Politics in the media, Media in the society, the culture of the society

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Abstract- Cognitive researchers support that media has a considerable effect on social behavior of its viewers. Media practices in portrayals of specific images and messages depicted in the content of media, be it in films, documentaries, news, etc, affect people's behavior, The highly polarization of Albanian media gives credits to politics as a conduit that might affect social behavior.

Political news is the main interest for the Albanian media, therefore putting it at number one of the public agenda, producing a similarly polarized society. But, in a political reality that offers hard images, language, unethical treatment of the other, we can assume with certainty that the politicized media is projecting to this politicized society a model that is not the best. According to the cultivation theory, media consumption in general and especially the effect of television, provide audiences with a consistent set of messages that, over time and with persistent exposure, influence consumer's real word social perception, such as the more a viewer watches, the more the views reflect those presented by TV, regardless of the veracity of the message (Gerbner et al. 2002, citet by Mastro 2009). Therefore, I raise the question whether the media has fueled the outrage that is sometimes reflected in the society? Is media using its power to watchdog politics and educate society? The paper examines these issues, attempting to make an analysis of the impact politics have on society through media.

Index Terms- media, politics, society

I. Politics and society

It will not be wrong to claim that Albanian media is captivated by politics, making them the main news in television, radio, newspapers. People's main discussions in cafeterias while drinking a morning coffee, or during lunch break revolve around politics. But the presence of politics in the media might sound normal and within the reason of media existence.

What appears to be an issue for the Albanian society is the intrusion of a violent political reality in our daily lives and private spaces, through media, where its increasing frequency only intensifies the effects of it.

Today, political debates, the life of public figures, or political gossips are part of people's lives, in such a level that one would know all the member of the family of the Prime Minister as it was his own. On the other hand, the personal life of a politician goes public rapidly and is unethically used as a tool to promote the other candidate's values. Ruthless political behavior has substituted and deviated from constructive political debate for some years now. Accusations like: "who you are married to", "whom your sister is married to", "your uncle was a war criminal", "your grandparent was a collaborator with the enemy", "you have paid to take your diploma", "whose money are those you bought your villa in the Riviera", "your brother goes in vacation with the mafia of Cosa Nostra" etc, have been publicized for most political figures active in the political arena.

It looks like politics have become so personal, that family conversations would end up discussing about political issues. Not to mention that some parliamentary sessions would be so important that are fully in live broadcast from media outlets.

Not only the intensified presence of politics in the media, but also the tense political environment in the Albanian society has transformed politics to entertaining shows that in fact are harmful to the individual in particular and to the society in general. Most Albanians would sit solemnly to watch plenary sessions, especially when important decisions have to be taken. And the end is almost predictable; boycotts, vigorous debating that might end to verbal and in some cases physical violence. Because of this standstill position of politics, in the last two years not one political decision has been made, development and democratic processes are halted and economy has impoverished. Consequently, as an important factor of country's development, and their relation to people's wellbeing, political news do interest Albanian citizens. Therefore, it is the audiences demand that appeals for media content.

However, in the contexts of ethics and communication culture, especially the culture of political debate, media, especially television has unselectively broadcasted a lot of aggressions, accusations, offences, violence; physical or verbal, all formulated in such a common language, inappropriate even for the most random public space. In fact, Albanians have witnessed a lot of the above indiscretions coming out from the house of representative, that supposedly sacred place, where our governors are elected to represent us and discuss constructively and take decisions for our wellbeing. Instead, the parliament of the last 5 years has been transformed in an arena of kung fu fighting and slang terminology, sometimes improper, unethical and offensive. These kind of violent actions have been mediated and sometimes transmitted live in the media and then repeated continuously in every news editions, all day long and the next day in all newspapers, and repeated again for some days.

Albanians viewers have been exposed to scenes filled with conflict, be it physical and verbal. The high level of exposure to violent information creates a tense socio-microenvironment that at some stage starts to be perceived as normal, and no one reacts to change it. People become desensitized towards this violence and in the worst case it may become subject to imitation. Audiences are just simply viewers of the violent acts. Cognitive psychologist and media researcher have long acknowledged the effects of media in social behavior. This means that individuals that are exposed to violent acts, tend to mimic the act. When the action then, comes from a legal authority, e.g. a physical violence or an unethical terminology, it is prone to imitation.

