

ASPECTS OF MEDIA PERCEPTION

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Abstract: After a critical review of the existing theoretical interpretations of the role of the elements in the communicative chain, already explicit in the writings of Lasswell, Schramm and Merton, in the article is argued the introduction of the topos in the whole process of perception and interpretation of the media message. The specifics of the topos can enrich the perception of the media reality and can determine its further internalization in the minds and behavior of the individuals and the audience in general.

There is a great difference when you are listening and understanding one and the same message if you are looking home TV monitor, or in a noisy pub among fans of the opposing team, or in an Arabic cafe, furiously chanting while bombing the Twin Towers in New York, or in the car with strangers hitchhikers, or lonely staying before he home computer. The study of the typology of these potential reactions will enable us to recognize more precisely and calculate the effectiveness of the media impact and reinforce its parameters.

Keywords: topos, media, communication, reception, visual impact, social media, social nets.

Among the “usual suspects” as factors for effective media communication since the time of Harold Lasswell, Wilbur Schramm and Robert Merton are several main factors – the Communicator, the message/message, the channel and the receiver, seen as a separate character or a compact audience. The classic formula, proposed by Lasswell, traces the elements of the communication chain: WHO SAYS, WHAT SAYS, THROUGH WHICH CHANNEL, TO WHOM HE SAYS IT AND WITH WHAT EFFECT¹.

For more than 70 years, media studies and related scientific fields have a look into each of these elements and look for their structural characteristics, parameters of impact and specifics of the exercised social roles. The production

¹ LASSWELL, Harold /1996/ [1948]. The structure and function of mass communication in society. pp.93-94. In: Boyd-Barrett, Oliver and Chris Newbold /eds/. Approaches to Media. London. Arnold, 1948

process of media has been studied from two main approaches, each critical towards the other. And each of them has its own characteristics and nuances.

The first traditional approach examines media production. These studies are positioned in organizational sociology and analyze the internal processes in the structure and behavior of media organizations. Jeremy Tunstall's research on the formation of media groupings in his popular book "Media Moguls" is characteristic here². Similar is the direction that examines media professions, activities, career development, culture and norms of media workers³. The third field that became popular in the late 20th century examines the influence of news providers on media content. – Schlesinger and Tumber⁴.

The fourth strand, based on radical political economy, focuses on media ownership and control, the relationship between media and power⁵, and also on cross-cutting topics such as the functioning of markets in changing conditions of total globalization.

The fifth direction pays attention to the role of public policy and the social management of the media and their synchronization and/or conflicts, often comparing them according to their degree of adequacy in responding to various social challenges⁶. As a similar direction are the attempts to analyze the behavior of the media according to the normative communication theory⁷ or to study the media from the point of view of the history of their origin and development as a business-political formation, an approach inherent in historical political economy with the most characteristic representatives Curran and Seaton⁸. These approaches, to varying degrees, look at the media primarily as organizations and draw their information from interviews with journalists, analysis of information sources, personal observations of participants in media organizations, through analysis of archives and reports on commercial activity, turnover, advertising ratings, etc.

The second general direction of research considers the media as carriers of cultural products. They analyze the media content as a kind of index of shared

² Виж в: Jeremy TUNSTALL and Michael PALMER. Media Moguls. London and New York. Routledge. 1991, reprinted 1993. pp.206-222.

³ WEAVER, D. and WILHOIT, G. The American Journalist. 1991, 2nd edn. Bloomington. Indiana University Press.

⁴ SCHLESINGER, P. "Rethinking the Sociology of Journalism: Source Strategies and the Limits of Media-Centrism" in: M. Ferguson / ed./ Public Communication. London. Sage. 1990. and also in: Schlesinger, P. and Timber, H. Reporting Crime. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1994.

⁵ CURRAN, J. and SEATON, J./ 1997/ Power without Responsibility. 5th ed. London: Routledge. Concentration and Ownership in the Era of Privatization, in M. Ferguson /ed./, Public Communication, London, Sage. 1990.

⁶ HUMPHREYS, P., /1996/ Mass Media and Media Policy in Western Europe. Manchester. Manchester University Press

⁷ McQUAIL, D. /1992/ Performance. London, Sage.

⁸ CURRAN, J., and SEATON, J., Op. cit.p.27,36 and others

values in the “cultural indicator”⁹, as an application of dominant ideologies in the algorithm of the traditional Marxist perspective¹⁰, as projections of the power structures in the radical critical structuralist tradition¹¹ etc. With no less critical charge is the interpretation in the style of the Italian Marxist theorist of culture Antonio Gramsci that the media should be seen as competing “spaces”, whether sheltering contents, reflecting the struggle for supremacy in society¹².

According to supporters of liberal pluralism, the media is a cultural forum that reproduces the collective debates of society¹³. Researchers following the functionalist tradition of Emile Durkheim believe that the media should be seen as a reflection of competition in norms and what has been achieved agreement¹⁴. More radical is the anthropological direction, which considers the media as expressing the totality of mythical forms, archetypes and the symbolic system of society¹⁵. According to the postmodernist tradition, the task of media content is to connect the many dynamic, variable and fragmented audience identities¹⁶. The psychoanalytic point of view, for its part, categorically assumes that the media express the transgressive desires, collective phantasms and feelings of their audiences¹⁷. On the other hand, there are the followers of the phenomenological structuralist and semiotic schools, who, based on the possibility of examining the message as a text and meanings, apply tried and tested approaches to the media and their production and go deeply into the specifics and content of individual media products and thus remain captive to the private manifestations of one of the elements of the communication chain.

