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Mediji kroz prizmu društvenih promena i poslovnih odluka

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Apstrakt: Medijska manipulacija zasniva se na razlici između percepcije i stvarnosti. Ljudima je uglavnom lakše i brže da usvoje, reprodukuju i distribuiraju kratke sadržaje iz novinskih članaka i različitih nepouzdatih internet blogova, nego iz naučno utemeljenih istraživanja i obimnih studija. Imajući u vidu široku dostupnost jednih i manju dostupnost drugih izvora lako je zaključiti čije izveštavanje će naići na masovniji prijem i omogućiti da nestvarno postaje stvarno. Objektivnost izveštavanja savremenih medija otežavaju napadi na ekonomsku održivost njihovog poslovanja, nepošteni izvori informacija, nerealni rokovi, kvote za pregled stranica, netačne informacije, pohlepni izdavači, loša obuka medijskih radnika, zahtevi publike i još mnogo toga. Uz svakodnevne promene u društvenom okruženju, procena situacije je važna za bilo koju vrstu odlučivanja, posebno prilikom poslovanja. Kroz pregled postojeće literature i analizu podataka, u radu će se sagledati moć medija koja utiče na javno mnjenje, kreiranje društvene stvarnosti, prihvatanje promena i donošenje poslovnih odluka.

Nove komunikacione tehnologije pružile su mogućnost i za nove načine persuzivnog delovanja i uticaja na formiranje stavova. S tim u vezi razmatraju se tehnike manipulacije i značaj medijske pismenosti. Akcenat je na prepoznavanju, čitanju i odgovoru na aktuelne društvene promene i tehnološke inovacije. Ukazuje se na značaj sposobnosti prilagođavanja u poslovnom svetu, kako pronaći sklad između društvenih potreba i poslovnog interesa.

Ključne reči: masovni mediji, komunikacija, manipulacija, objektivnost, poslovne odluke

Media through the Prism of Social Change and Business Decisions

Abstract: Media manipulation is based on the difference between perception and reality. It is generally easier and faster for people to adopt, reproduce and distribute short content from newspaper articles and various unreliable internet blogs, than from scientifically based research and extensive studies. Given the wide availability of some and the less availability of other sources, it is easy to conclude whose reporting will meet with more mass reception and enable the unreal to become real. The objectivity of modern media reporting is hampered by attacks on the economic viability of their business, unfair sources of information, unrealistic deadlines, page review quotas, incorrect information, greedy publishers, poor training of media workers, audience demands and so much more. With daily changes in social environment, assessment of the situation is important for any type of decision-making, especially when doing business. Through a review of the existing literature and data analysis, the paper will look at the power of the media, which influences public opinion, creating social reality, accepting change and making business decisions.

New communication technologies have provided an opportunity for new ways of persuasive action and influence on the formation of attitudes. In this regard, manipulation techniques and the importance of media literacy are discussed. The emphasis is on recognizing, reading and responding to current social changes and technological innovations. The importance of the ability to adapt in the business world, how to find harmony between social needs and business interest, is pointed out.

Key words: mass media, communication, manipulation, objectivity, business decisions

1. Introduction

Communication is one of the most complex, comprehensive and certainly the most dynamic activities in human society. The three basic levels in which it is used are expression, information and persuasion (Breton, 2000). With the development of human society, various persuasion skills also developed. These skills gained momentum only with the advent of the media, which have long been a reliable source of information for the public. Today, the situation is different and the media are no longer so reliable. However, old perceptions remain present in society for a long time, even when it comes to the media.

Searching for the truth, public opinion relies on the objectivity of the sources that provide it. The informativity of the mass media is achieved through current, timely, true, objective and complete messages (Radojković, Miletić, 2006). This requires payment for reliable information in one form or another, because quality and verified information needs to be obtained on time. The creators of information are often conditioned by deadlines, so it is sometimes more important to have any information at the same time, than reliable information after a while.

The mass media are an unavoidable factor of changes in society, which, on the other hand, are gradually changing the role of the media. Media content contributes to an individual determining himself and his behavior in relation to others - according to how they are presented in the media, because most content in modern circumstances cannot be directly verified. Thus, the media help the individual to position and determine himself in relation to the environment and to orient himself better in real social situations. In other words, the way in which we will play our social role and in which we realize ourselves, depends in part on the scope and content of the information we receive from the media.

