



## SOME STUDIES ON MEDIA POWER

Nguyen Manh Cuong

PhD student, MA. Faculty of Political Science, VNU, University of Social Sciences and Humanities

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\*Corresponding author: Nguyen Manh Cuong

PhD student, MA. Faculty of Political Science, VNU, University of Social Sciences and Humanities

### Abstract

*“Power” and “media” are two terms that are often linked but potentially in conflict. The first studies on the effects of the media - mainly under totalitarian regimes - made in the 1940s and 1950s, gave the media a virtually unlimited power to shape consciousness and create emotions in the recipients. These analyzes were grouped according to the robust effects model. In democracies, considered the fourth power, the media is both coveted and feared. The power of television as a vector of information and democratic debate is shaping the long-term mode of political production. Likewise, the myth of “investigative journalism,” free from all authority and all structural limitations, has made its mark in all media. But, over the past fifteen years, as liberal globalization has accelerated, this “fourth power” has lost its meaning, it has gradually lost its essential function of counter-balance. Worried especially by their pursuit of colossalism, which forced them to court other great powers, these large groups no longer proposed themselves, as a civic goal, which allowed the emergence of a “fifth power” that uses the new technologies of the internet against a civilian and citizen force against a new coalition of dominants.*

**Keywords:** Power- Media- Propaganda- political communication- Internet

### Introduction

We have known since Alexis de Tocqueville that the constitutional theory put in place by Montesquieu does not on its own account for the reality of powers. If the established powers are indeed three in number, it is the fourth power that the 20th century has come to know. Admittedly not instituted, but nevertheless constitutionally widely protected: remarkable for the extent of the freedom it confers, and its restriction as to the limitation of abuses, it is indeed a fundamental principle recognized by the laws to ensure that that none of the three powers excessively limits the freedom of what is therefore designated by the fourth: the media<sup>1</sup>.

Like writing according to Plato, the media are prostheses for thought or reflection. They are a crucible where thought is forged, and allow it to be communicated to one or more recipients, in various forms. Since the invention of the printing press, the media have hardly ceased to promote new forms of expression, which are

all means to man, to create new, glorious or derisory works<sup>2</sup>. The question of the “power of the media” very quickly became obsessive because of their spectacular use by totalitarian regimes. Radio and then television then aroused the most serious fears: we feared their “omnipotence” or their “all-powerfulness”, their ability to manipulate so-called weak minds (women, children, and by extension the masses).

It is largely in response to this type of schema, to better measure its accuracy and scope, that the sociology of the media has developed and that we have seen the flowering, from the 1940s, of more empirical work<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, the “editocrats” long considered as counter-powers, consider that the “information” they produce are faithful mirrors, absolutely neutral vis-à-vis the realities that

<sup>2</sup> Francis Balle (2017), The media, Collection: What do I know? Publisher: Presses Universitaires de France, Page: 128

<sup>3</sup> Grégory Derville (1998), The notebooks of mediology, Éditions Gallimard, N° 6, page 130.

<sup>1</sup> David Kessler (2012), Do the Media Have Power? Editions The threshold, page 105

they reflect in all objectivity, and that they cannot therefore exercise any power<sup>4</sup>.

The last third of the 20th century was marked by an unprecedented liberalization, as well as a disengagement of the State in the field of information. The marriage of telecommunications, computing and the resulting multimedia has caused the quantitative explosion of the information sphere. Information, a new material for human activity, is found at the heart of the balance of power between States and corporations, strategic capital, source of power and domination<sup>5</sup>. For the past fifteen years, as liberal globalization has accelerated, this "fourth power" has been emptied of its meaning, it has gradually lost its essential function of counter-power. In this phase of globalization, we are witnessing a brutal confrontation between the market and the State, the private sector and public services, the individual and society, the private and the collective, selfishness and solidarity<sup>6</sup>. The common public stage that characterized the era of mainstream mass media is shattering. The new technologies of information – Internet, mobile phones, TNT, etc. – which allow consumerist individualism to flourish in a thousand forms. We know that the reading of the written press does not cease to settle down, the audience of generalist radios has been halved in twenty years, that of large televisions has begun to crumble, it is "interactive solitudes", mentioned by Dominique Wolton<sup>7</sup>. In this subtle game of manipulation and influence: what role can the means of communication play in a system where political power is constraining? Can the media clearly influence political agendas in democratic countries and play their role as the "fourth estate" fully? Does the digital revolution considered - above all as a revolution of powers - give new means and new capacities for action to those who did not have them? Does it call into question the reserved expertise, the traditional modes of production, political expression and dissemination of information, thereby weakening the traditional structures of power and the so-called traditional media?

In this article, we will first examine the instrumentalization of politico-economic power whatsoever - directly under totalitarian regimes or indirectly in the democratic sphere - of the omnipotence with the means of the mass media as an ideological apparatus, to achieve the ultimate goal which consists in persuading the public by methods which confuse information and propaganda, i.e. a place of domination for the purpose of social consensus. Then, faced with the domination of power, certain media have tried in a period of history to mark their distance, and this thanks to the rapid rise in power of consciousness of public opinion, from an increasingly modernized space and to a vigorous investigative press.

