MASS MEDIA, PROTECTOR OF DEMOCRACY IN THE PRESENT POLITICO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: In the present politico-economic environment in Romania, Mass Media plays a very important role, it won the position of the fourth power in state monitoring the other three. The media managed to gloriously enter the political life and, thus, a new character was formed – the journalist who became a real expert in the creation of the public opinion, who outlines ideas and transmits them at the same time to the members of the society, sharing a part of his experience with them. Practically, the appearance of the media modified the constitution rules of public space and public opinion, thus creating a completely new system of relations between the political class and the voters, system that is generated and mediatized through this institution. The present article has as purpose the analysis of political communication through the media, both outside the electoral campaigns and during the election periods. The study has as starting point the debates existing in the specialty literature, concerning mass media's role and influence in the political communication.

Keywords: mass media, democracy, freedom of opinion, politics, television, elections

Mass Media between political spectacle and advertising democracy

Mass media has the quality of public opinion creator, of civic power co-participant, influencing the solving of certain social-political problems, due to the fact that the news represent an exercise of power in the interpretation of reality, being the result of a battle necessary in order to entail an opinion. From a methodological point of view, John Stuart Mill distinguishes three forms by which he expresses the diversity of opinions and controversies related to the individual forms of freedom: the active field of consciousness; the freedom of thought and feeling; the absolute freedom of opinion concerning all fields, practical or speculative, scientific and theological. (Olimid, 2010:12). In this context, the freedom of speech helps, if not to the finding, at least to the search for truth, contributing to rational decisions and to a democratic governing, in the acceptance of the ideal operation of the democratic system, in which the politicians transmit the decision, the mass media takes it over, processes it and offers it to the public who – after debating it – formulates the opinion of acceptance or of refusal.

In the "acceptance of the ideal system operation", mass media is placed on an intermediary position, bearing – on the one side – the public pressure, who considers it a governmental institutionalized counter-balance, who sees in the freedom of speech only a control on its authority (insisting on abuse, corruption, negative actions), and – on the other hand – being under the pressure of the public, claiming the right to truth, to objectivity, in order to recognize in the mass media the authority able to guide them and entitled to receive credibility.

Being placed in the ungrateful intermediary position, submitted to a double pressure, mass media will adopt the method of "spectacular capitalism", masking both the political advantages (financial offers, partnerships), and the public advantages (supremacy through credibility), demonstrating a neutral position of socio-political space monitoring, of taking-over, elaboration and transmission of information, even if, sometimes, such information receives biased nuances (on the one hand or on the other). In this way, the mediated communication appears as a filter between the political and public spheres, between the power and the individual, thus mentioning its hegemony in the society, in the sense that the ideas of the ruling class are not imposed to the public, but these are controlled and elaborated through media's magnifying glass, which projects them in a proper vision to the public, based on the liberal theory and on the social responsibility.

The media hegemony diminishes, thus, the autonomy of the political sphere, the written media, the online media, the radio and the television dethrone the political ideology, proclaiming them as the unique holders of the truth that they reveal to the individual and appearing as public representatives, and the politicians - in order to maintain and improve their credibility in voters' consciousness – must react according to the mass media operating method, because the governing through publicity engages them in an acute competition to acquire a favorable image in public. This competition amplifies during the electoral campaigns, becoming, not infrequently, a real political show in which the mass media has the role of producer.

Mass Media's intrusion in the political sphere

The passage from the parliamentary political system supposes a proliferation of the political parties, but also of the mass media institutions, both engaged in grim battles, the first having a political nature (right-center-left), and the others for winning the influence on the market, being, nevertheless, in a certain symbiosis, in the sense that the Mass Media is under a state of dependence (financially, economically and of authority) towards the political parties in power and which – realizing the impact of the media on the public – seek to control the radio, television and written media institutions, in the idea that in this way they can influence and guide the public opinion to the benefit of their own interests. Moreover, a series of radio and TV stations, as well as written and online media institutions are set up and supported by the political class (either in the government, or in the opposition), having – in fact – a reduced audience, but relating and coordinating their actions according to the common interests.