Today's media content, which is marketed mostly online, is constantly exposed to exaggeration, distortion, fabrications and simplifications. In all this, the media make people think about different topics, and even make certain decisions based on that. The objectivity of modern media reporting is hampered by attacks on the economic viability of their business, unfair sources of information, unrealistic deadlines, page review quotas, inaccurate information, greedy publishers, poor training of media workers, audience demands and so much more. The question that arises is whether the media themselves are socially neutral, or, often non-transparently funded by certain social elites, they serve only certain parts of society that are constantly striving to control them.

2. Mass media and communication

Mass media means all media that are designed to attract a wide audience that is considered to have a common interest. Mass media is also a subset of a broader concept, mass communication. One of the widely accepted explanations of mass communication was given by sociologist John Thompson of the University of Cambridge (Thompson, 1995) who identified five characteristics of mass communication:

- Contains technical and institutional methods of production and distribution - this is evident throughout the history of mass media, from print to the internet, each suitable for commercial use.
- Includes "commodification¹ of symbolic forms" - because the production of material relies on its ability to produce and sell large quantities of work, just as radio stations rely on their time sold for commercials, so newspapers rely on their space for the same reasons.
- Separate contexts between production and reception of information.
- Range to those far away in time and space, compared to manufacturers.
- Information distribution - a form of "one to many" communication, where information is mass-produced and distributed to a large audience.

The main feature of the mass media is that they strongly influence the formation of a "mass consumer society" which is in great opposition to independent decision-making. Massive global media emerged

¹Commodification in the capitalist economic system means the transformation of goods, services, ideas, nature, personal data and people into goods or objects of trade.

long after the emergence of local and national ones. In Europe, the first mass media were newspapers that dominated the nineteenth century. From the very beginning, the development of mass media was hesitant, newspapers and magazines were written for domestic readers, the language barrier made it difficult to export. In essence, the media function in a way that reflects the common interests of powerful social groups that are able to distribute social resources. Despite these limitations, the media play a key role in all modern societies. Moreover, if society is more open to everyone's voice, the role of the media is more important, that openness lasts longer. Mass media includes a combination of print, radio, film, television, electronic and internet communication that is capable of transmitting information locally, nationally and globally. The basic means of mass communication is that it achieves coverage of the majority of the public audience. In simple words, mass communication refers to the act of disseminating information to a mass audience, while mass media refers to the media or methods used to disseminate this information.

2.1. Dysfunctional properties of mass media

The term mass media initially referred to the "masses" and described people living in Western developed countries. The term has negative connotations in media theory, because it refers to an undefined group of people with low individuality that passively accept what is placed before them and are not critical of media content and messages. The dysfunctional consequences of the mass media are supported by the fact that there are no guarantees that the interpretations of media commentators and the so-called expert accurate and valid. Therefore, there is a real danger that an individual over a certain period of time will start to rely too much on the views in the media and lose his critical ability. Uncritical acceptance of what the media places on us is easier than forming our own opinion, but it can lead to a dysfunctional situation in which an individual becomes passive and leaves others to think about him (Rabiu, 2010).

In addition to information, the media today have an educational character, which means a certain power to influence the consciousness of young people. Due to the relentless race for profit, some large and influential companies and media houses decide to show light content that targets the lowest human emotions. In this way, the media manage to significantly influence the categories most susceptible to influence - young people, and more and more often the elderly. In many underdeveloped countries, content originating from developed western countries is broadcast and refers to the entertainment of certain, wealthier social strata. Following such content by less affluent social strata creates either resentment or a noticeable disproportion between desires and possibilities. The media collects and analyzes current information. Individuals, social organizations and companies have recently increasingly relied on the mass media to inform themselves about events in the country and the world in general, the mass media have become a vital link in the information system. The fact that the mass media are a vital link between government and ordinary citizens, which contribute to political life and the general character of society, implies that they are not neutral in their work (Herman and McChesney, 2004).

