ORIGINAL PAPER

The Influence of Media in Constructing and Deconstructing Political Imagery

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Abstract
Mass-media and the internet have long surpassed their meagre prerogative as being just a simple purveyor of information, transitioning towards its new objectives of establishing trust, influence and even intimidation or control in its relation with its citizens, with the receivers of what is now strategic and weaponised information. The media is no longer a vector of objectivity, nor does it formulate that assertion any longer. Media conglomerates have become quite outspoken in embracing or rejecting one ideology or the other, one candidate or the other. Therefore, objectivity has been abandoned to the detriment of subjective purpose. Major media players will choose to either carefully construct the positive image of a candidate or a party while at the same time, often viciously and unjustifiably, attacking the opposite candidate or the rival political movement. Simply supporting one candidate is no longer the norm and the so-called dirty adds and biased reporting of our contemporary political era expose an intricate mechanism that, however, has a simple purpose, namely, to lower certain percentages and elevate others in terms of public perception and favourability.

Keywords: *media, internet, imagery, message.*

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The generative infrastructure responsible for the construction of the public political image resides in the paradigm of interaction between the transmitter of the political message and the collective receiving mass. These two independent communicative instances would be deeply detached and dislocated in the absence of a coagulation factor able to facilitate and secure the informational transfer. The phatic guarantor of the functionality of the entire communication paradigm is conferred by the multiplicity of dissemination methodologies resulting from scientific advances or correlation perspectives through which individuals have decided to interact or receive ensembles and subsets of strategically correlated messages. Whether we are talking about the mass media or the Internet, political culture has undergone profound metamorphoses and implicitly recalibrations of political campaign strategies.

The primary duty of the media communication infrastructure would be, at the level of deontology, an informational dissemination to citizens to facilitate their control or at least the premises of an ideological authorization by virtue of being aware of ideological challenges or platforms before formulating an electoral opinion.

A definition of the associative contextuality between the concept of media and the relevance of the spectrum of political communication states, from the perspective of Jacques Gerstlé, the following analysis of the mediatization of the political image from a communication point of view: "In the general theory of communication, the term designates any means of communication, natural or technical, that allows the transmission of a message. In current language, the term is more restrictive, referring to a situation characterized by the dominance of mass media and which allow the spread of information among a larger, heterogeneous and anonymous audience. Even if we speak of the media without any further clarification, the discourse refers to the mass media and not to other recognized channels of political communication, such as organizations or interpersonal relationships." (Gerstlé, 2002: 46)

The mass media often surpasses its condition as a simple courier of information, facilitating a heritage of trust and relevance even between governing structures and citizens, starting from the premises that only by maintaining a stable connection between political actors will it be possible to achieve, improve and strengthen the responsibility and assumption of the act of governance. If we go into the depth of the specificity of the dissemination vectors, we will conclude that an important part of the news programs that assemble the discussion agenda is based on the transmission and proliferation of a multiplicity of ideological contexts and economic strategies, with the aim of providing the final choice or at least the illusion the notion of option.

The new methodology of disseminating political information was assembled by activating an automatic pragmatism of adapting political image strategies to the new technological realities that have radically changed the paradigm of mass communication, speed, quantity and exponential growth in the number of receivers. This synchronicity between the communication of the desired and the ideological imagery based on the new methods of dissemination was explored and understood by Jacques Gerstlé who stated the following: "In general, developments in broadcasting, telecommunications, computing, and audio and video technologies, as well as the possibilities offered by their mixing, have applications or implications within political practices. The increased role of the information media in society is therefore presented as a consequence of the technological revolutions that appeared, above all, in the electronic information media and which tend to reveal the fact that the traditional forms of political communication are obsolete." (Gerstlé, 2002: 47)

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In a modern and consolidated democracy, the phatic dissemination facilitator has the role of providing a platform that will facilitate the access to communication of a multiplicity of ideational, political, as well as citizen instances, consolidating the emergence of civil society and civic analytical identity. The watchdog of democracy has essentially acquired an institutional functionality, being from all perspectives and points of view the fourth power in the state, a regulatory and normalizing entity designed to guarantee communication and the consolidation of normality, and where appropriate, has the role to oppose, regardless of inherent forms of partisanship or ideological affiliations, substantial abuses that can be a danger to the healthy functioning of democracy, of the complementary relationship between those who have reached power and those who facilitated that transfer of power following the vote electoral freely expressed.

