

Svetlana Bodrunova

**Mediacracy or Mediademocracy?
On Some Conceptual Approaches
to the Interaction of Journalism and
Politics in Established Democracies**

WP 2010-07

Bielefeld University



St. Petersburg State University



**Centre for German and
European Studies (CGES)**



CGES Working Papers series includes publication of materials prepared within different activities of the Center for German and European Studies both in St. Petersburg and in Germany: The CGES supports educational programmes, research and scientific dialogues. In accordance with the CGES mission, the Working Papers are dedicated to the interdisciplinary studies of different aspects of German and European societies.

The WP presents working material for the course “Media and Politics in Contemporary European Societies: European and National Public Spheres” taught by Svetlana Bodrunova and Anna Litvinenko at the MA “Studies in European Societies”

Svetlana Bodrunova is Assistant Professor at the Department of International Journalism, Faculty of Journalism, St. Petersburg State University

Contact: spasibo-tebe@yandex.ru

Abstract

The paper assesses current theoretic approaches to the critical concept of mediocracy. As the author argues, the 'marketing' approach provides better stances for mediapolitical analysis than the 'etymological' one. A conceptual framework for an understanding of mediocracy as a distortion of mediademocratic political process is discussed in the paper. The author also suggests some prospects for future comparative research of mediocratic regimes, including a complex index of mediocracy resulting in a 'map of mediocracies'. The vectors of development (or, rather, avoidance) of mediocratic practices will be connected to the digitalization of politics and the rise of new mechanisms of direct democracy.

Key words: audience behavior, democratic practices of media, journalism, media, mediocracy, mediademocracy, mediapolitical studies, political communication, politics, power distribution

In recent decades, a substantial number of researchers focusing on media and political studies both in Russia and in Western democracies have been developing a discourse for the description of the integration of media into the processes of distribution and for the exercise of social power in postmodern societies. They differ in the extent of their criticism/idealism towards this integration, in the methods and results of their assessments of the changing role of journalism in public politics and policy formation, and in their interpretations of the causes of mediatized politics etc.

As for criticism/idealism, these approaches range from the highly critical to the state-of-the-art ones and even extend to those which welcome the changes or deny them. To understand more profoundly the nature and effects of the mediatization of power distribution and execution, it may be useful to juxtapose some of these approaches.

For this purpose, at the outset it is necessary to be clear about terms and concepts. Both European and Atlantic media and political studies offer us a chance to conceptualize the relations between traditional (politics) and new (media) institutions of social power by engaging with the concepts of *mediacracy* and *mediademocracy*. Both concepts, as we see from the nominations, deal with the *distribution and execution of social power in a community with media involved*.¹

To clarify our position, we would like to pre-empt the legitimate question of our readers as to whether we would examine the whole mass of literature on how and for what reason institutions of power used (and continue to use) media in their efforts at, manipulation, persuasion or disseminating propaganda. The analysis of manipulation theories and practices has been carried out for over a hundred years but the overwhelming majority of these concepts perceive media as *means* for the imposition and execution of power (mainly in autocratic regimes) rather than as *participants* in the re-distribution of power and *bearers* of

¹ For the purposes of this research, the operational meaning of the term '(social/political) power' will be taken from elite studies and will be shaped as an 'ability to set goals and agendas, change rules and standards, influence decision-making and behavior, dictate will and form final decisions'.

some social authority and power. From early Marxists (including Lenin) to the Frankfurt school and New Left thinking, right up to the latest research which analyses the instrumentalization of media, media is allocated a dependent position as a channel of political communication. Moreover, it is characterized as an aggregate channel that does not allow individual media enterprises to have any distinctive features and that does not allow media as a system to intervene into political decision-making and power execution. This position, of course, recognizes various degrees of media dependence; but the overall notion of the perception of media as a channel with no self-determination within the framework of power distribution has lasted. For example, ‘the father of the New Left’, H. Marcuse, whose thought focused on elites’ and the establishment’s means of social control perceived mass media as a means of indoctrination (and, thus, of correction of behavior): ‘Can one really distinguish between the mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination?’², though without clearly specifying the media’s own intentions within the process of indoctrination. In works from the 2000s, instrumentalization is, again, perceived within this discourse: ‘What we mean by instrumentalization is control of the media by outside actors... who use them to intervene in the world of politics’³, though D. C. Hallin and P. Mancini undoubtedly recognize that the degrees of instrumentalization may vary.

What we here are trying to explore differs from the concepts of propagandistic, manipulative, indoctrinatory, or purely instrumental uses of media (as a system or as individual agents). We are interested in *how the participation of media in power distribution is conceptualized* in modern academic writing. One may pose the following questions while designing the exact research scheme: When and for what reasons for did the concepts appear? How and why are they interpreted nowadays? Are there flaws or gaps in conventional interpretations of the terms (if there are any conventional ones)? Have they got any potential for wide theoretical description of the recent practices of media and political actors?

² Marcuse H. One-Dimensional Man. Boston, 1964. Part 1, Chapter 1. URL: <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/64onedim/odm1.html>.

³ Hallin D. C., Mancini P. Comparing Media Systems. Cambridge (MA), 2004. P. 37.

Can the concepts be used together and/or form a conceptual ‘umbrella’ for a special zone in media and political studies?

1. Critical Discourse: ‘Mediocracy’

For decades, a critical discourse has been developing towards the participation of journalism (as a system) and media (as actors) in processes connected to power and authority. We assume that many interconnected processes and practices described critically can be conceptualized under the ‘umbrella’ term of mediocracy.

Though the term, mediocracy, critical in its nature, seems to have first been coined in European research, by the 1990s, among multiple schools of media and politics developing in and beyond established democracies, the Atlantic liberal zone of critical media and political studies (mainly American and British) has, arguably, become one of the best developed and one of the most critical towards the mediatization of politics. Here, a whole group of similar terms, including ‘telediplomacy’, ‘radiocracy’, ‘telecracy’, ‘mediality’ (‘media reality’) etc., has been invented.

Today, in the Atlantic zone of media theory, two mainstream interpretations of the term ‘mediocracy’ (parallel to each other) may be traced. In both cases, the basic scheme of mediocratic interaction implies (just as in the classic scheme of mass communication) the interaction of three elements: the *political field*, conceptualized as a field by P. Bourdieu (or individual political actors), the *media* as a system and the *media audience* - first and foremost that of electoral capacity. This means age and social status which permit individuals the right and the wish to make self-dependent and socially relevant decisions (that is, social choice) and to control the mechanisms of power execution. It is in conceptualizing the nature of the interaction of these three elements (which appear to be an inseparable and inalienable context for each other) that the difference in various approaches to mediocracy in English- and some French-speaking research lies today.

A thoughtful reader could deduce two major interpretations of the very essence of mediocracy from the variety of existing critiques. Juxtaposition and even some degree of opposition between these two is easily traced in the history of several social disciplines, including political studies and mediology, though one might argue as well that the two major interpretations have grown into full concepts in parallel branches of science and have never interlaced.

2. 'Etymological' Interpretation of Mediocracy

The first significant approach to mediocracy can be easily found not only in the works of notable scholars, but also in online user dictionaries or, more precisely, wiktionaries – online dictionaries where users themselves both create optional entries for new words and vote for the most precise and comprehensive variants. We here cite examples from such wiktionaries instead of scholars' works to show that this approach is close to the one of mass audience and is anchored in public consciousness to a much larger extent than the second one. The essence of the 'etymological' approach is easy to see from the definitions in the wiktionary entries for 'mediocracy'. Thus, the dictionary at Unwords.com suggests this definition as the most popular: 'Government, usually indirectly, by the popular media; often a result of democracy going awry. A system in which politicians stop thinking and begin listening exclusively to the media regarding what the important issues are and what they should do about them'.⁴ A similar interpretation can be found in the Urban Dictionary: 'Mediocracy – government by the media; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the corporations and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents'.⁵ It is evident from these definitions why we call this approach 'etymological': mediocracy is here perceived as the *rule of media*, according to the meanings of the roots, 'media' and '-cratia'.

This interpretation is, though, not as superficial as it may seem and has its own historical basis in philosophy as well as in political and media studies; within this view, there is a Berkeleyan premise that what is not perceived does not exist.

⁴ URL: <http://www.unwords.com/unword/mediacracy.html>.

⁵ URL: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=mediacracy>.

There is also a significant development of this idea in sociology (by P. Bourdieu with the notion of symbolic oppression and symbolic power executed by media⁶) and in media studies (by M. McLuhan with his notion of media being extensions of human organs of senses⁷).

This interpretation also has many advocates and relatively few opponents in English-speaking communication studies. This approach has taken shape inside a massive body of classical and modern communication theory; in theories that explore opinion formation and its role in political decision-making, as well as so-called ‘media effects’ in the behavior of a media audience, including their political implications. The role of public opinion in the political process has, throughout the years, been both seemingly well institutionalized and regularly questioned. Today, the main issue for the mediocracy theory already seems to be not that of providing proof as to whether public opinion has some relation to media but that of how exactly media can possibly influence or even form public opinion; the ‘rule of media’ is, thus, ‘rule over public opinion and public behavior’ which, in turn, have some institutional roles in the formation of final decisions that change life in a given community.

This is why the theory of ‘media effects’ brings a range of crucial premises for an ‘etymological’ interpretation of mediocracy. The main branches of this theory are, logically, that of how a potentially influential media text is formed and that of media audience behavior. We will not go into a deep and unnecessary description of how these branches have been developing up to now, but instead we will extract from them the elements useful for conceptualizing mediocracy as new structure of power distribution and execution.

The first branch is best represented by agenda setting theories, the foundations of which were laid in early 70s in works by M. McCombs and D. Shaw⁸. Works which advance McCombs’ and Shaw’s findings study the forms and purposes of media content management and provide two significant

⁶ Бурдьё П. О телевидении и журналистике. М, 1992 [in Russian].

⁷ Маклюэн М. Понимание media. М, 2007 [in Russian].

⁸ For one of the first articles, see: *McCombs M., Shaw D. The Agenda-setting Function of Mass media // Public Opinion Quarterly. 1972. Vol. 36. P. 76-185.*

premises for the 'etymological' concept of mediocracy. Firstly, they claim that one of the main functions of media is *agenda setting* in the public sphere. After more than thirty years of studies of this media effect, scholars have come to various understandings of this claim.⁹ Thus, for example, a shift from 'agenda setting' to more complex 'agenda building' has taken place, and gatekeeping theory has developed. The latter claims, for instance, that a fact that does not filter through the editorial news judgment and does not show up in media content is not perceived as an event by the audience and is soon forgotten; that is, editorial offices possess an exclusive right to form public agenda.¹⁰

Secondly, the concept of a news frame – that is, a cognitive frame beyond which the interpretation of a fact can (or should) not go. A popular example of framing in practice in the British media is the issue of fox hunting. As is known, the famous decisions of Parliament Committee on Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales¹¹ and the legislation to ban the practice that followed¹² can be (and actually was) interpreted by the parties involved either with a 'traditional' frame (as, e.g., an impingement upon British traditions and the demolition of a significant recreational activity in rural areas¹³) or, on the other hand, with an 'ecological' frame (as an act protecting animal rights¹⁴ or preserving natural biodiversity). In reality even quite severe means of frame creation were used in the media. Thus, *The Daily Telegraph*, which occupied the 'traditionalist' position in this case, indirectly compared the ban supported by the Labour Party to practices of Hitler and Goering and compared the German 'aristocracy which for centuries had hunted foxes, wild boar, hares and deer on horseback' to British

⁹ For a summary of the several stages of agenda setting theory, see: Rogers E., Dearing J. Agenda-setting Research: Where has it been, where is it going? // *Communication Yearbook*. 1988. Vol.11. Pp. 555-594.