Gradually, the public starts to reject the aggressive political speech and the obsolete propaganda of the political parties, attitude manifested especially during elections through absenteeism, but also through the renunciation to certain press publications, forced to initiate bankruptcy proceedings. Influencing this situation and expecting the potential power of the Mass Media, the political elites tried to monopolize the means of communication as an important military position to support their power (Gross, 2004: 71-72), thus mentioning the parallelism media-party, the political power understanding that it could not obtain advantages in the absence of the Mass Media. Moreover, the political class in power considers that the Mass Media institutions are forced to influence the public in favor of the government because it would represent the will of the majority of the population, and, by controlling the communication institutions that they sponsored, they held or influenced them to reshape the public opinion.

Because of the conflicts between the political parties, but especially as a result of the appearance of certain independent stations and publications, outlining a relation of adversity

between the Mass Media and the politicians, the media communication institutions which were strongly manipulated started to claim their independence, producing a gradual differentiation between the Mass Media and the politics, the influence of the political factor being present only through the relation with the owners of certain media trusts, but the political decline manifests more and more emphatically. The appearance of the objective and neutral media institutions becomes vital for the process of democratization, because the means of communication are no longer engaged in partisan political battles, maintaining only the role of supervising the political area and of informing the public, thus obtaining a central position in the society. In this way, the political reality was approached from different angles, and the information was offered from several perspectives in order for the public to be able to acquire an accurate opinion on the political situation.

Other than that, lately, we can notice even an intrusion of the Mass Media in the sphere of the politics. Thus, a reporter takes possession of a piece of news concerning the abuse of a dignitary, for example. Obviously, he can ignore or amplify the subject, according to the sympathy or antipathy towards the politician, in order to denigrate him, especially if the editorial office does not have enough data on the case. Reaching the editorial office, the piece of news is elaborated and transmitted to the public still based on the advantage or disadvantage of the respective political person or formation. Once it enters the consciousness of the public, the information is debated and transformed into opinion, despite the intervention of the political factor, and this happens because the political enthusiasm of the public diminished afore the media influence. Also, the political speech is sometimes distorted by the interest for the spectacular or sensational (cases of corruption, abuse of office, personal and ideological failures leading to the generalization of the skepticism proven by the public in regard to the political life), so the individuals manifest a real disinterest for politics, fact that leads to a gradual diminution of the role played by the political institutions.

Through the model of selective exposure, of social influence and diffusion, the written and audio-visual media manages to attract or to distract the attention of the public regarding political persons or situations, establishing also priorities. In “Mass Media and politics”, Doru Pop considers that the “Media delimits the political debates and establishes the themes that generate the political consciousness among the public” (Pop, 2000: 25). In addition, this takes place because the receiver of political messages does not have a decisional power and is submitted to an informational pressure; therefore, the Mass Media will decide on the method of phenomena interpretation, method able to create pressure on the political sphere through the public.

The authority of the Mass Media manifests also through the elaboration of the work agenda (presented in the previous subchapter), the media influencing the agenda of the politician and not vice versa, and creating also the agenda of the public that determines the political formations to follow the media schedule (especially concerning the schedule of the electoral campaigns). It can be noted that the “distrust in the political parties and the erosion of the political system authority lead, during the last decades, to the mass media assertion as a palliative – institution for political parties” (Pop, 2000: 26). Therefore, the politics as institution and the politics as social mediator lost the central function of communication between the persons holding the power and the citizens, the role being taken over by the media. The distrust in the political parties and in politicians was outlined because of shattered hopes, diminution of the

standard of living, failure to comply with certain conditions self-imposed by the governors, fact that caused the population to go from enthusiasm to despair, and the media institutions took over the public state of mind, stimulating the dissatisfactions of the majority (even if they were accused by the politicians that they presented only negative aspects).