As a result, the media have managed to constitute a "counter-power" which has a major duty to denounce these violations of rights. But still, with the turn of globalization which therefore also constitutes the globalization of mass media, communication and

information, marked the end of the "Glorious Thirty" for the mass media. Preoccupied above all by the pursuit of their gigantism, which forces them to court other powers, these large groups no longer propose themselves as a civic objective, which has allowed the emergence of a "fifth power" which uses new 2.0 technologies. to oppose a citizen civic force to the new coalition of the dominators.

## 1. The media of power: the weight of propaganda

The 20th century was the great age of propaganda. Supporters of opposing ideologies have created offices or even ministries in their name, mobilized excessive means, sought out the most scientific methods. It has enslaved the world of culture and science, leisure or sport and even language itself. It compelled millions of men to proclaim a faith which was not always so sincere. Never has the business of making the crowds believe been carried out so systematically or denounced so stubbornly by methods which, with hindsight, seem obvious<sup>8</sup>. The political world, a place for decision-making, civil society, a place for shaping public opinion and the world of experts, a space for speaking scholarly is seriously mortgaged by a singular structuring of the media scene which draws up in a dangerous face to face media subservient to political power and opposing media.

While the former serves the most unmentionable designs of political power, the others are veritable pet peeves of the same power which never ceases to make them swallow their feather<sup>9</sup>. This tension crystallizes around the notion of manipulation, i.e. the potential to influence and transform (to spin) the ideas or behaviors of citizens without their being aware of it, by addressing their emotions rather than their reason or even by making use of lies or misinformation<sup>10</sup>: this was the golden age of the spectacle state<sup>11</sup>. This also means that the manipulation of political discourse has not disappeared from the democratic public space and that it is even consubstantial with it.

### 1.1. The media of totalitarian power: the paradigm of powerful effects

Totalitarianism is the political system of one-party regimes. It does not admit any organized opposition, the State tends to control all the activities of society, the possibilities of thought, expression, creation, research, gathering and even reaching into the private sphere of families and citizens. Requiring all citizens to join an obligatory ideology, outside of which they are considered enemies of the community. To this end, totalitarian systems make extensive use of propaganda and use the mass media (cinema, television and radio) to influence their own citizens and nations of the Third World. Totalitarianism is an extreme version of authoritarianism according to Benito Mussolini, great dictator of Italy, this system politicizes everything in the state, nothing is outside the state<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Blaise Magnin & Henri Maler (2018), The power of the media: between fantasies, denial and reality, <https://www.acrimed.org>, March 19 2018, Page 1.

<sup>5</sup> Gaëlle Grognet (2004), Media: do we need a fifth power? Master's essay at Laval University, page 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ignacio Ramonet (2003), The fifth power, [www.monde-diplomatique.fr](http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr) page 2.

<sup>7</sup> Denis Pingaud (2006), Bernard Poulet, From the power of the media to the bursting of the public scene, the review *Le Débat*, n° 138, January-February, p.7.

<sup>8</sup> François Bernard Huyghe (2008), *Master of making believe: From propaganda to influence*, Vuibert edition; page 39

<sup>9</sup> Louis Bertin Amougou (April /2006), *Power*, Journal ACTA IASSYENSIA COMPARATIONIS

<sup>10</sup> Caroline Ollivier – Yaniv (2010), *The languages of politics*. Open Journal No 94, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> GR. Schwazenberg (1977): *The spectacle state*, Flammarion editions.

<sup>12</sup> What is the role of the media in a totalitarian system? <https://www.etudier.com>, August 9, 2020 p.

Hannah Arendt points out that: "Since the totalitarian movements exist in a world that is not totalitarian, they are forced to resort to what we commonly consider to be propaganda"<sup>13</sup>. Throughout its history, propaganda appeared in the 19th century in the formation of trade union organizations with, in particular, the first "agitprop" manuals<sup>14</sup>. It was to impose itself completely during the First World War. Indeed, it was really during this period "that it tended to become institutionalized through the creation of civil and military bodies, responsible for both control information inwards and orchestrate this new kind of "politico-military" missions against the adversary". After the First World War, propaganda will be used by nations to explain the defeat or victory of their countries. It is precisely at this time that the first negative connotation will appear. We will then associate the propaganda to "a form of deception, even Evil". We then begin to denounce the propaganda and the rulers who use it are depreciated<sup>15</sup>.

### 1.1.1. The theory of powerful effects in the sociology of media and its criticisms

Media sociology had its first writings on its powerful effects of the media with the work most representative of the belief that media propaganda is capable of manipulating the masses, *The Rape of Crowds by Political Propaganda*, was published in 1939. Its author, Serge Tchakhotine, affirms that the power of propaganda is explained by the state of generalized weakening that it produces or that it exploits within the public<sup>16</sup>. All you have to do is bludgeon some simple and concise formulas, likely to generate in the receiver a varied range of emotions (fear, hope, desire). Over time, he will get used to these formulas and it will become a reflex for him to obey them. Admittedly, there are people who, due to their level of education in particular, are able to resist attempts at suggestion. But for the vast majority of the population, whom Chakhotin calls "group V" as "violable", propaganda carried out in accordance with Pavlov's findings is quite effective: it allows people to be reduced to the state of "automatons", "living robots" or "psychic slaves"<sup>17</sup>. In the following years, numerous authors adopted a similar point of view and analyzed the media from a stimulus-response schema close to Pavlovian reflexology.

