

THE THEORETICAL BASICS OF THE POST-SOVIET MEDIA

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Abstract

Media plays a huge role in a political life of society; it has an impact on a political agenda of society, it has significantly contributed to building of the pluralistic society and a state. Today, on the agenda of ongoing reforms in Georgia are governance ensurance that is based on the democratic principle, and this is why mass media means represent one of most important social institutions, which should support the state development in this direction. Media, as an important instrument of political processes, gains especially great importance when it merges with political sphere. It's important, that in modern politology mass communication means are characterized by such a superior "titles" like "The great arbitrator", "fourth power", etc. Belief in the omnipotence of television is so great that the political figures believe - who controls the media controls the whole country. And indeed, the modern politics is impossible without the mass media. Media creates monitoring of political processes, confrontation of the political positions and ensuring their public relations space. It is natural that it takes an important part in the development of the Georgian statehood, especially in The Post-Soviet period. Because of such a significant role of the media in public and political life, the research of the mass information means is a subject of the constant discussion and consideration among scientists, as well as experts and journalists themselves.

Keywords: Mass media; Mass communication; Propaganda; Indefendent media; People; Media research

Introduction

According to the conclusion of international organization "Reporters without Borders" in 2015 Georgia holds 69th position among 180 countries. While in 2014 it held 84th and 100th in year 2013. (According to the report of the following organization, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands and Sweden are holding top five positions by freedom of press).

Also, the annual report of the International Human Rights Organization “Freedom House” states that despite the negative worldwide tendency of freedom of press, position of Georgia has improved (In 2014 global rating of press freedom has decreased to its lowest of the last decade). More specifically, the research shows that the country has moved up to 7 points in 2010-2014.

According to “Freedom House” research of press freedom, Georgia holds the first place among Eurasian countries.

Regardless of the improvement, Georgia is still among the states with partial freedom of press. Furthermore, Georgia and Moldavia are the only countries in Eurasia with partial freedom, rest of the states are categorized as countries with no media freedom.

But the fact that Georgia is a leader in region gives us no reason to be proud. Leading position of the country is evident when it is compared to authoritarian states where corruption and human rights are the most essential problems and people are imprisoned for criticism of government.

Citizens are often making their statements on politicization of media:

“There has been no apparent changes. It is in same condition as it was in previous years. Media is not independent.”

“In any time, it was depended on its owner – the one who owns the press. The problem is that journalists themselves are useless.”

“Compared to last government, it’s free, but still influenced by the people who fund it.”

Well-informed and politically active society is the base of state democracy. Georgian society has always been politically responsible throughout the political life of country. And the most significant achievement of the following society is free press, towards which our citizens always were particularly sensitive.

It is impossible to establish democracy without free and competitive media. This is the cause of posed questions about ongoing media processes. Within short before the commencement of new political season and parliament elections, number of broadcast companies refuse hosting socio-political shows. While the growth of ratings (which should be main task for independent media) is depended on similar programs.

Georgian press is progressing, but yet experiencing serious business and economic problems. Development of media as a business, is vital to create independent and free space for press. Meanwhile, I would like to make clear that there is tangible lack of qualification and professionalism among the journalists.

At the first sight, there are large amount of TV broadcast companies, newspapers, radios and journals (not to mention online news) for such small market. However, very little number of them works as business. Vast

majority of TV broadcast companies (regardless to their statements) are depended on ones who give funding, or are involved in politics. Which impedes them to develop as free business. Evidently this does not concern Georgian Public Broadcaster, but its problems and permanent stagnation is different issue to discuss. Same problem occurs with print media, showing their palpable political motives (excluding little quantity of yellow, and grant-orientated press)

If one wishes to create media, which is objective, ethical and has its professional standards, one should acquire international funding, or struggle to survive. But the meaning of survival is not well understood by majority of media-owners. They have no knowledge of transforming media into business, while keeping qualified, professional and interesting contents and attracting more people. In other words, to “coax” the people, who tend to rely more on popular press. This can be achieved by proper marketing, which is quite rare in Georgia.

From all the problems listed above, economic issues are also apparent, and as a result we receive politically engaged media.

Regional televisions experience way complicated issues, as the market there is very small and often the only way to survive is to support political interests of influential one.

While getting acquainted with media theories, quite a fair question arises: How do the media theories correspond to Georgian media reality? Moreover, these theories are mainly based on stable Western society and formed by the universal understanding. As for the young democracy, totally different approaches might be needed.

According to one of the standpoints, western social scientist possess a higher symbolic status. They have a special activity to adapt their theories to different, less developed, "non-Western" countries. It is therefore not surprising that the Western media institutional analysis has become the main direction of media studies of the Post-Soviet countries.

According to media structural analyses, mass media independence in the Post-Soviet space, is closely linked to the political and economic factors. Issues considering media ownership, media legislation, formal control of the state and technological innovations are arisen in a variety of studies. By studying those issues we can make some conclusions about the independence of the media.

There is another point of view as well, according to which, the Western Media theories do not attribute universal status, but in this case are based on the modernization theory. The main determinant of the concept development is - people, country and culture is going through the same development path. Different cases are seen as deviant.

In this context, the role of the media is evaluated according to how effectively it contributes to the country development in the right way. This means that there is a constant expectation towards media that it will be independent of the "undesirable" forms of control (political, economic or other type of control) and will be subjected to the "desirable" legal control of public opinion. It is not hard to consider that such an approach is normative itself. It is widely used around the world, including China, Malaysia, Africa and Latin America.

