fiamengo also determined culture to be a very complex notion, but that in its determination there is usually a distinction between material and spiritual culture. The term material culture covers a collection of material products of a society, for which the most commonly used expression is civilization, whereas the

term spiritual culture covers all achievements, i.e. all developments in the spiritual space: art, religion, morality, science, values, and norms.

Milos Ilic starts from the fact that there are many different definitions of culture and, in order to avoid the unilaterality of many definitions, he is of the opinion that an integral definition should be given. According to him, culture is the sum of all processes, changes and creations that occurred as a consequence of material and spiritual intervention of humankind. The fundamental meaning of culture is to facilitate survival, continuation and progress of the human race.

Anthony Giddens (Petrovski, V., 2006) points out that cultures cannot survive without societies, but likewise societies cannot exist without cultures. According to Giddens, when we use the term culture in everyday speech, we often think of something sublime and spiritual - art, literature, music and painting. However, when sociologists use it, other activities are also understood by this term. In this sense, the term refers to the way of living of the members of a society or a group, within the framework of the society. In this sense, the term covers: the way people dress, their wedding customs, family life, how they work and create, religious ceremonies, how they spend their free time, etc.

Antonela Petkovska defines culture as a meaningful system of values, norms and customs, and artifacts that manifest in their everyday life. This manifold mechanism of human creations is created and functions through the network of the complex structure of human relationships. In doing so, as a social being, a man, above all, provides his own survival and shows the distinctness of his existence as a kind.

The sociological notion of culture, according to Marija Taseva, denotes a system of values and meanings that are shared by a group or a society, including the realizations of these values and meanings in material objects.

Within the analysis of the structure of culture, at the global society level, the basic issue is the question of defining and dividing the elements of culture. The basic elements of each culture are the following:

1. Language, as the basic form of communication cultural creations, which contains a series of related sounds that do not mean anything by themselves, but when standardized by the society they get a commonly accepted meaning, which ensures symbolic communication within the complex system. In addition to communication features, language also has significant cognitive, even normative, social characteristics;

2. Cognitive (gnoseological) creations that offer, more or less, an objective picture of the world, i.e. they are used by people to explain the world. Here are some of the subclasses: commonsense cognition, religion, philosophy, ideology, stereotypes and prejudices, as well as science. The fact that numerous parallel cognitive creations exist points that none is cognitively perfect, but also that cognitive components complement each other;

3. Values create a hierarchical system of spiritual creations that give meaning to life and guide human activities, determining what is desirable, good, proper, wise

or beneficial, and determining objects as goals and ideals. Inside these areas, which are made up of many hidden categories, as a special type of articulated type of creations, art occurs as a specific category characterized by aesthetic value, i.e. is what is beautiful;

4. Norms-rules, as elements of culture, contain orders and prohibitions for human behavior and in a certain sense represent operationalization of social values. Orders and prohibitions, as social standards and rules, also include punishments - sanctions for failure to comply. There are different types of punishments, i.e. sanctions, and they can be most easily differentiated analytically if the subjects and the nature of penalties are taken into consideration. The first are legal norms; they are brought by the state and it takes care of their implementation in practice, and punishment is determined by state bodies; customary norms, for which punishment is regulated by the unorganized society and the social groups in it; moral norms, where punishment consists of shame directed to oneself because of some acts that the community evaluates as something not positive and good, so the person has them on his/her conscience; as well as some normative elements that are less important, such as religious rules, dress rules, etc.

5. Expressive symbols become the subject of attention as a distinctive form of cultural creations at recent times. Expressive creations emphasize the commitment and loyalty to a system of symbols, such as flags, sound symbols, hymns, coats-of-arms, etc.

Culture and communication become two inseparable concepts and when we talk about culture, we think of communication and vice versa, and, in this context, domination in the sphere of communications manifestly takes place as a 'natural-cultural process', as a general objectivity that makes no difference or discrimination, but in the background of that video-cultural objectivity, interesting mechanisms of economic influence and regulations of economic power are found. (Petrovski, V., 2006)

### **Mass culture**

In sociological literature, the notions of mass culture and mass society are understood in a variety of ways. Most often, in order to understand the notion of mass culture, it is related to the classical high or elite culture. Mass culture represents a set of cultural contents, spread by means of mass communication in modern social environments, industrialized and urbanized, which are characterized by certain values of the masses and by social "density". Mass culture tends to standardize, as it tries to satisfy the taste of an undifferentiated audience.

In general, we can state the following about mass culture: values are produced for a market and are intended for mass consumption; they influence uniform behavior, they are transmitted by using the means of mass communication and are in the function of free time.