We find in Jean - Marie Domenach, for example, the notions of "reflex conditions" or "suggestibility": the swastika, the Hitler salute and the portrait of the Führer are described as "so many honks that make an entire people salivate"<sup>18</sup> which "hypnotize" the Germans and transform them into veritable "automatons"<sup>19</sup>.

Published in the United States in 1958, Vance Packhard's work, *Clandestine Persuasion*, also postulates that the media have almost unlimited power to shape people's consciences. These remarks would be the sign that the citizen is "more and more treated like

Pavlov's dog with conditioned reflexes"<sup>20</sup>. This kind of analysis outlines what media sociologists later called the powerful effects paradigm. The best-known metaphor here is that of the "hypodermic syringe" brilliantly defended by Harold D. Lasswell (1902-1978): it suggests that a transmitter can inject any idea or any injunction of behavior in the mind of any individual. His speech is a stimulus that instantly triggers, in any receiver, the programmed response. Laswell defines behaviorism theory<sup>21</sup> as "suitably a communicative action by answering the following questions", modeled according to the five Qs or five Ws (Who say? What? To Whom? In Which channel? with What effect?). Other authors have used the metaphor of irradiation, as if an individual is automatically influenced by the media stimuli he receives. However, the sociology of the media brought, during its development, several denials with this paradigm of the powerful effects. The first empirical research carried out on the subject in the 1940s, within the Bureau of Social Applied Research<sup>22</sup> under the leadership of Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleague (Elihu Katz). Both authors expected to see a strong influence from the messages broadcast by the media. The results go against this intuition, which would a priori grant an important place to political propaganda in the formation of choice. Thus the study showed not only that the formation of judgment was not influenced by the campaign, but highlighted the primordial role of interpersonal relations in the formation of choice<sup>23</sup>.

The perception of the message transmitted by the media is not directly perceived by the receiver. Indeed, the messages are filtered before reaching their addressee by opinion leaders. This is the famous notion of two-step-flow of communication. The Frankfurt School, which brings together a certain number of currents of thought such as cultural studies in Great Britain, semiology, structuralism have called into question the functionalist model of communication inspired by the theories of Lasswell. The followers of the Frankfurt School criticize the simplistic "hypodermic syringe" scheme and propose to introduce the problem of interactions. Contrary to Laswell's approach, this School sees the public as composed of reflective and active individuals, capable of voluntarily using the media to satisfy certain needs. Since this criticism of the media presupposes, it is believed, all-powerful media institutions and since individuals are seen as passive subjects devoid of any critical competence, Critical Theory would be condemned to adopt a position "overhanging" in relation to the universe of social practices<sup>24</sup>. In their work on the "agenda function", Mc Combs and Shaw are interested, for example, in the way in which the media structure the concerns of citizens. Second new line of research, the "spiral of silence" model. This model is based on the following principle: for each subject of discussion, the

<sup>20</sup> Vance Packhard (1975), *La persuasion clandestine*, Calmann – Levi, pp 8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Harold D. Lasswell (1938), *Propagande Techniques in the World War*, éditions New York, P. Smith,.

<sup>22</sup> This paradigm is attached to the current that will later be called "The Columbia School" because based at Columbia University after the installation of the Lazarfeld laboratory in 1940, where it was renamed Office for the post office at the sociology department of Columbia University and remained there until 1970.

<sup>23</sup> Grégory Derville (2013), *le pouvoir des médias*, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, p.13

<sup>24</sup> Ideology: culturalist concept and critical concept", *Actuel Marx*, n°43, 2008, p.68

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The totalitarian system*, Seoul editions 1972

<sup>14</sup> Stéphane Olivési, *Communication at work, A critique of new forms of power in Grenoble companies*,

Grenoble University Press, coll. *Communication in addition*, 2002, p.4

<sup>15</sup> Ibid p.5

<sup>16</sup> Serge Tchakhotine, *Le viol des foules par la propagande politique*, Gallimard 1939, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 44,120 and 140.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Marie Domenach (1973), *Political Propaganda*, Presses Universitaires de France; p.39

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p. 43.

individual evaluates at any time the balance of power between the points of view that cross the public space, and he anticipates what public opinion will be at the future, in order to know what ideas he can express without risking being marginalized<sup>25</sup>.

### 1.1.2. The propagandist techniques of the media of power

Formerly in dictatorial regimes and today in developing countries, propagandists use a certain number of methods, inspired in particular by social psychology. They are used to create persuasive but false messages. Many of these techniques rely on good use of audience emotionality:

*Fear*: a frightened audience is in a situation of passive receptivity, and more easily accepts the idea we want instill in him. For example, Joseph Goebbels exploited Theodore Kaufman's phrase, "Germany must perish!" to affirm that the allies have as their goal the extermination of the German people.

- *Appeal to authority*: the appeal to authority consists in quoting important figures to support an idea, an argument, or a course of action.

- *Testimonial*: testimonials are mentions, in or out of context, particularly quoted to support or reject a given policy, action, program, or personality. The reputation (or role: expert, respected public figure, etc.) of the individual is also exploited. Testimonials mark the seal of respectability on the propaganda message.

- *Herd effect*: this call tries to persuade the audience to adopt an idea by insinuating that an irresistible movement to be in the mass camp is already engaged elsewhere for this idea. Since everyone would rather be on the winning side than in the minority that will be crushed, this technique helps prepare the audience to follow the propagandist.