II. Media' social effect

Social psychologists have dealt with media influence on people's behaviors, attitudes, and their predisposition to evaluate or imitate others. People are aware of and can report most of their attitudes, but sometimes people come to favorable or unfavorable predispositions of which they might not be aware or deny[1]. The attitude construct assumes that a person's attitude – whether implicit or explicit- is an important mediated variable between exposure to new and old information on one hand and behavioral change on the other.

Therefore, media use and its content create a mental model that reinforce the cultivation of models, which are considered as cognitive devices that allow viewers to incorporate subjective and objective components of mediated information into malleable versions of knowledge, or mental representation for use in interpreting incoming messages. In other words, how much people watch and how they perceive what they are seeing in the content contribute to the formation of behavioral models.

a. Exposure/Repetition

Political news are in the media in high quantity, exposure and voltage in our daily life. Further below I will give some figures on political news in news editions which illustrate the level at which information gets to our homes every day.

The communication matrix model (McGuire 1985, 1989), contends that in order for effective influence to occur, a person first need to be exposed to the same news information. Also, by deciding what to present, those who control the mass media help define the range of issues to which the public is *exposed* (Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, & Krosnick, 1984, cited by Petty, Brinol, Priester 2009). Then the person must *attend* the information presented and according to the relevance of the issue with the person's personal interests the information gets absorbed and becomes personal, making a person develop *interest* on the information. The level at which the information becomes personal depends on the stress media puts on it and on the

relevance of the information to our interest and concerns. Then the person will start to understand and learn the information. So, when information is *comprehended* and *acquisitioned* the attitude change or *yielding* will occur. Once the person accepts the information he will store involving *memory*. At a certain moment, when the need arises the person will *retrieve* the information and attitude that it supports from memory and would perform the *action.* And then is *reinforcement* and *consolidation* that have to do with the person's behavior toward the attitude and the reaction that the attitude takes (reward or punishment)

b. Social diffusion.

As social psychologist claim, the images offered by the media are subject to imitation by the viewer therefore constructing a typology of the society that is induced by models offered by media. Even though, they admit that the society has the mechanisms to evaluate the information that would construct the behavior, in the condition that it (the society) is suppressed by the influx of information it should not be blamed for its behavior. Its relation with the medium becomes almost unconscious[2]. Public reaction toward that information that is irrelevant to the society is almost inexistent. Its consciousness is not interested to distinguish between what is normal and what is not. It tends to imitate as if being hypnotized.

Social diffusion is a process that fosters adoption of mediated issues to functional adaptations. When violent information is exposed to the media repetitively for a considerable time, it will be functionally adapted by the individuals causing them to imitate it. When dominating news in the media is politics, and when this politics is highly unethical, violent verbally and physically, the message conveyed from the legitimate authority through another legitimate authority, from parliament through the media, to the public is socially very meaningful for the numbed senses of the society. In this case people will behave in a way they deny if a legitimate authority sanctions their conduct, as they do not feel responsible for their action that spring from the dictate of others (Milgram 11974, Bandura 2009).

c. Numbness of the public

Imagine somebody or a group of people screaming (not just tell – but tell with temper) in your ear the same words. It becomes psychically tiring and unbearable to hear the voices or watch the images that are emotionally unhealthy. But, after some time the public becomes accustomed to them. Similarly, a person who works in a factory, or people who live close to airports are no longer disturbed by the noises and become used to it. In a way, they become so addicted to information that they lose their selective skill; can not live without it and absorbs everything in offer.

The repetitive informative frenzy becomes a normal environment of the function of the individual senses and his psychology. This is a dead end where the person feels pressed by the informative

[1]Petty, Richard, Brinol, Pablo, riester Joseph, Media attitude change, Implications of elaboration likelihood model of persuasion, cited in the book 'Media effects. Advances in theory and reseach' Bryant, Jennings, Oliver, Mary Beth, third edition, 2009, Routledge, UK, pg 127

[2] Fuga, Artan, Lexime mbi komunikimin, pg 220 Ora, 2005

influx offered by the media but at the same time cannot live without it. So, the person cannot react against any inappropriate information, such as violence etc, and he starts to perceive it as a normal situation. As long as these images get in our homes daily they look like normal, his conscious is numbed, his senses anesthetized and he starts to imitate.

d. Desensitization

Media audiences' number is by millions. Therefore, it can be said that every small statistical effect can translate into an important social problem. And media can not simply be a transmitter of the information, but should adhere to its principle as an informer and educator.

