

PSYCHOLOGY OF MEDIA

The media and the individual: economic and psychological interrelations

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The mass media have become one of the crucial institutions of modern society; it is hard to overestimate their role in the formation of people's beliefs, values, and physiological characteristics. The media industries are now an integral part of the leisure and entertainment industries. With free time becoming a key economic resource of society, the individual lives and psychological well-being of people are significantly influenced by the processes of mass communication and by media companies; this level of influence results in the emergence of a new human being—*homo mediatis*.

Keywords: mass media, media industry, media psychology, media audience, *homo mediatis*

Having become an essential part of the modern economy in the postindustrial world, the media have inevitably also become one of the most profitable and powerful industries. Their political, social, and cultural nature is directly influenced by entrepreneurial activity and the market laws of supply and demand (Albarran, 2010). However, the media industry is affected not only by corporate logic, the dynamics of financial transactions, and managerial decisions but also by the growing demand of audiences for media content. Today, the demand for information is a complex set of people's needs, as determined by their social and psychological nature, including various requirements for political and social news, financial analysis, opinion leaders' points of view, public reactions from the representatives of reference groups, and entertainment and leisure activities in individualized forms of communication.

In recent years, academic debates on the media and journalism have often been centered around the concept of *commercialization*, in reference to the growing dependence of the media on the logic of the market (De Bens, 2009; Mosco, 2009). Organized as market enterprises, media companies are increasingly guided by almost the same motives as those of other commercial firms: the search for profits,

returns on investment, cost optimization, and effective management. Managers of media companies require that editors and journalists make their companies economically successful and that media content become a profitable product. These demands come especially, for instance, from the majority of CEOs (chief executive officers), who are answerable to shareholders, who in turn are interested mainly in earnings per share (Aris & Bughin, 2012).

Before the beginning of the 21st century, the mass media and journalism, as an essential part of the market economy, had already taken on many of the features of industrial and even postindustrial production; they were governed by economic feasibility and the consumption stimulated by the development of the global and national media industries. However, the media as a key institution of democracy and journalism as one of the core professions for institutionalizing political communication in the public sphere have, in many instances, become subject to public control; this control is implemented in their social mission, which is defined by some scholars as the legal, rational authority of the media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). There is no doubt that the contemporary media, which function in market conditions with a number of public obligations that are placed on them by democratic societies, represent a multilayered and complex system that today requires an interdisciplinary and problem-oriented approach (Zinchenko, Veraksa, & Leonov, 2011, p. 58). From this angle it is important to place the audience's uses of the media and consequently individuals' behavior, beliefs, and values in the broader political and economic context of postindustrial society.

Media as leisure: shaping consumerist psychology

Time has always been one of the most crucial resources for the media industry. It was already an important factor in determining the amount and modes of media consumption in early industrial society. It is true that along with the two major resources necessary to read books and newspapers, money and time, the readership of the first newspapers needed a certain level of education, which was in fact a derivative of the same budgets as money and time. The charge to the public for the media was high before the formation and expansion of industrial mass production, in which the need for mass marketing initiated the birth of a new media business model based on advertising sales. The intention to maximize the readership allowed newspapers to attract advertising investments, which were returned to advertisers through the purchase of their goods. The readership was required only to spend time reading advertisements and to buy the newspapers. As a consequence, time had become an important economic resource for the media industry by the second half of the 19th century, the era of the formation of mass production and consumption (Picard, 1989).

With the transition to postindustrial society in the 20th century, the media business began to change. The media themselves became influenced by social and economic processes such as the individualization of consumption, the rise in educational levels, the formation of individualized lifestyles, the fragmentation of society, and, consequently, the fragmentation of the media. As a result, the need for more personalized and non-mass products appeared. During the second half of the 20th century the new phenomenon for the media was the formation of the audience's

negative attitude toward various types of advertising, especially on television and radio. The “fatigue” induced by mass advertising might be explained mostly by the audience’s irritation with wasting time. And viewers and listeners, in order to protect their leisure time budgets, turned from the “old” media to the “new,” such as cable and satellite television and video. The new media, as technologically-based forms of content delivery and computer-mediated communication, allowed the audience to optimize its leisure time budgets but required in exchange increasing fees for media content. Consequently, advertising on pay TV was reduced, and this change better met the needs of the target audiences for information and entertainment.

Thus, business models based either on selling media content (books, magazines, videos, and DVDs) or on being paid for access to that content (through cable networks, the Internet, mobile telephony) have been legitimized not only by changes in consumption patterns, based on the enhanced selectivity and personification of choices, but also by the increased commitment of the public to spend money, as one of the rare resources of media industries, in order to maximize the amount of another, even rarer resource, free time.

