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**If media is in the doghouse, maybe we deserve it**

It's time for us to rekindle that flame between media and society; media should no longer sleep in the dog house. But there's much that needs to be done to improve so-called informative news.

Media can't be blamed for every misunderstanding in society, but we have to live up to some of them. For example, I believe some reports on the BSE crisis were meant to enhance hysteric reactions, rather than present facts. Language manipulations that turn into headlines can be read every day. Then there are the "news" talk shows that have degenerated to tribunals, presenting presumed culprits to a public, hungry for sensationalism. And this isn't restricted to print.

In our world, systematically trimmed for glitter and entertainment, the doors are quickly closing on the important and necessary news stories, the ones Harvard Professor Richard Reeves calls "real news," those that are genuine information. Reeves says that to defend our freedom we need accurate information about laws and wars, about politics and the police, and about taxes and harmful substances, such as chemical substances damaging our ecology, toxins and gene-manipulated food.

Wherever the arms of the octopus of global media reach, public discussion suffers. News is no longer democratic and objective. Triviality and banality grow, civil engagement withers, and an ever-growing number of people turn their back to politics, as we can observe with decreasing numbers of people voting in elections. Media has become a propagated world of subjective manipulation. Prophets of the digital world and multi-channel television promised the beginning of a golden age, new technologies and global TV networks. They said telecommunication and the internet would lead to an unbelievable supply of information. Knowledge would be growing and people and nations would understand each other better.

But this rosy picture of the future is an illusion. Admittedly, information has grown dramatically. New global technology appeared in front of us. And the intensity, the bulk and the speed of the information and cultural exchange have grown dramatically across all borders and continents. Yet, what is the primary messages reaching us? Mostly, it is the Americanized western commercial and trivial culture. We live in a material world where wants dominate needs, and I believe this attitude comes from the media. It is a world held together by communication and e-commerce with one main aim: to create a global demand for goods and images, courtesy of a continuous shower of slogans, advertising, sponsor-messages, jingles, and omnipresent logos.

The objective is the perfect *homo economicus*, the human consumption machine, extremely name-brand minded, yet never quite satisfied, on an eternal hunt to satisfy new demands and wants.

Television is the preferred medium for this quest. It's the most effective medium for meeting and feeding the ideals of those dominated by consumption and commerce. The existence of TV and its digital multiplication is based mainly on our attitude to consume more and more. In this brave new media world, TV commercials have become dominant program features. The youth of the world love these short commercials that are saturated with action and special effects that fuel their wants. A study in 14 European countries revealed that more than 50 per cent of youths took advertising messages as plain truth. The advertising industry aims more and more at children. Even one- and two-year olds are targeted to be conditioned at an early age to be brand-loyal consumers. The goal is to glue these children to the TV screen and then later convince their parents to buy the products of the teletubby industry.

A non-controlled market and commercialization has brought about a tough fight concerning viewer-shares and circulation figures. Wars between rival media companies and publishing houses foster a process called "dumbing down". Its mechanism is simple: if you want a bigger market share, you have to appeal to the darker instincts of humans. So a media world was created by voyeurism, sex and crime. Due to the desensitization of viewers, they are now lured by promises of even stronger and more drastic stimuli.

Meanwhile, we are continuously fed by TV programs 24 hours a day. There is hardly any reason or need to think for yourself when you're served with non thought-provoking stimulation. Daytime programs reveal the worst side of the medium. TV addicts have the TV screen is on continuously, while babies grow up in front of flaring pictures. Cheap soap operas are presented in uninterrupted series, and quiz- and talk-shows follow those "confession-programs" disguised as an aid for real-life situations, where fake emotions are sometimes presented by fake guests who want to exhibit themselves. This artificial world is simple, black and white. Adults can express only anger and accusation.

It is rare to find TV displaying discerning viewing or information. Even teachers will admit children's ability to think and express themselves has decreased. And the number of overweight, even obese children grows steadily, in part a result of being glued to the television.

So we breed a passive citizen, interested in nothing. Commercialization has changes the face of TV and media. So called docu-soaps pretend to present reality and documentaries - at first in the UK, then in Germany and other countries. The reality they offer is nonsense. The presence of the camera changes the world these people live in and changes how they act. The truth behind docu-soaps is this: they're popular because they're cheap to produce and do not need any expensive research by journalists.

On commercial channels, news broadcasts are a mere disaster and serve mostly for entertainment. Attractive newscasters present a sequence of catastrophes, fires, plane crashes and crimes. News of this kind look very much like the catastrophe programs regularly featured on all commercial channels around the world.

Simplification and sensationalism is not only found on TV; the trend is there in all branches of the media industry. There is less room to approach a topic in a balanced way, to analyze it and to try and understand what happened in a broader frame of reference. The sensational approach, the exaggerated headline, and the extraordinary story are more important than the effort to follow the events and explain them. Excerpts are all we receive anymore.

Arrogance and presumption cannot be overlooked. Media trusts are unusually influential. But regretful their number decreases steadily and oligopolies or monopolies arise. At the same time, media owners watch that journalists do not hurt their economic interests and that advertisers are not annoyed by unsuitable programs. Science programs tend to follow scientific institutions which more and more depend on research money donated by big companies.

Another offering on the altar of commerce is reporting from abroad. In the US it has nearly disappeared, only to be replaced by gossip, sex and crime. In Great Britain commercial TV stations and mass circulation papers don't have foreign correspondents any more. We see this trend everywhere. And, should something explode somewhere, should a war be fought or should there be a dramatic accident, journalists are flown in to the area to offer kidnappers and gangsters oxygen for their publicity.

What the public sees, hears or reads about other countries and people, often is only the extraordinary, the dark events, the sensationalism.

Modern journalism, which doesn't describe and analyze events and their long term development, is also a child of commerce when it hunts for sensationalism, applauds politicians today and degrades them tomorrow. Such journalists are also responsible for the fall of our democratic culture...and should themselves be left in the dog house.