

(Not)free media = (Not)free society

Pressure on media – causes and consequences

Journalism exists to bring sense where economy, politics and wars reduce the sense of human life. Journalists explain that such things are possible, highlight those who cause them and strive to force the decision makers to improve the state of society.

Most important roles of media are: informative, educational and entertainment role. Each of them has their own sense and place in the public domain if they are appropriately represented. Some media functions were mentioned by Vreg, and they include: „a) functions immanent to mass media (opinion, orientation, informative and action); b) functions performed by mass media, such as social functions, and functions with other institutions in society (socialization, recreational, interactive and integrative), and c) functions derived from human social activity (political, economical, cultural, scientific, educational, sport, religious and other activities)“. (Vreg, 1991:51) From these media functions, much can be concluded about their importance in a society. They not only inform the public, they also help the public orient itself in complex environment, they educate it, transfer cultural heritage, entertain, and help marginalized groups to integrate into society.

Key role of media in society remains its role of supervision over actions of politicians, its respective “watchdog” role. Sense of this function is in maintaining public concern. Media are not only considered to be „Fourth Estate“, but are also considered to be an extended arm of public, and patron of public against politicians. Media connect the politicians with the „pulse“, interests and needs of residents they were chosen to serve. They are expected to work with public interest in mind which by Press Complaints Commission that regulates British printed media means: (I) revealing of crimes and misdemeanours; (II) protection of public health and safety and (III) prevention of misinforming of public by some statement or action of some individual or organization.ⁱ

For Winfried Schulz, media are important because „1. They *extend* human activity in time and space, 2. *Change* the public activities that previously were performed in face-to-face communication, 3. Encourage *the fusion* activities and 4. Because factors of many sectors have to adapt their behaviour to media values, forms and routines.“ (According to Stig, 2008:108)

However, in many functions, media have failed, and there are many reasons for that, with two that should be considered as key reasons.

First and the most mentioned reason, probably not entirely justified, is the sudden development of new media, internet technology, which enabled anybody who wants to emit information, to do it anytime and anywhere (F. Bal named this paradigm 3A – anybody, anywhere, anytime). This changed relationship between the communicator and recipient, this freedom that allows anybody to be a communicator if they want to, significantly relativized

the role of professional journalist. Many authors consider that neither the technology that enabled the development of internet nor the Internet itself are neutral when we observe the decrease of quality in journalism. In his work, *The Cult of the Amateur: How blogs, MySpace, YouTube, and the rest of today's user-generated media are destroying our economy, our culture, and our values*, Andrew Keen criticizes the one of internet's hailed advantages – enabling every user to be a communicator. That possibility is used to create a „culture of digital narcissism“ (Keen, 2008:9), where users do not use Internet to interact with each other but to express themselves and emit themselves. Regis Debray thinks that „we should position ourselves in an Aesopian way –as towards the best and worst invention in the same time.“ (Debray, 200:234) In his opinion, internet will not lead to extinction of some classic media, it will lead towards their transformation and adaptation as it happened with the earlier media. He says that fears of technology are overblown because „the technology becomes a hyperbolised synonym for evil.“ (Debray 2000:230) We should not talk about the influence of the Internet, we should talk about the „complex interaction“ (Ibid) which happens between the media and society.

Second, and more important reason, McChesney says that it is the key reason for changes facing the media, is the contemporary, global, ruthless and it also seems the unstoppable development of capitalism. Why? In his book *Digital Disconnect* McChesney talks about the capitalism as the cause of fall of quality in journalism, because as he says „capitalism has the unforgiving logic, that if you play, you play to win.“ (McChesney, 2015:51) It uncovers the hopes of Internet optimists who forecasted that Internet would end the advertising, end the powerful corporate monopoly, support the development of democracy and end the censorship. For him „the critic of technology that we lost control of is the critic of commercialism that we lost the control of.“ (Ibid, 99) Advertisers, PR experts, spin-doctors and politicians have found the new ways for even more sophisticated advertising on Internet. For McChesney journalism is the „public good“ same as water and air. It can have positive and negative „externalities“, and „if the market underestimates and spoils journalism, then the journalism will produce the uninformed public, and the result of that will be corruption and poverty.“ (McChesney, 2015:78)