- *Redefinition, revisionism*: consists of redefining words or falsifying history in a partisan way.

- *Obtaining disapproval*: this technique involves suggesting that an idea or action is adopted by an opposing group, so that the audience disapproves of this idea or action without really studying it. Thus, if a group that supports a policy is led to believe that undesirable, subversive, or contemptible people also support it, group members are more likely to change their minds.

- *Dazzling generalities and virtuous words*: Generalities can cause intense emotion in the audience. For example, appealing to love of country, desire for peace, freedom, glory, justice, honour, purity... can kill the critical spirit of the audience.

- *Intentional imprecision*: this involves reporting facts by distorting them or quoting statistics without indicating the sources. The intention is to give the discourse a scientific content in appearance, without making it possible to analyze its validity or its applicability.

- *Transfer*: this technique is used to project the positive or negative qualities of a person, of an entity, an object or a value (an individual, a group, an organization, a nation, patriotism, etc.) on a third party, in order to make this second entity more (or less) acceptable.

<sup>25</sup> Grégory Derville (1998), *The power of the media according to the classics of the "COM"*, Gallimard, p.13

- *Oversimplification*: these are generalities used to provide simple answers to complex social, political, economic, or military issues.

- *Quidam*: to win the trust of his audience, the propagandist uses the level of language and mannerisms (clothes, gestures) of an ordinary person. By projection, the audience is immediately more inclined to accept the positions of the propagandist, since the latter resembles him.

- *Stereotype or label*: this technique uses the prejudices and stereotypes of the audience to induce him to reject the object of the propaganda campaign.

- *Slogans*: a slogan is a short expression, easy to remember and therefore to recognize, which allows you to leave a trace in all minds<sup>26</sup>.

Indeed, under democratic regimes, propaganda has not changed in its essence, but it has changed its methods and its instruments.

## 1.2. The media of democratic power: propaganda in freedom

For Noam Chomsky, convinced that: "Propaganda is to democracies what violence is to dictatorships"<sup>27</sup>. It is interesting to note that in today's democratic societies, the majority of people have a view of propaganda as being strongly linked to dictatorships. Even if this is often the case, democracy, which by etymological essence refers to the holding of power by the people, is not for all that devoid of any propaganda. The democratic state, in essence, does not express the interest of a party or a class because it must not exclude a minority but on the contrary take it into account. He takes into account all the opinions and differences, from then on he is forced to fight against his opposition or dissident powers, but for that he cannot use authoritarian methods<sup>28</sup>. In his book "*Propaganda*", Bernays assumes and develops his thinking by saying that the choices of the masses being decisive, it is those who will manage to influence them who will really hold the power. He also says that democracy implies a new form of invisible government and that unlike totalitarian states which use violence to keep the people on the right track, they use propaganda to transform consciences and keep the power of decision. Gradually since the fifties the definition of the characteristics of modern political communication is different from its propagandistic ancestors<sup>29</sup>.

### 1.2.1. From propaganda to political communication

The definition of political communication proposed by Dominique Wolton in 1989, in one of the first issues of the review *Hermès*, is that of a "space where the discourse of the three actors who have the legitimacy to express themselves publicly on politics and who are: politicians, journalists and public opinion through polls"<sup>30</sup>. We

<sup>26</sup> <http://tpe-propaganda.e-monsite.com>, 16 août 2020, p.1

<sup>27</sup> Noam Chomsky & Edward S. Herman (1998), *Consent to Manufacture The Political Economy of Mass Media*, Pantheon Books, New York.

<sup>28</sup> Jean Jaurès (2018). *Propager, Propagation, Propaganda*, édition illustration, p32

<sup>29</sup> Edward Bernays, *Propaganda: how to manipulate public opinion*, published by Ig publishing New York, 2004, p13

<sup>30</sup> Dominique Wolton, *Political communication: construction of a model*, *Hermès*, La Revue N°4, 1989, p. 67.

can identify two main sets of studies that signify the replacement of propaganda by political communication. The first is part of the theoretical perspective of the Habermasian public space and define political communication as a condition for the functioning of an enlarged public space. The latter is part of a historical perspective and endeavor to define the characteristics of contemporary political communication in order to dissociate it from propagandist methods<sup>31</sup>. We would have passed, in a period that we place, depending on the case, somewhere between the 1950s and the 1980s, from an age of propaganda to an age of political communication, a movement which would have so.

Accompanied by the shift from the time of the masses to that of public opinion. Two approaches, in fact, command two major definitions of political communication. In one case, it is reduced to a set of techniques borrowed from advertising and marketing and adapted to the political field, methods for mastering the media (media training, media , etc.) and analyze the aspirations of the public (polls), various practices built on electoral strategies, all requiring the contribution of "technicians", media specialists, survey specialists, communicators. By barely forcing the line, one could say that the public space is seen as a vast competitive market, identifying voters with consumers, where the political offer tries to conform to the demand (thanks to polls), where the politician applies exclusively to seduce (thanks to television). In the other case, political communication borders on a social ideal attesting to the maturity of democracies. While propaganda applied itself to maintaining the unequal relationship between political actors and the masses through the unilateral nature of the message, political communication is based on the exchange between politicians, the media and public opinion, expressing in particular through polls; the interaction between different actors conditioning the reality of democratic functioning. Through the posture of listening and dialogue that it presupposes, communication constitutes the binder of democratic society, breaking away from propaganda, totalitarian in nature<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, whether state or corporate, the media are under great institutional pressure.

