

## BETWEEN THE LINES AND THROUGH THE IMAGES

### IZMEĐU REDOVA I SLIKA

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#### *Abstract*

Media considerably contribute to the shaping of modern society because they influence the formation and change of public opinion, as well as the adoption of imposed cultural values that are, due to subtle manipulation methods, accepted as "free" formed views. In situations where media methods, based on words and images, fill in the gaps in the real world and provide a surrogate for the economically and culturally impoverished society, the media become a tool that allows control of individuals and groups. Resisting to be overtaken by the crowd mentality, which thinks in accordance with the media imposed pattern, is possible only if we, as a society, engage to educate the recipients of media messages, so they could be able to "defend" themselves from the media-falsified reality. Media education is a prerequisite for critical assessment of social values as well as the values of and the commercialized culture.

#### *Sažetak*

Mediji u značajnoj mjeri oblikuju suvremeno društvo jer utječu na formiranje i promjenu javnog mijenja, kao i na usvajanje nametnutih kulturnih vrijednosti koje se zahvaljujući suptilnim metodama manipulacije prihvaćaju kao „slobodno“ prihvaćeni stavovi. U situacijama kada medijske metode riječima i slikama popunjavaju praznine u realnom svijetu i nude surogat za kulturno i ekonomski osiromašeno društvo, medij postaje sredstvo koje omogućava kontrolu pojedinaca i grupa. Odupiranje utapanju u masu, koja misli po nametnutom medijskom šablonu, moguće je jedino ako se kao društvo angažiramo da medijski obrazujemo primatelje medijskih poruka tako da se mogu „odbraniti“ od medijski lažirane stvarnosti. Medijsko obrazovanje je preduvjet za kritičko sagledavanje društvenih vrijednosti kao i vrijednosti komercijalizirane kulture.

### **1. Introduction**

Modern man is accustomed to the fact of the media being an integral part of the daily life. The mass media have enabled information to become a global phenomenon and its distribution unconditioned by the local boundaries imposed by the geographical origin of the information. The term mass media indicates any means of communication, ie, the mass media is the extension of human senses, namely: radio - an extension of the hearing, photography - an extension of the vision, and television as an extension of the sense of touch /1/.

Broadest understanding of the term „mass media“ refers to any media that has mass distribution and that targets the “mass socie-

ty”. Faced with such an expansion of the media, that are drawn into all aspects of modern society, we can see in the media landscape the presence of almost passive audience on the receiving end of the “media reality”, according to the screenplay controlled by media owners or other parties’ possessing the power to pull the strings in the media sphere. Modern man is unfortunately constantly “hungry”. In searching for the meaning of one’s own existence there is a growing craving for new information. And, the more information one receives, the more information one needs. Thus, the thirst becomes unquenchable. Those who recognize the true name of the media game and recognize the patterns of the scenario “writers” are making efforts to help the

nameless crowd get out of the vicious circle within which the "reality" represented by an image is taken for granted. For the vast majority of media audience, the truth has always been defined by the media. An the very truth interpreted through media constantly varies from moment to moment. When they need the masses in support of the military action, they will bias them accordingly. When they need masses to hate, they will provide a good rationale and set of reasons to boot. At times, the masses are needed to worship the candidates, so they are subtly pushed into a loud applause. Apparitions from the Grimm's fairy tales are subliminally lurking among the shadows of media words and images. Everything is dreamlike, pulling you into a slumber on the tones of a media lullaby. The audience is slowly dozing off, not giving it too much thought, being thus skillfully and slowly boiled into the uncritical passivity. The media so robs its audience of the critical thinking caps, only to help them absorb the precise interpretations of reality underpinning the fabrication of the general consent. The audience needs to wake up. The need for media literacy is a conceptual alarm clock that has potential to shake the "information consumers" out of their drowsiness into making an effort to recognize the hidden messages, and in doing so, free themselves to form their own value judgments on incidents and events that constitute their daily lives and the reality we all have a democratic claim on. Media undereducated public will often unquestioningly accepts the media messages, without deeper analysis and search for the real agenda based on facts, behind cleverly designed facade of the media message trojan horse. Modern man has become a media addict and there is almost no one who, in some way, is not exposed to the influence of the media.