It is easy to understand that the impact of the Mass Media in the political life is overwhelming and "manifests itself not only during the pre-electoral and electoral periods, but whenever things go wrong, and the citizen seeks a reason in order to find a guilty in the situation created" (Schwartz, 2001: 136). However, it is obvious that during the electoral campaigns, the supremacy of the Mass Media in the society is undeniable. The referendum is initiated to offer the citizens the possibility of participating to the government policy through vote, in the sense of supporting the favorite political candidates or formations. This is, in a way, a method of controlling the political environment by the voters who want to know the agendas of each party, to find the political leaders' capacities, to formulate ideas concerning the chances to win and, finally, to decide to whom to give their vote. It is clear that, in such conditions, people need the support of the Mass Media, which plays not only the role of intermediary between the politicians and the public, but also of mediator that can contribute to the formation of a favorable or unfavorable opinion for a certain candidate or political formation. Moreover, the Mass Media sets up for a guardian in order to stop a series of illegal actions (donations forbidden by law, expenses of companies in favor of certain candidates, money for publicity, price reductions for the appearances on the air etc) At the same time, the media institutions have the obligation of being equidistant, of offering the same airtime or space in the publications, of offering equal appearances at primetime hours, as well as advertising blocks for each party entering the competition. This is why the station, the newspaper will take into consideration several factors:"the time sold previously to a certain candidate, the interruption of the usual program, the possibility of receiving a solicitation from the candidates according to the legal provisions." (Middleton & Trager &Chamberlin, 2002: 219) In this approach, we will not submit to your attention the particular aspects of the electoral campaigns (presented hereinabove), but the general relation Mass- Media – politics, during the ballot. In addition, we take into consideration the independent Mass Media and not the party media, which is losing prestige and which aims at a certain political orientation, receiving no more credibility from the public. Nevertheless, a series of relations can be noticed between politicians and journalists during the pre-electoral periods, they create friendships between them, and they reward them with certain advantages in order to realize strategies for preparing the ballot in favor of the respective formation. Thus, a journalist zealous in his political sympathies cannot refrain from mentioning, during a broadcast, information against the political adversary in order to favor an advantageous position to the sympathizer. However, these privileged relations are calculated in precise proportions in order to produce effects but without causing adverse reactions from other formations or even from the editorial office, because the law can determine only the limits and not the professional level or the efficiency of the journalist approach. Rightly, Gheorghe Schwartz noted that "The degree of freedom is not the only indication of democracy, but also the fact that politicians maintain the relations with the media unaltered, and the fluctuations within these relations demonstrate only the fragility of a system preoccupied with the immediate success." (Schwartz, 2001)

Just to correlate the temporary success with the medium and long-term success, the Mass Media makes the public aware of that, in fact, the political parties are nothing more than systems

of representation of citizens' interests on power level or, as Miruna Runcan stated "a political party is, ultimately, nothing more or less than a human group understanding to represent society's interests through the fight of ideas towards the social project."(Runcan, 2002: 250) In this way, the democratic-type civic spirit seems to institute a sort of political nationalization. It is obvious that the political sphere covers the actions based on ideological projects, while the civic sphere controls and somewhat guides the political exercise. Therefore, the civil society manifests as individualities aware of their rights and obligations, capable for the political exercise with a proper representation system, who accept or refuse the political factor. Naturally, the Mass Media will function as a filter between power and society, through messages of the civil society addressed to the power, but also vice versa. In this conception, the public uses such rights to self-present itself on a decisional level, thus creating also a political democratization. In this way, the role of the Mass Media is reinforced or provokes the civic interest, annulling the distinction between public and political, stimulating the ideological debates and maintaining the authority of the civil society over the political sphere. But for that, the Mass Media should be really free to separate itself from the political power which it should permanently monitor.

The political stratum understood the role that the Mass Media had in society and in the democratic manner, regarding the "rules of good governance", gives a special attention to the media, considering that without its complete freedom there is no democracy. It is a direct recognition of the mass media's type of power, which places the politicians in front of a democratic way of approach of the journalists and the public, even if in certain situations, the means of communication cause troubles to the power. By monitoring the socio-political events, by interpreting their meaning, by individuals' socializing but also by manipulating the political processes and the public interest, the mass media imposes its social authority, creating effects on an individual level (formation and modification of the public opinions), but also of the system in its entirety.

From this point of view, the relation of the mass media with the public and with the political class represents an expression of democracy, Gheorghe Schwartz stating that "a constant attitude of the political class towards the media, irrespective of the moment of the electoral cycle, proves the appurtenance to a consolidated democratic system."(Schwartz, 2001)

It is well known the fact that the vote is influenced by a series of variables: social-economical statute, political and religious affiliation, age, family, electorate's residence (urban-rural), degree of interests etc., therefore the voter bearing a crossed pressure, the attitude being represented in a "zig-zagged form", the only authority capable of diminishing these influences being the mass media which, through activation (awakening the latent predispositions to vote in a certain direction), through consolidation (arguments to maintain or change the intention) or through conversion (for the individuals with diminished interest), develops the public's interest and orientation by the persuasive message with convincing effects, in a great measure.

