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Media modeling of cultural identity

Abstract

Contemporary society propagates flexible identity, which is susceptible to trends and images of the world created by the media. The media have an increasing role in shaping people, especially young people, which are one of the most important consumers of content placed in media. Young people become just one of the expedient of manipulation controlled by the media, and as such they are a perfect target for shaping. Style of life that propagates main stream culture is widely accepted because it is closely related to consumer society and capitalism that are our everyday life. The globalization of the media industry has brought negative changes when it comes to the quality of media content, such as globalization of taste and unification of product, all of which are a result of commercialization and monopolization in the sphere of media content distribution. The personality of the modern age is a kind of' "electronic individual" whose identity is shaped by the media. Technological advancement and profitability as the underlying logic of capital, particularly contribute this. Since the media are not a passive reflection of society, but its active and dynamic factor instead, it is important to study the mass media feedback to society as well. The goal of any society should be to create a media-conscious individual able to critically observe the forms of mass culture. That individual becomes an active member of society who deliberately uses forms of mass culture in order to achieve progressive social change.

Key words: identity, cultural identity, media, culture, entertainment, profit.

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Introduction

In traditional societies, the identity[2] was pre-determined and fixed. It slowly developed as an expression of predetermined social roles and values. People were born and lived as members of one group or society whose orientation was determined in advance, so the category of identity was not problematic. Identity is a modern phenomenon that has its roots in western individualism.[3] The concept of identity in sociology is multidimensional. Sociologists commonly mention two forms of identity, social identity and self-identity or personal identity. The sociological concept of identity has the opposing attitudes towards the understanding of identity as individual characteristics, namely the existence of an essential centre I, that represents personal identity. In contrast, the sociological concept of identity is based on the fact that individual identity is always evolving in the interaction with other / others, in the interact of I with society. The sociological concept of identity is trying to make a shift from the conception of identity as fixed, as the essence that exists objectively, and goes towards a variable and socially constructed identity.

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[2] Identity, as well as the derived expressions identify, identification, identity, derive from the Latin word idem (the same), via the French noun identitete it crossed into many languages. It could be translated as sameness and identification, and a verb derived from it as equated himself and others (person, group). Identify would therefore mean the determination of the identity of the physical, spiritual, psychological characteristics of people and groups or data files. Then, the group identity means identical commonalities of race, group, nation, people. The distinctive meaning of identity indicates special characteristics: cultural, ethnic, national, political, and historical. Further meanings are portable - identity is synonymous with self-esteem, feelings of belonging, self-awareness and their personal characteristics, and group awareness. (Stevan Majstorović, *In search of an identity,* Slovo Ljublje – Prosveta, Belgrade, 1979, p. 210-211)

[3] Hence the notion of identity since its inception in the 16th Century and over 17th and 18th Century marks the need of individuals and groups for diversity. Personality, however, does not belong to the plane of diversity but to the plane of otherness, it is not established on the route and as the route of the self-other distinction, but as a category of full autonomy on the route of self-other. Hence the difference between identity and personality lies in the fact that an individual attains identity when it becomes able to accept the norms that are justified by authority, while one person is created in the moment when the identity of the individual becomes able to perceive the difference between the norms that are justified by the authority and the norms that are justified by principle. (See more in: Zagorka Golubović, *Me and others, the anthropological studies of individual and collective identity*, Republika, Belgrade, 1999, p. 6 and p. 24 and further)

Acquisition of own identity, which involves the search for new needs, knowledge, affirmation, striving to acquire spiritual and material values, fueled by the poor condition in the society, inevitably leads to a crisis of individual identity among all and especially among the young. This as a result can often have an "escape" into a collective identity, as it is not found and accomplished the individual identity. Therefore, achieving a balance between individual and collective identity is difficult for young contemporary people and causes conflicts of identity that can cause a number of adverse effects such as inertia, antisocial behavior and conflicted position.