Media violence in films, entertaining programs, debate, news might increase aggressive behavior because it causes emotional desensitization. So, with repeated exposure to this violence, psychological saturation or emotional adjustment takes place such that initial levels of tension, anxiety, disgust etc. diminish or weaken. As people's sensitivity to violence becomes increasingly dull, violent behavior may increase, in part, because it is simply not recognized any longer as behavior that should be curtailed (Sparks, Sparks and Sparks 2009). [3]

So, with the media getting so deep in the details of a crime the readers/viewers lose sensitivity. This is even more dangerous when a child might be in front of television by accident (apparently news editions should be classified as not appropriate for children), because watching violence on television can affect the way children view the world and the way they relate to others. It can anesthetize their responses to cruelty and suffering or make them excessively fearful.

According to the cultivation theory, media consumption in general and especially the effect of television, provide audiences with a consistent set of messages that, over time and with persistent exposure, influence consumer's real word social perception, such as the more a viewer watches, the more the views reflect those presented by TV, regardless of the veracity of the message (Gerbner et al. 2002, citet by Mastro 2009)

III. Social issues vs. political issues
a. The impact of media content in social behavior

Most of political actions and power relationships operate at the societal level. Failure to link social problems with societal and political responsibility extends to poverty, racism, crime, etc. This supports the fact that most social problems, that are abundant in the Albanian society, come by the displacement of responsibilities by the legitimate actor. Economic and societal

[3]Glen Sparks, Cheri Sparks & Erin Sparks, Media violence (2009), Media effects: Advances in theory and research: 3rd ed (edited byJennings Bryant, Mary Beth Olivr), Taylor & Francis

problems of Albania are blurred by violent and controversy of politics, which are reflected also in the media. As mentioned in this study, media can be a contributor to the way social issues are perceived by the society.

Similarly to the violent political content present in the news, the social life appears to be frustrated. Last year, statistics of crime in Albania were significantly high. Let aside organized crime, a concerning issue has become criminality in the street, in family, suicide, etc., which gives the impression that life in Albania has started to look so scarce. Despite this, in the news edition politics takes up most of the space. According to a survey undertaken by The Forum of Free Thought and the Institute for Contemporary Studies in 2010 politics dominates the media landscape. Although, Albanian society has a lot of concerning social issues to be covered , media shows little interest for those. According to the survey, respondents have admitted that political news are important for them and the society, because politics determines other aspects of development such as economy. However, respondents complain that media pays more attention than necessary to political news. For example, if a news edition is 25 minutes, it is estimated that $12 - 15$ minutes is dedicated to politics, which is $48 - 65$ % of the total time of the news. The rest of the news time remains for crime ($13 - 16$%), then is economy ($12 - 13$), and in the lower proportion are social issues, culture, and etc.

The situation is the same 3 years later. According to a student survey of the Department of Communication, political news take up 63% of news edition followed by crime, business and other news sectors. Crime news take up the second position in level of importance in the news editions in television or in newspapers, after political news. On the other hand, news about social issues take up only a small percentage of the overall news edition or newspaper pages. But adhering to the role of media, its duty is not only to inform, but also to educate. Media reporting on criminal issues does not have the social gravity, instead crime is reported as a simple occurrence of the day. Furthermore, it describes all the details of the felony accompanied by inappropriate images, treating the personal stories of people as interesting news to increase medium's audience ratings rather than address social problems. There is no reporting on the increase of this phenomenon from the standpoint of the society. Imagine an article reporting on a suicide, describing details and the way (knot a tie or the poison used) the act has been performed. It is not a news informative, but a 'how to' manual for those desperate with their lives. And when the repetition of these kind of news to all media available, print, broadcast and online, at any time of day, people with suicide or criminal predisposition would involuntary be pushed to criminal actions This concern has also been expressed in a study by the Albanian Media Institute that analyses the content of social issues in the media. They are taken to such action by the immense effects of media that, numbs mind and pushes people to imitation.