Ever since their inception, media were exposed to different kinds of pressure. For a long time, it was considered that political pressures were the worst and that worse than political control cannot happen. Today, combination of economical and political pressures show that it can still go worse. Apart from censorship they are exposed to, journalists themselves accept even worse abolition of freedom through auto-censorship or partial, ideological and subjective reporting for their own interests. Those interests range from life important, keeping their jobs and source of income for their life and lives of their families to other smaller financial or political party interests. These and other types of influences on media and journalists, authors of *Media and Shrinking space in Bosnia and Herzegovina* publication consider these a „narrowing of public space and media space for discussion, or shrinking space.“ (Turčilo, Buljubašić, 2017:11)

Under the influence of different types of pressures, it is questionable how media succeed in achieving their basic objectives, and those are according to Čerkez: “1. To obtain a true

information, 2. To professionally and expertly edit it, 3. To deliver it on time so that information can fulfil its function (come to its public, citizens, ruling political elite or opposition).“ (Čerkez, 2009:30)

Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina face the trends that are confronting the media in whole world. Pressure on media, attacks on journalists, disrespect of law by political and economical elites, labelling the journalists as traitors, foreign mercenaries, are integral part of Bosnian media everyday life.

There is a huge number of media in this country and we all agree in one thing – such big number of media is unnecessary. According to information from *Balkan media barometer for 2015.*, *Working conditions of journalists* publication by Radenko Udovičić, *Media and shrinking space in Bosnia and Herzegovina* by Turčilo and Buljubašić, number of media in Bosnia and Herzegovina is following: 44 television stations (and three public TV stations), 140 radio stations, 184 different publications, magazines and newspapers, eight news agencies and five daily newspapers. Even though the data is not uniform, it is evident that number of media exceeds the needs of country with three and a half million people. 69% of population has access to internet. According to data from *Yearly report of Regulatory agency for communication*, penetration level of mobile phones was around 96% in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2016.

In spite of such high number of media, and very good legal regulations, report of Reporters without borders for 2017. shows that Bosnia and Herzegovina is on 65th position according to the index of media freedom, and neighbouring countries are even worse (Serbia – 66th position, Croatia – 74th position, Montenegro – 108th position). Bosnia and Herzegovina is in category of countries with „visible problems“ considering the media freedom.

According to the index of media sustainability (IREX) for 2017., Bosnia and Herzegovina is in „unsustainable combined systems“ category. In 2017., our country fell back when compared to 2016. Considering the freedom of speech, and there is no noticeable progress considering the professionalism in reporting and plurality of news. Management of media is decreasing, and these „conditions contribute to bigger influence on editorial policies of media by their remaining income sources, including the political factors“.

Electronic media in Bosnia and Herzegovina are regulated by Regulatory agency for communication. Printed and online media work under the self regulation principle, and it is carried out by Council for press and online media of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Laws that are relative to media are Law about communication in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Law about slander protection (FBIH, RS, Brčko District), Law about freedom of access to information (BiH, FBiH, RS). Council for press has a Codex for printing and online media which „aims to set the basics of system of self regulation in press and online media, which will be considered as morally binding for journalists, editors, owners and publishers of press and online media.“ Every Law and Codex guarantee to some degree the independence and freedom of journalists, either through giving the media rights to obtain the information in public interest service, or through the right of media to serve the public, or through prevention of misuse of Slander Law. Unfortunately, in reality, things are different.

Pressure on media

Huge problem facing the journalists from private media is dependence of editors and editorial policies to media owners. Professional journalist autonomy does not exist in private media. Journalists are not allowed to write critical articles about advertisers in media they work in even when the criticism is deserved. In research carried out by Independent association of journalists of Serbia, one of journalists from private media said that media are to owners „just a pendant in sea of other businesses, where they do not have damages but could have some use in some specific moment.“ However, the key problem is not the pressure of media owners on journalists so they can please the advertisers to which they are financially dependent, but also the consciousness of journalists that if they lose the advertiser, they will probably lose their paycheck as well. That leads to self-censorship where the journalists, along with owners take care that they do not offend in any way their sources of income. Journalists from the above mentioned NUNS research admit they approach their advertisers „in a different manner when compared to those from which they do not have any financial gain: the first group are given more attention and importance than they deserve (meaning they would not receive such attention if the financial situation in media was better), and the second group is usually ignored or they are given less attention.“ From this it can be observed that dependence of private media to their advertisers comes from bad financial condition of media. Reasons for such state are, according to earlier research by Udovičić, „trend of lesser investment in advertising, and trend of decline in tax revenue“ (more important to public media). Some of the causes for bad situation on media marketing market are economical crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Crisis has started in 2009.), high competition level, lack of advertising interest of domestic companies, low prices of advertising when compared to neighbouring countries and the rest of the world, lack of advertising laws, disorganized market which repels foreign investors and other. So, „Bosnia and Herzegovina loses millions of marketing money. Marketing agencies and media lose money as well, which leaves the consequences such as bad working conditions for journalists, low quality programs, dependence of media to political support and lack of media pluralism.“

