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Article

On the False Representation of the Present-Day Crisis Society in the Global Corporate Media

Abstract: *There is a legitimate expectation that the global media should accurately reflect and positively assist the democratic political process. The great crises that are shaking the world today show there is no chance of this happening. The global media has been a major contributor to inadequate response of the West to the flows of forced migration from the wars in the Middle East and North Africa. In the period of the global pandemic, they spread ominous panic predictions and contributed, in fact, to justifying the curtailment of human rights. At present the energy and the environmental crises are deepening as a result of media propaganda.*

It seems natural and justified to explain the disappearance of independent journalism and the tendency of the global media to offer false pictures of the world with the reflex to serve the ruling elites and with the financial and political dependencies of the owners.

However, there is one perspective for revealing manipulateness of the media that is usually lost. It is possible that journalists isolate themselves from reality

for epistemological reasons, misconceptions and prejudices, that make them unable to understand and give meaning of it. The failure to understand today's extremely complex and confused world can be a more serious source of delusions and fake news than financial and political addictions or serving political and economic interests.

In the presented paper I will analyse some subjective obstacles through cognitive and creative thinking that have been analysed by philosophers and

social scientists and inevitably impact the depiction of the world in the media. They outline a rich tradition that raises serious doubts about the attainment of reliable knowledge and true media information.

Keywords: *crisis society; global media; subjective obstacles; truth*

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1. Introduction

Today, we are increasingly asking ourselves why we stopped believing that the global media should accurately reflect and positively assist the democratic political process in present-day liberal democracies. Un-

fortunately, the great crises that are shaking the humanity today lead us to the conviction that no chance of this happening. The global media has been a major contributor to the West's inadequate response to the flows of forced migration from the wars in the Middle East and North Africa. In the period of the global pandemic, they spread ominous panic predictions of scientists and the WHO, and contributed in fact to justifying the curtailment of human rights. At present the energy and the environmental crises are deepening as a result of media propaganda of environmental alarmism and silencing of the critical voices. The turning of a blind eye to political and corruption scandals at all levels of global and state bureaucracy and the one-sided coverage of wars and social conflicts also testify to this process. The media also create critical tensions on climate issues and human survival: they are about to become a new dangerous ideology. This is undoubtedly a loss for democracy, but it very easily becomes a threat to it. Media manipulation undermines the foundations of democracy and citizens' right to free choice. We will be justified to ask ourselves why the media choose to serve political and economic interests and neglect the responsibility to inform people and protect the truth?

It seems natural and justified to explain the disappearance of independent journalism and the tendency of the global media to offer false pictures of the world with the reflex to serve the ruling elites and with the financial and political dependencies of the owners. It is little consolation to say that there are also good, brave and honest journalists, indeed! The problem is that today's corporate media must be brought under public pressure because they have ceased to work for democratic institutions and the interests of citizens.

Censorship of what is written on social networks is an open secret, and the curious thing is that the global media do not even need one, because they present distorted information inadequate analyses and targeted ideological suggestions. Social media is owned by private companies that, through employees, control the opinions expressed and the news spread to conform to the accepted ideology. We can ask them to be replaced by information sources that adequately represent the opinions, proposals and initiatives of citizens. These can be blogs, publicly funded media, information institutions from the field of higher education.

However, there is one perspective to explain the manipulateness of the corporate media that is often missed. The journalists can isolate themselves from reality for epistemological reasons, misconceptions and prejudices, and be unable to understand and make sense of it. Failure to understand today's world can be a more serious source of delusions and fake news than financial and political addictions or the inclusion of political and economic interests.

In this paper I will analyse some subjective obstacles through cognitive and creative thinking that have been analysed by philosophers and social scientists and can be assumed that they inevitably impact the depiction of the world in the media. These philosophical challenges outline a rich tradition that raises serious doubts about the attainment of reliable knowledge and true media information. Ways to counteract the manipulateness of the corporate media on the basis of deliberative democracy and some communitarian criticisms against the neoliberal system and media environment will also be brought out.