Given dynamics of media activity indicate the case of extensive psychological manipulation, and it has a growing impact on both conscious and the unconscious parts of the personality. Media shape the public as required by the power centers that have control over the means of mass communication and privileged access to information. The one who has

the power "can convince anyone to think and do anything" /2/. The mass media are extremely influential in the creating of the public opinion when it comes to new themes /3/, and "assistance" in creating a picture of reality "that only seems like reality" /4/. "The imperceptible manipulative manner becomes a new source of "danger and uncontrolled media power" /5/. The culmination of media manipulation is achieved due to the inseparable connection between technology and society. Media audiences are "swallowing" the content without a deeper search for the substance and ignoring the truth, since such behavior is subtly encouraged and fabricated by the media in the capacity of a producer, controller and owner of information. They form the information according to their own rules, giving it a shape in line with their interests. With the development of technology, to which the media have always been quick to adapt, the world is faced with the threat of even more drastic forms of media manipulation. Manipulation can be achieved by changes in people's consciousness that is "equal to the one achieved by changing natural and social circumstances" /6/, or by introducing specially trained manipulation experts into the deception, consequently making the manipulation resemble the truth. "Spin Doctor is a person responsible for shaping the favorable public perception of politicians or political parties through skillful manipulation of the mass media" /7/. Since the advent of television, audience has been receiving manipulated information placed inside cleverly designed programs, delivered directly at their doorstep. Manipulation reaches into the private, family space, so that the whole family is exposed to the simultaneous absorption of messages that are intended for the masses. Clearly, the receipt and processing of such contrasting images can create emotional confusion and cause different reactions of viewers /8/. A family sitting in front of the television screen, waiting for their favorite media to tell a bedtime story, becomes an easy prey to the aggressive advertising industry. "Advertising is the most compelling sales message addressed to potential buyers of a product or

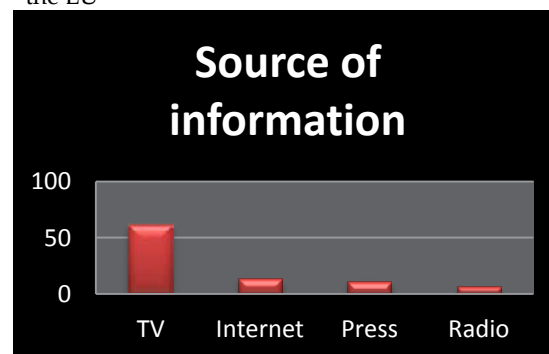
service at the lowest possible cost"/9/. Looking at the advertising as a process of communication, it can be said that it is "a bond that enables dynamics among the advertising manufacturer (or distributor), an agency that creates the advertising and the audience addressed by the add" /10/. Karla Sewell and Paul Brown, believes that advertising, besides communicating the image of the product itself, also contains an image that reflects the work of a particular advertising agency. "When you're making a commercial for your product, do not forget that your ads reflect who you are /11/. "Advertising medium represents every means by which the message of the sale of an item is transferred to potential buyers" /12/. The question is how thus created relationship can be favorable for the audience that becomes a potential customer, or "prey" of the advertising agencies. To what extent any kind of "prey" is in a position to have any other choice except flee or surrender. Vans Packard rightly pointed to aggressive, manipulative character of ubiquitous advertising messages that are having effect on all human senses with the intent to take advantage of man's conscious and unconscious needs. In order to attract as many potential buyers, manufacturers and retailers are turning to unconventional methods of market research "/13/. Market researchers are particularly interested in these two levels - the subconscious and the unconscious, because they represent the very space within which the most successful manipulation of insufficiently conscious or totally unconscious customer needs takes place /14/.