¹⁰ For detailed description of various concepts in framing theory, see, for instance: Яковлев И. П. Современные теории массовых коммуникаций. СПб, 2004 [in Russian].

¹¹ The Final Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales // Her Majesty's Stationery Office. 2000. 9 Jun. URL: www.defra.gov.uk/rural/hunting/inquiry/mainsections/huntingreport.htm.

¹² Hunting Act 2004. URL: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/ukpga_20040037_en_1.

¹³ The Social impact of Fox Hunting on Rural Communities // Masters of Fox Hounds Association. 2000. URL: http://www.mfha.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=62&Itemid=58.

¹⁴ The Morality of Hunting with Dogs // Campaign to Protect Hunted Animals. URL: http://www.league.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_271.pdf.

supporters of fox hunting¹⁵ (though many other countries and regimes had or still have various restrictions on traditional hunts). The paper also used metaphors of war in arguing its position.¹⁶ Metaphors, in general, are the main means of frame setting, whether in the broadly interpreted sense¹⁷ or in a more practical usage, in actual political discourse¹⁸.

Here, two mutually exclusive frames were used; as a rule, frames can overlap, interfere, be part of each other etc. And, as one may see from the fox hunt example, frames can easily be politicized and used in current political battles.

The second branch of ‘media effects’ studies is a complex of audience theories focusing on the perception of news content by media audiences, the possible impact of media upon their audiences and audience behavior under that impact.

Taken in aggregate, the two branches provide us with stable dipole ‘media content – audience behavior’; both elements are managed by agenda-setting and framing mechanisms, but there is a clear arrow along which power is executed. Thus, in conceptual approaches dealing with ‘media effects’, the classical scheme of communication (‘communicator – channel – recipient’) is *de-facto* reduced to studying two elements:

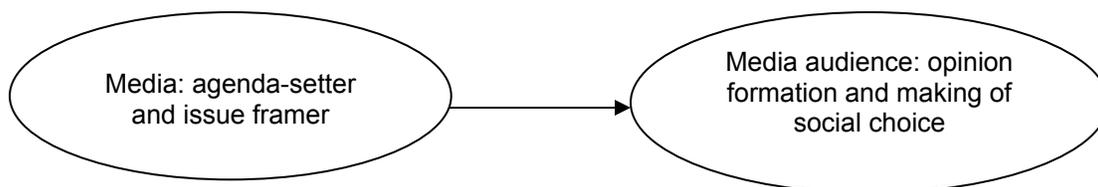


Table 1. Scheme of studying mediocratic phenomena in the ‘etymological’ concept of mediocracy

¹⁵ Harrison D., Paterson T. Thanks to Hitler, hunting with hounds is still verboten // *The Daily Telegraph*. 2002. 22 Sept. URL: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1407954/Thanks-to-Hitler-hunting-with-hounds-is-still-verboten.html.

¹⁶ Kallenbach M. Peer Warns of a War with Countryside // *The Daily Telegraph*. 2002. 20 Mar. URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1388261/Peer-warns-of-a-war-with-countryside.html>.

¹⁷ Маклюэн М. Указ. соч. С. 68.

¹⁸ See: *Political Language and Metaphor* / Ed. by Carver T., Pikalo J. New York, 2008.

Here, in the majority of theoretical constructions and even experimental studies, from behavioral media studies in the Annenberg school¹⁹ and ‘two-step communication flow’ introduced by Columbia University²⁰ to ‘social drug’ or ‘newszak’ content problematization in the early works of Columbia’s P. Lazarsfeld and R. Merton²¹ and the more recent works from the University of Cardiff²² (respectively) or quite radical descriptions of ‘meaning-crazy’ as an opposition to bureaucracy²³, other actors of communication (in particular, newsmakers who form the premises for media agenda) are eliminated from the research to make this research more focused on the two main elements. In whole branches of social science, research on factors that shape newsmaking and/or on external influences upon the editorial news judgment was often excluded from the list of research questions. For example, as D. Lazere of *Cyrano* has noted, such an influential wave of research from the 1970s within consciousness studies as H. M. Enzensberger’s *The Consciousness Industry*, G. Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, H. Schiller’s *The Mind Managers* and *Communication and Cultural Domination*, S. Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness*, S. Aronowitz’s *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness*,²⁴ ‘represent a movement by conservatives to co-opt the leftist critique by locating power in media personnel themselves without considering them as agents of corporate capitalism, and by focusing on the points of opposition between media and the state rather than of collaboration’.²⁵

¹⁹ For full information, see: URL: <http://annenberg.usc.edu>.

²⁰ Lazarsfeld P.F., Berelson B., Gaudet H. *The People’s Choice: How the Voter Makes up his Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. Columbia University Press, 1944; Katz E. *The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-To-Date Report on a Hypothesis* // *The Public Opinion Quarterly*. 1957. Vol. 21, Issue 1. P. 61-78.

²¹ Lazarsfeld P.F., Merton R.K. *Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action* // *Mass Communications: A Book of Readings* / 2nd ed. / Ed. by Schramm W. Urbana, 1960.

²² Franklin B. *News and Newszak*. London, 1998.

²³ Холмогоров Е. Происхождение смыслократии // *Золотой лев*. № 67-68. URL: http://www.zlev.ru/67_77.htm.

²⁴ Enzensberger H. M. *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media*. New York, 1974; Debord G. *Society of the spectacle*. Detroit, 1970; Schiller H. I. *The Mind Managers*. Boston, 1973; Schiller H. I. *Communication and Cultural Domination*. New York, 1976; Ewen S. *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of Consumer Culture*. London, 1976; Aronowitz S. *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness*. New York, 1973.

²⁵ Lazere D. *Reflections on Capitalist Culture and the Systematic Monopolization of American Publics*. URL: <http://www.bestcyrano.org/reflections.html>.

Despite this lacuna, we need to note that the ‘etymological’ discourse towards mediocracy has by far gathered the most significant proof in academic literature; scholars describe several unquestionable trends and phenomena that strongly support the ‘etymological’ view. Arguably, the three most popular are the following.

The first one is growing media concentration and the monopolization of media markets – above all in the Atlantic basin and in Western Europe – along with the growing impact of media conglomerates upon a) the political scene and b) media content and (as audience theories claim) upon audience behavior. Taking this into account, media power is viewed not as the power of the printed/audiovisual word/picture but as power executed by a group of persons who possess a monopolistic/oligopolistic right to bring to life and promote media output favorable to themselves and their interests, to which one may also attribute viewpoints, lists of agenda points, issue frames, or news agenda on the whole. This, in its turn, reduces the size and capacities of the public sphere as a free market of ideas. Hence, the scheme provided in Table 1 changes to:

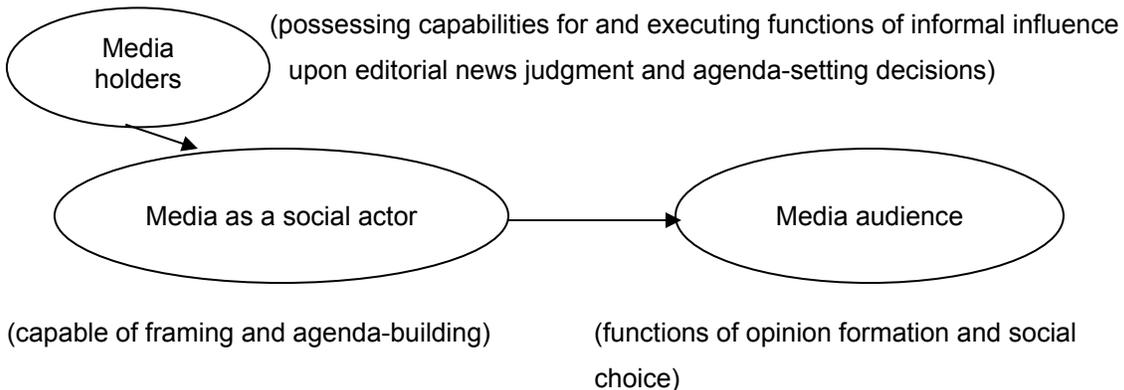


Table 2. Informal influence of media holders in the ‘etymological’ concept of mediocracy

One need not search long for facts to prove the might of media holders; their economic position potentially allows them to execute control (via both economic and informal measures) over editorial offices while being much less controlled by means of public scrutiny than any politician. This creates an option for theorists to endow media moguls with powers that border on misbalanced hegemony - powers beyond the dreams of traditional political actors. Thus, Paul

Hurtz from the University of New York in Buffalo describes media conglomerates as the most powerful voices in a society. He also provides figures on Rupert Murdoch's New Corp. which owns circa 40% of national circulation of paper press in the UK alone²⁶; Murdoch's share in the TV market is comparable to his share in the printed media market, and his informal influence spreads even further.²⁷ Kurtz also draws on the example of Bertelsmann AG, the German media and publishing conglomerate which has become the major player on the US media market with the purchase of the Random House publishing house; this carries a potential threat for the US audience whose values may be neglected or influenced and, thus, for US interests on foreign markets and in the worldwide public space where the EU is one of its major competitors.²⁸

To prove the low capacity for control over media holders, some scholars correctly point to the wave of deregulation in media law that deals with antimonopoly rules in the media field in the countries of liberal democracy: throughout the last thirty years, elites and lawmakers in these countries have demonstrated an inability to oppose the monopolistic media lobby. In particular, P. Kurtz notes that in the US the 1996 Telecommunications Act allowed one company to own up to 35% of the national TV market and up to 40% of regional radio stations.²⁹ We would draw Italy as an evident example, where the so-called Gasparri law of 2004 (further vested in the framework of Unique Text on Radio and TV in 2005) was lobbied through the Parliament by the right-centrist party coalition lead by Silvio Berlusconi. It creates an integrated system of communication instead of media markets (including traditional and new media, telecoms, and publishing) and allows a single proprietor to own 20% of this

²⁶ More precisely, by 1997, circa 39% of the circulation of national dailies and circa 32% of national Sunday papers.

²⁷ Numerous cases of the exertion of informal influence upon media and political institutions potentially attributed to Murdoch include support for the invasion of the Falkland Islands by major British national dailies in the 80s, support for the New Labour election campaign by the same papers in the 1990s, and downplaying of competitors on the British TV market which might have led to the infamous Dr Kelly case in the 2000s. For details, see: *Бодрунова С. С. Современные стратегии британской политической коммуникации*. СПб, 2010 [in Russian].

²⁸ Kurtz P. The New Mediocracy: A Threat to Democracy // Comitato Italiano per il Controllo delle Affermazioni sul Paranormale. URL: <http://www.cicap.org/new/articolo.php?id=101001>.

²⁹ Ibid.

System. This evidently means that earlier restrictions on media concentration and cross-ownership (vested, among others, in the EU Green Paper on Media Concentration in 1992³⁰) were easily abolished.³¹ In the UK, media concentration rules have been systematically circumvented since the 80s and the most vivid attempts have been connected with the activities of Rupert Murdoch.³²

Despite all the attempts by both the US and the EU to introduce measures supporting external (or market) and internal (or editorial and individual) pluralism³³, this defeat in the struggle with media monopolies cannot but be alarming for observers from academia, the media industry and politics, since there still are no effective means of controlling the informal meddling of media holders in editorial news judgment, investigative practices, or the interpretation of facts. Consequently, there is no guarantee that media holders will provide their editorial offices with political independence in content production. There is also an accurate claim that media staff themselves (especially printed press, since it does not undergo licensing and has a higher degree of editorial freedom) have no significant borders that would prevent them leaving the area of social responsibility; a fact that in the political field means providing equal space for various viewpoints. Thus, they act against the 'theory of social responsibility'³⁴ which ascribes to the media the role of liberal watchdog fixed today in many deontological codes on the editorial, national and international level throughout Western civilization. However, we need to note that in the 'etymological' scheme one cannot see why and for what purpose media holders impose this or that interpretation and restriction (and not others) upon media content. In some

³⁰ Pluralism and Media Concentration in the Internal Market: An Assessment of the Need for Community Action. Mission of the European Communities COM(92)480 final. Commission Green Paper. Brussels, 23 December 1992.