2. The media does not see the world as it really is

The reluctance of people working in the media to understand the complexity of today's world can be explained by the perceived immorality and selfishness of young people in developed countries and the crisis of higher education in the neoliberal era. The danger of losing good salaries in the corporate media is an incentive to avoid deepening the knowledge of the world

that the media reports on. Better to find news that sells well. Media workers would prefer the easy profit from preparing custom articles over the more difficult profit from rating and fighting for public causes.

Perhaps the oldest element of this tradition are the arguments of the sceptics. They draw attention to the differences in the senses of living beings, the differences between people, between the readings of the five senses, human states, the influence of the position and distance of things, of impurities and quantities, of the relativity of the way things appear to us, in the ways of pronouncing judgments, the various customs and laws (Sextus Empiricus, 1990). From the fact that sensory experience lies to us, a conclusion is made about the impossibility of proving the reliability of knowledge. People see the world with different senses, attitudes, experiences, and this makes their perceptions subjective and unreliable.

And when we say that the media doesn't see some events as social protests and political actions, maybe they don't have enough experience to see them to understand the essence of these events. Seeing the world through the glasses of an elitist worldview can place such a veil. Such a worldview is nurtured in the elite universities, whose budgets are larger than the state education budgets of the countries of Eastern Europe. And when this attitude is tied to a radical liberal ideology, based on environmental alarmism, a rejection of the racist colonial past and revolutionary rewriting of history, real things in the world become even more complicated to understand. The situation becomes critical and even dramatic when journalists do not know the history of the world and their country.

Higher education seems to be increasingly losing the good traditions known in the past, the rich content and efficiency. It is oriented only towards practical benefits and survival skills in terms of economic development. It can definitely be argued that journalism education has no subject of its own. Communication sciences reveal technology and craft skills, but do not provide knowledge of essentials. If the media covers scientific achievements, the authors should have a corresponding education. Modern education in the social sciences and social experience, and also a democratic culture, is mandatory for political journalists. Education in arts and culture is mandatory for journalists in these fields. Education and erudition in the natural sciences is a must when informing people about scientific discoveries and threats from natural factors. The presentation of crises of a different nature requires skills from the spheres of national and corporate security. This means that an earthquake coverage requires knowledge of physics, geography and seismology. Authors of media releases and analysis must have authority and responsibility in order for people to believe them. Today's media are further and further away from this ideal.

People who do not read books and are easily manipulated start working in the media. Selection opportunities are limited because the media can no longer earn from ratings and followers. They have to rely on financial support from business, projects, contributions from NGOs and especially addressing unfair media practices. Digitalization also leads to the deprivation of traditional media of funds acquired in a transparent way – buying newspapers, paying fees for cable TV. Thus, the media is placed in a situation to seek salvation and development in all possible ways.

It is easiest for the media to take a political and economic position with the powerful people of the day, to adopt a winning ideology that guarantees them finances. We can recall the theory-ladenness of observations analysed and defended by Thomas Kuhn. They are affected by the theoretical ideas held by the scientists. Two paradigms (theories) are incommensurable because there is no single instance as an independent language of observations by which to

compare them. Kuhn believes that the paradigm predetermines the vision and description of the world. For Kuhn “paradigm changes do cause scientists to see the world of their research-engagement differently. In so far as their only recourse to that world is through what they see and do, we may want to say that after revolution scientists are responding to a different world” (Kuhn, 1970: 111). Similarly, people in the media perceive the ideological pictures about the world of their class, group, national or religious community. Present-day humanitarian education models uniform thinking in stereotypes. It is true that ideological biases can also be shaped by financial interest or as a result of insufficient education. It prevents media authors from seeing anything different and closer to reality.

Inevitably, we must consider that natural language does not describe reality sufficiently adequately and accurately. Its words and expressions often cannot be applied to many real-world phenomena because they are too general and imprecise. They become part of a condensed thinking, allowing for different applications and interpretations. In many cases, we don’t even have the opportunity for something better or more accurate, and that’s why we settle for the stereotype. It relies on commonality of names. We are dealing with stereotyped thinking when the genus is identified with one of its species. Journalists prefer to spread their notions of typical images, behaviour, reactions, beliefs over all people and cases. The craftsman journalist can make a sensation out of any simple fact by adding fabrications and misrepresentations.