Apart from being often (not) objectively forced to be voice of economical powers, private media are not free from the *political pressures*. Even though the optimistic people expected that capitalism and market will arrange the relations in media, so the best will survive, something completely different occurred. Capitalistic Darwinism made the survival of the fittest possible, but also not the survival of the best. Those who were ready to sacrifice freedom of media and professional standards for the interests of advertisers and politicians (often incarnated in the same centre) managed to survive, other were smothered by debts and disappeared. Dejan Arsenijević, journalist of Vreme from Serbia magazine thinks that „Financial difficulties and fear of losing the jobs are the biggest problems for media freedom.“ Typical example of political pressure on media is Dnevni Avaz newspaper that became a complete political bulletin of its owner Fahrudin Radončić and space to clash with political enemies. Apart from that, we witnessed the pressures on portal Klix.ba, when members of Ministry of internal affairs of Republic of Srpska raided the editorial staff space.

Turčilo and Buljubašić talk about „instrumentalization of private media where owners use media as source of influence and negotiation with elites and for interventions in political areas, which is in many cases the most important goal of media ownership.“ (Turčilo, Buljubašić, 2017:16) According to McChesney, capitalism and democracy are mutually exclusive. Capitalism „promotes inequality, monopoly, hyper-commerce, stagnation, and all of these eat away at democracy.“ (McChesney, 2013:47) Freedom of media is a key condition for existence of democratic society. However, from the examples from our media, we can see that neither media nor journalists are free, and they cannot be free since they financially depend on powers. Media are not the system whose organisation can be left to market, or even worse, to market in combination with politics.

Combination of political and economical pressure is widely spread. Society transformed from „informational shortage to informational abundance“ where „everybody with some news can compete for attention of public.“ Hernes, according to Stig, 2008:107) Wanting to be first on the turbulent information market, journalists often accept „packed“ information sent by PR experts from political parties. Consciously or not, media wilfully accept dependence on politicians concerning the information. On the other side, politicians restrict information access to „disobedient“ media, and so they violate the Law of freedom of access to information and Law against slander. They often restrict access to press conferences if they are not obedient. Turčilo and Buljubašić point out „that border between political and economical pressures is often non-existent, and that politicians often give financial support to media conditionally, and that this sort of support is only given to those media who are loyal to ruling political parties and who do not publish critical content about members of these parties.“ (Turčilo, Buljubašić, 2017:30) In this way, by preferring loyalty to professionalism, media loses credibility and public trust. Thanks to Internet and new media, politicians can communicate with public without conventional media. More and more, they address their voters over the social networks (Twitter, Facebook), leave the media without the information, and bypass them as mediators in communication.

Media public, also known as consumers, pressure the private media as well. Impatient generation of „digital natives“ (Prensky, 2001.) does not have developed reading habits and does not value quality articles. They skim through the articles rather than read them. Therefore, it happens that sensationalist stories receive more clicks than the articles from quality media such as Centre for research journalism. Among the most read websites in Bosnia and Herzegovina are, according to research by alexa.com portal, Google, Youtube, Facebook, buying and selling portal OLX.ba, and the informational web portal Klix.ba is only at sixth spot. Portals of quality media houses, such as Al Jazeera or Centre for research journalism are not even among the first 50, by number of visits, while the N1 television portal is only at 48th spot. Ethnically and nationally divided public discredits and calls traitors the media who critically write about national political leaders. Writing about them objectively without being negative is impossible. Impatience of modern prosumer conditions the journalists and media to make their content as short and interesting as possible, which reduces its quality. It seems that media who try to be professional and independent are targeted by political and economical powers, but also by the public in whose interest they try to work.