³¹ See for details: *Bodrunova S.* A Case of Incompatibility: EU Regulation of TV Sector and Its Adaptation in the Italian System of Law // *Medya Elestirileri 2009: BILINC ENDUSTRISININ IKTIDAR ve SIYASET PRATIKLERI*. Istanbul, 2009. Pp. 99-126. [in Turkish]

³² See Chapters 2 and 3 in: *Бодрунова С.* Указ. соч. [in Russian].

³³ See for details: *Законы и практика СМИ в одиннадцати демократиях мира (сравнительный анализ)*. М., 1996 [in Russian]; *Телевидение в Европе: регулирование, политика и независимость*. Open Society Institute, 2006. URL: http://www.library.cjes.ru/online/?a=con&b_id=747&c_id=10202 [in Russian].

³⁴ See for details: *Siebert F. S., Peterson T., Schramm W.* Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do. Urbana, 1956.

works, some 'demonic' traits implying borderless influence with a personal view are attributed to media moguls, along with the fact that media holders' sense of responsibility is not at all comparable with the level of their influence'³⁵; all other interactions between media and social forces are paradoxically excluded from this viewpoint. In other works, media influence (not personified by media holders but taken in aggregate and directed to growing media consumption) is described as the ultimate aim of media themselves (Media enterprises? Editorship? Journalists?)³⁶. The media system is perceived as a 'mighty and independent geopolitical factor'³⁷ or as a 'self-dependent supranational and suprapartial power'³⁸.

The second factor which supports an 'etymological' interpretation of mediocracy is the historical development of social culture in the journalism industry which follows a vector of detachment from the interests of audience. Instead of many examples, we here would rather cite Sam Smith, chief editor of the webzine called *The Progressive Review*. He names three aspects of this detachment: 1) the transition of a whole body of leading journalists from the working class to higher social strata by means of income and status and, *ergo*, the reshaping of the social perspective on their judgment³⁹; 2) the growth of academic education in the industry which has led to the growth of abstract thinking and theorizing, as well as to studying the issues in universities rather than in fieldwork; 3) the general success of journalism as an economic entity, which has led to an increase in career opportunities, yet when the journalistic profession started to be perceived from a career perspective, functional idealism disappeared from practice and the interdependence of all journalists increased – this is why the volume and grade of investigative journalism diminished as soon as it brought risks to the higher editorial echelon. 'In short, journalism has

³⁵ Юрьев Д. Низвержение в телевизор // *Киноарт*. 2006. № 4. URL: <http://www.kinoart.ru/magazine/04-2006/media/juriev0406> [in Russian].

³⁶ For one of the most radical interpretations, see: Дугин А. Искусство смотреть телевизор: Эссе о медиакратии // *Литературная газета*. № 52 (5906). 2002. 25-31 дек. URL: http://www.lgz.ru/archives/html_arch/ig522002/Polosy/art15_1.htm [in Russian].

³⁷ Дугин А. Основы геополитики. М, 1999. С. 135 [in Russian].

³⁸ Медиакратия против государства. URL: <http://warweb1.chat.ru/gusin.htm> [in Russian].

³⁹ This trend was described even much earlier by Ben Bagdikian.

become more scholarly, more snobbish, and more scared and, in the process increasingly has separated itself from the lives of its readers.⁴⁰ Taken together, these changes, again, undermined the basis for carrying forward the watchdog function and the function of representing the interests of the ‘ordinary reader’ or, more precisely, of particular media audiences.

The third factor is the relatively high levels of trust in media content in established Western democracies, above all in Western Europe:

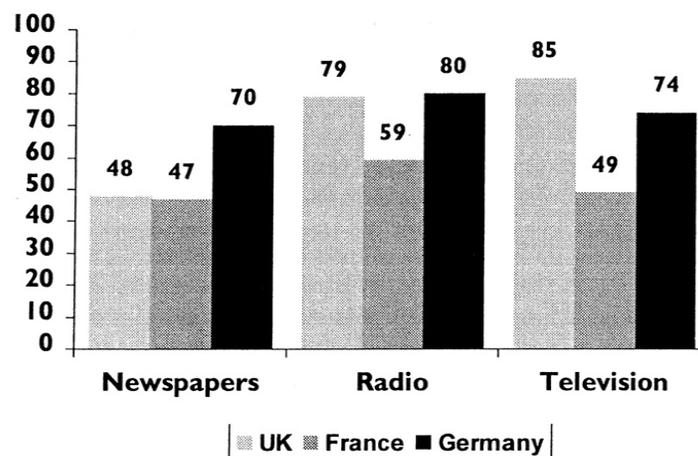


Table 3. Levels of confidence in newspapers, radio, and television in the UK, France, and Germany in 1997, in %. Source: Watts D. *The Mass Media: Political Communication in Britain Today*. Sheffield, 2000. P. 61.

In the US, 45% of followers of the Democratic Party trust ‘all or most’ of CNN broadcasts; amongst Republicans this figure is a little lower but still relatively high.⁴¹ Scholars in these countries believe that these figures are low; but it is sufficient to compare them to Russian figures to prove the opposite. For instance, one of the polls by the Levada Centre in 2004 shows that 18% of Russians do not trust the Russian media at all⁴², 45% believe that the Russian media do not quite deserve trust, and only 26% trust some media content (press,

⁴⁰ Smith S. When Journalism Went Bad // *Writing and Journalism: Essays by Sam Smith*. URL: <http://prorev.com/essaysmedia.htm>.

⁴¹ Sanson C. Gullibility and Mediocracy: A conflict of disinterests // *Etalkinghead*. 2004. 15 Jun. URL: <http://www.etalkinghead.com/archives/gullibility-and-mediocracy-a-conflict-of-disinterests-2004-06-15.html>.

⁴² To compare: in the UK (on average) this figure never went over 5% even during the Iraq invasion; the only exception was London where in 2003 the level of mistrust in the media climbed to its record of 11%. Source: Baines P., Worcester R.M. When the British ‘Tommy’ Went to War, Public Opinion Followed // *Journal of Public Affairs*. 2005. Vol. 5. P. 15.

radio, TV).⁴³ Levels of trust in media in the West significantly increase the impact of the media agenda on the individual agendas of readers/viewers when a media event is perceived as a personally relevant one, as well increasing the potential for the audience to be manipulated. This may even transfer real management powers from managing institutions to media. Clear cases of such transfer are natural and anthropogenic disasters, such as the case of the huge forest fires in Greece where, in 2007, '[t]he rescue efforts, bizarrely, were actually being directed by the media. Not only were resources diverted to those areas most visible on TV, but frantic callers turned to TV and radio stations because that's how they felt they had the best chance of getting aid.'⁴⁴

This phenomenon allows critics to speak of 'sociedad teledirigida'⁴⁵, or, generalized to all media, of 'media-driven society'. In the UK of the years 2000, 'media-driven society' was a popular concept used excessively by political journalists and commentators⁴⁶. In such a society, individual agendas and social attitudes are formed under the direct influence of media agenda-setting and framing; this would be impossible with lower levels of trust in the media.

To sum up, there are four general conclusions that seem to be well-grounded within the 'etymological' interpretation of mediocracy. The first is a downgrading of the role of traditional political institutions in policy formation in comparison with public media discourse. The second is the formation of a tightly connected and coherent link 'popular media – media audience'. The third is the undermining of the legitimacy of the political field and of trust in the democratic process through various smaller-scale negative effects. These effects are summed up by Kenneth Newton from the University of Southampton.⁴⁷ We have

⁴³ Статистика // Индустрия рекламы. 2004. № 20 (70). С. 8. [in Russian]

⁴⁴ Lajos T. G. The dangers of mediocracy // *The Seattle Times*. 2007. 31 Dec. URL: http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/opinion/2004068026_taso13.html.

⁴⁵ Analogous to 'market-driven society'. The term 'opinione telediretta' ('tele-driven opinion') is coined by G.Sartori in: *Sartori G. Homo Videns. Televisione e post-pensiero*. Roma - Bari, 1998; The term 'sociedad teledirigida' ('media-driven society') appears in the Spanish translation of Sartori's book: *Sartori G. Homo Videns. La sociedad teledirigida / Trad. de Soler A. D. Madrid, 1998*. URL: <http://www.monografias.com/trabajos12/pdaspec/pdaspec.shtml#HOMO>.

⁴⁶ E.g., by Nicholas Jones, veteran political journalist from the BBC, in his public lectures and TV reports.

⁴⁷ Newton K. May the Weak Force be With You: The Power of the Mass Media in Modern Politics // *European Journal of Political Research*. 2006. Vol. 45. P. 212-213.

added several other options to his list and cite it here in a shortened and restructured version, with references reselected:

Formation of negative political attitudes and opinions: stimulation of ignorance, political fatigue, and incomprehension of political issues⁴⁸; introduction of debased and empty political discourse and ‘mean world effect’⁴⁹; perception mainstreaming⁵⁰; undermining social capital⁵¹;

Degradation of political participation of both elites and masses: falling voter turnout⁵², qualitative and quantitative party membership and identification⁵³; packaging and presentation favored over substance⁵⁴;

Degradation of political process: ‘incumbency effect’ and shortening political lives⁵⁵; ‘fast forward effect’ and canalization of electoral choice⁵⁶; privatization of political discourse⁵⁷;

⁴⁸ *Ansolabehere S., Behr R., Iyengar S.* Mass Media and Elections: An Overview // *American Politics Quarterly*. 1991. Vol. 19. P. 109-139, and other works by the authors; *Baudrillard J.* The Evil Demon of Images. London, 1987, and other works; *Blumler J. G., Gurevitch M.* The Crisis of Public Communication. London, 1995; *Kalb M.* The Rise of the New News (Discussion paper D-34). Cambridge (MA), 1998; *Franklin B.* Packaging politics: Political Communications in Britain’s Media Democracy. London, 1994; many others. Here we cite works emblematic for various schools of media studies.

⁴⁹ *Dautrich K., Hartley T. H.* How the News Media Fail American Voters: Causes, Consequences and Remedies. New York, 1999; *Gabler N.* Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality. New York, 1998; *Patterson T. E.* Out of order. New York, 1994; *Hallin D.* Sound Bite News: Television Coverage of Elections, 1968-88. Washington, DC, 1991; *Blumler J. G.* Origins of the Crisis of Communication for Citizenship // *Political Communication*. 1997. Vol. 14, Issue 4. P. 395-404.

⁵⁰ *Gerbner G. et al.* Charting the Mainstream: Television’s Contribution to Political Orientations // *Journal of Communication*. 1982. Vol. 32, Issue 2. P. 100-127; *Kerbel M. R.* Remote and Controlled: Media Politics in a Cynical Age. Boulder (CO), 1995; *Kubey R., Csikszentmihalyi M.* Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience. Hillsdale (NJ), 1990; *Sartori G.* Video Power // *Government and Opposition*. 1989. Vol. 24, Issue 1. P. 39-53.

⁵¹ *Putnam R. D.* Tuning in, Tuning out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America // *Political Science and Politics*. 1995. Vol. 28, Issue 4. P. 664-683.

⁵² *Ranney A.* Channel of Power: The Impact of Television on American Politics. New York, 1983; *Ansolabehere S., Behr R., Iyengar S.* Op. cit.; *Sparrow N.* More Anger than Apathy // *The Guardian*. 2001. 6 Nov. URL: <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/polls/comment/0,11030,611962,00.html>; *Cohen N.* This Time, Will Even he Bother to Vote? // *New Statesman*. 2005. 25 Apr. P. 20.