Does the media lie knowingly or unknowingly? The more justified answer is that they lie unconsciously, because they are unable to understand some complex processes in today’s world and fill in the information in all sorts of ways. They are not afraid to ignore the truth and factors outside their interest, and they are ready to fill the information with their own constructions in order to appeal to the public. A lie cannot be defined simply as a statement that is not true. It is not about the “objective” untruthfulness of the sentence in relation to reality, but about the inconsistency of the statement and the beliefs of its author – what he, perhaps mistakenly, believes to be true or tries to present it as such. The dialectic of objective and subjective, goals and effects is extremely important in this case. The operationalization of the lie/mistake distinction entails the rejection of the lie=falsehood identification in the same way that the operationalization of the reality/illusion distinction leads to the rejection of the identification of lie and insincerity. The orientation to defining falsehood by penetrating the speaker’s subjective beliefs is inextricably linked to the goal of misleading the addressee or error of regarding the utterance as true. A lie is a statement whose intention is to attribute an inadequate status in the opinion of the speaker to a certain situation, perhaps different from the one being evaluated, by the addressee.

The procedure of telling a lie can be reduced to the deliberate construction of mental misunderstandings. The simplest form of lying is the brazen statement of an untrue statement. For such lies, as today the information environment of social networks and the “mainstream” media itself is filled with, the folk wisdom that “a lie has short legs” applies. The media in question turned the wars into a brazen televised hoax, and in the US elections they firmly insisted that they were the “first” power, or at least its main tongs. Ethical and legal regulations no longer matter to the media. There are many more refined variants of lying. If the truth is only one, at least in our naive intuitions, the possibilities for deviations from it are countless. Among the most refined variants of lying is not telling the truth, the “whole” truth, and hiding the actual state of affairs. Speaking the “whole” truth is a simple rhetorical device, because it is hardly possible to reveal the complete truth about every possible factual state of the world. Today, this form of communication by processing and reshaping the given “true” information

is so often used and developed in countless variants that it is found in almost all sources – from media productions, to direct propaganda as a means of “hybrid” wars and ideological manipulation of history and cultural values. The transmission of the truth does not end with the requirement of sincerity and even responsibility of the speaker. A critical attitude towards media messages is of paramount importance.

The ancient Greeks distinguished knowledge from opinion by their validity. With the name of Plato and his dialogue *Theaetetus* (Plato, 2021: 201C–210D) is associated the analytic philosophers’ conception of knowledge as a body of justified true beliefs (Russel, 1990: 131–140). And if we assume that knowledge consists of true beliefs, for which there is a *logos*, i.e. grounds, opinions are devoid of such. It seems to me indisputable that the presentation of events in the media expresses opinions. Opinions are not proven and cannot be proven: they are only disclosed. So why do we expect to get credible information from them? Opinions may be substantiated, but should not be associated with a claim to ultimate truth. Opinions expressed in the media cannot carry more weight than the convictions of citizens. In times of limited circulation of the written word, this may have mattered, but it does not today.

Today’s human life continues to be wrapped in all sorts of prejudices and superstitions, which are also an obstacle to knowledge and independent thinking. Prejudice is a type of belief that is not justified, but is supported by negative attitudes towards a person, object or problem. Today we are witnessing how Western societies try to wash their collective conscience of the racial and gender prejudices rooted in the era of colonialism and the domination of the West over the world by imposing new ones in a radical reading. The crisis-to-crisis life of today’s humanity heightens the interest of journalists in producing dramatic narratives to attract followers and to accumulate profits in a dishonest way. The truth has no chance in the woven web of lies.