### 1.2.2. The influence of institutional sources on the media

Whether private or public, capitalist or state, institutions exert a heavy weight on the media, they tend to co-construct information in routine contexts. In the event of a social crisis or military conflict in particular, the use of disinformation techniques helps to transform the media into simple relays for the powers that be, without it being necessary. To understand it, one has to resort to explanation by intentional and concerted manipulations, the existence of which it would be naive to deny. The control of media content has become an issue of struggles within the economic and political powers. A fight so intense and a stake so strategic that the public relations industry, which supplies arms and ammunition, has become a major economic sector. And, as well as the stories they build, have become the filters that now interpose themselves between the this is how armies of communicators and "spin

<sup>31</sup> Jürgen Habermas (1988), *Public space, Archeology of advertising as a constituent dimension of bourgeois society*, Paris.

<sup>32</sup> Christian Delporte, *From propaganda to political communication*, Flammarion, 2003, page 30-31.

doctors", attachés of pre professions with journalism is at this particularly significant and disturbing regard<sup>33</sup>.

Analyzing the "manufacturing of consent" in democracies, Noam Chomsky shows what "filters" condition the production of information and how the reduction of pluralism leads to a consensual, sanitized and purified representation of information, when it is not strictly propagandist. The making of consent relies on the connivance of power and the media. This privileged relationship is first maintained by the predominance of official sources. Indeed, the media protect their image of objectivity by drawing their information from sources that can be presented as above suspicion. This choice also has an economic basis: preferring pre-selected sources reduces investigation costs, while careful journalistic work is much longer and more expensive. Focusing their investigation on the United States, Chomsky and Herman point out that the White House, the Pentagon and the State Department in Washington are the epicentres of the production of labeled information. Large corporations are also regular producers of information deemed credible, that is, i.e. worthy of publication. "On public relations and propaganda, write the authors, only the business world has the means to compete with the Pentagon and other government departments."<sup>34</sup> The most powerful sources also control the media by directly or indirectly subsidizing them. Thus, the American State (in particular the departments of the army) gives them the benefit of its financial largesse, which guarantees it privileged access and even a right of scrutiny over the production of information.

The weight of institutional influence is also evident in the relationship with journalists. Certainly the media and journalists produce and disseminate information (of unequal interest) which respond, more or less, to the right to be informed. Most of the major media and information producers (taken collectively) find themselves in situations of close interdependence with regard to the political and economic powers vis-à-vis which they are therefore not in a position to play any counter-power role. "The media representation of the world, as it is fabricated daily by journalists, does not show what is actually reality but what the ruling and possessing classes believe it to be, wish it to be or fear it to become"<sup>35</sup>, the choice and putting into perspective of information produced in the mainstream media inevitably reflect highly situated worldviews and social concerns. But if the media do not constitute, by themselves, a "fourth power" or a counter-power, what powers do they exercise?

### 1.3. The power of the media: the influence of the "fourth power"

Perhaps the most amazing power of the media is to make people believe in their power. And therefore to make us act accordingly. What is "media power"? The media do not order anything. At worst, they suggest we (upvote or buy) when their messages are aimed at deliberate persuasion. Even then, there is no scientific evidence that they carry out conviction every time. All the work carried out on persuasion concludes that it is astonishingly complex and reveals a no less surprising "receiver resistance". If

<sup>33</sup> Blaise Magnin & Henri Maler, *The power of the media: between fantasies, denial and reality*, op. Quoted, page 3

<sup>34</sup> Noam Chomsky & Edward S. Herman, *Consent to manufacture*, op.Cité

<sup>35</sup> Alain Accardo, *For a socioanalysis of journalism*, coll. *One Hundred Thousand Signs*, 2017, p.6

the "fourth power" is not (or not only) that of making us think, could it be that of preventing us from thinking? Or tell us what to think? Or how to think?<sup>36</sup>

However, under the influence of globalization, the redistribution of powers generating a new economic, political and social situation. This same movement pushed the media to trade their role of counter-power. A media power, which is allied where necessary with economic or political power, to crush in turn, as an additional power, the citizens. However, power without checks is a danger to democracy. In this context, how can citizens react, defend themselves against the "betrayal" of the media?<sup>37</sup>

"A fifth power" lends itself to the emergence of a new force, which would express itself through many avenues. The Internet, and the media of social networks, the tools for the free circulation and sharing of information par excellence, are therefore redistributing the cards.

### 1.3.1. The role of the media as the "fourth estate"

Edmund Burke, British politician and writer, first used the expression "fourth estate" to condemn the French Revolution in 1790. In June 1978, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, addressing Harvard students, issued this warning to Western democracies: the press has become the most important force of the United States; it exceeds, in power, the other three powers<sup>38</sup>. The media do wield certain powers. Scattered and shared powers which are not exercised in a uniform and continuous way, which vary according to the circumstances and the balance of power which they carry, but very real powers<sup>39</sup>. The free radio movement, the demand of many journalists claiming the same rights and duties as their colleagues in the private or written media reinforced this independence, it however, it will be necessary to wait until the 1980s for freedom of communication to be considered as a whole and to receive constitutional legislative sanction to protect independence of editorial staff, severing of the direct link between power and the media through the establishment of an independent administrative authority guaranteeing this freedom<sup>40</sup>. This "quiet revolution" followed by the proliferation of radio and then private television stations clearly changed the situation when the "reference" press took precedence over the partisan press and when television was installed in all homes, when the hour of a certain emancipation from power. The growing power of the media on the public scene will then manifest itself in two ways. On the one hand, the power of television as a vector of information and democratic debate is shaping the mode of production of politics in the long term. On the other hand, the myth of "investigative journalism", free from all power and all limits, deeply structures all of the media.