⁵³ *Pfetsch B.* Convergence Through Privatization? Changing Media Environments and Televised Politics in Germany // *European Journal of Communication*. 1996. Vol. 8, Issue 3. P. 425-450; *Wattenberg M.* The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1980. Cambridge (MA), 1984; many others.

⁵⁴ *Davis D. K.* Mass and Modernity: The Future of Journalism in a post Cold War and Postmodern World // *Research in political sociology*. Vol. 7: op. cit.; *Jamieson K. H.* Packaging the Presidency: A History and Criticism of Presidential Advertising. New York, 1984; *Franklin B.* Packaging Politics, op. cit.

⁵⁵ *Meyrowitz J.* How Television Changes the Political Drama // *Research in political sociology*. Vol. 7: op. cit.; chapters in: *Graber D.* Mass media and American politics. Washington, DC, 1993.

⁵⁶ *Ranney A.* Op. cit.; *Hallin D. C., Mancini P.* Italy’s Television, Italy’s Democracy // *OpenDemocracy Project*. 2001. 18 Jul. URL: http://www.opendemocracy.net/media-publicservice/article_59.jsp.

Degradation of institutions ensuring democracy: presidentialisation of leadership⁵⁸ (especially in the UK⁵⁹); diminishing responsibility and accountability of leaders⁶⁰; political overload and ungovernability⁶¹; loss of political trust and confidence in institutions⁶².

The fourth and most important conclusion is that, in the 'etymological' concept of mediacracy, *media is declared an autonomous and the most influential player in public sphere*; it possesses both the right and the will to form public opinion and to influence the political process according to its own wishes and interests. A clarified scheme of power distribution may as well look like this:

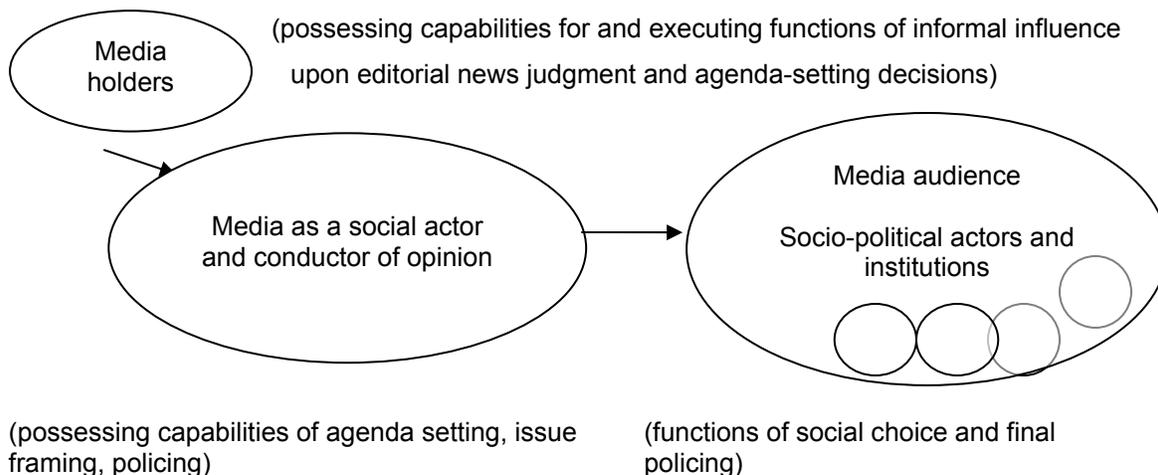


Table 4. A clarified scheme of power distribution in the 'etymological' concept of mediacracy

As we can see, the scheme practically neglects the meaning of the socio-political field in socially relevant policy. This scheme exists as a functional simplification for a more distinct demonstration of deductions from various research projects. Variations of this scheme may move some actors (e.g. lobbying institutions or social movements) out of the circle of media audience.

⁵⁷ Many works by J. Habermas, including early works, e.g.: *Habermas J. The Public Sphere / Communications and the Class Struggle / Ed. by Mattelart A., Seigelaub S. Vol. 1. New York, 1979.*

⁵⁸ *Ranney A. Op. cit.; Lewis J. Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along With It. New York, 2001.*

⁵⁹ *Kavanagh D., Seldon A. The Powers Behind the Prime Minister: The Hidden Influence of Number Ten. London, 2001; Larocca R. Strategic Diversion in Political Communication // The Journal of Politics. 2004. Vol. 66, Issue 2. P. 469-491.*

⁶⁰ *Iyengar S. Is Anyone Responsible: How Television Frames Political Issues. Chicago (IL), 1991; Kavanagh D., Morris P. Consensus Politics from Attlee to Major. Oxford, 1994.*

⁶¹ One of the early and seminal works: *Crozier M., Huntington S. P., Watanuki J. The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission. New York, 1975.*

⁶² *Sex, Lies and Democracy: The Press and the Public / Ed. by Stephenson H., Bromley M. London, 1998; Cappella J. N., Jamieson K. H. Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good. New York, 1997.*

This viewpoint is, for example, supported by *The Economist*; in 1993, S. Ansolabehere, R. Behr and S. Iyengar introduced media as a non-controllable element into the scheme of political communication.⁶³ Thus, the scheme varies as follows:

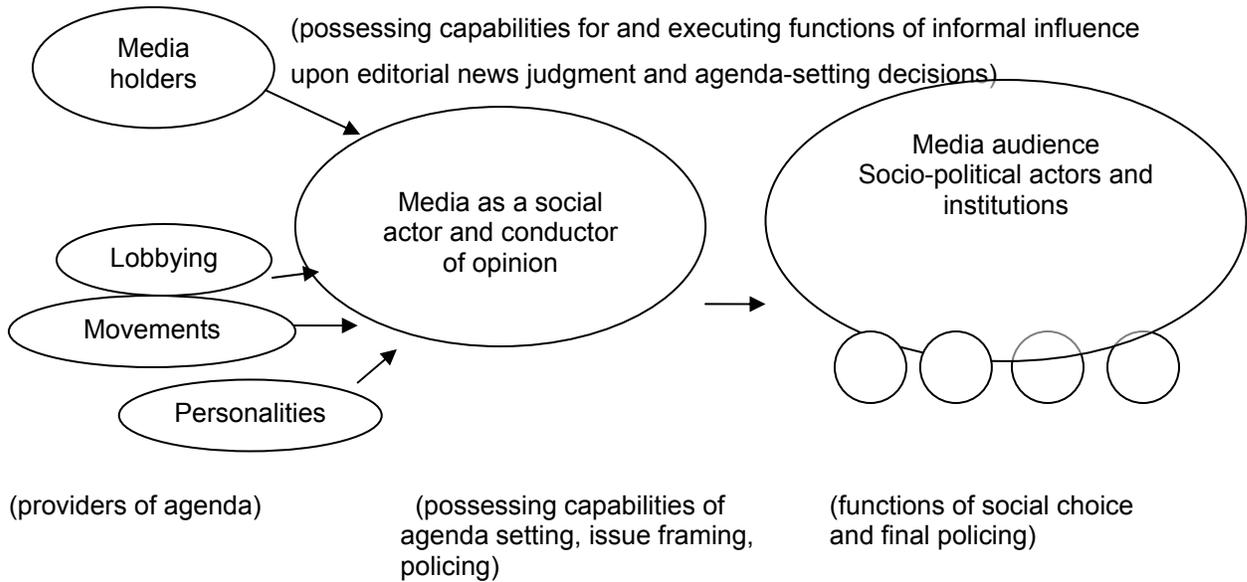


Table 5. A clarified scheme of power distribution in 'etymologic' concept of mediocracy, *The Economist* version

There is, though, a legitimate opposition to the 'etymological' concept of mediocracy in today's academia. First, the 'etymological' scheme lacks explanation of media holders' behavior, but this would be the lesser of evils, since media holders can be (and have been, though rarely enough) an object of further research. A bigger objection is raised by a group of scholars who legitimately question the very capability of media to rule⁶⁴ – that is, to carry out the basic functions of institutions of power (maintenance of order, ensuring freedoms, attainment of equality⁶⁵). They also prove by examples that media is a 'weak force' and may become a, say, catalyzing agent in the public sphere only in special cases. These cases include the case of high degrees of awareness on the subject of public discussion (when opinions expressed in the media coincide with previously established values and expectations formed not without previous

⁶³ Ansolabehere, S., Behr, R., Iyengar, S. *The Media Game*. New York, 1993. P. 1.

⁶⁴ See: Iyengar S., Reeves R. *Do the Media Govern?* Thousand Oaks (CA), 1997.

⁶⁵ Formulated in: Janda K., Berry J. M., Goldman J. *The Challenge of Democracy. Government in America* / 2nd ed. Boston, 1989. P. 5-21.

media work) and the case of low awareness (when the audience has neither its own experience nor enough information on the case available from alternative sources). In other cases, multiple factors shape the decision taken after the consumption of media content.⁶⁶ These factors were, again, summed up by K. Newton:

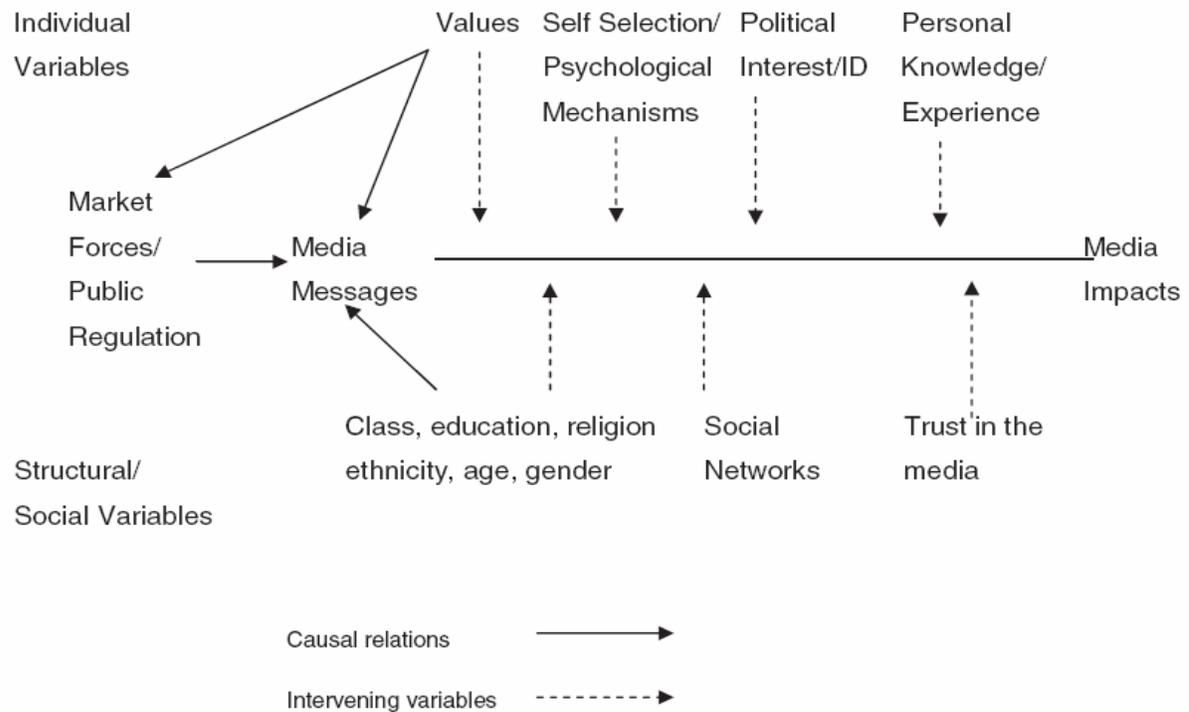


Table 6. 'Mediating the media' by K. Newton. Source: Newton K. *Op.cit.* P. 219.