Self-censorship remains the biggest hurdle for media freedom. In situation where media are economically dependent on politicians and advertisers, self-censorship is unavoidable consequence. Censorship is not even needed here, because the media are blackmailed and work in such conditions where self-censorship occurs as a normal part of journalist profession. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, every man who tries to survive on a job and live in normal conditions is self-censored. Society lacks freedom so it is hard to recognize if we say something as we mean it or we say it not to confront the sources of power. Interlocutors of research *Media and shrinking space in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, agree that „due to political and economical influences, a lot of journalists accept censorship and self-censorship from fear that they will lose their jobs or suffer financial sanctions.“ (Turčilo, Buljubašić, 2017:44) So, journalists often „choose between ethics and professionalism on one side and existence, on the other. (Ibid) In *At Journalism* book, Kurtić says that „the biggest obstacle in reaching the imperative of journalistic representation of reality, and truthfulness of mass-media information, represents the impossibility to avoid representation of events (reporting) to happen without mediators as a symbolic presentation of meaning.“ (Kurtić, 2006:83) Journalists are often trapped in their own „pre-typed pictures of reality, whose origin they are often not conscious of“ (Ibid) it means that journalists themselves, often unconsciously, report under the influence of their own stereotypes and prejudice. That segment of unintentional and unconscious partiality, imposed by journalist himself, should be taken into account and it influences the final result of media report.

One of the problems, especially in online media domain, is the increasing number of citizen-journalists and other content producers who equally compete with professional media content for public attention. Journalism found itself in a situation where it must fight for clicks with ruthless competition that does not shy from publishing half-truths or even completely fake news. Current state on the web (social networks, blogs, portals, forums) Keen describes as „a situation where blind man leads a blind man“. (Keen, 2008:20) „Instead of serving to search for news, information or cultural content, we use it to be the news, information and cultural content“. (Ibid) Dejan Anastasijević, Journalist from Vreme magazine from Serbia, says, „lately, not only here, but also globally, journalism is ceasing to be a paid profession“. And „all other problems stem from there, because poor and afraid man is easily abused and blackmailed.“

Consequences of pressure on media

Many problems arise from the pressures endured by media concerning the content of media.

First problem is different kinds of partiality. Dennis McQuail mentions four types of partialities: „political party, propaganda, unintentional and ideological“. (Street, 2003:20) Each of these deforms and impoverishes media reports. Even the columns in newspapers are dependable on advertisers which are wanted.“ (Ibid) In online media, many columns are form technology, health, food and drink, fashion, make up, cars areas which is an obvious consequence of advertisers influence on media. Advertising in online media, as we said earlier, did not disappear with inception of internet, it evolved in forms that are more sophisticated. Today there is a lot of hidden advertising, so called „brand journalism“ which is also implied as „allowing the advertisers to produce text which look like they are made by journalist“. (Phillips, 2015:120) Nick Davis defines this as „churnalism“, the practice to „give a journalist PR materials and he interprets them“. (Ibid, 41) Apart from advertising, in a country such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, a huge problem is also reporting in media that deepens the national tensions, bigotry and does not contribute to understanding and peace among the nationalities of the country. Some media do not even try to hide their intention to address only one of the three constituent nations. It is especially bad in online media where hate speech spreads unstoppably.

Another consequence is increasingly *lighter theme* of media. In their reports, journalists choose to deal with less serious stories, and „softer“ themes. Petterson came to result that shows that the number of soft news when compared to hard news in America increased in all media he researched (national and local television, leading newspapers, daily journals, weekly magazines). In 1980s, 25% of analyzed news was soft, while in 2000s their percentage rose to 40%. James Curran came to similar results in Great Britain. Therefore, „British press writes 54% of their texts about themes such as criminal, sport, entertainment, lifestyle“. (Curran and associates 2009:4) Similar situation is in Bosnian media. Infotainment, tabloidization of media, representation of soft news, fake news, sensationalist „hook“ headlines, are visible consequences of suppression of media freedom and their financial dependence on politicians and advertisers. There are lot of „data without context“ in media (Bogdanić, 2013:14), because journalists are afraid to offend advertisers and politicians by their interpretation. We are aware that „essence of reporting work is reporting and analysis.“ (Vočkić-Avdagić, 2002:70)

Financial dependence, economical, political and other pressures, competition, lowered the *ethical standards* in media. Every day, media mislead us with headlines which are not confirmed by texts. Number of fake news rises day by day. Therefore, recently two portals were started in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, which deal with revealing and analyzing of fake news. Those portals are raskrinkavanje.ba i raskrinkavanje.rs. However, there are new ethical dilemmas. We still do not know how to deal with content shared by citizen-journalists, citizens or journalists on social networks. How to deal with texts that have twitter profiles of terrorist organizations cited as sources? Often, profiles of dead people are used as source of

information. It is obvious that we need redefining of media ethics and creation of new codes and laws which will prevent the abuse. „Profit is placed ahead of ethical standards and norms, in the race for influence, scope and viewership, it was unavoidable that ethical codes and standards would fail first“. (Turčilo, Buljubašić, 2017:62)