However, human life and thinking are impossible without prejudices and superstitions. This was also reported by Paul Feyerabend, who, criticizing Francis Bacon’s ambition to remove and clear all “idols” that hinder knowledge, noted that “eliminate all natural interpretations, and you also eliminate the ability to think and to perceive”. These interpretations could be considered as a priori presuppositions of science in the context of Kantian ideas or as prejudices, which could be removed before any serious examination has begun (Feyerabend, 1993: 58). They are subject to verification and rejection through critical discussion. They are ideas so closely connected with observations that special efforts are needed to establish their existence and content; they cannot be subjected to verification and corrections. They are transmitted by media images and stories to the public like a contagious disease. Journalists perceive the world through their natural interpretations. They limit their perception of the world by reducing it to individualistic preconceptions.

One could justifiably claim that Francis Bacon’s critique of the idols of the mind remains relevant. The “idols of the marketplace” are rooted in the connections and relationships between people, in the names “that strangely bind the mind”, in the definitions and explanations of scientists who cannot fix things. “But words plainly force and overrule the understanding, and throw all into confusion, and lead men away into numberless empty controversies and idle fancies” concludes Bacon. The idols “derive their origin from the peculiar nature of each individual’s mind and body, and also from education, habit and accident...and they exert the greatest power in polluting the understanding” (Bacon, 1901: 21–28). In this way we could explain how media outlets fabricate mountains of false narratives, empty words and shoddy propaganda. The idols of the theatre could be considered as an expression of the ideological and political affiliations of the media.

In Bacon's critique of the idols of the mind we can find motifs from Plato's myth of the cave. I believe that the Feyerabend's theory of natural interpretations refers to the same phenomenon. The opportunities for deviation of information in the media from the truth grow in direct proportion to their development, influence and power in society.

3. Critical thinking and the false images

Critical thinking, the classical method of doubt, and analytical methods for uncovering linguistic errors can be particularly effective means of counteracting the delusions of the pseudo-informational environment and manipulation. It includes skills to analyse, synthesize, evaluate, evaluate, and apply information gained through observation, experience, and reflection in problem solving. Critical thinking is meaningful, rational thinking, the purpose of which is to establish what beliefs to accept and how to act. It is independent – it is based on one's own opinions; information is its starting point, not its end point. Nor can it be accepted uncritically. It starts with asking questions and is problem-solving oriented. It looks for convincing and correct arguments where more than one solution is possible to demonstrate why the preferred solution or statement is logical and applicable. Critical challenge and discussion of ideas, news, analysis, theories and propositions is necessary to break down preconceptions in order to advance one's position.

Rational discussion is the domain of free critical thinking. Nothing in it can be considered immune from critical scrutiny. The latter is not limited to deduction alone, but can follow all possible logical arguments, deductive and non-demonstrative. Part of the strength of this procedure lies in the objective advantage of refutation over confirmation – the negative strategy has logical priority. This can be explained by the fact that an infinite number of confirmations cannot in a logically rigorous way prove a statement, and a single refutation is enough to disprove it.

Discussion is also the most important weapon against manipulation and propaganda. Persuasion is a message by which the agent tries to change the views of the addressee. The media persuades through false narratives, produces followers by spreading lies and false sensations. The agent transmits the message always with some purpose. When this goal is hidden from the addressee, we have manipulation. It is implicit persuasion with the aim of taking away the individual's right to free choice. Succumbing to manipulation is a voluntary relinquishment of the freedom to maintain one's own opinion. The situation with propaganda is similar – there one opinion is imposed as authoritative, without taking account of it to the audience. Usually both are associated with closure regarding reality or some fragment of it. Stupidity can also be defined along these lines: it implies giving in to manipulatively created beliefs and ideas, refusing any critical thinking. It is a lethargy of the mind that makes a person manageable and submissive, after he has replaced the problems of his own life with those of imaginary "stars", with false notions and ideas.

Today, manipulation dominates our lives – in politics and security sphere, media, advertising. The human voluntarily gives up his own life to accept the convenience of another "desirable" one created by the media and politicians to distract him from the thought of social protest and to entrench the hidden power of certain corporate forces. The only antidote to the subjugation of stupidity is to question everything, in the context of a discussion in which every proposition offered must stand critical scrutiny. Even if the manipulator is not in a position to

answer – if he is only a TV or political figure, a fake expert, or a pretentious sage – we should be able to put him before the court of our own critical judgment.