Another objection (an obvious though legitimate objection) to the 'etymological' interpretation was raised by an anonymous Italian participant in an online discussion under the nickname 'NeSoAPacchi' on Yahoo.Answers where the term 'mediacracy' was discussed. This objection reasonably brings in Italy as a case and the author argues that '[i]f mediacracy means government (though indirect) by the media, I think Italy... is just the opposite of mediocratic'⁶⁷ since media there are deprived of the right to control the government, though any observer would argue Italy is a mediocratic country, and even the EU has raised

⁶⁶ Cm.: Newton K. *Op. cit.* P. 209-234.

⁶⁷ URL: <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090529193013AAoTEr1>.

concerns about the state of media in Italy and its excessive influence over electoral decisions.⁶⁸ So, is mediocracy indeed the ‘rule of media’?

3. The ‘Marketing’ Interpretation of Mediocracy

In another branch of academic literature, the term ‘mediocracy’ also occupies a significant place. Mediocracy is also interpreted as ‘rule by or through media’⁶⁹, which is evidently different from ‘rule of media’ and brings us closer to the manipulation paradigm. But, as was mentioned previously, this approach gives credit to the media and endows media with some authority. This approach has developed within a special field of political studies, the field known today as *political marketing*. We here argue that this approach has a bigger potential for explaining power re-distribution involving media than the ‘etymological’ approach, since it has integrated and conceptualized the power of media as the ‘power of a mediator’.

One of the first scholars who conceptualized the ‘power of a mediator’ was, paradoxically, Karl Marx. However one need not be perplexed by the fact that an investigation of how the liberal ideal of media (the ‘watchdog function’) is transformed or even destroyed is based on premises taken from Marx, as long as we have the preservation of the liberal ideal as a constant aim of research.

⁶⁸ Resolution of the European Parliament on ‘Risks of Violation, in the EU and Especially in Italy, of Freedom of Expression and Information (Article 11(2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights)’. 2004. 22 Apr. URL: <https://lists.firenze.linux.it/pipermail/e-privacy/2004-June/001447.html>; Monopolization of the Electronic Media and Possible Abuse of Power in Italy. Report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education. Doc. 10195. 2004. 3 Jun. URL: <http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/workingdocs/doc04/edoc10195.htm>; Opinion on the compatibility of the laws ‘Gasparri’ and ‘Frattini’ of Italy with the Council of Europe standards in the field of freedom of expression and pluralism of the media. Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 63rd Plenary Session. Venice, 10-11 June 2005. URL: [http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2005/CDL-AD\(2005\)017-e.asp](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2005/CDL-AD(2005)017-e.asp).

⁶⁹ Философия политики: глоссарий терминов проекта «Арктогея». URL: <http://www.arcto.ru/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1005> [in Russian]; a similar interpretation may be found in: Третьяков В. Т. Как стать знаменитым журналистом: Курс лекций по теории и практике современной русской журналистики. М., 2004 [in Russian].

The growth of academic research within or close to political marketing is evident in both Anglo-American and continental European political studies⁷⁰, as well as (consequently) in Russia⁷¹. This may prove the universality of this field for both established and transitive democracies. Political marketing focuses on the behavior of political parties in postmodern social circumstances and the modern political process. One of the first comprehensive research books in this field, the book by K. P. Phillips, was, not coincidentally, called *Mediocracy: American parties and Politics in the Communications Age* (New York: Garden City, 1975).

The essence of political marketing is that wide electoral strata of the population are viewed and described in terms of categories from classical marketing (that is, as target groups with definite needs), and political parties and their programs of ruling and change are described analogous to a consumer product responding to the interests of electoral audiences. Since 1969 when P. Kotler and S. Levy expanded classical marketing to non-business entities⁷², an extensive field of political marketing research has formed in the Atlantic and European social science⁷³.

The mechanics of political marketing are well described elsewhere; for this research, it is important that the effect of 'marketing politics' has formed several new types of party behavior, among those is the 'catch-all' party strategy popular among major nation-state parties and alliances. Widely known examples include the Democratic party in the US that modernized itself into 'New Democrats'⁷⁴, the

⁷⁰ See, e.g., books published in different countries: *Phillips K. P. Mediocracy: American parties and politics in the communications age.* New York, 1975; *Seguela J. Ne dites pas à ma mere que je suis dans la publicité – elle me croit pianiste dans un bordel.* Paris, 1992 [in French]; *Maarek P. J. Political marketing and communication.* London, 1995; *Lees-Marshment J. Political Marketing and British Political Parties: The party's just begun.* Manchester, 2001; *Meyer T. Mediokratie: die Kolonisierung der Politik durch die Medien.* Frankfurt am Main, 2001. [in German]

⁷¹ *Лебедева Т. Путь к власти. Франция: выборы президента.* М, 1995 [in Russian]; *Недяк И. Л. Политический маркетинг: основы теории.* М, 2008 [in Russian].

⁷² *Kotler P., Levy S. J. Broadening the Concept of Marketing // Journal of Marketing.* 1969. Vol. 33. P. 10-15.

⁷³ For detailed description of the three stages of development of political marketing, see: *Lees-Marshment J. Op. cit.* P. 2-5.

⁷⁴ *Fritz B., Keefer B., Nyhan B. All The President's Spin: George W. Bush, the Media, and the Truth.* New York, 2004. P. 51.

Labour party turned 'New Labour'⁷⁵ and 'party of enterprise'⁷⁶ and the Conservative party turned 'New Tories'⁷⁷ in the UK, the SPD in Germany that gained a 'Mediakanzler', G. Schroeder⁷⁸, the UMP in France 'looking for a good topic of chronicle'⁷⁹ and articulating modernization on their website⁸⁰, and 'Forza Italia!', called the 'media-party' or 'media-mediated personality-party' in Italy⁸¹ etc.

Studies of the mediatization of party behavior have mainly focused on the media strategies of mainstream, rather than niche and radical, parties. The party strategy that in Kirchheimer's works⁸² and later writings⁸³ has acquired the name of the 'Catch-all Party' model (sometimes called in the US the 'big tent parties' model and in Germany the 'Volkspartei' model) implies that parties feel that the ideological affiliation of people steadily declines with the development of modern social trends (such as horizontal and vertical mobility, the growth of individualism, the decline of traditional institutions such as family and class stratification etc.). In response they seek to catch the largest possible share of electoral votes; ideologies tend to play a smaller and smaller part in the formation of party behavior and their information strategies. This leads to the corrosion of ideology-based party platforms and to the centripetal movement of parties within the

⁷⁵ Allender P. What's New About 'New Labour'? // *Politics*. 2001. Vol. 21, Issue 1. P. 56-62; *New Labour, Old Labour* / Ed. by Seldon A., Hickson K. London, 2004.

⁷⁶ Osler D. Labour Party plc: New Labour as a Party of Business. Edinburgh, 2002.

⁷⁷ Rawnsley A. It's the Tories who are Addicted to Spin // *The Observer*. 2002. 14 Jul. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,,755045,00.html>; Hall I. Tories look for Saatchi and Bell for salvation // *PRWeek*. 2003. 25 Apr. P. 1; Chandiramani R. Howard appoints trio to head Tory comms // *PRWeek*. 2003. 21 Nov. P. 1.

⁷⁸ Crivelli G. Il cancelliere mediatico e il prussiano di Baviera // *Sole 24 Ore*. 2002. 10 Dic. URL: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/fc?cmd=art&codid=22.0.821966221&chld=30> [in Italian].

⁷⁹ Maurus V. Signé Sarkozy // *Le Monde*. 2009. 18 Dec. URL: www.lemonde.fr/opinions/article/2009/12/18/signe-sarkozy-par-veronique-maurus_1282674_3232.html [in French].

⁸⁰ URL: <http://www.lesateliersduchangement.fr/> [in French].

⁸¹ Seisselberg J. Conditions of Success and Political Problems of a 'Media-mediated Personality-Party': The Case of Forza Italia // *West European Politics*. 1996. Vol. 19, Issue 4. P. 715-743; Statham P. Berlusconi, the Media, and the New Right in Italy // *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*. 1996. Vol. 1, Issue 1. P. 87-105.

⁸² The main work on the topic is, as recognized in the research field, the following: Kirchheimer O. The Transformation of Western European Party Systems // *Political Parties and Political Development* / Ed. by La Palombara J., Weiner M. Princeton University Press, 1966. P. 177 – 199.

⁸³ See, for instance: Krouwel A. Otto Kirchheimer and the Catch-all Party // *West European Politics*. April 2003. Vol. 26, Issue 2. P. 23 – 40; Lees-Marshment J. Op. cit. P. 12.

political spectrum, as was well described in the corresponding literature. Such a trend has been spotted in many established democracies, including the UK⁸⁴, Germany⁸⁵, other continental European and even Scandinavian democracies.⁸⁶ Some transitive democracies, like Romania⁸⁷, have also experienced this trend; thus, it seems to be universal for today's democratic states passing through mid-term or the final stages of institutional development. And, as Daniel Hough has argued in 2002, 'although many authors have sought (with differing levels of success) to illustrate the flaws in Kirchheimer's case, his argument has remained remarkably resilient'⁸⁸.

This, in its turn, leads to the graduate superposition of political parties' platforms and the matching of responses to 'issues to attack'. One of the best examples are the large British political parties: the history of the centripetal slide of the New Labour Party is thoroughly described by Jennifer Lees-Marshment in 2001⁸⁹; in 2003, the Conservative Party experienced a less successful turn to the New Tories⁹⁰. With time, 'all-catching' party responses to the same issues tend to be more and more similar to each other; parties' manifestos coincide to a substantially larger extent than before World War II. This further provokes the disenchantment in parties' positions and the ensuing fall of voter turnout and party support.

Several possible responses to the collision of party platforms are described in literature. One is the total *mediatization* of party politics, very

⁸⁴ Lees-Marshment J. Op. cit.

⁸⁵ Hough D. The PDS and the Concept of the Catch-All Party // *German Politics and Society*. 2002. Vol. 20, Issue 4. P. 27 – 47.

⁸⁶ Krouwel A. The Catch-all party in Western Europe, 1945-1990. A Study in Arrested Development. Manuscript. 1999. URL: <http://dare.uvu.vu.nl/bitstream/1871/13043/1/4664.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Roper S. D. The Romanian Party System and the Catch-all Party Phenomenon // *East European Quarterly*. 1995. Vol. 28, Issue 4. P. 519 – 532.

⁸⁸ Hough D. Op. cit.

⁸⁹ Lees-Marshment J. Op. cit.