## 2. Media addiction

"The mass media audience" builds its image of the outside world through the means of mass communication. Man cannot live without interacting with other people. In the peri-

od of globalization, individuals and groups are becoming more focused on the "contact" with the media that are transmitting information to them. But, media scene is increasingly serving the interests of the special interest groups that exert their influence on the media, and thereby elaborate methods for using media. Study of the Reuters Institute says that, if the trend continues, we will have media that no longer contains news /15/. It is believed that a modern individual receives the most of information through the media, which are the most powerful industry that produces and broadcasts information. Global audience is usually served an overdose of information, but still, there is little information to be found, that is the product of investigative journalism. Research conducted in the area of the European Union /16/ provided insight into the extent of bias in European citizens towards relying on the media as the main source of information. More than 60 % of the population is "in symbiosis" with their TVsets and perceives it, in the literal sense, as its own window into the world.

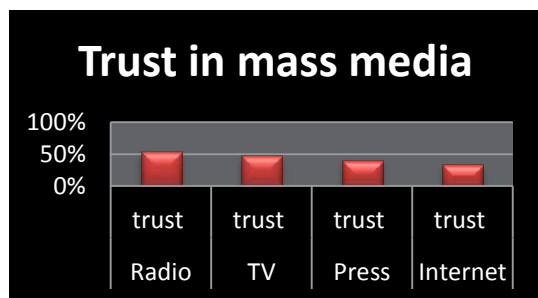
Fig. 1. Getting information through the media in the EU



Source: Authors

Europeans are the most oriented to the television programs (62%), which for them represent a major source of information. The following on the list are: internet (14%), newspapers (11%) and radio (7%).

Fig.2. Trust of European citizens in mass media



Source: Authors

The survey results show that almost half of respondents readily believe the media, especially the radio (54%), and television programs (48%), followed by the print media (40%) and the lowest level of trust is indicated in relation to the information coming through the Internet (34%). How, under such circumstances, can we come to the stage of understanding of the media and media content? If the audience does not doubt the veracity of images and words, it will not feel the need to analyze the semantic shadows running between the rows of delivered information. Why look for a thief if nothing is stolen? This means that we need to remind the audience that the real world can only be recognized through one's own eyes and not through the prism of the media reality. Media literacy is a link to freedom. Only educated media audience can recognize who and how manipulates its perception of reality and the right to accurate information. Everything else is in the area of deception, which can be interpreted as a synonym for the enslavement of the mind. Masterman, one of the most famous critics of media education, points out that a media literate person cannot be easily manipulated and that his/her opinion in the media is respected because of the ability to make independent judgments. It is the viability of critical autonomy which should become the primary goal of continual education for the media /17/. Media literacy, as an important area of communicology, is especially important in times of abrupt social changes affected by the emergence and development of global media technologies, the expansion of the media as well as the role of media as

an important factor in shaping the system of social values. Free access to information, a right which is usually provided by the legislation, reinforces the level of media literacy culture, which in turn, represents a more efficient modality of understanding the messages from the media sphere. Media literacy is the process of accessing, analyzing, evaluating and creating messages in a wide range of media types, genres and forms. Accessing media literacy encourages people to ask questions about what they are watching, hearing and reading. Media literate audience becomes able to leave the vicious circle inside of which the media uneducated masses are dwelling, earning an opportunity to depart from the hopelessness of the nameless masses and transform itself into an active citizenship capacity which understands what the media really communicates, at the same time having the potential to assess the value of such messages.

### 3. Dreamtime Escape - One Step Further

Economist Robert Lekachman warned that advertising strategies that favor the model of success, are creating a "lost" feeling in the "little" man, which, in times of economic recession, might have a dramatic effect on the integrity of the human person /18/. Images, scenes and activities of media culture are leading to the formation of unstable identity that is often based on superficial characteristics of the phenomenal media model. A choice of many models that media present at the same time gives an individual the freedom to play with identity, but it can lead to total confusion and the formation of unstable, fluid and impermanent identity /19/. The man, in the global space and time, is faced with a lack of time and opportunity to focus on personal pleasure. It all boils down to a smiling face with perfect rows of incredibly white teeth smiling at us from the television screens. Successful people talk about success, which usually implies buying products that are advertised to make one beautiful, young and successful. The story of the success of others in-