Next to the structural analysis, that approach quickly became the second dominant direction of the Post-Soviet media research during which researchers basically consider mass communication mainstream theories of 60-70s and leave beyond attention relatively new tendencies, the use of which would make media-researches diverse. I believe that Michel De Sarto stimulated new views of sociological researches and not only in the sphere of mass communication. Especially should be marked his definition of tactics and strategy. Agenda strategy is a dominant, imposing established rules upon others, which are determined by political or economic powers. Subordinated people become subordinated to the rules, but they also have an opportunity to replace the established agenda (existing) by the other one. De Sarto calls such an opportunity – “tactics”; it is always temporal and determined on short term results. That is why it is never stable. But this absolutely does not mean that mass communication means are universal and they can totally determine important or less important social problems. The whole pathos of De Sarto is that his ideas lead towards recognition of “weak agents”, estimated improperly by other researchers

It should be mentioned that De Sarto’s ideas conditioned emerging of other similar theories. I consider H. Martin-Barbero’s paper is especially interesting the importance of which is growing day by day. M. Barbero cast doubts in the works of the western researchers, in accordance to whom society is divided in dichotomic way: on the one hand “people’s will”, expressed by means of democratic procedures and on the other hand “will of people having no right”. He has underlined that the decisions, made by “empowered people” are not the results of their independent will, it includes itself interests of “people having no right” as well. At the end, Martin-Barbero placed mass-media in this oppositional forces center.

Media resources, as an expressive means of oligarch owners’ interests, are represented in L. Altschull’s papers).According to “Elite Theories” of V. Mosco, there is connection between media elites and the rest political, economic and cultural elites, also between the processes, by which the leading classes participate in creation and regulation of policy.

N. Chomsky develops the idea and represents “propagandistic media model” according to which, media along with the government creates ability

of preserving governing party. According to L. Altschull “Content of press is in direct correlation with the interests of press sponsors”.

Thereby, media gives special character to some information or occasion by selecting certain themes and issues, neglecting others and putting into frames media coverage which usually expresses their owners’ political beliefs and interests. For ten years, V. Adorno, G. Deborah, P. Golding, D. Kelner, D. Shiller and others were concerned about media and government problems. N. Chomsky and E. Herman say that “political economy of mass informational means gives us a critical analysis of the large corporative mass sources and that media space functions being influenced by political and economic power functions”, “money and power contribute to the ruler and dominant commercial interests – to provide the desired information for the auditorium.

Historically, in media researches of the Anglo-Saxon world, the greatest attention was dedicated to ownership and media economical control relationship issues. Media-researchers were analyzing micro-economical processes and political-economic perspectives, trying to explain how it will affect the balance of power in society; mass media in economic relations, therefore, the activities of the media companies on media market. In such manner were created the mass information means of political-economic theory. Political-Economics is the science of humans’ economic relations and laws that govern the development of socio-economic formations.

Regarding media we can talk about what kind of influence does the wielders of power relations have on the media industry resources usage and distribution. It is important to highlight that while mass media researching, the political economy and economics are getting closer to each other which is a natural phenomena considering mass information means role and media market bilateral nature in society.

According to political economists, “ideology and power of media organizations is determined by economic base”.

Media-means express their owners’ interests which, as a rule, are representatives of dominant parties or oligarchs. Thereby, there are connections between media-elites and the rest political, economical and cultural elites, also between the processes, by which the leading classes participate in creation and regulation of policy. According to above mentioned point of view the media, in cooperation with the government, creates the ability of preservation dominant party. According to L.Altschull, “Content of press is in direct correlation with the interests of press sponsors”. Thereby, media gives special character to some information or occasion by selecting a certain themes and issues, neglecting others and putting into frames media coverage, which usually express their owners’ political beliefs and interests.

As the media is closely linked to dominant structure with its owner's help, it would be interesting to describe what kind of communicational strategies uses media while drawing up an informational program (news). Liberals often claim that, elite media contacts other authorized elites, including the government. Although many media claims that it is independent of the external pressure, this is not often true.

“It is not necessary to advise them how to write, because in any matter they will say it in a right way” says Chomsky. In the words “they will say it in a right way” is meant the “truth” that is media owners and editors think is right. Media resources are selling their auditorium to other corporations. As larger auditorium they “recruit”, more success they will gain. Auditorium does not “participate” in this purchase-selling process; it is just in a role of “supervisor.” “Money and power contribute to the ruler and dominant commercial interests to provide the desired information for the auditorium.

In modern democratic countries media is practically independent from political power, but is constantly under the pressure in economical terms. To be more precise, political power influences media using economical factors. Media space mainly functions under the influence of political and economic power. The owners of large corporations, after purchasing mass informational means, ensure high degree of control on informational groups. Frequently, various mass communicational means (television, radio, newspaper) are gathered in one unity and all of them are directed towards promotion of the idea.

Kolin Spark is also talking about influences of political and economic factors – in any system, media independency degree depends on how an power is distributed in a society, especially when it deals with economic and political separation.

Conclusion

Commercial mass-media is much more pluralistic in western countries, because pluralistic society means decentralization of authority, but “market” model of mass informational resources in the third type countries perfectly co-exists with dictatorship. According to Eastern Europe and Asia countries media traditions, ruling political powers retain important role in subsidizing mass information. One of the reasons is that particular media organizations cannot gain financial benefit. Integrated political-economic “elite” puts forward political task to media companies; instead it guarantees its economic activity. Accordingly, mass-media owners, high rank managers are less concerned about attaining financial independence and consciously serve to their sponsors. In post-soviet space and in The Middle Eastern countries media organizations, owned by oligarchs, are partially financed by

state structures. Such secret funding is the fee of direct or indirect political loyalty.

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