In the dynamics of identity formation is necessary to bear in mind the process of socialization as a relationship in which the individual is connected to his community. Through the social interaction the individual takes from the community the substrate not only for his sociability, but for the view of himself. In addition to the socialization process is an important process of the internalization of socio-cultural experiences through which the individuation is conducted by the adoption of external norms and standards. The identity occurs in a social context, through the mindset of individuals about what they associate with the social world and their representation of themselves. Through these processes, the individual establishes a relationship with his environment and integrates the culture of the society in the structure of his personality. Thus, the identity is a social construct where individual inevitably gets set by external factors and he is defined according to the constructed model - social, political, religious, national, cultural and media.

In this paper, we focus on the role of media in the formation of identity in contemporary society. We come from the fact that the media in contemporary society is imposed as one of the key agents of almost all social changes. This is particularly evident in the culture. The media have become the element that determines the culture and cultural patterns. The way of life propagated by the media and the mainstream culture has become widely accepted. Media contents are commercial which aim at globalization of taste which of the personalities of the modern age creates a kind of electronic individual.[4] However, the audience of the media content can not be a group that is destined to passively accept the content by the media. In order to better pace the content of mass culture and avoid the intellectual passivity, one should critically observe those contents, forms and expressions, as well

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[4] *"*TV personality is an electronic individual par excellence that all you can get, gets from the media shows: market identity as a consumer in the society of the spectacle ... traumatized serial being."* (Kroker and Cook, cited by: Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*, Clio, Belgrade, 2004, p. 386)

as expose the process of their encoding and decoding, in which an important role can have the media education.

Cultural identity

Although the concept of identity is multidimensional, however, the identity can be defined as a feeling of belonging to a social group - ethnic, cultural, confessional, national. Cultural identity is constructed in specific socio-historical circumstances in which it develops and culture itself. Individuals their own cultural identity base on cultural heritage that is made of the language, customs, behavior patterns, values and lifestyles. Thus, cultural identity can be determined as a spiritual self-consciousness of a community consisting of its own value-normative patterns, based on which the group maintains, integrates inside, communicates with each other and is different from others. Cultural identity is a sense of ownership of certain cultural characteristics which are immanent in the corresponding social group, and it is not allowed to lose sight of the personal characteristics by which a person is recognizable as a member of the group.[5] Koković emphasizes that the birth of a particular cultural group does not mean the exercise of the cultural identity of the group. Adoption of cultural identity does not mean a priori adoption of cultural features, creation of culture, language, customs, traditions, lifestyles, behavior patterns and value systems. An individual can accept, and also reject certain characteristics and patterns of culture, to change and shape them.[6] Thus, the cultural identity is constantly evolving between origin and determination on the one hand and projections, aspirations, on the other hand. Cultural identity is not covered only by a constancy of what we are, but even more by aspiration for what we want to be.

In the sociological perspective, the cultural identity is dynamic and contradictory analytical category. This means that it is not given once and for all, that occurs and changes in the contradictory socio-historical circumstances. Group enables to gain a cultural identity, but it allows an individual to change their cultural identity. The verification of personal identity involves communication between the universal cultural values and

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[5] See more in: Dragan Koković, „*Cultural and Ethnic Identity, "*Sociological Yearbook (Nation and modern society), no. 3. 2008. p. 117-129
[6] *Ibid*

personal characteristics. Personal cultural identity is more pronounced in developed countries, which are concerned with the issues of quality of life, than in developing countries that are committed to resolving the existential problems of the people.

The impact of media on cultural identity

Far before the advent of mass media, Plato started a discussion about the social harms and benefits of the mass culture of ancient times. In his commentary on the upbringing of children, who should become the guardians in his ideal state, he expressed concern that cultural facilities (epics, myths, stories) that are used to educate young people carry with them good, but also threatening to their spirit. Therefore, it was necessary, says Plato, to select the content and to prescribe certain standards.[7] Thus, even in ancient times was about the shaping of personality in order to create socially desirable specimen. The policy of social, economic and cultural unification never in history has had such advanced and successful means of what has today. The game includes a powerfull factors - the mass media, economics, technology, political, cultural and scientific institutions. The conditions in which man now lives leaves no space and time for man to form himself and to construct his own views, visions and intentions, but is rather uncritically left to what is offered in the market and what is usually a good marketing packaged so with the attack on the human senses creates a feeling of comfort which is hard to resist.