The process of the media’s integration of free time into the industry has become an important economic and, at the same time, social and political trend in both industrial and postindustrial societies. There are several reasons why it was precisely in the 20th century that the media turned from being a democratic institution into the industry and service organization of free time.

First, during the 20th century, the media and, above all, its entertainment segment became a key element of the market economy as a result of its convergence with the advertising industry, which since the mid-19th century had been trying to create a system of effective advertising. Analyzing the state and structure of the media industry, economists in most countries of the world combined the media and entertainment markets long ago. In 2010 experts estimated Russia’s entertainment and media market at 16.38 billion USD, and by 2014 it was expected to increase to 25.58 billion USD. In the coming years, the compound annual growth of the Russian market for entertainment and media will be 9.3% because of double-digit growth in sectors such as online advertising, pay TV, and video games (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010).

The explanation for this expansion is obvious: the growth of the world economy will inevitably lead to an increase in advertising costs. Media companies are built into the system of selling goods and services and also into the marketing strategy of producers. Thus, they are guided above all not by the political and cultural needs of society but by the consumption needs of target audiences, which are very important for advertisers. As a consequence, the media have become the industry that organizes not only the production and distribution of content but also the delivery of ads from advertisers to consumers. So, in order to achieve the maximum efficiency of the industry while maintaining a truly mass audience, it is necessary to integrate the previously separated segments of media and entertainment. A special role here belongs to the electronic media, which become increasingly important every day because of the formation of a powerful producing sector for it: for example, recording studios, film studios, production companies, syndicates, photo services. Because it can create relatively cheap content products, this sector enhances the commercialization of media content and its entertainment aspect.

However, the Internet promotes a level of creative self-realization that has never been seen before, and at the same time it expands the horizons of communication as never before. So far, there is no strict scientific definition for the term *audience*, which is widely used in media studies, although attempts to study this phenomenon have been made. The criteria for the description of the audience are still not clearly defined, although the demographic, psychographic, and psychological characteristics used in mediometrics are quite accurate. However, many questions about the individual political and cultural preferences, values, and beliefs of people in the context of their media uses remain unanswered. Thus, the consumption-oriented economy objectively encourages the movement toward the entertainment industry.

Second, because of the digital revolution, new platforms of consumption and new content-delivery channels, including the extensive use of digital interactive and mobile technologies, have appeared. Home computers have become the center of entertainment and, at the same time, the point of access to journalistic stories. Today, computers or other access devices such as mobile phones and tablets are also used for receiving online media and video games, buying ringtones, downloading and watching movies, ordering movies online, downloading TV programs, buying books in traditional and electronic formats, and reading electronic books (e-books). Meanwhile, any Internet user can today produce and publish content in the social networks of growing popularity, and this activity has become a hobby for many nonprofessionals. Users increasingly find it rather difficult to separate the real and the virtual, and the psychological dependence of individuals on the new media, which is driven by the growth of the media, computer, and telecommunications industries, has become an issue for further experimental research (Zinchenko, Menshikova, Bayakovskiy, Chernorizov, & Voiskounsky, 2010, p. 16).

Because of the dual nature of the media industry, it has a significant impact on the values of society in general and of individuals in particular through the production of content. For this reason, the industrial production of content for the media is an essential component of the spiritual life of modern society. According to Adorno, the contradiction between the individual process of spiritual creativity and the factory-type production of cultural industries appears with increasing frequency in the practices of the modern media and is converted into a conflict of public, cultural, educational, and market values (Adorno, 1944/2002). As a result, modern technological platforms offered by the media industry establish the basis for a new way of life in which the consumption and production of digital media become a key form of the news and entertainment media, often even organizing the civic participation of people. The interests of advertisers looking for more efficient and narrower channels of access to target audiences are also better satisfied. As a result the new digital media have become a key force in determining the psychological viewpoints of individuals in the market-driven sociocultural environment.

Third, during the process of economic recovery after World War II in many developed countries around the world a steady decline of voters' interest in politics and participation in the activities of political parties occurred together with a growing interest in professional careers and personal lives. Sociologists called this process a social shift toward individualization (Bauman, 2001; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). This process could not help but be reflected in the information

needs of the audience. The interest in media content that is specialized, on the one hand, and generally entertaining, on the other hand, began to rise, and parallel processes were initiated: the formation of specialized media segments (B2B, business-to-business) and the enhancement of entertainment strategies in the activities of the universal mass media.

So, as a result of common economic and social processes that occurred in many countries, the modern mass media are an important component of the industry of free time and entertainment, and they have changed in their nature and functions in connection with the weakening of their social and political roles along with the amplification of the role of recreation in people's lives.