#### *Power of television, trivialization of politics*

The power of television is recognized as we have moved from the psychologization of politics to its "peopolization". Therefore, it is

<sup>36</sup> François-Bernard Huyghe, *Master of Making Believe: From Propaganda to Influence*, op.cite. p3

<sup>37</sup> Gaëlle Grognet, *Media: do we need a fifth power?* op.cite.p83

<sup>38</sup> Francis Balle, *The media, Collection: What do I know?* Publisher, Presses Universitaires de France, 2020, p. 79

<sup>39</sup> Blaise Magnin & Henri Maler, *The power of the media: between fantasies, denial and reality*, op. page 4

<sup>40</sup> Lahaca, High Authority of the Audiovisual Commission, first chaired by Michèle Cutta.

tempting to consider that policies are no more than puppets what they quickly became, "Guignols de l'info" (information puppets) or others, in the program schedules. The small screen has worked to trivialize politics and language of politics not by the demagogic use of this or that popular expression but by the excessive simplification of a necessarily complex discourse. Speech is limited henceforth to a message, the exposition to an ethrhetorical conclusion to a formula. The "spin doctors" have traded in the talent to reduce political thought to a few "small sentences".

An exercise, one can easily imagine, which contributes to reducing the concomitant desacralization of politics<sup>41</sup>. The personalization and exposure of the private life of political actors in the public sphere that, even if it does not consist of henceforth, a constitutive element, or almost, of the mediatization of politics<sup>42</sup>. Roger Gérard Schwartzberg in his book *"The Spectacle State"*, quotes that "Politics used to be ideas. Politics today are people, or rather characters"<sup>43</sup>. The author's remarks dismantle and denounce the "star-system" and its supports, which are the audio - visual "mass media" but also the entertainment and television advertisement industries. It is a game of theater and arenas that take place within the framework of televised debates. Democratic debate in developed countries is organized according to television imperatives. The style of political communication can no longer be as "impositive" as before, analyzed by J. Mouchon<sup>44</sup>.

Power is also exercised through the selection of political personnel: television has indeed engendered a new selection of political personnel, it has, at the same time, favored the emergence of politicians who have not had to go through the forks caudins of the parties. Similarly, if media coverage imposes the need for daily (and no longer electoral) legitimation that can lead politicians to favor the short term over the long term<sup>45</sup>.

Television also exercises power over government action, which is guided by media logic. In summary, two trends should be noted:

1°- *Political action becomes more event-driven*. Faced with the complexity of the politico-administrative decision and the difficulty of evaluating the real impact of political action, political know-how is supplemented by a policy of "doing - knowing", an essential complement to public action.

2°- *The clash of temporalities paralyzes political action*. Through the daily use of polls, the media create pressure for the legitimacy of the ephemeral. This pressure leads certain rulers who want to be re-elected: to avoid taking unpopular measures<sup>46</sup>. Gladly "Anglo-Saxon journalism": it is the triumph of investigative journalism.

#### *Power of investigative journalism*

Investigative journalism aims to reveal hidden information by cross-checking and verifying it, through sometimes long and

<sup>41</sup> Denis Pingaud, Bernard Poulet, *From the power of the media to the bursting of the public scene*, page 2

<sup>42</sup> Ioanna Vovou, *Politics as a game show*, journals.openedition.org, 7/02/2010,p.122

<sup>43</sup> Roger-GérardSchwartzberg, *The Spectacle State*, page 32

<sup>44</sup> Mouchon J. (1998), *Politics under the influence of the media*, Paris, L'Harmattan

<sup>45</sup> Éric Dacheux, Bordeaux (1999), *Action and political communication: an impossible distinction? Quality and communication*, N°15, p2

<sup>46</sup> Cayrol R., *Media and democracy: the drift*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1997

meticulous investigations, guaranteed by respect for the ethics of journalism and the protection of journalists' sources of information, regardless of the editorial line of the media that practice it<sup>47</sup>. This is from the case of the Watergate in 1974, when the press brought down what is believed to be the most powerful man in the world – US President Richard Nixon – the myth of “investigative journalism” was born and that, from the fourth power, the press and all the “media” will gradually convince themselves that they have become the first power. For thirty years, the “independent” media will, through investigations and revelations, track down the abuse of all other powers, in particular those of politicians, mixing major cases like Watergate with the first revelations about the private lives of politicians. It must be understood that these new audacity stem for many from the growing weakening of politicians.