The media society that is experiencing a boom after World War II identity is increasingly associated with style, creating an image and appearance. This is best illustrated by Kellner citing the example from the movie "Pretty Woman." This film, as it says Kellner, describes the key role of the image in the construction of identity in contemporary society. A prostitute from working-class meets corporate prince and transforms from ordinary mudlark to super modern beauty. This film illustrates the process of self-transformation with the help of fashion, cosmetics, diction and style,

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[7] Education, and shaping the personality begins in early childhood and it is done, as always and everywhere, and in Plato's state, by the separation of what is considered good, desirable and selected from everything else, "which may seem disturbing or destructive to the soul of the child" . There are themes, activities, and stories that are appropriate to children's age and the others that harm them and that should be avoided, "heavy stories" as they are called by Plato. (Plato, *State*, Belgrade, 1969, p. 65-66)

showing the extent to which identity in modern culture depends on the image and appearance.[8] Douglas Kellner argues that television, fashion, music and film play an important role in defining the modern identity and shaping the thought and behavior. This explains in the notion of identity in popular television shows such as "Miami Vice," which is often taken as an example of a symptomatic postmodern text, as well as the advertisements for cigarettes. Kellner points out that "Miami Vice" in particular provides many insights into fragmentation, reconstruction and the fragility of identity in contemporary culture, and also provides insight into how identity is created by incorporating the subjective positions that were given to us as role models by the media culture. Advertising is also engaged in selling a lifestyle and socially desirable identities that are associated with promotional products, as well as selling the products themselves.[9] Media culture provides to public images and representations with which they can identify and support them. In this way, it achieves important social and cultural effects of presenting role models who value certain forms of behavior and style, while the other are underestimated and negatively characterized. Effects of the show "Miami Vice," are the relaxed clothing and ever-changing appearance and image.[10] The show invites viewers to identify with a dynamic lifestyle aimed at exciting consumer leisure. "Miami Vice" achieved remarkable insights into issues of identity in modern techno-capitalist societies. All the main characters have multiple identities and turbulent past, which unexpectedly intertwines with the present. The identity of each of them is fragmentary and unstable, different and specific for each character, but however, is subject to drastic changes."[11]

While Kellner about the influence of media culture globally speaks through examples of the show "Miami Vice," the phenomenon of Madonna, Michael Jackson and others, here a typical example of a media culture that has a great impact on the audience is turbo-folk music.[12] It is shown by the

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[8] Message of the film is that if you want to become a new person, to transform your identity and become successful, you need to pay attention to image, style and fashion. (Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*, Klio, Belgrade, 2004, p. 387)

[9] See more in: Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*, Klio, Belgrade, 2004, p. 410-432

[10] Postmodern identity is constructed through drama and role play to create the image. While the modernist identity revolves around the profession, functions in the public sphere (or family), postmodern identity was established at the leisure, appearance, image and consumption. (Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*, Klio, Belgrade, 2004, p. 417)

[11] Douglas Kellner, Op. cit., p. 399

[12] Name of turbo-folk was created in the early nineties of the last century and means a musical direction, subcultural style, and the wider view on life. Rock musician

number and the constant tendency of artists, celebrity status which is gained by performers of this music, as well as the number of shows and television that broadcast this kind of music. Turbo-folk is marketed as a mainstream culture that has developed primarily due to the media. Turbo-folk music, shows, the image of the stars, all that can be considered as models of simulation.[13] What is on the global level Madonna, about whose phenomenon wrote Kellner, here could be one of the performers of this kind of music. "Thus, for example, Lepa Brena - the character, image, iconographic concept, a world of imagination itself, the illusion and the most widely accepted, most massive, populist and cultural model. Therefore, it seems that the phenomenon of Lepa Brena and newly composed folk music as a whole could be analyzed using concepts common in the analysis of post-modernity as a social and cultural phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century."[14]