Shaping *homo mediatis*

The dependence of society on information increased in the 20th century and is shown in the transformation of the interests and behavior of the audience. For this reason audiences are still considered as certain communities of people for whom the media exist. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the researcher D. Smythe (1977) hypothesized that the main "commodity" of the media is the audience. He believed that the media industry appeared only after the media companies had designed and created the media audience, access to which was organized by the same media companies and then sold to advertisers. Smythe showed that under market conditions there are differences in a person's roles as "employee" and "buyer." During working hours, employees are engaged in the production of items for consumption, and during their off hours they themselves become the items of advertisers' consumption. As a result, the audience becomes a commodity produced by the media industry and consumed by advertisers.

In these conditions, a core technology for producing profit in the media industry consists of using media content as a mechanism for attracting an audience and then selling the audience to an advertiser by offering a certain content. The concept of the dual media market, which combines the market of goods (the media content) and the market of consumer services (advertisers' access to target audiences) (Picard, 1989), was based on exactly this idea. The audience was considered an economic resource of the industry before, but today it has become an increasingly common concept. At the same time, the media audience can be considered through the prism of the same concept in the political context as a phenomenon resulting from the implementation of the political aspirations of the ruling elites. In this case, it is not surprising that the techniques of tabloid journalism are borrowed by and transferred to the political media, which transform politics into an entertainment and the politicians themselves into the "stars" of the political show, into a certain sort of celebrity. Therefore, under market conditions, audience formation is a process that is equally necessary for political purposes (and, consequently, for political elites) and for the economy.

Not coincidentally, the concept of the dual media market was equally popular among media economists and political economists of the media. And, as a result, political economists of the media worked out the concept of commodification. *Commodification* is the transformation of the user value of communication products, audience, and labor into exchange value. This process, as noted by Mosco

(2009), has the same nature as the commercialization process, but it is characterized by “inclusiveness.” Commodification suggests that the relationship among the people themselves, as market subjects, takes the form of “goods” (commodities); these goods have a phantom objectivity and are a source of value as determined by the market and on the market (Picard, 1989).

Long ago researchers took into consideration the process of commodification in the production of content. As was already mentioned, Adorno in 1930–1940 determined the causes of this process’s emergence in the field he identified as a “cultural industry.” French sociologist A. Moles, in his book *The Sociodynamics of Culture* (1966/2008), tried to explain many cultural phenomena through the lens of market philosophy and the economic realities of the market. On the basis of Durkheim’s statement that social phenomena are things that can be measured and evaluated (that is, measured and evaluated phenomena), Moles built a bridge from the concept of “information” / “message” to economic theory. With a foundation in information theory, he proposed considering information in materialistic terms and introduced the concept of *goods* in reference to information.

Circulating in modern society as a commodity, information can be equated to other goods. In the media the cost of information as a commodity is measured by money, by time, and, increasingly, by the attention of the audience—in other words, by all the well-known rare economic resources. Moles does not emphasize the importance of nonstatic information (information that exists outside of social communication processes), but he does emphasize the importance of the dynamic information that is circulated and exists in communication systems. Obviously, information has a different value for journalists and for the audience, but, given current market conditions, the logic of commodity exchange applies to all nonmaterial phenomena. The result is “communication products,” or information products, the value of which is determined not only in production (in the case of the media: journalists, editorial staff, authors of advertising and public relations messages, all who create media messages in the broadest sense) but also in the processes of content distribution and consumption by the audience. Such consumption leads to the appearance of target audiences, to whom access is created for advertisers. The process of social communication (that is, communication that depends on the type of content and “latitude”—mass or non-mass) involves the distribution and consumption of content produced by media outlets; it creates the added value of content and very often affects the culture, identity, and value systems of society.

Moles believed that in today’s society an “economic man” (*homo economicus*) is transformed into a “social man” (*homo socialis*) because “in our time all kinds of human activity ... cannot be reduced to the exchange of goods, in any case, without spreading concepts of goods’ exchange to such intangible factors as the strength of ideas, the power of culture, the price of genius (1966/2008, p. 86).

In trying to join the material and the symbolic parts of the world, Moles (1966/2008, p. 87) found that the world of signs

is not identical to material media signs, although necessarily associated with certain relations. ...The emergence of the mass dissemination of information emphasized the importance of the signs’ material side. ... Within the dialectics of the abstract and the concrete, of the tangible and the intangible, modern

communication technology plays an important role because it connects ideas, forms, elements of culture with the world of things and gives it the properties of things.

On the basis of the approaches of Smythe, Mosco, and Moles and by analyzing the role played by the media in the political and cultural life of society, in the market processes of the economy, and in the structure of a person's free time as part of modern human society, we can conclude the following: neither the economic nor the social nor even the individual existence of a modern person can occur without participation in the processes of mass communication. This is the foundation for several important conclusions.