creases awareness of one's own failure. The Salvation pill can be purchased as a product that dabbles as perpetual mobile production line of the fabricated, unquenchable needs. Identifying the source of man's unhappiness in many unfulfilled and repressed needs marks the beginning of manipulative efforts of advertising agencies in imposing certain, until then, unknown products. The products are installed with exactly those traits the people find within themselves, providing the sense of the psychological intimacy with the product. Packard suggests the necessity of discovering the hidden needs which need be addressed and implemented in the perception of various products, resulting in the increased effectiveness of sales /20/. The media are the missing link between man and the product, coming packed with promises of success and a better future. The totality of human being in the modern media and consumer society is threatened by a number of contradictory roles it takes. But all these roles represent the short-term experience in relation to the identity of molded construction. The preferred audience is one that is composed of individuals that resemble one another, and who think alike, or do not think much at all. All this either because they do not have time to fight the recession, or due to the simple lack of interest, hence - no doubt. Man, by nature, has a tendency to trust. Only those "who stand out", who are experiencing their the social molds as tight, doubt everything said or shown. They are looking for a source of information, because they believe that the information on the origin of knowledge is indicative of the truthfulness / untruthfulness of information. Struggling with an imposed manipulation, a man is usually alone, or in the company of cyber "friends". The advertising, through utilization of different techniques of persuasion, offers to compensate him/her all the modern communication the society fails to provide /21/. Advertising is like a mistress: relying on seduction, theatrics, originality and often manipulation. Audience often lays down its arms because the media, in delivering its persuasive content, thanks to modern techniques, is becoming an art in itself /22/.

Deceit becomes extremely subtle and irresistibly resemblant of the truth. This is its greatest power. Not being recognized. If there is no doubt, there is no need to dig deeper. We have the truth, we can move on. Thus, the public reasoning of private persons gathered in the audience is orchestrated /23/. "Public opinion is a collection of opinions and attitudes about a particular social issue or situation, derived through the public political and communicational process, with the active participation of the media and citizens in its creation" /24/. Is the so formed public opinion realized from the same starting position? Have all the parties in the communication received the same treatment? In reference to this, the important position is the one between the broadcaster and the recipient, the individual belonging to different groups, the character of interpersonal relations, as well as the personal experiences and personality traits /25/. "Passive audience and powerful media have strongly encouraged the interest for exploring the manipulation quite in line with the normative assumptions and clearly ideologically dominant theoretical framework" /26/.

### 3 Conclusion

The theorists' referring to the power of media and the corresponding passivity of the media audience represents the drawing of attention to the position of modern man as a media "addict" Mass media are the most frequently owned by global capitalists, or are dependent on them as the biggest advertisers . This creates a servile-financial relationship of the media and journalists, which by means of potential threat, quickly creates perpetrators of imposed tasks. Each of these tasks is subordinate to the interests of the elite, never the interests of the masses. Intellectual potential of the masses is being permanently dulled by the superficial, "flashy" content that does not require exertion of the intellect. "Lightness" of such content is like a lullaby to the already deadened critical intellect. Fun for the senses distributed by the media is commonly accepted as a reward for a day spent in the real

world that “drains” the energy thorough the constant demand of even greater efforts. An individual, a member of the media audience, is included in the daily process of creating capital for another, while such an effort is not leaving much room for finding the meaning of one’s own existence. Dissatisfaction caused by such circumstances and all the gaps in a gray everyday ritual, a modern man compensates by giving power over to the media, allowing to be “tucked” in the words and pictures. “All you need can be bought” is the message deliver by media. For the vast majority of the audience such a media message is a road signpost pointing to the “Holy Grail”. The road pay tolls, have not been considered. Thus, media messages are seamlessly moved into the subconscious. The media always say and show more than the audience recognizes. In such a context, the commissioned message is being delivered to imperceptibly manipulate the minds. The sobering of man as an individual and man as a member of the masses is a difficult mission. You need to make someone understand his/her being subject to deception, in order to motivate him/her to fight against it. Thus we arrive at a broad front, where our main weapon comes down to media literacy. Media literacy involves comprehensive sobering of masses, since the society divided into elite and the masses is constantly “pushing the little man” into ignorance, passivity and dependence on media.

#### Notes

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