Some authors look at the development of the media with trepidation and are afraid that the media will contribute to the disappearance of traditional society, which will result in moral disorder. Author Kevin Williams (2003) cites five negative effects of media action:

- The mass media are a negative and disruptive force in society and should be controlled;
- Mass media have the power to directly influence the attitudes and behavior of ordinary people;
- People are vulnerable to the power of the mass media because they are isolated and alienated from traditional social institutions that have protected them from propaganda and manipulation;
- Social changes caused by the disruptive influence of the mass media will result in the emergence of more authoritarian and centrally controlled societies;
- Mass media also lead to a decline in cultural standards and values by promoting trivial and degrading ideas and activities that threaten civilized behavior.

One of the ubiquitous media tendencies is that they often unjustifiably pay significant media attention to certain groups of people and individuals. In that way, a certain number of people, although they did almost nothing for the benefit of the community, became recognizable in the world of media, and thus gained a certain influence and power in society. On that occasion, the impression of his popularity and greater acceptance in society is created among the broad masses. The media granting of status to

individual people is functional if they receive a status that is proven to be deserved and socially productive. In other cases, it is dysfunctional and based on profit interests. It is evident that more media space is occupied by pop and sports stars, and even people from the criminal milieu, while socially productive categories such as scientists and inventors are far less represented in the media, although they are more socially productive.

2.2. Media literacy

Media literacy was defined at the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (1992) as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and send messages through the media" (Aufderheide, 1992). Media literacy implies critical and creative skills, how to ask questions and recognize the right answers, identify misconceptions that are the foundation of intellectual freedoms (Medijska pismenost, n.d.).

The Media Coalition, with the assistance of USAID, launched a 15-month project Media Literacy Campaign in August 2013. The research - Media literacy in Serbia, was conducted for the Media Coalition by the BIRODI organization, on a sample of more than 3200 high school students, professors of civic education, journalism students and journalists. Main conclusions were (Medijska pismenost, n.d.):

- There is a false impression about the level of media literacy among the respondents;
- Education on general media literacy of all actors is necessary;
- Education about new media and social networks is especially important;
- Raising awareness about the power of consumers is necessary - all participants in the research stated that the media do not have quality, but also that they do not have the impression that they can do something about it;
- The media (as a content producer) must be involved in media literacy education;
- Research has shown that high school students use the internet and social networks more than other media. Also, young people say that they can recognize media manipulations and the ways in which the media affect their environment, but they say that they themselves are immune to such influence (which is why one task of the Media Literacy Campaign is to get them to reconsider the real extent their immunity);
- Students were not entirely convinced that they should participate in workshops on the role of the media;
- Civic education teachers were not very interested to participate in research.

From all the above, it can be concluded that media literacy should be worked on in order to spread awareness, especially among young consumers about the need for critical access to information and responsible production of media content.

According to the concept of the message as a mirror of reality, five questions should be asked: who, where, what, when and how. However, the message is always a part of more complex content units, so for objectivity it is necessary to ask the sixth question: why? - What is the deeper meaning of a comprehensive interpretation of reality? In reality, a media message is a product of professional media organizations with certain criteria. The answer to the question why (exactly that message, in that form and at that moment) can diminish the significance of the previous five answers, when persuasion is a priority, the informative value of the message is lower (Radojković, Miletić, 2006).

3. Media manipulation

Media manipulation, in relation to the etymology of the words media and manipulation can be defined as the control of systems and the organization of communications for one's own benefit. While media manipulations are interpreted in different ways, the official legal definition of this term in the USA is certainly one of the most precise: "Media manipulation refers to the act of creating an image or argument that favors someone's special interests" (US Legal, n.d.). This includes using logical fallacies and propaganda techniques, suppressing information or views by suppressing them, forcing other people or groups of people to stop listening to certain arguments, or simply diverting attention elsewhere. Furthermore, media manipulation includes the use of employed news specialists, stand-alone manuals, programmed appearances, and positive and negative reinforcement in working with

journalists and news media. It is often used as a powerful tool for manipulating the masses with the help of modern technologies (US Legal, n.d.).