1. The individual worldview of each person is to a large extent created by the media or, more precisely, by media texts, which are produced mainly by editorial staffs and distributed through media outlets. A large role in the creation of media content continues to be played by journalists: they look for relevant and interesting facts of reality and create materials about those facts. The most important functions preserved in journalism, even in the active development of new media and during the increase of information activity by Internet activists, are still (1) the formation of the news agenda and its framing by journalists and (2) the media's influence on the perceptions and attitudes of audiences (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Zinchenko, 2009, p. 472). All the activities mentioned here have some variations depending on the content and on the media format, which, to a large extent depend on the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the audience. Today's media content is formed not only from journalistic materials but from the media products of mass (popular) culture, such as music, movies, TV series, entertainment shows, talk shows, syndicated essays on the theme of "human interest," articles about the life of celebrities, and updates of fashion, films, and books—all initiated by image makers and public relation agencies. These are the products of the modern "cultural industries" that are vital for the functioning of the consumer market. As a consequence, they form a significant block of media content greatly different from traditional journalism, but it attracts the attention of an audience interested in entertainment or in satisfying their consumption needs. Another important set of media content produced by nonjournalists is advertising, which becomes the main link between the media as an institution of democracy and mass industrial production as the main characteristic of an industrial society. Despite the growing criticism of advertisements in the media, the audience uses them to meet their consumption needs, to find information about goods and services, to form their own ideas about brands. Although the audience's trust in advertising in general is low, there is still sufficient evidence of its effectiveness.

The final editorial "product" (the media content) is an integrated "product" created by a whole team. The role of middle and senior managers—from ordinary editors and department editors to editors-in-chief—cannot be overstated: the influence of those who take, shape, and "pack" the content in the media process is often decisive.

2. Modern people "check" a considerable portion of their political decisions with the media. The vast majority of the techniques used by political candidates, such as agendas, framing, two-level communications, derive from paying particular

attention to the role of the media in forming opinions about candidates. An equally important role is played by the media in shaping the image of product brands, of countries, and of many other phenomena. Personal experience and time are usually not enough to form an opinion or an attitude toward an event/phenomenon. Therefore, the media begin to play a major role in the process because of being the closest, the most available, the most widespread, and the most credible sources.

3. A significant part of the cost of media content arises in the media process of both interpersonal and mass communication—in particular, by the part that is implemented by the old, analog, mass media and by the part that is implemented by the new, digital, interactive, individualized media. Thus, the content of the media itself becomes valuable in the process of “consumption” by its audience—and not just in the process of perception and understanding but during a whole lifetime. This process is connected with the features of the interaction of the media and advertising markets. A human presence in the media means, at the same time, (1) the satisfaction of people’s media demands—specifically, for the enhancement of media coverage of individual experience—(2) their involvement in the processes of consumption—specifically, in the production of the goods and services of modern society—and (3) the growth of people’s socialization by the media as a key function of the process.

It seems that, depending greatly on the media, a modern person is transformed into a “person of the media” or “media person” (*homo mediatis*), and this transformation has become the current trend of social development. This trend is not, of course, unambiguous. The media consumption of various people is very different; dividing lines do not always follow age, social, educational, and gender characteristics. Media habits need to be taken into consideration too. Nevertheless, the significant role of the media in people’s lives allows one to speak, although in different forms and, perhaps, with exaggeration, about the birth of a media person. A media person is a member of society whose existence is determined to a large extent (1) by the content of the media as a product that is made by a certain sector of the modern economy—in this case, by the media industry—and that is used in the processes of mass or social communication organized by media companies and (2) by his or her own communication processes and interests as well.

Based on the dynamics of the transformation of an “economic person” into a “social person,” as described by many researchers, it can be assumed that with the increase in the media coverage of economic and social processes as well as the growing influence of mass communication on society, there is a transformation of a social person into a media person: *homo economicus* > *homo socialis* > *homo mediatis*.

Conclusion

The processes of producing, distributing, and consuming media content—the central processes of mass communication—currently are becoming of particular importance for society and will eventually become important for the audience as well.

On the one hand, because of the increasingly complicated social and economic dynamics of society, the influence of media content on individuals, on a variety of communities, and on society as a whole is increasing. On the other hand, increased understanding of the media system’s role in society requires an analysis not only of

the “production chain” of its creation by journalists and editorial staffs but also of the features of social distribution and of collective and individual consumption by the audience.

Despite the fact that concrete manifestations are needed of increased media influence on the process of social and individual choice and on the formation of collective and personal values, beliefs, and convictions, one thing is clear. On the basis of the amount of free time spent on media consumption and the impact produced by it on the behavior of the audience in the political processes, on the mainstream issues of the agenda, and on people’s socialization, today’s mass media have been transformed into one of the central institutions of society.

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