⁹⁰ Hall I. Tories Look for Saatchi and Bell for Salvation // *PRWeek*. 2003. 25 April. P. 1; Rawnsley A. It's the Tories who are Addicted to Spin // *The Observer*. 2002. 14 Jul. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,,755045,00.html>.

characteristic of mainstream parties.⁹¹ Another is the *customization* of party messages, described, for example, by Irina Nedyak.⁹² The two differ in the following way:

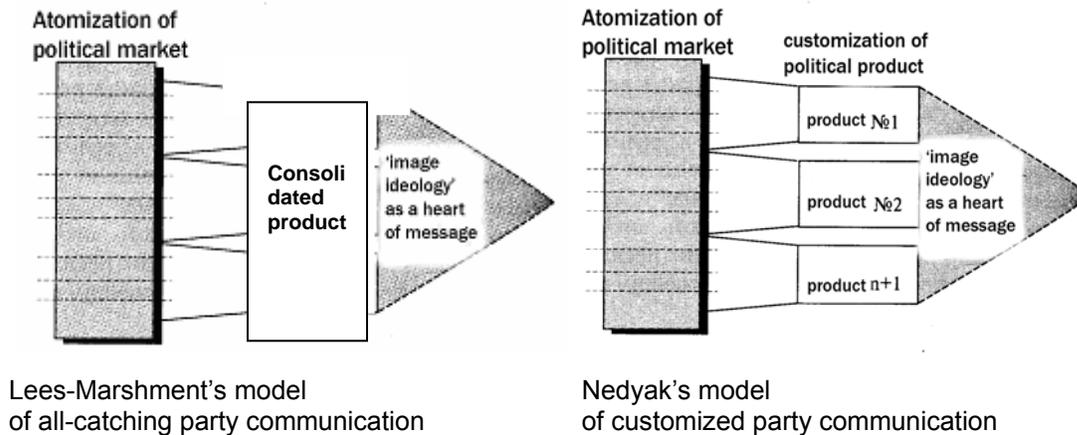


Table 7. 'Catch-all' parties and their communication models

Other options could be the *radicalization* of the political spectrum suggested by Thomas Meyer⁹³ and the *grassroots political activism* supported today by new IT possibilities. Here, we'd like to underline that all these responses involve media appeal and (at later stages of party/movement development) media management; relations with the media and the possible influence of media upon political process is most evident in the first case, when researchers speak of the mediatization of politics.

This is why an important novelty within the Atlantic political marketing theory was the appearance of the *concept of media politics*. As F. Esser after J. Zaller argue, it may be 'defined as a "modernized" way of conducting politics by which individual politicians seek to gain office (in election campaigns) and make policies while in office (governing as permanent campaigns) through

⁹¹ Bodrunova S. Political Marketing as a Forefather of Media Politics: Despondency of British Political Journalism at the Turn of the Millennium. In: Medya Elestirileri 2009: BILINC ENDUSTRISININ IKTIDAR ve SIYASET PRATIKLERI. Istanbul: Beta, 2009. P. 225 – 276. [in Turkish]

⁹² Недяк И. Указ. соч. [in Russian]

⁹³ Meyer T. Op. cit. [in German]

communication that reaches citizens through the mass media⁹⁴. To our viewpoint, the term ‘media politics’ may be regarded as a derivative of the concept of ‘mediated politics’⁹⁵ which has a potentially wider scope. The American analyst of political communication, Doris Graber, notes that in new conditions the political field and news media are inseparably intertwined which leads to a rethinking of the concept of political power. It is now viewed as a communication construction which needs monitoring and support, and those aspiring to power need to play by the emerging rules of media politics.⁹⁶ Richard Rose, a UK author, has used domestic material to create a theory of the media and political complex: this complex, as Rose argues, operates cognitive frames co-produced by journalists and Downing street.⁹⁷ One can find detailed research on the social aspects of media politics in Peter Osborne’s works on spin-doctoring and the rise of the British media/political class.⁹⁸

Thus, here we see at least three inevitable components of the scheme of distribution and execution of political power:

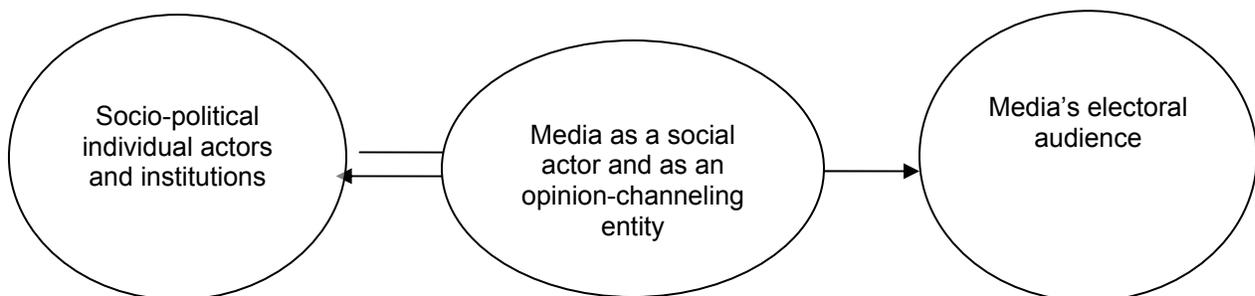


Table 8. Elements of the ‘marketing’ approach to the mediocracy concept: participators of three communication processes

⁹⁴ Esser F. Media Politics and Media Self-coverage In the British Press (conference paper) // International Communications Association. Annual Meeting. 2003. San Diego, CA. P. 3; for a detailed account of media politics, see: Zaller J. A Theory of Media Politics: How the Interests of Politicians, Journalists and the Citizens shape the News. Chicago, 2000. URL: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/media%20politics%20book%20.pdf>.

⁹⁵ See for details: *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy* / Ed. by Bennett W.L., Entman R. M. Cambridge, 2000; especially the chapter: Blumler J. G., Gurevitch M. Americanization Reconsidered: UK-US Campaign Communication Comparisons across Time.

⁹⁶ Graber D. *Mass Media and American Politics* / 6th ed. Washington, DC, 2002. P. 266.

⁹⁷ Rose R. *The Paradox of Power: The Prime Minister in a Shrinking World*. Cambridge, 2001. P. 101.

⁹⁸ Osborne P. Alistair Campbell. *New Labour and the Rise of the Media Class*. London, 1999; Osborne P. *The Triumph of the Political Class*. London, 2007.

Thus, a historical line of the decline of ideology-based politics and its conversion to media politics may be outlined: ideology-based politics – political marketing (from ‘tackling issues’ in policymaking to full-scale party marketing) – mediated politics (with various results: media politics with solid messages, customization of political messages, grassroots protest politics, radicalization of the political spectrum and perhaps others). With the intensification of this trend in the political process, the media system, has established itself as a new, essentially irremovable element of growing importance.

For us, it is particularly important that media politics is perceived as a new type of politics –one that is in principle conducted via a medium and one which is *mediated* at a qualitatively new level. In this case, it is quite logical to suppose that, within a democratic perspective, the ‘media(ted) democracy’ would mean such an interrelation and co-operation in between the three elements that would imply a balance capable of preserving the democratic features of the political process (accountability of rulers; free, whether rational or more irrational, choice by the ruled; equal access to means of articulation and the struggle for individual and group interests; regular and reasonable elite shifts etc). This would mean, in other words, the balance of all the vectors of relations within the scheme of *mediademocracy*:

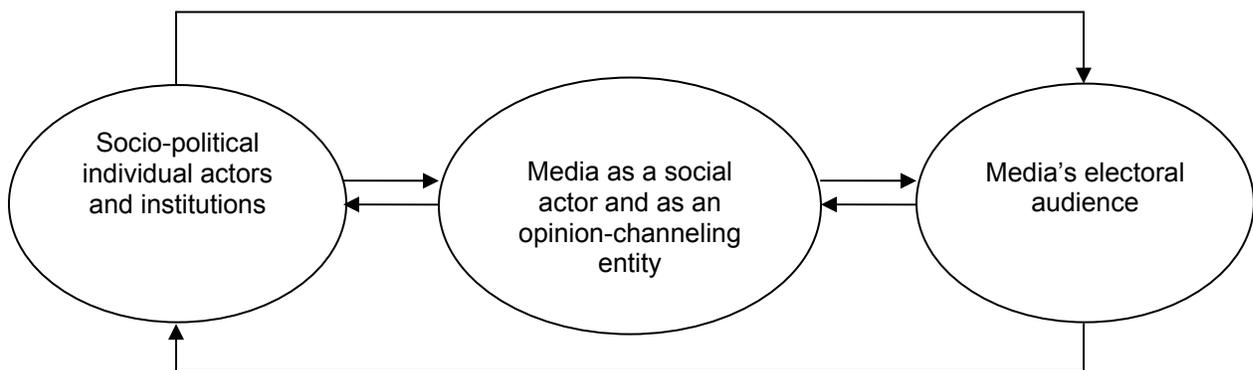


Table 9. Visualizing mediademocracy

However, as contrasted to political reality, such a picture would evidently seem idealistic; even the simplest depiction of the mediated political process in Table 8 shows significant imbalances within the provided scheme. Further on, it

is just as equally evident that the scheme might provoke several types of imbalance in the mediapolitical process. One type of imbalance could favour the behavior of political actors, media, or the audience, respectively, uncontrolled by the other two elements of the system, to the extent that it would pose a threat to the system itself. Examples of such cases on the political side are numerous and are well (or even too well) described in the relevant literature; examples from media and audience fields are more rare, though one needn't search for long to recall the 'victimization' of Gerhard Schroeder by mainstream papers in the first half of the years 2000⁹⁹ or the expression of popular discontent in the UK or Italy, where such discontent led to the change of the ruling party (the 'Winter of Discontent' of 1978-79 in London) and heavily contributed to the disruption of the political system of the First Republic (the rapid growth of discontent movements and protest voting in 1976-79), respectively¹⁰⁰.

Another type of the imbalance would be provoked by co-operation and agreement between two of the elements in order to drive out or delegitimize the third one's legitimate democratic interests or positions. This is what we would propose to describe as **mediacracy**: it is such a shift of democratic balance within the mediapolitical process that implies the *fusion and conjugation of (political) power-holding and media institutions in the field of both interests and communication*. Via this fusion the mediator (that is, a medium, a media entity) becomes *affiliated to (a) given political actor(s)*. **Mediacracy is, then, politics carried out via an affiliated mediator.**¹⁰¹ A *mediacratic regime* is, then, heavily reliant on the media element and capable of integrating mass communication as a strategic element in its political struggle, policymaking, and power distribution, preserving, though, the main legal framework of a democratic system, such as

⁹⁹ Litvinenko A. Mediacracy in Germany // Средства массовой информации в современном мире: молодые исследователи. Тезисы VII межвузовской научно-практической конференции. СПб, 2008. С. 207 – 209.

¹⁰⁰ Bull M. J., Newell J. L. Italian Politics. Cambridge, 2005. P. 72 – 73.

¹⁰¹ We'd here like to underline that, in some cases, affiliation works 'vice-versa' in the interest of the public (or definite public groups more or less institutionalized), when protesters or other strata of the public involve media in power brokerage; but in most cases this needs to be understood rather as 'mediademocratic' than 'mediacratic', since basic media functions in a democracy include the articulation and expression of aggregated interests. However, such cases again support the view of the principal mediatization of the political process and growth of 'grassroots mediademocracy'.

free and accessible elections at all levels, established measures of public scrutiny and the competitiveness of the political articulation of interests etc.

Table 10 illustrates just one of many possible designs of such a fusion. Mechanisms of the fusion include both the personal and institutional levels. If, at the individual level these could be informal relations between journalists/editors and politicians within everyday political communication, the institutional shape of the fusion would be, arguably, more diversified and more influential as well. The channels of the fusion most frequently described in literature include three of these: blooming institutions of political communication and ‘spin doctoring’ from the political side, and media holders and special journalistic bodies (like journalist pools) from the media side.