It looks like media in Albania is weak to play its watchdog role. Politics are imposed to the media that submerges itself to the power of the elected few. This increased influence is because

media outlets are peripheral businesses of their owners, who opened up a media, as a mean to create advantages for their primary businesses. This factor has submerged media in the pressure of politics behaving like a servant or a spokesperson of political actors, who seek public advantages by misbehaviors of their opponents. And media easily succumbs to their wits and desires. And in an environment where politics is characterized by violent actions, foul language, anger toward the opposing party, where tolerance, compromise, compassion, morals, and rules are inexistent, it looks like social life is reflecting it.

A few years ago, an armed member of parliament shoots his colleague because of a political argument. A year ago scenes of MP-s 'kung fu' fighting with each other became so common that they started to look normal. Boycott, punches, offences and other unethical and outrageous behaviors were anticipated and apparently imitated. Similarly there have been reports of people getting killed after quarrelling for a piece of land, a husband slaughtering his wife because of suspicions of infidelity, a young man shooting his friend because he loses in a chess game, an old man chopping a young woman whom he claims owed him 300 euro, a group of youngsters running over a Greek- ethnic minority man because he speaks Greek. Life spared for nothing.

IV. Media programming culture in the Albanian society

According to academics, media not only offers knowledge informing us for what happens, but they also classify and structure the political reality by defining if news are more or less significant by the level they are present or not in the media program.

Because of the relevance of political decision-making to our lives, political news attract a large number of audiences. Therefore, political news are placed in television throughout the day, from the first hour of the morning. The morning programs are a mix of soft news, political news, actuality, accidents, etc., exposing people to the hard realities before facing the day. If somebody chooses to read the newspaper it is the same reality. Then, throughout the day, repeated editions in TV would keep the audience 'informed' about the events of the day and/or repeat those of the previous one. The influx of political information is enormous and the repetition of it even more troublesome. In more than half of the time of the whole news edition televisions would broadcast parliamentary meetings held in tension and vigorous debates with offences and accusations, refusals and boycotts etc.

Adhering to the informative pressure of the media and the need to be informed, the individual can do nothing but accept the information offered. This fact may explain the impact that politics had in people's lives during communism in Albania. Since then, with a thirst for information, the Albanian society of the immediate post-communism period was a willing frequent client of cafeterias where people would gather to read newspapers and debate on the news that sometimes would deteriorate to verbal and physical confrontations.

V. Conclusions

Because Albanian media is merely a watchdog, and it has surrendered itself to the hand of politics, it is the latter that makes up and defines the quality of the media. Information that is exposed in the media is massive in terms of quantity but void in terms of quality, consequently affecting societal construction. Therefore, the question in the today Albanian media is not only 'what' are we watching, but also 'how' and 'why' is it selected for transmission? Referring to the quality of the media we can deduct that little thought is put to answer this question. Most evidence shows that the influence of politics in the media is the main factor for media quality.

The political dependence of Albanian media and its interest to convey ideological messages to the public, has made media a spokesperson of politicians who accuse, offend, fight, harass their counterparts, and all this is broadcasted uncensored. This tense political environment comes through the media to our homes and remains there. Facts and images conveyed by the media form a social construction of the reality influencing people's conception of the world around them. Images that come through television have an immense contribution on this. The mass media conveys basic images about the social and political structure of society, their ideological orientation, conventional composure of different groups and the power or relations among them.

In term of social behavior, media influences in shaping and changing individual behavior. Repeated exposure to violence, especially to violence that comes from a legitimate authority, can be reproduced in real life as it starts to be perceived as a normal occurrence. Recurrent exposure can numb the senses and desensitize and habituate people to cruelty. They are no longer upset by it. They will experience launch of emotional arousal and tolerance to some level of aggression depicted by media violence until they are lead to aggression. This effect contributes to shaping a public consciousness. Media has a say in this. Therefore, we can assume that media is the mirror of society

Despite concerning issues that are apparent in the media landscape, the problem should not be fully placed on the media. Given that the Albanian media landscape is still generalized, all of them have almost the same informative and thematic structure, oriented to the same public that is only different as far as political ideology concerns. For this reason, news are intensively repeted in all print or electronic media outlets. Profiled media would probably be a solution to this unified way of information, that most probably would distract audiences attention from political news the generalized media offer.

However, in a highly politicized media, where owner's interest prevail, and in a highly politicized society, politics will continue to dominate the news editions or newspaper pages. It is then, the quality of politics, followed by the media attitude and its criteria of news selection that will determine societal behavior.

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