3.1. Media manipulation strategies

Media manipulations have been dealt with by many authors explaining the different principles by which they are implemented. One of the most prominent authors in this field is certainly Noam Chomsky (n.d.), who defined 10 strategies for manipulating the population through the media:

- **Distraction strategy** - a distraction strategy that should divert the public's attention from important issues and changes identified by political and economic elites, using the technique of flooding irrelevant information. This strategy is essential to prevent the public interest in fundamental knowledge in the fields of science, economics, psychology, neurobiology and cybernetics.
- **Create problems and then offer solutions** - This method is also called "problem-reaction-solution". It is necessary to create a problem that provokes the reaction of the audience, ie the public. For example: let urban violence intensify to make it easier for the public to accept restrictions on freedom. An adequate example would be the creation of an economic crisis for the public to accept the abolition of social rights and public services.
- **Gradual strategy** - changes whose implementation in a short period of time could cause strong resistance, it is necessary to implement gradually, step by step. An adequate example of this would be the acceptance of the rights of the LGBT population. At one time, homosexuality in Serbia was treated by criminal law, and then by fierce violence of right-wing organizations against members of the mentioned population, in order to significantly popularize its promotion over time.
- **Postponement strategy** - another way to accept an unpopular decision is to present it as "painful and necessary" and to announce it much earlier, in advance. This way, people do not feel all the weight of change at once, because they get used to the very idea of change beforehand. In addition, the "common hope for a better future" facilitates their acceptance, although the necessary sacrifice cannot be avoided.
- **The use of children's language in public speeches** - when we address adults as we speak to children, we achieve two useful effects: the public suppresses its critical awareness and the message has a stronger effect on people. This suggestive mechanism is also widely used in advertising.
- **Use the emotional side more than thinking** - the so-called. the technique of causing a short circuit on the rational analysis and critical feeling of an individual. Critical consciousness is replaced by emotional impulses (anger, fear, etc.), while the use of the emotional register enables access to the unconscious, so it is later possible to provoke certain behaviors, implement ideas, desires, worries, fears or coercion.
- **Keep the public in ignorance and mediocrity** - making the public incapable of understanding the technologies and methods used for control and enslavement. "The quality of education given to the lower social classes must be poor and mediocre, so that the gap between the education of the upper and lower classes would remain insurmountable."
- **Encourage the public to be content with mediocrity** - encourage the public to believe that it is fashionable to be stupid, vulgar and uneducated. At the same time, it is necessary to provoke resistance to culture and science.— **Instilling guilt** - to convince individuals that they are solely and exclusively to blame for their misfortune, due to the failure of their intelligence, limited abilities or insufficient effort. Such an insecure and underestimated individual, burdened with a sense of guilt, will give up looking for the real causes of his position and rebellion against the system.
- **Getting to know individuals better than they know** - in the past 50 years, advances in accelerated science have created a large gap between public knowledge and the knowledge available and managed by dominant elites. Thanks to biology, neurobiology, and applied psychology, the system has enjoyed a sophisticated understanding of human beings, both physically and psychologically. The system got to know an ordinary person better than he knows himself, which certainly reflects on greater control over individuals.

3.2. Techniques and specifics of media manipulations

Along with the accelerated development of the media and technological achievements, the possibilities and techniques of media manipulation increased. Although nowadays the techniques of media manipulation are very numerous, there is no officially adopted definition or division that would cover all the ways in which it is manipulated through the media. The reason lies in the era of the internet and digitalization, faster flow, easier placement and reception, or greater availability of information that has completely liberated human creativity, and thus created new opportunities for manipulation. For example, authors who dealt with media manipulation techniques in the last century did not mention, nor could they predict media manipulation techniques such as clickbait, modern video manipulation, use of bots, gamers, trolls, influencers and others that have found their application in 21 century.

However, the most well-known media manipulations are those that are based on the following principles: paying media attention only to certain personalities, selection of topics, interlocutors and sources of information, publishing debatably conducted surveys (without adequate survey methodology), concealment of facts and placement of misinformation, tendentious selection of news and information, diversion of attention, increasing or decreasing the number of actors in an event, marginalization and moral condemnation of individuals and groups, glorification of certain events, personalities and their significance, creating the impression that the participants of an event do not know what they really want, presentation of statements of "accidental" passers-by who condemn (or praise) a phenomenon, forcing only a certain opinion, "overlooking" undesirable arguments, silence and downplaying the significance of adverse events, framing persons with a conspicuously "sympathetic" or "unsympathetic" character, asking suggestive questions, etc.