The channels of mass transmission of information come to overcome their humble condition of informational aqueduct, becoming, without any reservations or hesitation, themselves democratic institutions, similar in importance to the mechanisms of justice, the executive or the legislature. If the three traditional powers have the role of mutual supervision and regulation, the unofficial fourth power acquires an almost meta-institutional role, with the assumed objective of checking and keeping the entire democratic system in check.

The new dimension of mass media and the Internet stands under the sign of a destruction of deontology and objectivity, affirming increasingly consolidated forms of partisanship. This partisanship, however, is a moderate one that would not tolerate, in a healthy democracy, abuses or serious transgressions of morality or the legislative framework.

A number of researchers deplore this propensity towards the de facto adoption of subjectivity and partisanship in political communication and in the sphere of opinion-formers' concerns. This clear affirmation of specific preferences, of affiliations towards one candidate or another, towards an ideological spectrum considered more performing and correlated to society's needs, simply represents an honest assumption of the condition of normality in the universe of information distributors. This pseudo-lability does not in any way mean an elimination of deontology in journalism, but rather an adaptation based on the correlation of this deontology with the spectrum of socio - political realities of our society. There was always partisanship or there were certain interests in the way the press did its duty, but those interventionist impulses were hypocritically concealed precisely in the context of an underdevelopment of the media meta-structure. Today's public actually benefits from a superior media education generated by the very often capricious diversity and multiplicity of instances of communication in the public space.

The approach of any contemporary journalist to assert with maximum hypocrisy a sacrosanct independence of the analytical self in relation to the economic and political complexity of social reality would be derided even by the most uneducated or unspecialized recipient of media messages. The current dimension of the dissemination of image structures and political ideology means a proliferation of the complexity of the social space through the subjective and pragmatic intermediation of the anticipation of the audience's desired reception. Simplifying this paradigm, we can say that the media has come to give people what they need to see or hear in relation to their sentimental or ideological affinities. It is precisely this potential vulnerability of the integrity of the objective identity of journalism that represents its greatest source of legitimization and

substantiation. Media conglomerates, blogs or websites obviously belong to individuals or groups of individuals who, naturally, could try to consolidate or assert a singular unitary point of view, which could contravene the interests and purpose democracy.

Sociological and pragmatic realities, however, dictate an impossibility of consolidating this danger through the prism of an inherent unprofitability of such an approach. If, in a free and democratic society, there is a group or coalition of individuals who adhere to a certain set of values or principles, capitalist financial pragmatism will ensure that there is also a media voice for those people. As long as people think differently, there will also be a capitalization of the diversity of dissemination structures, which in itself is synonymous with a legitimization of democracy through the voice of the people. If a politician feeds on the strength and authority established by the freely expressed vote of the citizen, the media trusts will be the product of the same healthy representativeness of the functions that activate the merits of putting the citizen to the service, in this instance through the related financing of all media channels as an economic consequence materialized by circulation, audience or number of hits.