The function of the mass media consists in the possibility of mass transfer of cultural and artistic goods. Their improvement also increases their influence on the population. For mass culture observed from a sociological point of view, one can state the following: first, it is a culture that reduces the social distance among social groups; second, it enables the emergence of a mass consumer and creates a qualitatively new audience; third, it carries out the internationalization of cultural values; fourth, a deeper interweaving and mutual conditioning of culture and technological innovations is performed, which in turn is accompanied by an increase in leisure time and its use; fifth, it causes a shift in the hierarchy of cultural values and a change in the procedure and processes of cultural selection.

Zygmunt Bauman (Golubovic, 1973, 533) lists three important components of mass culture: dependence on the market, dependence on the organization and dependence on the technology. Mass culture disperses "culture" in all areas of social life and in all segments of people's personalities, but, acting in the function of the system, it loses its creative influence on the shaping of social life and development, which is an essential characteristic of true culture. In this way, culture is reduced to an ideological means - it is acquired with an instrumental character instead of inherent values, that is, it ceases to be culture.

Mass culture does not produce an authentic psychic experience and does not require any effort; it wants nothing more from its "customers" than their money. The popularity of mass culture can be explained by the fact that it is, above all, entertaining or informative, that is, it does not produce a deeper aesthetic and cognitive experience, but satisfies only the surface layers of rationality and emotion.

Some authors state that mass culture is an obstacle to "real contact with the world". With an abundance of information, which does not have to be correct or true, it misguides a person to think that he is informed about everything that is happening in the world that surrounds him. A person is satisfied with that "secondary contact with the world". The person gets an impression that he or she is free and creative in his or her spare time.

For Moren, mass culture plays the role of the "mythology of the 20th century" because it is essentially anti-utopian, anti-visionary and superficial; it separates fantasy from life and transforms imagination into a field of escape and compensation. In a word, mass culture does not appear as a space for autonomous, free and spontaneous action of a person and its human confirmation, but, more or less, as a successful substitute (surrogate) for this and hence all the functions of the mass culture are subordinated to that role. (Golubovic, Z., 1973, 545). The products of mass culture move on the surface of life.

Modern society is spoken of as a society and culture based on values derived from money, 'to have' and not 'to be', that is, consumption becomes the main focus of social life and the values of the consumer culture are characteristic of the society based on a market economy. Namely, it is assumed that consumption culture is universal. The question asked by most of the researchers of modern society, rightly referred to as

consumer society, is this: to what extent is it true that the choice, in terms of consumption, is the basis of the new concept of freedom, the freedom of the individual, above all, which is fulfilled and constructed in his role as a consumer? Or, as Bauman puts it, we are all at the same time both on and for the market, at the same time both goods and consumers. And, in that context, it is not surprising that relations also follow the pattern of consumption.

For Baudrillard, (Baudrillard, 2005) a French sociologist, these new means of consumption are not important only as places where people spend symbols; they are important in themselves, as structures that lead people to spend more and spend on a variety of things. Consumer society is a society where a man is taught to spend, but as Baudrillard thinks, the idea that people have certain needs and that they should be satisfied with consumption is a myth, "all the more so because human beings are never truly satisfied and because these needs are never met". In this process, the mass media play a key role and, therefore, postmodern analyses of everyday life experience are concentrated on the characteristics and experiences of the mass media consumption culture.

### **Conclusion: Worrying aspects of mass society**

Mass culture has almost no value. It is a commercialized product for gaining profit. It is a culture that is imposed "from above, produced by technicians, and paid by businessmen; the audience is made up of passive consumers who participate only because they decide to buy it or not. The masters of the kitsch, in brief, take advantage of the cultural needs of the masses to make a profit. Mass society and mass culture helped totalitarian regimes to dominate more easily and to survive, primarily because of manipulation, that is, political control enabled by the means of mass communication. In the spirit of Marxist understanding, mass culture can be a means of the ruling culture, with the fact that it is everywhere, brutal and excessive, and it threatens high culture. People understand it more easily and it requires less mental effort. Consequently, mass culture eventually creates a unique homogenized culture, where the difference between high and mass culture will gradually be lost. What is worrying is that mass culture leads to a state of formation of "precocious and infantile adults"; infantile adults who cannot deal with the problems of life except by resorting to mass culture in their free time, but also excessively stimulated children who are rapidly becoming adults. What is also worrying is the fact that mass culture destroys the social fabric, which forms a mass society and atomized, isolated individuals, who are only linked with centralized systems and organizations such as means of mass communication, political parties and companies.

"The mass man is a solitary atom, uniform with and undifferentiated from thousands and millions of other atoms who go to make up 'the lonely crowd'", as David Riesman calls American society.

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