The method of doubt is a means of removing delusions, as with René Descartes, its application leads to finding an undoubted starting point of philosophizing. Following its rules, however, is beyond the power of today's human mind, which is to a great extent deprived of "*lumen naturale*" of reason (Decartes 1978). The method of doubt can help citizens to counter media manipulation. Nothing can be affirmed without critical scrutiny and discussion. Media materials can instil more credibility with objective presentation of facts and actual critical analysis.

Arguments by reference to authorities are especially suspect. It relies on natural interpretations and is a common catchphrase in the media. Argument by reference to authorities (politicians, thinkers) has not always enjoyed a particularly high prestige in the history of philosophy. In a logical aspect, it does not weigh more than the arguments "to the force" or "to the man". A truth can remain so even in the mouth of the biggest liar, and even the most serious philosopher could be a slave to lies and delusions. The agreement of the "sages", the consensus around one's opinions can be an indicator, a sign, but not a sufficient criterion for the truth.

In his work "*The Myth of the Framework*", 1987, Karl Popper developed the thesis that a "myth of the framework" prevails in the classical views of discussion (Plato, Aristotle), according to which 1) truth is born in it, 2) the parties recognize each other's arguments and together seek its establishment following certain "common frameworks". This point of view leads to dogmatism – accepting as true something that has not been proven logically correct. Let us recall that confirmations lead only to probable conclusions. In a rational discussion, the parties must start from a maximally large "gap" between them, they do not admit their arguments, and nothing is protected from critical scrutiny. Pluralism and criticism lead to a "clash" that is beneficial to each side. Popper extends his arguments in a broader cultural context – the "clash of cultures", not their submission to the "common framework" of a culture is useful, and European civilization is the best example of this (Popper, 1996).

The epistemological difficulties described here provide a sufficiently reliable explanation for the media's inability to objectively describe the news and the world as it is. The construction of a false world is the result of entrenched prejudices and delusions, of self-manipulation and a lack of critical thinking skills. thinking towards understanding events.

The media often lie to us not intentionally, but because they cannot connect the events, understand cause-effect relationships, and prefer to project black and white pictures of the world.

4. Conclusion

Media freedom does not mean that the media can write everything and supplement the missing information with lies and manipulative constructions. It implies a bold criticism of the violations of people's rights by the political authorities, of corruption and all negative phenomena in society. One can hardly expect such from the corporate media, which protect the interests of those in power and the big owners. A free media has scope for discussion and collective displays of civil disobedience, for giving a forum for the expression of all possible opinions.

How can political and media manipulation be countered? One possibility is through rational discussions that could show the hypocrisy of political suggestions and the inadequacy of media images of the world and point to sharing the good values of collective coexistence.

Doubt in the media and their objectivity can lead to justified mistrust and stimulate them to set higher demands for quality and objectivity towards their journalists. The dominance of

the media in the minds of people and in the spiritual life must be based on a principle of competitiveness and competition, which will give way to free media with high quality information and analytical culture. It is such public media and free citizen initiatives as blogs, discussion forums and projects that will be able to adequately express public interests. Each person's point of view and interests should find expression in collective discussions and public media. The media release process can help restore their role as a pillar of democracy and an instrument of democratic institutions.

Public criticism through free media and discussion can lead to social change and overcome policies that violate civil rights and public interests. The free initiative and actions of citizens to express their interests must have a field of expression that does not violate the rights of anyone involved. Freedom of thought and speech are fundamental values at the foundation of democracy. They must be defended without hesitation by citizens when threatened by the actions of governments, authoritarian policies and media propaganda.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

About the author

Vihren Bouzov is a Professor of Philosophy of Law and Logic at "St. Cyril and St. Methodius University" of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, born 1966. He has been 8 years Dean of its Faculty of Philosophy (2003-2011) and since 2018 is a Vice-Rector for Quality Assurance and Accreditation. He has been a coordinator of international and national scientific projects. Prof. Bouzov teaches courses of lectures on logic, culture of thinking and philosophy of law for philosophy and law-students and decision theory for security students. He has many publications in the fields of security studies, legal philosophy, political decision theory and logic in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Italy and other countries.

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