Thus, the mediocratic configuration of political process would be the following:

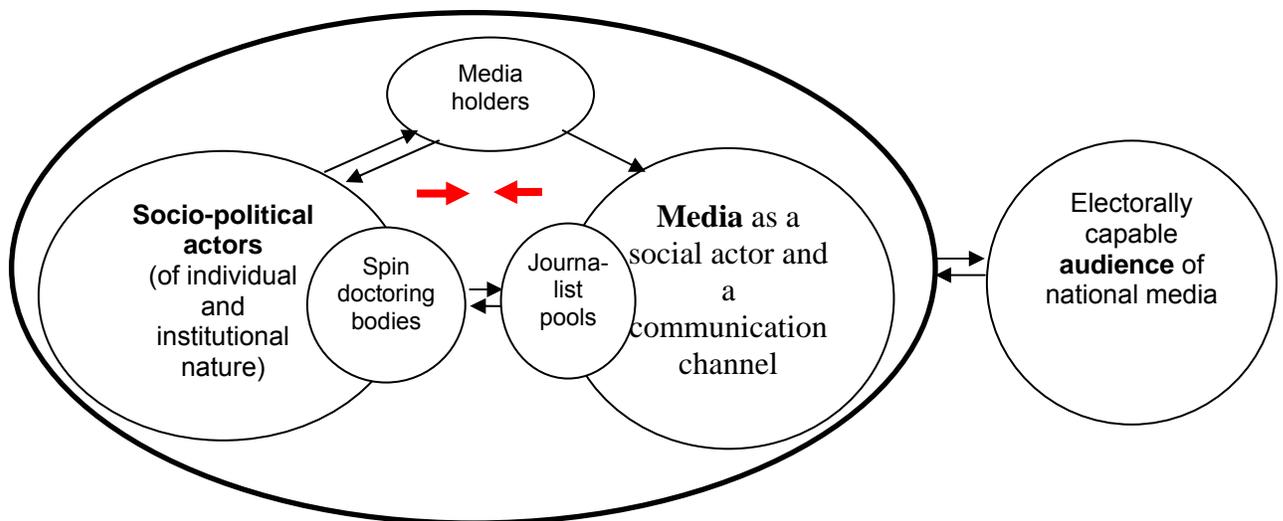


Table 10. The scheme of the fusion of political and media fields in the ‘marketing’ concept of mediocracy

The ‘marketing’ approach to mediocracy as to the *politics via an affiliated mediator* has also found some support in the humanities - it has even appeared in Russian works.¹⁰² We’d like to underline that the scheme on Table 10

¹⁰² See, e.g.: Solovyev A. I. Political Discourse of Mediocracies: Problems of the Information Age // *Polis*. 2004. № 2. URL: <http://www.politstudies.ru/arch/2004/2/12.htm> [in Russian] where the author introduces the

integrates the scheme referring to the ‘etymological’ concept of mediacracy, thus allowing an assessment of how media work with particular messages and how the audience reacts to the promotion of mediocratic agenda – to the same extent as in the ‘etymological’ approach itself.

4. Mediocratic Alternation of the Democratic Political Process

Within the chosen scheme, an analysis of the mediocratic political process has specific features. First of all the three basic elements constitute an inseverable context for each other and should therefore always be analyzed together. Changes within the system have systemic character, which implies that changes in one element lead to almost inevitable changes in the other two elements. This allows to differentiate such a systemic transformation of the political process from other existing propagandistic models of political communication which describe the subordination of one element to another (media to politics), rather than the fusion of them.

Today, it is *deformations* in these three spheres and in their interaction that in most cases become the object of mediapolitical analysis.

Deformations in the political field form within the framework of mediatization and include various rapidly developing trends, all marked in academic works with a suffix ‘-zation’. To name just a few: technologization (‘sharpening’ of communication techniques), strategization (the growth of the role of political communication in the political process and of communicators in policing), and the institutionalization of political communication – this latter having both qualitative and quantitative dimensions: from simple growth of the number of employees to the strengthening of the institutional structure and vertical integration within this structure.¹⁰³ This is also the growing visualization of politics that leads, for example, to alternation of the principle of the selection of

concept of ‘mediacracy as a particular configuration of power within which information relations turn into a key mechanism of formatting of political space and of ensuring interaction between power and society.’

¹⁰³ Бодрунова С. С. Указ. соч. С. 84, 296. [in Russian]

party leadership: from carriers of traditional ideology to media-friendly leaders.¹⁰⁴ It is also the growth of political PR, media advising, and spin-doctoring on the basis of the constant usage of polling techniques. The political process speeds up significantly, and its outcomes often transform into public announcements of achievements with no connection to reality. This is how the phenomenon that various researchers mark as ‘media politics’¹⁰⁵, ‘performance politics’¹⁰⁶, ‘horse-race politics’¹⁰⁷, ‘event politics’¹⁰⁸ etc. is born. The sociologic dimension of this transformation is also worth noting. ‘Mediocracy’ is often used as a metonymy to mark the newborn mediocratic administrative elite. The latter is also singled out as a new stratum – ‘media class’ or ‘political class’, and its members possess definite social and personal features: they combine traditional elitist characteristics (level of income, education, origin) with new ‘media features’ (age, appearance, reputation, marital/family status, media friendliness, charisma, rhetoric capabilities etc.). Such a derivative as ‘mediocrat’, born in the 1980s, is still in use.¹⁰⁹ Examples of the description of such a class are the books by Peter Osborne. In his first book on the history of New Labour in the UK, he introduces the concept of the ‘media class’ as the basis of the new mediocratic regime and a substitute for the traditional class-conditioned elite; he makes the rise of the British media class conditional on the centrist-oriented transition of the Labour party.¹¹⁰ In his next book, ‘The Triumph of the Political Class’, Osborne goes further to call the new stratum a political class, implying that media politics today *is* politics itself; this means that big politics which involves a whole stratum is no longer possible without media. Another important effect at least partly dependent on mediatization is the privatization and re-feudalization of politics described by

¹⁰⁴ See, e.g.: Meyer T., Hinchman L. *The Theory of Social Democracy*. London, 2007; Бодрунова С. Информационно-политическая фигура: формирование, существование, борьба за успех (на примере медиаобраза премьер-министра Великобритании Тони Блэра) // Журналистика. Молодые исследователи. Межвузовский сборник научных работ студентов и аспирантов. СПб, 2006. С. 77-86. [in Russian]

¹⁰⁵ Zaller J. Op. cit.

¹⁰⁶ Clarke H. D. et al. *Performance Politics and the British Voter*. Cambridge, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Cappella J. N., Jamieson K. H. *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. Oxford, 1999. P. 33.

¹⁰⁸ Meyer T. *Mediocratie – Auf dem Weg in eine andere Demokratie?* // *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. 2002. B. 15-16. S. 12. [in German]

¹⁰⁹ URL: <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/mediocrat>.

¹¹⁰ See for details: Osborne P. *Alistair Campbell...* Op. cit.

J. Habermas, whereby the commercialization of the press, the concentration of media property and control over the media turn the public sphere into a set of private domains of individual politicians and media moguls, just as the political process turns into a private business of the mediocratic elite.¹¹¹ We also cannot help mentioning that such a system ‘blocks real anti-crisis measures, it is only capable of generating something joyous and nice for its voters, it can irritate the zones of joy only, and it cannot irritate the zones of displeasure, since this will provoke a reaction opposite to how this system functions’¹¹².

As for deformations in the media sphere, researchers have already pointed out, for example, the systemic transformation of political journalism in the UK.¹¹³ Among the most evident changes, are the so-called press cynicism and metacoverage. One might also mention the privatization of journalism in the Western countries provoked not only by political communication but by a boom in the PR field itself. Thus, the Cardiff school of media research claims that ‘60% of press articles and 34% of broadcast stories come wholly or mainly from one of these “pre-packaged” sources... [and] 47% of press stories rely wholly or mainly on wire copy and other media’¹¹⁴. But the basic mediocratic effect is deeper: it is the detachment of the interests of journalism from those of its target audience¹¹⁵ - the articulation and defense of which journalism in the West proclaims as the basic purpose of its work. This is how the watchdog function of journalism is undermined.

¹¹¹ See, e. g.: *Habermas J. The public sphere // Communications and the class struggle. Vol. 1 / Ed. by Mattelart A., Seigelaub S. New York, 1979. P. 198.*

¹¹² *Леонтьев М. Медиакратия ведет мир к гибели // Russia.Ru. 2009. 5 Apr. URL: <http://www.russia.ru/video/2020leontyev>. [in Russian]*

¹¹³ For a summary, see: *Бодрунова С. С. Реакция журналистики Европы на медиатизацию политики: опыт Великобритании // Журналистика в мире политики: диалоги о свободе. Сб. ст. участников конференции в рамках Дней петербургской философии. 20 ноября 2009 г. СПб, 2009. С. 21 – 29. [in Russian].*

¹¹⁴ *The Quality and Independence of British Journalism: Tracking the changes over 20 years. A report prepared by Professor Justin Lewis, Dr. Andrew Williams, Professor Bob Franklin, Dr. James Thomas and Nick Mosdell at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. University of Cardiff, 2006. P. 3-4.*

¹¹⁵ Journalists themselves have noticed this. See: *Toynbee P. Breaking News: Intense Circulation Wars Have Created a Vicious Press Pack Which Ultimately Might Make the Country Ungovernable // The Guardian. 2003. 5 Sept. URL: www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1035943,00.html.*

Sometimes transformations cannot be attached to this or that particular field, or express causal relations that inevitably draw both the politics and media fields into the analysis. Thus, Thomas Meyer describes the ‘colonization of politics by journalism’ in Germany.¹¹⁶ We could name ‘the decline of the Parliament’ in the public mind of UK citizens as a partial result of the shift of media attention to the government as a main newsmaker.¹¹⁷ Both phenomena cannot be understood adequately ‘from within’ just one field.

But most significant are the deformations in the behavior of the audience, since they directly influence political participation, the degree of democratic deficit and, *ergo*, the stability of a political system. A whole range of research has focused on such transformations that (to various degrees) connect the growth of political apathy with the mediatization of politics.¹¹⁸

The ‘marketing’ approach to mediocracy appears to have a greater potential for explaining phenomena that the ‘etymological’ approach cannot explain: for example, how the agenda pursued by media holders is formed, how access to information is controlled, how and why gradual detachment of the media from their controlling and deliberative position (‘the fourth estate’ role) develops and how and why the instrumentalization of media is possible.

The analytical framework for the concept of mediocracy suggested in this paper also visualizes how the functions of a passive recipient are assigned to the media audience. As many have argued, in a democratic system, people (who are at the same time the audience of national media) perform, amongst others, two irrevocable functions: that of political choice (that provides the replacement of personalities at power institutions) and that of control of the democratic quality of

¹¹⁶ Meyer T. *Mediocratie...* Op. cit. S. 7. [in German]

¹¹⁷ See: Бодрунова С. С. Реакция журналистики... Там же. [in Russian]

¹¹⁸ See, e. g.: Jones N. *Control Freaks*. London, 2001. P. 92; Ingham B. *The Wages of Spin: A Clear Case of Communications Gone Wrong*. London, 2003. P. 199; *Low Voter Turnout – a Threat to Democracy in the UK?* Report for Tutor2U project. URL: www.tutor2u.net/politics/content/topics/elections/voter_turnout.htm; Miller D. *System failure: It’s not just the Media – the Whole Political System has Failed* // *Journal of Public Affairs*. 2004. Vol. 4, № 4. P. 374-382.

the system. In a mediocratic political process, there are evident obstacles to the fulfillment of these functions:

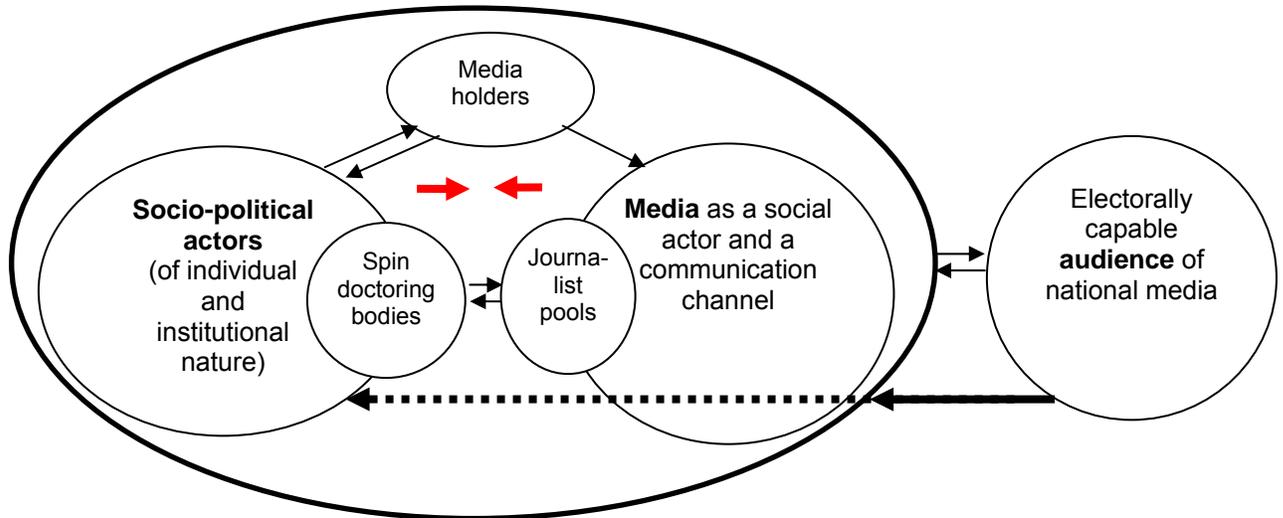


Table 11. Obstacles to public choice and public scrutiny within a mediocratic political process

Neither public choice nor public scrutiny is possible without the key supporting feature – access to reliable information, which (at least in theory) the media should provide. This, among other factors, challenges the very possibility of rational choice of the political audience – at elections just as in everyday preferences. This challenge is easily perceived in both voter behavior and in journalists’ reflections upon the degradation of media roles; this feeling is shared not only by scientists¹¹⁹ but also by journalists in both established and transitional democracies. Of the former, the ‘age of contempt’¹²⁰ formula by Steven Barnett of *The Guardian* is characteristic: it tells of the three-pole decline of trust between politicians who feel over-scrutinized or non-relied-upon, media who lose consumers’ trust and are perceived as political agents, and an audience which does not have the adequate information necessary to make an informed political choice and engage in active political participation. Of the latter, Russian TV journalist, Mikhail Leontyev, points to the link between the reactive

¹¹⁹ See the major work: Blumler J. G., Gurevitch M. Op. cit.

¹²⁰ Barnett S. The Age of Contempt // *The Guardian*. 2002. 28 Oct. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2002/oct/28/pressandpublishing.media>.

character of political choice and the strategic fusion of media and politics: 'Choice is reactive in its character. But when choice is reactive, and you deal with a strategically solid, serious enough system, you just cannot trust your reactivity to perform the choice. This is why the emasculation of choice becomes automatic'.¹²¹

Conclusions made within such a frame of analysis (even if this frame is yet rarely called mediocratic) are quite pessimistic: they point to the dangers of the systemic nature in the functioning of modern democracies, even in the oldest examples like the UK or France. The sensation of a 'system failure' of democracy¹²² or a 'crisis of public communication',¹²³ which became almost basic for mediapolitical researchers in mid-90s (and which persisted later) mirrors the system's faults. Moreover, most importantly, these faults are mirrored in the growing political apathy towards traditional democratic mechanisms in the Atlantic zone and their substitution for the means of direct democracy and non-conventional routes of will expression and political activism and recruitment: the British did not come to the polling stations in 2001 but at the same time came out to massive demonstrations against GM food, the fox hunting ban or, most memorable, against the military campaign in Iraq. In the US, the Tea Party appears as a significant 'third pole',¹²⁴ in a previously-bipolar Duvergerian party system, and alternative media channels such as blogs (in 2006)¹²⁵ and social networking (in 2008¹²⁶, in 2010 in the UK¹²⁷) are important tools in gathering political support and getting people to vote.

Even more important is the fact that our conceptual framework for the analysis of mediocracy poses the following questions: What would be the new

¹²¹ Леонтьев М. Указ. соч. [in Russian]

¹²² Miller D. Op. cit.

¹²³ Blumler J. G., Gurevitch M. Op. cit.

¹²⁴ Ferrara P. The Tea Party Revolution // *The American Spectator*. 2009. 15 Apr. URL: <http://spectator.org/archives/2009/04/15/the-tea-party-revolution>.

¹²⁵ Rogan J. Blog Wars (film). Brook Lapping, 2006. 59 min.

¹²⁶ Web 2.0 Case Study: Barack Obama's Use of Social Media // *The Global Human Capital Journal*. 2008. 29 Dec. URL: <http://globalhumancapital.org/?p=216>.

¹²⁷ Arthur C. 2010: The First Social Media Election // *The Guardian*. 2010. 3 May. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/apr/30/social-media-election-2010>.

criteria of mediademocracy? (Is the system where political choice is inevitably low-rational and is carried out under the influence of intentionally ‘spun’ mediated information and public control over political process distorted by the introduction of media discourses into bureaucratic and administrative procedures, still to be called democratic? Or by another name?) Where is the boundary between more or less balanced mediademocracy – and mediacracy as its distortion? Is mediademocracy at all possible?

The answers to these questions differ greatly. Whereas Atlantic theory is mostly pessimistic towards the future prospects of mediated democracy, in continental Europe (e.g. Germany and Italy) the academic discourse of ‘mediendemokratie’¹²⁸ has gained a positive (in all respects), though in any case critical, stance within media theory and runs somewhat parallel to research upon ‘mediocratie’, as Thomas Meyer puts it for ‘mediacracy’.

5. Mediacracy Assessment Criteria: Prospects for Future Research

We would be at fault if we did not mention the middle option in between the ‘etymological’ and ‘marketing’ approaches. Several authors have spoken of *competition* between political and media actors in agenda formation with political actors weakening and media actors rising, rather than the subordination of politics to media (as the ‘etymological’ concept would insist) or the fusion of media and political interests (as the ‘marketing’ approach would argue). A group of Dutch researchers have even measured the role of both political and media actors in the formation of the agenda of national papers – and have found out that the ‘Netherlands [is] less a mediacracy than France [and the] UK’, since

¹²⁸ *Kleinsteuber H. J.* Mediendemokratie - kritisch betrachtet // *merz. medien + erziehung*. 2008. Jahrgang 52, Heft 4/08. S. 13-22. URL: http://www.mediaculture-online.de/fileadmin/bibliothek/kleinsteuber_mediendemokratie/kleinsteuber_mediendemokratie.pdf; *Parteien in der Mediendemokratie* / Hrsg. von Alemann U., Marschall S. Wiesbaden, 2002; *Rusconi G. E.* Die Mediendemokratie und ihre Grenzen - am Beispiel von Berlusconi's Italien // *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. 2004. B 35-36. S. 32-38.

‘Parliament in the Netherlands is better able to determine its own agenda than in France and the UK’.¹²⁹

This attempt could bring us to another thought. Despite the abundance of mediapolitical research, there is still no possible comprehensive framework for the *comparative analysis of mediocracies* as regimes – to be able to tell whether the UK is, indeed, more of a mediocracy than the Netherlands – or, maybe, for the *comparative analysis of mediocratization (that is, its speed)*. Here, research would be based:

- on quantifiable parameters of the (media)political process that *have* already changed vs. traditional (pre-war) political process – to measure how ‘mediocratized’ this or that polity is in comparison with another;

- on quantifiable parameters in the *process* of change – to measure the pace of mediocratization both within a polity and in the comparative perspective.

If the second option seems to be from a more distant future, the implementation of the first stage of such research would create a complex *quantitative index of mediocracy* for democratic polities, a new instrument that would reveal vectors and the extent of mediatization in established and (later) transitive democracies. As is widely known, such indices work relatively well in other fields of the humanities. Examples could be G.Hofstede’s index of national cultures¹³⁰, Hallin&Mancini’s analysis of the political backgrounds of media systems, various indices of press freedom in the world, or the ‘World Politics Map’¹³¹ created by the ‘Political Atlas of Modernity’ project of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). Analogous to the latter, the mediocratic index, applied to the political map of a region, would provide an instrument for ‘mapping mediocracies’.

In search of assessment criteria for mediocratization (that is, the research parameters), we would need to look at all the three elements of our conceptual

¹²⁹ *Netherlands less a mediocracy than France, UK // NIS News Bulletin*. 2007. 9 Dec. URL: http://www.nisnews.nl/public/091207_1.htm.

¹³⁰ For online visualization, see: URL: <http://www.clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions/>.

¹³¹ URL: http://worldpolities.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=83&Itemid=371.

framework: political, media, and audience fields. But as previous research suggests, what one needs to search for are meaningful *transformations in the zones of interaction* in each of the two/three fields, especially those that have taken place within the latest decades. Thus, in politics, one would suggest looking at the quantitative parameters of growth of political marketing, the strategization of communications management, the colonization of political field by media practices, and the personalization of politics etc. In the media field, the parameters would mark the general shape of the media system, the extent of journalistic influence upon political agenda setting, the role of media pools, levels of political parallelism and the polarization of media, as well as the interpretation of professionalism. For assessing transformations of audience behavior, one would want to look at the parameters of trust in the media, political participation/political apathy, political education, the development of new and social media and their role in avoiding traditional media in politics, and so forth.

6. Alternative Routes: Some Thoughts on the Future Development of Mediocracy

How will mediocracy develop? Will the scheme produced above change significantly and what factors are likely to influence this change? Here, we need to search for factors that are likely to influence all three main elements of the scheme.

At least several such factors may be suggested today, and most of them will, arguably, have to do with mechanisms of so-called ‘direct democracy’, in such a form that will try to avoid both the traditional mechanisms of political participation and the traditional mainstream media as political communicators. Nowadays, in the age of the decline in the political role of traditional associations¹³² and the disintegration of social strata, virtually the only alternative to a common everyday information background formed by pan-national media is one-to-one communication on the Internet. In the nearest future, the growing digitalization and interactivity of communication will inevitably

¹³² Putnam R. Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital // *Journal of Democracy*. 1995. Vol. 6, Issue 1. P. 65-78. URL: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/putnam1/putnam.htm>.

produce further changes in political communication, taking, arguably again, one or more of the routes marked today by observers.

One of the models of the further re-distribution of power and even of the re-structuring of social classes was predicted for the world's digital community by A. Bard and J. Söderqvist as early as in 2002.¹³³ The authors speak of 'netocracy' – new social stratification and power relations based on access to crucial social information; the population will thus be divided into a 'netocratic elite' ('informed networks of influence') and 'consumtariat'. The only change to the scheme offered by us seems to be the networked structure of elite (which is not so new a feature as it would seem) and the crucial role of access to information resources.

Other alternatives brought in by digitalization include direct (networked) democracy based on wide social networking rather than on elite networking and some version of e-democracy where the distribution of power will not change significantly but public discussion will play a significantly bigger role, as well as will the tools of social choice (including e-voting) which are likely to come to every home sooner or later. For the former, the 'Obama Web 2.0 campaign' provides both positive and negative insights concerning democratic procedures¹³⁴ and for the latter, European experience with the creation and promotion of e-government tools may be invaluable.

¹³³ Bard A., Söderqvist J. *Netocracy: The New Power Elite and Life after Capitalism*. London, 2002.

¹³⁴ Harfoush R. *Yes We Did! An Inside Look at how Social Media Built the Obama Brand*. New York, 2009; *Web 2.0 Case Study...* Op. cit.



ZDES Working Papers

Arbeitspapiere des Zentrums für Deutschland- und Europastudien

Рабочие тетради Центра изучения Германии и Европы

Universität Bielefeld – Fakultät für Soziologie
Postfach 100131 – 33501 Bielefeld – Deutschland

Staatliche Universität St. Petersburg – 7/9 Universitetskaja Nab.
199034 St. Petersburg – Russland

<http://zdes.spb.ru/>

info@zdes.spb.ru