There is a strong predilection for the adaptations of the mechanisms of social evolution through the lens of the evolution of the communication society. Explosive mutations in the area of media dissemination paradigms have substantially reconfigured and enhanced the integrity and diversity of the act of political communication. Media transformation actually means the decisive transformation of social systems, a revolution in communication methodologies, both at the individual and social level. Jacques Gerstlé agrees with this framework of argumentative relevance, noting that: "To describe the social changes related to this modernization, sociologists use various expressions: media revolution, information revolution, technotronic revolution , communication society, information society, digital society, telematic society... whatever their merits, these expressions cover common themes which structures the half-prospective, half-normative discourse on the information and communication society. These themes are organized around three axes: the quantity of messages in circulation, the quality of the content and the restructuring of social relations. […]. The instantaneous transmission of information at a distance illuminates space and time, which is reflected in political conduct. Not only can information travel at very high speed from one end of the planet to the other, thus overcoming territorial constraints, but social memory can expand thanks to very large capacities for preserving information, such as databases." (Gerstlé, 2002: 47-48)

The evolution of the democratic superstructure was realized in an interdependent relationship with the development of the dissemination infrastructure in the context of designating an institutionalized dimension of the mass media's role in society as a defender of the immutable principles of democracy. The mechanisms for assuming media responsibility involve a series of restrictive measures aimed at the sustainability of the foundation of media independence vis-à-vis leading institutions based on the premises of the independent provision of financial resources necessary for operation and profitability of free access to information. The ideal structures of the operating objectives provide for the allocation of normative priorities on all levels of the information dissemination structures. The analysis of media realities, however, indicates certain functional inconsistencies that could peripherally compromise the desired fulfilment of the ideal objectives of the media apparatus. A first functional dissociation of media ideals resides in the protocol for choosing the relevance and authority of journalistic sources. There is often an artificial narrowing of information circles to perform an affiliation with a hypothetical legitimacy provided by high-level politicians

or highly popular opinion leaders. This can lead to a dangerous disregard of the broad framework of diversity provided by legitimate representatives of civil society whose only discursive authority is their sincere connection to the collective psyche of the social groups they represent. The complicated connection between journalists and their operating sources or resources has often led to a to a lack of trust in media channels through the lens of a whimsical exaggeration of subjective connections or inherent forms of partisanship. The symbiotic dimension of the link between the vectors of political dissemination and the channels that facilitate this often puts under the spectre of doubt the level of commitment of journalists or journalistic institutions to the receiving groups who are, after all, the final beneficiaries of the entire communication effort.

The contemporary relevance of the media context is determined by an extended synchronicity towards the previous problems that society faced from the perspective of the development of a consolidated and independent infrastructure of the media universe and implicitly of the information dissemination methodologies: "theories about media and culture are best developed through the study of concrete phenomena and contextualized through the vicissitudes of society and contemporary history . So, to query the media culture that belongs to the present requires a critical approach involves studying how the cultural industry produces certain artifacts specific that in turn give rise to the social discourses found in conflicts and in the difficulties of everyday life." (Kellner, 1996:3-4)

The opportunity to institutionalize the entire media apparatus as a guarantor of consolidated, democratic structures can be endangered even by certain indirect mechanisms of censorship or self-censorship. This turn of events comes as a confirmation of human nature which, organically or instinctively, automatically rejects certain points of view or divergent critical perspectives. Even the most enlightened democratic leader will seek to use his political power or economic influence to strike at those who disseminate information or opinions contrary to his own political activity. Some level of backlash is a normal part of the political or democratic game, but the moment a hypothetical disproportionate imbalance of forces of any kind is reached, the powerful will seek and effectively be able to exert pressure on the weak that can even flirt with the morbid spheres of censorship or communicational-ideological abolition.

The most important method of disseminating the political message and image is definately television. Beyond a shadow of a doubt: "television became the main source of information at the expense of media and even radio. Moreover, it is the television that dictates priorities in public space, imposing strategies on political actors. Television is regarded as the most agreeable way of information, the easiest to understand, the place where political figures can best assert themselves" (Lăpădat and Lăpădat, 2019:69). Despite the spectacular development of the online environment, the Internet cannot yet compete with the wide range of individuals and variability, especially from the age perspective offered by the versatility of television as a means of communication. Television has the great advantage of being new enough not to be outdated or worn out as a vector of synchronicity, but not old enough to be superseded by a powerful global medium.