With the desacralization of politics and the trivialisation of debates, politicians find themselves in a position of flagrant vulnerability<sup>48</sup>. Anglo-Saxon countries have long had a head start in the field, thanks to the development of popular newspapers of information. In Germany, investigative journalism has had success thanks to the practice of the weekly *Der Spiegel*. In France, *Le Canard enchaîné*, a reference in the field since its creation, was joined by newspapers such as *Bakchich* (print and digital version) and *Media part* (exclusively digital)<sup>49</sup>. The place taken by investigative journalism cannot be understood solely by personal qualities or even by the importance given by such or such editorial staff to this type of journalistic approach. It operates in a very particular intellectual, political, social and journalistic context. This is expressed within journalism as a crisis of legitimacy and a loss of credibility for what had hitherto constituted the reference in the French media, i.e. political journalism. In France, political and opinion journalism constituted the heart of the legitimacy of the profession<sup>50</sup>.

## 2. The emergence of the “fifth power”: the media in the digital age

It is no longer possible to evoke the media universe without mentioning the changes brought about by the arrival of new types of media carriers via the Internet. The eruption of the Internet has disrupted social and cultural practices, as well as modes of communication, including the media and political communication. Politicians increasingly use these new media as a means of communication and seek, as Dominique Wolton points out, to “escape journalistic tyranny”, in other words to do without the intermediary of journalists (the very definition of the function of “media”), to create a direct link with their constituents<sup>51</sup>. The “digital revolution” has broken down the boundaries which previously separated the three traditional forms of communication: sound, writing, image. It has enabled the appearance and growth of the Internet, which represents a fourth mode of communication, a new way of expressing oneself, of obtaining information, of having fun. Globalization has led to upheavals and has redistributed powers generating a new economic, political and social situation.

<sup>47</sup> Investigative journalism, on [www.franceinter.fr](http://www.franceinter.fr), 17/4/2013.

<sup>48</sup> Pierre Péan, “*In the kitchens of the investigation*”, on *Le Monde diplomatique*, September 1, 2019

<sup>49</sup> Fabrice Arfi, “Investigative journalism exists still in France? », conference delivered on May 20, 2014 at the Ecole Militaire at the invitation of the ANAJ-IHEDN.

<sup>50</sup> Christian Delporte in *Journalists in France 1880-1950*, Paris, Seuil, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Jérôme Clément (2010), *A rather indirect influence on politics*, Armand Colin, *International and Strategic Review*, 2 N°

This same movement has pushed the media to trade their role of against that, more preponderant, of second power. A media power, which combines where necessary with economic or political power. However, a power without counterweight is a danger for democracy<sup>52</sup>. In this framework, how can citizens react and defend themselves? We will see that the current context lends itself to the emergence of a new force, which would express itself through many channels. It quite simply creates a “fifth power” - a power that will make it possible to oppose a civic citizen force to the new coalition of the dominant.

### 2.1. Democratization of information: effects on traditional media

The mass media and their owners have lost their image monopoly. The artists were first ousted by the producers and broadcasters of technical images, it is now it is their turn to lose the monopoly of the production and distribution of images to the benefit of users of social networks. That is why today we are not talking about visual media, but about social media, through which users fully participate in the dissemination process. Users are no longer just the “recipients” but also the “receivers”, the authors of the messages, supporting “representative production configuration”. They themselves produce the representation and thereby participate in the power of the representation. If in the visual culture of mass media, “the medium [is] the message”<sup>54</sup>, in social media “everyone is the sender”. The construction of public opinion is upset: we are witnessing a crisis of the traditional intermediaries who once produced the dominant representations of society. The one to many media (radio, press, television) gave pride of place to the “dominant word” of the intellectual, the expert, the journalist..., described as “unique thought” by their detractors. , these media were under state or commercial control, concentrated and few in number, therefore with less competition for access to the truth of the facts and less diversity of the points of view expressed. However, the contributory Internet and the democratized means of digital production (text, audio, video) allow the multitudes of citizens to express themselves directly, to comment on the news, to pose their concrete problems and to begin to imagine new solutions. “We the media”, according to the very telling formula of Dan Gillmor<sup>53</sup>.

As Jürgen Habermas has shown in his classic works, our deliberative democracies were built around a public space, first “bourgeois” then “communicational” because oriented by the big media. But the Internet is building a public space before our eyes. of an entirely new kind, both local and global, based on the possibility of participation by each individual from a given point in the network, information that can be replicated millions of times if it coincides with an event of interest for its “replicators”<sup>54</sup>.

### 2.2. The “fifth power”: a force of civic counter-power

By giving individuals and networks of individuals free speech, the Internet is upsetting the conditions for exercising power that we have known at all previous times. The democracy of opinion imposed by recognized intermediaries becomes a liberated democracy of opinion, where all individuals and all groups have

<sup>52</sup> Gaëlle Grognet, *Media: do we need a fifth power?* Op.cit. p.83

<sup>53</sup> Dan Gillmor (2016), *We the media*, Editions O'Reilly Media.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Weibel (2019), *Sound as Medium of Art*, documentation of the ZKM.

the same freedom access to the public communication space. Restoring the counter-power therefore requires the return to the journalistic field of critical speech. This protest aspect is developing more and more thanks to the alternative media. "Dominant institutions are not immune to public pressure. Independent (alternative) media can also play an important role. Although they lack resources, almost by definition, they gain importance in the same way as grassroots organizations: by bringing together people with limited resources"<sup>55</sup>.