Most often is talked about the negative impact of the media, especially on the young people, and we forget the positive characteristics. The media can not be blamed for every situation, the overall context should be considered, the social reality in which the media reports, such as the family, religious institutions, political and legal framework of the country, and the like. The media can be harmful and helpful. Although the public usually deals with hazardous and harmful side of the media, they can be a useful source of information and entertainment. Both ways are influencing the social socialization and identity formation for all, especially young people. Conceptual paradigms about the impact of the media were changed, and the results within these paradigms were not corroborated, as well as in science there is no agreement on whether the media influence is positive or negative. Mediologists indicated the possibility of a positive influence of the media, if it is based on their entertainment and other positive qualities, reconstructed teaching and education. Others say that television is harmful for both individuals and society, and that from homo sapiens creates homo

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with the stage name Rambo Amadeus is the first, according to his own statements, who coined this term, using it to indicate an ironic song in which he parodied "folk" on his album, but soon afterwards the name gained a much wider meaning. (From the text: Ivana Kronja: *Turbo-reactive Folk,* magazine „Kvad-art" no. 13, Belgrade, 2001)

[13] The simulation based on the model creates a new real world that does not have origins in reality. (See more in: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacrum and Simulation,* Svetovi, Novi Sad, 1991)

[14] Milena Dragičević-Šešić, *Neofolk culture - The audience and its stars*, Publishing house of Zoran Stojanović, Sremski Karlovci, Novi Sad, 1994, p. 139

videns[15], incapable of abstract thinking and understanding of concepts, because his image has become more important than words. Noam Chomsky believes that the media in contemporary society play a crucial role in the control and supervision of the masses, and are managed by private capital and private interests. Chomsky believes that the worse is the schools do nothing to defend the people of this, but are themselves part of the apparatus of indoctrination and misinformation.[16]

These opposing views on the impact of the media and their power was created after research on the effects of media. During the study sought to answer the key question: How do the media influence the public? However, it is difficult to give a correct answer to this question, because the scientific research of media impact is very problematic.The impacts of producing media content are often not clearly visible because it does not work immediately, but may have a delayed effect, so it is difficult to investigate and prove their origin. Potter shares the media influence on short-and long-term depending on when the impact occurred. He points out that the media teaches, and the media have effects on knowledge. The media can act immediately and instill some current knowledge, they can create, enhance and diminish our attitudes, can affect our emotions, can make us to some action, excite or calm us. It is not always negative, they are often the emotions of pleasure and very useful knowledge that help us in social roles and relationships.[17] Difficulty in answering the question how the media influence the public lies in the fact that the media are not the only one affecting the opinions and views. The major influence has the environment in which the individual operates, family, church, school, and personal passivity and emotional and intellectual unwillingness to live with the media.

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[15] *Man prone to watching.* The discovery of the Italian sociologist Giovanni Sartori. His book Homo videns: tele-orchestrated society became a bestseller in South America, and its Italian edition sold out in a few months. Sartori's thesis, which can be rebutted, but deserves attention is that from the 1950s the evolution is in decline because the homo videns deposed from the throne the homo sapiens.

[16] Noam Chomsky, *Media, Propaganda and the system*, Library Što čitaš, Zagreb, 2000, p. 41

[17] See more in: W. James Potter, *Media Literacy*. Second Edition. London: SAGE Publication, 2001.