Fejzić-Čengić writes how today we live society of spectacle, where „culture around us turns into celebrity culture, and politics turn into spectacle politics“. (Fejzić-Čengić, 2016.) Aim to create an equal ratio between important and fun information, to earn money and to give public a quality information, resulted in a lot of *genres* or „pseudo genres“ (Fejzić-Čengić) including: „infotainment, infomercial, argutainment, communication stampede and spin, and media spectacle“. (Fejzić-Čengić, 2016:14) Attention turned to musical celebrities scene, and turning of politics into scene to make it more interesting, adverts that dominate over the media content, exaggeration in reporting of situations which scare public (terrorist attacks for example), hyper sensationalism, are all part of the phenomena which many authors call spectacularization and tabloidization of society and media.

Phenomenon of so called *copy paste or plagiarism journalism* is getting more and more noticeable, and journalist is not there to collect the facts and interpret and explain them, he is there to copy the content created by somebody else (agencies mainly) and carry them over to his media, usually without mentioning the original information creator. Copy-paste journalism is only of the segments of copy-paste culture. According to Alić, this culture spreads by multiplication of mass media messages, and that multiplication goes so far that it ends in „copy-paste culture which, not aware of mechanisms and technologies, slowly but surely does the job for someone else.“ (Alić, 2008:64) A lot of news is created based on tweets or facebook posts. For a journalist it is enough just to be active on social media, which is a job that required a constant movement, and now that is a big and significant change. Now we can talk about the new generation of *twitter, facebook or instagram journalists*. This, superficial mass media content raise superficial people, people who live the „bla bla culture“. (Alić, 2008:70) where it is important to talk and not say anything substantial, to be hyper-informed and not know anything, to watch and not see. Our role in such media is to have our own stance, the stance about everything about what we do not have a rational need to have a stance.

For Ratko Božović, consequences of media adapting to „competing market“ are numerous. Media act in a non-conflict manner in order to keep its position, by acting so they also preserve the status quo that fits the government. „Patronization exists in all forms of non-recreational realizations of non-free man.“ (Božović, 2015:121) Therefore, a person who is not free, or a journalist who is not free, cannot create authentic nor quality media content. He can talk without saying anything substantial. That is how Božović notices the lack of dialogue in our media. There is no dialogue because freedom is necessary for existence of dialogue. Because of that, our media (most of them) do not analyze, do not interpret, they only transfer factual content. Although, the media are everywhere, they, being not free, are not capable to stop human anxious loneliness in the world. Time that we spend with such media, is not a quality time it is „killed“ time. Television, the favourite media in Bosnia and Herzegovina „became an unconcealed time killer“. (Ibid, 16) In our politics, economy, media, and society

itself, monologue dominates. We have a right to give our opinion, but we do not know to whom, and whether this world will change in any way because of our opinion or because we gave it on social media. Non-conflict and subdued, media does not manage to be a generator of change for the better.

In the end, we will return to criteria for assessment of healthy journalism, which were given in the above mentioned Robert McChesney's book. The first criterion for healthy journalism is that journalism „must secure a rigorous revision of people in the governing institutions and of people who want to come to power by the way of country government, corporate or non-profit sector“. (McChesney, 2013:113) Our journalism, depending on politicians and corporations, cannot fulfil this criterion. Paradoxically, it seems that we are lucky that media are nationally divided, so we do not listen to completely orchestrated stories. However, such critic is not honest and does not help healthy journalism. Second criterion for healthy journalism is so out of reach for our Bosnian and Herzegovinian journalistic situation that it seems written to describe it. It says that journalism „must have a convincing method of distinguishing truth from lies or at least preventing liars from being irresponsible and thus lead people to catastrophe – especially wars, economical crisis and social conflicts“. (Ibid) Any comment seems unnecessary there. Third criterion relates to obligation of media to „consider all human needs for information as legitimate“. (Ibid) Therefore, the media should be inclined to be on side of those who have less political influence and economical power. Unfortunately, the state of media here is mainly opposite of that idea. In the end, healthy journalism „must offer a wide array of information content about the most important questions of our time. Researches show that it is the key factor for encouragement of informed citizens to join politics.“ (Ibid) Our citizens are completely apathetic, which can be linked to a media's way of informing about politics.

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Biography

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¹ Više o ovome na linku: https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/2010-11/Journalism/index1766.html?page_id=21 (4.6.2017.)