The knowledge that one fact can be manipulatively presented in the media in as many as seven different ways contributes to a wide range of media manipulations. Each of these ways affects the different formation of images, attitudes, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, etc. according to one and the same fact. We can present this fact: positively, negatively, passing over it in silence, increasing or decreasing its significance, approving or disapproving it (Volkov, 2001). The following techniques stand out as increasingly present techniques of media manipulation that are conditioned by the existence of mass media:

Astroturfing is the practice of disguising the sponsor of a message or organization (e.g. religious or political) to make it appear to come from local participants who support it. In political science, it is defined as the process of seeking electoral victory, helping political actors gain the sympathy of the public, that is, it is designed to create the image of public consensus where it does not exist (Howard, 2005).

Clickbait is an expression of a pejorative character that refers to the sensationalist headlines of online newspapers that allegedly offer unusual, exclusive or even completely fictional content. He uses people's natural curiosity to make people "click" on certain titles such as "shocking", "you won't believe" and the like. Clickbait is mainly used to generate revenue (more clicks bring more money for ads) or to promote certain personalities (most often from the world of pop, sports or politics) (pcchip, n.d.).

Spinning is a technique by which a certain story or information is "twisted" in order to turn the public to the side that corresponds to the interests of those in whose interest the information is placed. In public relations and politics, spinning is a form of propaganda that is achieved through the conscious provision of a biased interpretation of events or a campaign to influence public opinion about an organization or public figure. Although traditional public relations and advertising can govern their presentation of facts, spinning often involves the use of infamous, deceptive, and manipulative tactics (Safire, 1996).

Spinning is the method most used by marketing agencies, which, when ordered, in this way divert people's attention from serious and essential problems.

Social bots are not covered by a special and unique definition, but it is a generally accepted mocking term for people who are "programmed" to perform specific tasks on the internet, not including a personal critical review of the placed content. They are used for political reasons, to exaggerate the number of supporters a politician has, to spread propaganda, and to subtly influence political discourse.

Bots often attack political dissidents and manipulate facts about an issue. This is especially true of sensitive, contested political events such as national elections or referendums on important national issues².

3.3. The role of media manipulation in creating moral panic

The term moral panic means a social situation in which, based on individual cases (real or imaginary) or sensationally interpreted statistics, a belief is created that the community and its value system are in (mortal) danger, which can usually be avoided only by radical or repressive measures. The phenomenon of moral panic has existed for centuries, in all social communities that the younger generations criticize as potentially immoral because they deviate from generally accepted social norms and lifestyles. The very term moral panic was introduced by the British sociologist and criminologist Stanley Cohen, who states that societies are occasionally subjected to periods of moral panic and that the mass media act as a means of exaggerating deviance: "It appears that a condition, period, individual or group of people is defined as a threat to social values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical manner by the mass media; moral barricades are regulated by editors, politicians and other right-wing leaders; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of dealing with them are developed or resorted to; then the condition disappears, sinks, worsens, and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of panic is completely new, and other times it is something that has existed long enough, but suddenly appears in the center of attention" (Cohen, 2002).

When a threat is identified, then panic is created and intensified through the media, and then demands are imposed that something must be done regarding the identified threat. At the same time, public figures, people in positions are included in the whole story, and as a final result, certain rules mostly appear, the non-observance of which implies sanctioning the so-called socially unacceptable behavior. In the whole process, it is the mass media that provide information about the events themselves and at the same time establish patterns of deviance.

British sociologist Kenneth Thompson states that moral panic is present in every culture and civilization, but that today's speed of information circulation has led to the multiplication of cases of moral panic and the impression that we live in an age of moral panic. Although we live in the safest and most comfortable time in human history, we are scared, anxious and upset like never before. Newspaper contents warn us every day of new dangers arising from weakened morale, and then the same contents are repeated in sensationalist television shows. Thompson states that the media are not the ones who cause moral panic, but that they are significantly involved in the process of causing it, on the basis of which he concludes that today it has almost happened that every phenomenon can cause panic (Thomson, 2003).

In sociology, there is an unresolved debate about whether the media consciously creates moral panic in order to divert attention from important events to marginal ones. Media analysts do not have a dilemma about whether the media influence the attitudes, opinions, lifestyle and behavior of the audience, but to what extent and in what form they do so and under what conditions this process takes place (Džinić, Bačević, 1977).