The electronic individual

In a situation where the traditional signposts became less important in modern society an individual is faced with incredible efficiency choices, on what to be, how to act, how to think and how to live. However, that abundance creates a problem for the individual. Some media theorists point out that the figure of the modern era is kind of electronic individual whose identity is shaped by the media. Media are finalizing what started the Industrial Revolution, and a man is slowly but surely losing in the abundance of choice the freedom of choice. This can be illustrated by an example of an individual who, when he finds himself in a supermarket in front of rafa who are filled with dozens of identical products from different manufacturers, has a problem to decide what to buy. Francis Ball emphasizes that hyper-choice can paralyze us, because the excess of freedom is a form of servitude. "This issue has already appeared in the sixties, but then it could not even be imagined what a crucial role will media have in that evolution, constantly improving, they count on people's desire to be different from each other, which paradoxically leads to the fact that they more resemble to each other. The thirst for novelty, which is just another side of the terrible fear of tapping into place, keeps pace with the affirmation of individualism. Once rebellious blue-jeans unisex jeans, which now wear everybody, became kind of uniform, not less than suits and ties for men and suits for women."[18] Technology, human rights, media, the cult of individual autonomy paved the way, as it says Ball, to the narcissistic individualism, and he concludes that our fascination with the media takes us away from the famous Cogito ergo sum.[19] According to him, the new credo might be: "I communicate, therefore I am."[20]

Baudrillard points out that under the influence of technology are produced two kinds of reality - one that reflects the current life and the one that is mediated by technology (virtual reality). Virtual reality is referred to as non-existent world of simulated events in which we enter through the computers and other technical equipment.[21] Hiding behind the monitor individuals protect their anonymity and think that they exercise multiple

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[18] Francis Ball, *The power of the media,* Clio, Belgrade, 1997, p. 90

[19] Latin - *I think, therefore I am.*

[20] Francis Ball, Op. cit., p. 92

[21] Virtual reality in the anthropological and sociological terms can be explained as a technical tool for indirect production of reality, which can mean an escape from the genuine to non-existent reality and establish full control over man and his actions. (According to: Dragan Koković, *Society and media challenges: Introduction to Sociology of Mass Communication,* Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad 2007, p. 179)

roles and multiple identities with different groups simultaneously. In computer culture there are possible some strange mutations of identity. Many people on the sites for communication and forums are taking the identity of the opposite sex, profession and so on. Anthony Giddens notes that, with the exception of e-mail, in which users can authenticate each other, no one on the Internet knows who is actually who - whether male or female, or where he lives. Giddens has illustrated this by referring to a famous cartoon that shows a dog sitting in front of computer. The text under the picture says: "It is great that on the internet nobody knows you are a dog."[22] Internet becomes a place where people meet, socialize, fall in love, debate. This virtual space gives individuals the incredible possibilities of self-deception and distortion of the truth. "Everything is fine until these processes take place in the normal range, if the real world is not replaced with the non-existent one. About pathological addiction can be told when a computer monitor and mouse become a powerful center of the world. Staying in 'cyber space may eventually lead to a metamorphosis of personality and create a new' virtual identity'."[23]

The mass media and new technologies have played a crucial role not only in the abandonment of traditional culture, but also in the creation of its visual successors, which are uncritically accepted by generations to come. There is already foreshadowed a dangerous discontinuity in the value field. "It is easy to prove that the Internet can not become sufficient and adequate substitute for the book, which the coming generation less accept and less read."[24] Media content to a large extent provide the audience a chance to by the domination of the virtual images achieve at least an imaginary escape from the trivial and poor reality. Thus, with the homogeneity of the audience is achieved the concept of media domination and maintained the relations of power and influence. It is obvious that on the television is more diversion, pleasure and beauty than in reality. Nobody cares that the treatment is actually a part of media manipulation and an important prerequisite of disorders of system of values. [25] Kellner notes that television can be seen as a one-dimensional shallow desert of superficial images, and can also act as

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[22] Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, Faculty of Economics, Belgrade, 2003., p. 474

[23] Dragan Koković, *Society and media challenges: Introduction to Sociology of Mass Communication,* Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad, 2007, p. 183)

[24] Ratko Božović, *The Silene of leisure*, Čigoja štampa, Belgrade, 2010, p. 414

[25] English media researchers argue that viewers who more than four hours a day watch television that deals with reality, are unable to see reality without the mediation of the media. (Ratko Božović, *The Silene of leisure*, Čigoja štampa, Belgrade, 2010, p. 412)

an ordinary noise without meaning and purpose. "We can also become oversaturated, or indifferent, according to the course, speed and intensity of the images, so that the meaning of the television can be pushed aside or completely disappear."