Knowing this aspect, a sort of competition is created between the political parties during the electoral campaigns in order to obtain time or space in the free mass media broadcasts or columns (benefiting from a special credibility and with a high audience rate), having as purpose to win the electorate. Keeping the rule of equidistance, the mass media can exercise the technique of subtle persuasion (presented in the previous chapter), in order to outline the merits of the

favorite party or candidate or presenting the hilarious behavior of certain members or leaders of the other party during the parliament sessions under the form of show: napping, reading the press during debates or voting for the absentees representing „voters' interests by their absence". If, besides all these situations, a case of corruption of a dignitary affiliated to the respective formation occurs and is mediatized, the party is in free fall in the electorate's consciousness, without any negative propaganda, but using the strategy of destroying the whole by discrediting the component parties.

Another act of the political spectacle (in mass media's production) takes place in the studios of the radio and television stations within the direct confrontations between party candidates or leaders, when – in the middle of the disputes – the guests begin to use certain radicalisms in language or even defamations meant to attack the personality or the professional qualities of the political adversary, by attributing certain quotes, by insinuations, by denigrating the profession, religion, race, behavior or habits. In this situation, the media representative sanctions the calumniator, drawing his attention on the fact that he exposes himself to the public disdain and – in case of repetition of such trivial language – blocking his interventions in order not to affect the morality of the broadcast or to compromise the station's audience rate.

Finally, on the eve of the elections, the political spectacle moves into the street, in a form of rudimentary (neighborhood or alley) propaganda, accompanied by electoral gifts, manifestation sanctioned by the mass media through an anti-propaganda drawing the public's attention on the fact that any party in power distances itself from the citizens, and the false gestures of love are only circumstantial and are oriented towards a perfidious purpose which humiliates and defies the electorate, considered as marionettes.

It is significant the fact that, as the election date approaches, the interest for the media increases, and with it also the interest for the general knowledge of the political life, the need of orientation stimulating the desire to watch the media messages and – indirectly – the game on the political scene, based on the effect of agenda setting, which, in this case, supposes an accumulation between the degree of media exposure and public involvement in the political spectacle. Thus, the media agenda is created, agenda that determines not only the public but also the political agenda in the sense that the mass media induces a certain compulsoriness related to citizen's agenda to the political factor. Moreover, the politicians are obliged to follow the media agenda because - otherwise – a negative perception would be produced both on the person and on the political formation that he represents. Let us suppose that the leader of the political formation X, expected by the public on the date and hour announced by a radio or television channel to present a program or a position of his party, fails to comply with the agenda. His absence causes confusion among the sympathizers, and the media station will be able to interpret his non-participation by negative propaganda, influencing the public's political belief and changing the order of priorities, fact that will determine a diminution in the percentage of votes. At the same time, the public is forced to watch the media agenda in order to be informed on the events and on the political activities, in order to be able to take a stance concerning the voting decision.

Obviously, the agenda effect can have a persuasive character according to the preferences of the station or publication: the presentation in primetime, the formulation of supporting

questions, the size of the titles, the positioning on the first page etc., but all these actions demonstrate that the mass media induces the politician's and citizen's agenda of priorities.

Rightly, it is considered that the political news are not controlled from the outside, either by the legislative power, or by the executive power (except for the politically engaged media), Doru Pop stating that „In a liberal democracy, the governments are considered to be population's loyal servants, being potentially corruptible or aggressive towards citizens, their permanent monitoring through the mass media, an objective structure defending public interests, being required." (Pop, 2000: 28) This is why it can be stated that the political news – and, generally, the media information – are evaluated only by the public, their monitoring, procurement, selection and interpretation being only in mass media's attribution, involving a self-control (an administration council, made up of a director, editor-in-chief, publisher, head of departments, editors, reporters and producers), because „Any attempt of controlling and limiting the unwanted effects in the media space should take into consideration the protection of the fundamental rights of free information and free speech."(Runcan, 2002: 251-252). From this point of view, Gheroghe Schwartz uses a comparison that unifies the universe of electronics with the universe of informatics, seeing in the mass media " a giant robot that programs itself and that uses the power of embedded artificial intelligence",(Schwartz, 2001: 136) serving the democracy, the freedom of speech and the pluriformity.