According to Cohen, there are five key stages in building moral panic (Cohen, 2002):

- Someone, something or group is defined as a threat to social norms or community interests;
- Then the threat is presented in a simple and recognizable symbol/form by the media;
- The display of this symbol is of concern to the public;
- There is a response from government and policy makers;
- Moral panic due to problems results in social changes in the community.

The impact of media manipulations through these phases can currently be monitored in many countries on the example of the current problem with the Kovid-19 virus and the problem of increasing the number of migrants in European countries. Considering that diametrically different perceptions (positive /negative, increased /decreased importance, approved/disapproved) can be observed for both

² Political bots spread misinformation during U.S. campaign <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/political-bots-misinformation-1.3840300>

treated problems in the media of opposite orientation, it is indisputable that certain social elites in this case perform media manipulations. The fact is that both problems have theoretically entered "Cohen's" phase 5 and that some social changes in the community have already occurred. It remains to be seen in the coming period who will benefit from certain decisions at the level of the manipulated individual and the community on the one hand and the social elites who presented these problems in ways that suit them.

3.4. Media: a tool for making proactive decisions

Business decisions are made in order to achieve the planned goals. Accurate, relevant and timely information for action is needed when making decisions. In addition, the prerequisites are appropriate competencies, experience and assessments of the decision maker, as well as the ability to separate problems from opportunities. The problem when deciding is that inconsistencies can occur due to bias and interference (noise) in communication (Ekonomski fakultet, 2014). For the best possible decisions, it is necessary to make maximum use of resources and avoid restrictions (Janićijević, 2008).

Decision making is important for all organizations; however, the approaches used to make the decision differ. Accordingly, many books on decision making have been written, due to their importance for business and organizational functioning. The decision-making process exists in all management processes: when planning, organizing, leading and controlling (FON, 2014). Decision making is time limited, decision review is a limited process that also requires a lot of time. This begs the question: do social media support a particular decision-making approach, to what extent is the role of social media in decision-making related to the decision-making approach?

Nedeljković (2017) discusses how corporations make decisions in relation to social demands and accordingly states the following activities: obstruction or denial of responsibility, defense or justification, acceptance of social responsibility and proactivity or recognition of social interest in accordance with business decisions.

From the point of view of business decision-making, social media can be seen as a tool for making decisions for the future. Organizations that, based on the reactions of public opinion, recognize social needs and find business interest in accordance with them, see the media as a tool and make proactive decisions. During the Covid pandemic, obvious examples are pharmaceutical companies, but also educational institutions that organize classes through online platforms, companies that provide home delivery, online ordering etc. On the contrary, insufficient information leads to bad decisions and socially irresponsible behavior, as in the case of tourist carriers that did not provide the promised return to tourists, due to stricter rules for crossing the border.

Decision-making requires the identification of patterns, and these patterns are led by individuals, especially at the time of formation they are immanent to their views. Social media is a tool that can use patterns and improve the decision making process, which requires media literacy and a focus on social needs.

4. Conclusion

One way to understand the importance of media in our lives is to imagine life without media. The media play a significant role in today's society by providing, in a variety of ways, a wide range of information. They strongly influence attitudes in the community, beliefs and behaviors, play a vital role in politics, economics and social practice, and as such penetrate all spheres of society. For a long time, the media are not just intermediaries who transmit some content, but they form a social environment. They affect individual attitudes, social relations and actions. Most of what we say about the media is primarily about ourselves. What intrigues us at the end of the paper are the questions: why the media have a great impact on people's lives in modern society; what can affect moral panic? The message of moral panic is more than clear: such behavior should not be tolerated; the media can play a socially positive role in illuminating reality. They show social reality, provide information, knowledge, entertainment, socializing, etc. With their real strength, they manage to typify social relations, shape identity, model lifestyles and values, stimulate cognitive and emotional processes, participate in socialization and the process of education, create social consensus, but also create stereotypes - while having an impact on social reality and human behavior (Prodović, 2015).

Social media is a tool that can use patterns and improve the decision-making process, which requires media literacy and a focus on social needs. Based on the reactions of public opinion, organizations that recognize social needs and find business interest in accordance with them, see the media as a tool and are able to make proactive decisions for the future.

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