The emergence of television led to a paradigm shift in the dissemination and composition of the structural components of political communication. If before the consolidation of this effective means of mass communication, the battle of electoral discourses was fought based on ideological foundations presented in a limited, truncated way, through transmission channels that only partially activated the senses (newspapers,

magazines, radio, electoral flyers, etc.), with the advent of television, it moved to a totally changed strategic communication framework. In the early period of political communication, the message was strictly focused on political arguments, platforms of ideas or, in the most fortunate case, electoral slogans with some subjective appeal to the public. Television did not simply change the amount of information provided to the public or the speed of its proliferation, but meant a transition, a metamorphosis of the struggle to communicate ideas into a subjective contest of popularity and eloquence. The synaesthetic quality of television, its ability to activate a whole set of senses simultaneously, meant that the political image would become more important than political ideas, that form trumped substance in terms of the impact of ideological empowerment. Viorica Roșca believes that: "Television redefined political action seen today as a theatrical performance. Subject to a commercial logic, specific to the show, political activity has become synonymous with the management of visibility and the star-system. Representative politics, as the foundation of political action, is no longer a resource for the legitimization and action of political man. Today, the importance of apolitical elements (style, charisma, rhetoric, clothing, notoriety, etc.) in the perception of the politician increases and these become forms of political action. Television has changed the condition of the politician who can no longer legitimize himself with political programs and projects. Politics has become personalized action. The value of public policies has been replaced by the value of political leaders, value resulting from image and notoriety." (Roșca, 2007:44)

There are a number of elements that can influence the structure of information disseminated through media networks. A first element that would be able to produce a residual impact at the level of information transmission would be generated by the deontological standard of journalists and the way in which they relate to the public reception system. The existence of a prototype of journalistic professional ethics does not, however, constitute the prerogatives of a democratic press. Of course, there is a desirability of ascendancy in this regard, however, the propensity to use and manipulate the message for profit will lead to a pragmatic shift in the exploratory reporting agenda.

A direct method of putting political communication into perspective constituted by the creation of a framework of analysis and debate through which the mass media end up transforming from a factor of disseminating communication into a shaper of opinion. Objective reports end up turning into descriptive, subjective judgments that end up being interpreted and reinterpreted in accordance with the pragmatic interests of the trust or the opinion maker, still remaining within certain limits of responsibility and professional integrity. The entire staging reflects a theatricality of the act of political communication, a commercial-artistic adaptation intended to function as a captatio benevolentiae in a modern society where the time for analysis and attention is getting shorter, emphasizing images or short subjective perspectives anchored in impressions that have the potential to resonate with the ideological fragmentations that still motivate the sphere of public discourse.

The relevance of the applicability of information dissemination through mass media focuses on relational frameworks at the level of social psychology. The way potential receivers communicate and relate to each other expresses a contextual processualism associated with the availability of receptive cooperation regarding the media message. The development and consolidation of relational structures can even generate pseudo-ideologies or coalitions within society, being thus formulated the premises of a predictability of the availability of understanding and assuming the

message through the prism of relational interdependencies adapted to the infrastructure of communication and reception of the political message with the help of the mass-media. Constantin Sălăvăstru states that: "The availability of individuals to relate to others, while imperative, remains different from individual to individual. Interesting studies in the field of group psychology, but also everyday experience show us quite clearly that there are individuals who feel more at ease in terms of fulfilling the goals of an activity when they relate (cooperate) with others, they even seek this relationship because in the company peers seem to give the maximum yield in the activity. However, they show us with the same force that there are also individuals who, without refusing communication and cooperation, have greater productivity when they work individually on a problem, on a course of action, on a future projection." (Sălăvăstru, 2009:73)

The construction of the political image in relation to the relevance of the association of media coercion was generated based on the foundation of a dual, complementary control system. The first element of the generative dualism was constituted by the discursive component of the transmitter. Any political communicator who built a message had as his primary objective the generation of a grid of persuasion, manipulation and control, with the aim of empowering the electoral mass. The second element of relevance in the composition and formulation of a coherent political image explores as the main factor of emergence the ideological desideratum provided by the collective mind of the receivers. The broadcaster was thus forced to generate a communication act deeply contextualized and adapted to the requirements of the electoral market. Self-image became nothing more than an echo of public desires, an adaptive response, a reflection in the public mirror of the intrinsic link between the communicator and the people for whom he communicates.