The practice showed that the freedom of speech must be obeyed, the simple political promises not covered by facts have an increasingly weaker impact on the electorate, and the political spectacle starts to become cheap divertissement for the public. But this divertissement becomes dangerous when the relations between the politics and the mass media are obstructed by politicians' intent to control the media space, to acquire a leading role on the means of communication through the economic control (limiting the access on the market, financial stimulation of certain stations or publications), normative control (interdictions, intimidations, selective granting of the right to license) or structural control (exercise of pressures, censorship).

We consider that the discovery of the mass media's operating manner and of the impact produced on the society should make the politicians aware in order for the latter to be able to keep and improve their image, to react based on the principle that the mass media represents the absolute expression of community consciousness.

Mass Media the fourth power in state or the monitoring power

Can we speak of a real mass media power in the society? If so, then this power has particular forms of manifestation for our usual way of representing power. In addition, this is because the Mass Media does not have the power to make decisions, to formulate laws, the media institutions offering only analyses, evaluations, using nevertheless a particularly powerful weapon: the information, which awakens the public's critical spirit that, as we showed, represents the modern and whimsical despot of social life.

The qualification of the fourth power in state was attributed for the first time by the English historian and philosopher Edmund Burke who addressed the journalists in the British Parliament by stating "you are the fourth power", after the power of the Church, of the Aristocracy and of the Bourgeoisie. In a modern sense the Mass Media would represent the

fourth power by following the three other powers: legislative, executive and judiciary – although we also speak of the economic, technical-scientific or financial powers - all these powers having also counter-powers, except for the media, which is outlined as an exceptional power through the word leading towards the truth. A valuable literary critic (G. Călinescu) appreciated that "in the beginning was the word", the word having the sense of absolute idea, and in the attempt of paraphrasing we can consider that we permanently have the word, but this time, the word having the sense of social idea, of communication, fact that confers on the individual his main characteristic of social being. On the other hand, the word creates for the means of communication a sort of public magistracy, quality that intercepts Mass media's new position and new statute. To the extent in which media's opinion intersects the public opinion and "comes to reunite the majority of the illuminated minds around it, it can become a great power" (Dobrescu, 2003: 121), a power of the truth, whose legitimacy comes from the public. As power of the truth, the media force must supply information, outline certain phenomena, organize the social perception, delineating the picture of a media reality, created according to the image of true reality, an image that cannot be annulled by the other powers of the society and that no one can ignore. This is the reason for which we consider that the formula of "fourth power in state" should be rethought and the "dominant power" or "superpower" changed, because the mass media occupies a primordial position, intersecting all the fields of the society and thus emerging as a counter-power, as the true owner of the public space. The affirmation according to which the mass media intersects the other powers in the state should not be understood in the sense of substitution, for it is neither a legislative house, nor government, nor court, nor police, but it has the right to information and to free speech in situations specific in these fields, keeping the responsibility for the truth. By truth, the mass media organizes and delivers the information, thus orienting the public perception, which does not form its opinions through the dignitaries, politicians or government, but based on the persuasive messages transmitted through the means of communication, so that two forces dominate the public space: the media – having a decisive role and the public opinion.

This is precisely why the political power is afraid of the media, because it shapes the public opinion, being sometimes perceived even as a real parliamentary opposition. For example, during the last governing years, certain mass media institutions represented the real opposition against the legislative and executive power, fighting against the governmental measures, detecting imperfections, without preoccupying with solution offers, but orienting the public consciousness to be in disagreement with the measures of the power (salary reductions, taxes and duties increase, VAT increase, etc.). One thing is certain, the media "plays a more and more important role on a cultural level and, generally, becomes a functional substitute for certain specialized institutions."(Dobrescu, 2012). Therefore, mass media's power is related not only to the organization of information, but also to their delivery on time, orienting and shaping the public opinion. We can say that the mass media institutions established a monopoly on the information, putting the people in connection with the surrounding events and instituting a sort of dependence of the individuals on the media.