But one media message can lead to radically different interpretations, evaluations and behavioral responses. WHY? We need to analyze the specifics of media reception, its dependencies from the place in which the message is received and interpreted, so that it becomes a building block of the recipient’s future social action. Today, in the age of the Internet and digital communications, media messages

⁹ NOWAK, K. /1984/ “Cultural Indicators in Swedish Advertizing 1950-1975”, in G.Melischek, K.Rosengren and J. Stappers /eds/, *Cultural Indicators: An International Symposium*, Vienna, Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften

¹⁰ PARENTI, M. /1993/ *Inventing Reality*. 2nd edn. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

¹¹ HALLIN, D. /1994/ *We Keep America on Top of the World*, London: Routledge.

¹² HALL, S./1982/ “The Rediscovery of “Ideology”; Return of the Repressed in Media Studies”, in M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran and J. Wollacott /eds/, *Culture, Society and the Media*, London, Methuen.

¹³ NEWCOMB, H. and HIRSCH, P. /1984/ “Television as a Cultural Forum: Implications for Research, in W. Rowland and B. Watkins /eds/, *Interpreting Television*, London, Sage

¹⁴ ALEXANDER, J. and JACOBS, R. /1998/ “Mass Communication, Ritual and Civil Society” in T. Liebes and J. Curran /eds/, *Media, Ritual and Identity*, London: Routledge

¹⁵ BIRD, S. and DARDENNE, R. /1988/ “Myth, Chronicle and Story: exploring the Narrative Quality of News”, in J. Carey /ed/ *Media, Myths and Narratives*, Newbury Park, CA, Sage.

¹⁶ McROBBIE, A./1994/ *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge

¹⁷ MODLESKI, T. /1984/ *Loving with Vengeance*. New York: Methuen.

seem readily available across space and time. At the same time, each user in the network communicates with the other person and the whole world, positioned in his village, country, region, nationality and religion, which are the usual “filters” of his digital view. Modern digital communication brought and developed the new meanings of the topos in the communication of the recipient, the new role of the place of reception – the home, in the car, the neighborhood, the village, the country, and the region. The notion that we are all similar citizens of the vast web world is only partially true. Our inclusion in the modern world of digital communications is now inevitably colored by our loneliness in front of the computer screen, by the comfort of the place in which we have positioned our lives. It is not just colored – we perceive media messages “through” the peaks and troughs of our national psyche, “through” the metamorphoses of the place in which we live and work, “through” the peculiarities of the region.

This view is certainly loaded with a different social self-esteem, which today is defined not only by age, education, and social position but also by where we place our connection (and dependence) to the global social world. The truth is that the web did not just blow up our notions of time and distance, but actually created a radically different time-space, a completely different chronotope – in Mikhail Bakhtin’s terminology. The famous aphorism in marketing, according to which the three most important conditions for the success of a commercial establishment are: “The place, the place and the place” today seems more and more applicable to the media reception as well. The place turns out to be important and significant, the topos becomes a main indicator of the specificity and quality of our media reception, of our attitude to media facts, of our media preferences.

The Internet has created opportunities for complete anonymity of communication, it has multiplied the creative beginning, the ability of everyone to be a user and creator of media content, with the ability to hide behind an avatar that he likes, but also that he considers unattainable in his life outside the network. In fact, the media topos often seems hidden in our bag – through the smartphone or tablet, but practically our media reception is dependent on the street of our home (cafe or restaurant), from the place where we are, from the size and importance of the settlements in which we live. Our media reactions and communicative energy are one when we are citizens of a megalopolis and completely different if we are residents of a small village in the mountain. The consumers’ reactions to the same media content are different if they are in an English pub, in an Arab cafe in Syria or in the famous cafes of Paris. The place changes the media perception of the messages. In the tradition of Hippolyte Ten, the geographical environment of the place is charged with its living energy, which complements the energy of the recipient in the process of media reception. The Internet has revived and created a new chance and opportunities in front of the topos, because it is that specific indicator that differentiates media reception not simply through the individual user,

but primarily through the user and his topos. Thus, if the computer and the network technologically “equalize” the possibilities for media communication, then the individual user and his topos distinguish each media reception of the person in the jungle of the digital universe. It is the specificity of the topos in a certain sense that predetermines the first most important reactions of the audience to the media message, which, once demonstrated, can become decisive for the further social behavior of the individual and of a certain segment of the audience.

Future analyzes of the topos of reception, based on sociological studies of where and how we perceive media messages, will certainly enable us to refine the parameters of the recipient’s media behavior, and hence to measure more precisely the effect of communicative impact. The conceptual and empirical indicators for future sociological studies of the topos in its role as a fundamentally new indicator in the communication chain, which has a specific impact on the media reception of modern man, are to be developed. In this way, the topos in which we live and communicate (as the endpoint of the communicative chain) will enter modern media theory in a new way. Thus, the field of application of our knowledge about the possibilities of the media by considering the specificity of the topos to influence and change social life will be expanded.

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