The complexity of the means of disseminating information, the generation of multiple instances and areas of transmission and understanding has led to an artificial, even anomic reality, through the prism of formulating the political discourse based on public desires that are outside any ideological or strategic spheres. The communicator ends up refusing responsibility towards himself, as well as the adaptive consideration at the level of the ideology of reception in order to listen to temporary trends of perception, to media voices that are transient, but with a strong impact on the present. These trends in communication are not under anyone's control and are the product of an unintentional and haphazard collaboration between the public and the disseminating media structures. The natural consequence of this image trajectory was also a contamination in the area of political marketing, as a counterweight to the artificiality beyond the control of the candidates. The promotion of the political image through marketing techniques means a new strategic dimension of taking control in the context of a chaotic political complexity through its quantitative-representational dimension. The use of this methodology in advertising constitutes a pragmatic move in a context of communication where the image has come to exceed the relevance of the proposed social message or strategy. From the point of view of researcher Viorica Roșca: "The evolution of the media has stimulated the emergence of the event agenda, which distances political actors from the ideal of representative politics. Programmatic policy has been replaced by momentary actions that must satisfy a horizon of expectation at the level of public opinion. Reporting the politician to the median state of mind measured at a given moment cancelled the autonomy of the politician because he has to conform to the media voices, favourable and unfavourable to a trend of the moment, in order to posit his image. Since the image is built over time, marketing has become a set of communication techniques

used, especially, in extra-electoral periods. Therefore, his contributions to electoral success are very high. Maintaining a positive image (as a long-term competitive resource), however, is not enough to win elections. Electoral voting is influenced by many other psychological and social factors, some of which even operate at the unconscious level." (Roşca, 2007:38-39)

The new paradigm of political values in the media context portrays a mercantile formatting of the electoral product. There is a structural concern according to which the media space becomes a vector of intellectual simplification of the collective mind detached from investigations and deontological rigor, following easy stories presented in the most artistic way but devoid of substance, thus exposing the public space to a shortage of concrete political information or relevant. The real problems of a society have come to be replaced by reports that are easy to obtain, without controversy, but which bring an audience or hits if we are talking about the online environment.

This lack of intellectual consistency in the transmission of communication and political reality is far from a dangerous phenomenon, but rather an organic adaptation to the public's informational desires. Complex issues, reports or investigations also have an extremely well-established target audience, especially among intellectuals or savvy media consumers. The simplistic, tabloidizing side of the political scene should not be investigated or subjected to analytical contempt, but simply understood even as a facilitator of a positive order because through its spheres of subjective, simplistic and primary exploration of political and public life it is the only facilitator able to enable the public with a low level of mental training. If we have the pretext of a media space that proposes and supports the undesirable elements of an abusive plutocracy, then indeed, tabloid reports must be eliminated as quickly as possible from the area of information proliferation. But if the aspiration of a free press is to be the structure of communication, the voice of a consolidated democracy that speaks to all, for all and on behalf of all, then tabloidization and even pathological simplification are a positive sign of social unification and inclusion.

The main perspective of the analysis of the media dissemination framework involves an identification of the mediating dimension of the interaction between the sender and the receiver of the political message and image. The intrinsic status of political struggle involves a competitive confrontation between a certain number of candidates. The result of this confrontation, of this competition, will be decided by the voters who have a role as referees or determinants in assigning the vote and implicitly to the authority of the most persuasive communicator. If the politicians represent the combatants, and the public is the supreme court of arbitration, by default the media infrastructure represents the courthouse, the arena for the entire political event, the facilitator that mediates the entire relationship framework between the generator and the receiver of the political message infrastructure.

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