On the one hand, because the Internet offers everyone a free forum, an inalienable space for expression appears. No censorship possible on the web, except in extreme cases. The Internet user is not reduced to the role of a dramatic extra, it is in control of its words and its orchestration. On the other hand, because by putting all these forums end to end, as well as associative sites, specialized online publications - parallel newspapers, we obtain an infinite chain of information sources. The Internet therefore represents an unlimited, uncensored space, where the reign of information is entirely based on the notion of sharing, where power comes from the number of citizens whose interest and reaction can be aroused. The network of networks therefore constitutes a significant alternative to traditional sources of information, especially since the web does not have to undergo the constraints imposed on television, radio or press<sup>58</sup>. The appearance of a new counter-power facing the economic and media powers. First, because citizens find a "voice" allowing them to denounce the abuses they suffer: Internet. The information shared on the network of networks challenges the power held by media giants, who cannot control what everyone can read and publish on the web. Then, the functionalities of the Internet, combined with an awakening of consciences in Western democracies, trigger the emergence of a civic society (and not only civil) on the favorite terrain of informational capitalism: global space <sup>59</sup>.

However, many recent studies in the field of communication are built around dichotomies - digital media versus traditional media, citizen mobilization on the ground versus online activism, the written press versus blogs – dichotomies that it considers rigid and not very fruitful. It emphasizes the importance of understanding how new media practices incorporate traditional logics, just as how traditional media practices incorporate emerging logics. In this sense, the scholars argue for an analytical approach that understands the processes of political communication as a hybridization between old and emerging technologies, genres, practices and norms, which coexist and interact within fluid media and polycentric political systems<sup>56</sup>.

Another example of the civic role that social networks can play during the coronavirus epidemic (Covid19) is undoubtedly a subject of general interest on which everyone must be able to express themselves by any means. Journalists, health professionals, representatives of public authorities, but also all citizens interested in the subject will find in social networks the ideal public places to exchange and compare their points of view as it had never been possible before. From this point of view, social networks properly fulfill their democratic mission by giving perfect equal access to means of communicating ideas and information. And that is why the debate is necessarily polluted by the mechanisms of

manipulation that may have flourished in these services. However, isn't this the ultimate end of this fundamental freedom? Should information labeled as "false" not be accepted as an integral part of the debate? Their dissemination would not participate in the debate of general interest and democratic life? The answers to these questions are essential to identify the need for limits that can be placed on freedom of expression during this period of health crisis. A first vision would consist precisely in "letting go" of the debate, in the name of the free market of ideas. The concept, well-known to American law, is based on the principle that the free change of ideas is the most effective means of resolving conflicts and seeking "the truth". Any opinion is good to be disseminated, but also and above all to be debated, criticized or denounced. This free debate is supposed to settle the fate of unfounded, erroneous or dangerous ideas or information. Therefore, discussions on the coronavirus could be encouraged in this way, the dissemination of false information being only the best way to sort out the true from the false<sup>57</sup>.

This crisis has highlighted the importance of the media and access to verified information. Free and independent media are an essential source of credible and vital information, and they help people by detecting and debunking the lies of misinformation. Professional journalism - the publication of verified facts and opinions informed – gave people an alternative to misinformation and helped disprove lies. Operating in the light of the public square, it contrasts with the hidden and difficult to challenge content that is shared in private messaging services. Many online media have dropped their paywalls and provided free coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the name of the public interest. Social media is extremely important in the fight against this contagious disease, not only to get information and be updated about it, but also to understand how it spreads, how people interact and how we can react to it. As Heidi Tworek, an assistant professor at the University of British Columbia in Canada, has said, "Communications in a public health crisis is as crucial as a medical intervention...in fact, communication policies are an intervention medical"<sup>58</sup>. We didn't have this tool a hundred years ago, but now we need to put it to good use in every possible way to overcome this pandemic.

## Conclusion

There is probably no more persistent illusion, when it comes to propaganda phenomena, than to believe that they are the exclusive mark of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. The diffuse production of a latent democratic consensus by agencies specializing in the manipulation of opinion, the collusion of political, economic and media powers in times of consent crisis and the defiant rationalization of public opinion as a body without a head to be subjugated or framed define the orientation of propaganda work in a democracy. This tends to make politics the art of keeping citizens away from what concerns them. Since their existence as a state repertoire, propaganda activities have never

<sup>57</sup> PhilippeMouron, Coronavirus and false information, Review of fundamental rights and freedoms, 2020, Chronicle n° 33,2020,p10-11

<sup>58</sup> Heidi Tworek on Twitter: "A thread: Communications in a public health crisis are as crucial asmedical Intervention. (1/25)". Twitter. Available from: <https://twitter.com/heiditworek/status/1240340632666701824>cited Apr 16th, 2020

<sup>55</sup> Benoît Sillard, Internet in 2049, digital master or slave, Eyrolles editions, 2011

<sup>56</sup> Patrick Viveret, A humanism to be refounded,



ceased to justify in practice this elitist definition of politics and democracy.

The emergence of a "fourth estate" for a period thanks to the investigative press has been completely overtaken by economic and technological upheavals, have involved companies in a race for info-dominance on an international scale, which resulted in an unprecedented wave of concentration, and the formation of planetary media conglomerates. The loss of meaning of the fourth power is illustrated by the crisis of the noble media, the written press, which has seen its audience and credibility diminish. The foundation of the fifth power therefore requires a reform of the mass and alternative media, with the aim of multiplying voices and awakening ideas, so as not to be reduced to social silence. In this way, the citizen would again be considered as a thinking head and reintegrated into the workings of the world.

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