Thus, recently, the written and audio-visual media transmitted information according to which the mayor of a locality was accused of corruption and abuse of office. Based on the method of repetition, the piece of news was commented, debates were created on the television channels, the public orientation was achieved and pressures were exercised on the other powers

(political and legal), so the mayor was investigated and excluded from the political formation in order for the image of the control authorities and party be not damaged. The fact described represents only a test of the efficiency reached by the media that, without making any decisions, compelled the other powers to make decisions, thus proving its strength and stability.

Besides, the powers of the state "are part of a grid where each one occupies a certain place, and the normal relations are obstructed if one of them assumes fields of activity that do not belong to it"(Schwartz, 2001: 136-137). This is not the case of the media that does not have a certain grid, but is able to intersect the other grids, to notice imperfections and to bring them to the attention. For example, the assumption of a large number of emergency ordinances, by assuming responsibility represents a violation of the legislative field by the executive; the failure to solve certain criminal cases because of the political intervention in the judicial sphere or certain abuse from the judiciary are imperfections of the system, noticed by the Mass media which has the duty to oppose the temporary authorities and to exercise a publicly expressed control. Nevertheless, we have to mention the fact that Mass Media's fight with other powers does not represent an attempt to eliminate them, but only the attempt to force them to comply with the objectives engaged by constitution. We should not omit the decisive importance that the information and correctness have absolute priority in the media messages. To maintain supremacy, the information must be neither false, nor truncated, nor distorted, to achieve a sound public opinion.

To understand the dimensions of the means of communication force it is necessary to become aware of the fact that the authority of a power consists in the capacity of joining two factors: the coercive and the symbolic powers. The second factor "has the role of transmitting a code of conduct, legitimating actions, cultivating beliefs, consolidating convictions"(Dobrescu, 2012: 287) Therefore, the symbolic power has a decisive role in the legitimation of the proper authority. But the media works, by excellence, with symbols, using words, and in a symbolic plan they concentrate on information, interpretation, idea and opinion. A concordance between the production of the symbolic forms and their reception has to exist, nevertheless, because the public can receive the same message in different moments, under different shapes, this depending on the attitude manifested at message reception. Due to the theory of extended availability, the winning of message acceptance depends on the manner of symbolic goods broadcast and thus the Mass Media owns the methods for drawing public's attention. Paul Dobrescu and Alina Bârgăoanu consider that "the ruling cannot be exercised in a modern way unless it associates its symbolic power" (Dobrescu, 2012: 289). But, we stated that the Mass Media works with symbols. Thus, the main sphere of power of the means of communication is identified, a special but effective power, which creates a subtle and omnipresent domination.

Peter Gross noted that the " power of Mass Media comes from the trust with which it is invested in the public, by the ability with which they touch the public and from their independence and social respect for the freedom of speech" (Gross, 2004: 71) It is a dominant power which does not substitute to the other powers or, as Doru Pop stated (Mass Media and Politics), "a de facto power", quasi-official, namely the true superpower of the contemporary society.

Conclusions

In the everyday existence, each individual confronts with events that are hidden from his view, not being able to be the witness of the multitude of facts of life and having no possibility to formulate an opinion about what he is not aware of, fact due to which he feels an acute need to be permanently informed, to have a source able to transmit and to interpret the situations surrounding him. The specialty literature says that the one who possesses and interprets the information is in control of the situation, but for this, the existence of a source able to discover the event and to transmit it to the public is necessary. It is known that the information represents the raw material in Mass Media, which thus becomes an organized shaper of opinions even if between the realities that we perceive and the proper reality there is a certain discrepancy, the media generating a pseudo-reality, based on which each individual reacts. From this point of view, the means of communication appear as a social magnifying glass that should detect the political, economic, legal and other imperfections, but also as a projector contributing to opinions outlining. Being known the fact that people are set in motion also by people, the experts consider that Mass Media, as a guardian observing and announcing all the social-political phenomena which occur, helping the public to get informed, to weight the alternatives, to distinguish the true from the false and to be able to act. Through the major functions of monitoring, interpretation and socialization of the individuals, the Mass Media was considered, metaphorically speaking, as the "democracy watch dog" that perceives everything that happens in the society and alerts its owner, namely the public, in order to be able to act.

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