Conclusion

Marginalization of the audience in the communication and media theories according to the media inject ideas, opinions and beliefs to the passive media audiences, which these impacts can not resist, is characteristic for the early stages of development of media. The crowd was understood as an anonymous mass left to manipulative mechanisms of mass media, or seen as a "recipient of the message". Changes in the perception and understanding of media audiences followed in the sixties and the seventies of the 20th century, when emerged theorists who believed that people are able to make personal conclusions based on media information, some messages accept and some reject, and use the media in different ways and in different life periods.

Decoding the meaning of media content depends on everyday life experience, education, current social norms, social environment, family environment, geographical environment, including political, religious or ideological affiliation. The media today largely influence the intellectual life of the individual, they determine his attitude towards the world and developments. In order to pace the content of mass culture individual must critically observe those contents. In this way, the individual becomes an active member of society who observes social reality, and forms of popular culture uses deliberately, knowingly and with the aim of achieving progressive social change.

In order to properly understand the media culture, the constant media education is needed [26] in all educational areas. Media should be given

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[26] UNESCO has in the mid seventies of the last century raised the issue of media education. Building the idea on the importance of the media in society, it asked to meet at the international level scientists to discuss ways of including media education in the school system. Since the signing of the Declaration on Media Education in 1982 until today, the concept of media literacy and media education has changed somewhat, but remained based on the basic idea - communication rights deriving from the basic human rights that are guaranteed by the documents of the international community, particularly the United Nations Charter on Human

rightful place in education so that young people could become media literate.[27] It is important to learn how to critically decode media messages, and the contents of the media culture to be read and critically analysed, and to assess the aesthetic quality of the content. Media literacy involves acquiring knowledge of all media - print, radio, television, and it is necessary to study their history, production, and economic principles of their functioning, look for the answer to the question of who owns the media, what is the concept of media ownership and what consequences it may cause in the terms of concentration of social power and the commercialization of content.

For this to happen, we need activist strategies to consider how the media, and above all television and internet, can be used as instruments of social progress. "Critical media pedagogy can cultivate citizens, helping individuals to get rid of media manipulation and gain the ability to criticize the media culture and obtaining information from various sources, thus enabling informed citizens intelligent political judgment."[28] Therefore, the media should act as a progressive force in society that will promote social enlightenment, which is certainly a challenge facing the media culture. When it could happen to us that the school introduces the subject to allow the education to understand the media, it is difficult to predict, because in this respect we lag behind developed Western societies. The residue is most evident in the sphere of economics and politics, which carries backlogs and in other areas - technology, law, education and the like.

Instead of defining media as a phenomenon threatening social values, it is necessary to take measures that will lead to successful media policy. In addition to media education in schools are necessary the strategies and laws that will be based on positive European examples. Also, it is important to establish a new scale of values which requires a reconstruction of the public and the media sphere. First of all, it would mean the freedom of the press and the autonomy of the media. The function of the media is a social responsibility, acting in the public interest and the needs of individuals,

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Rights (1945) and the European Convention on protection of Human rights and Fundamental freedoms (1950).

[27] The concept of media literacy is defined at a conference on media literacy in 1992 as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and transmit messages through the media. This definition focuses on the concept of media literacy, which is based on the media as a positive source of information and entertainment.

[28] Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*, Clio, Belgrade, 2004, p. 558

society as a whole, and particularly small vulnerable groups such as young people, and in this sense, the media must promote a quality program.

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