

Chávez Versus The USA Perspective on Media Behaviour

“A series of brief and fragmented news articles produces a double, negative effect:
information-overload and disinformation.”¹
- Ignacio Ramonet

According to the *Chávez: Inside the Coup* (Bartley and O'Brian; 2003) documentary, the United States of America tried to remove Hugo Chávez from his position as a Venezuelan president. This was, supposedly, provoked by a confrontation between the North-American interests and the Venezuelan ones, mainly based in the control of the petroleum resources. However, the confrontation between the South and the Occidental part of this continent also has more precedents, such as the big Stick Ideology, based on the United States impossibility to still growing in the East and the blockade in the northern territories by Canada, that forced this country to try to invade the less developed adjacent zones (therefore, to try to control the central part of America) in search for resources, territory, power and influence.

It is also necessary to add that, after the colonialism and the neo-imperialist movements by the capitalist Occident, which plundered many virgin areas and caused the death of millions of persons and also the humiliation of the older indigenous societies that had lived there since time immemorial, all the old colonies developed (in many different ways) national liberation movements. A few examples of these movements would be: Cuba with Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Ché' Guevara or the Liberation Front of Mozambique.

That all those movements adapt the Marxist theories for themselves does not seem to be by chance, it is probably because the socialist theories were opposite to the predominant capitalist rules that caused the invasions by the European countries.

So, in order to understand the apparently excessive struggle of some South American countries for repealing the North American influence, we should consider that, meanwhile the United States are looking for geopolitical advantages, and the south of the continent (as many other regions all over Africa and Asia) also want some kind of vengeance or, if not possible, a privileged position as autonomous and sovereign countries. This apparently inner resistance becomes, therefore, justified.

¹ The original Spanish sentence says that ““la sucesión rápida de noticias breves y fragmentadas produce un doble efecto negativo de sobreinformación y desinformación”.

In this scenario, we must consider that a war, hidden or not, implies a whole culture's social opinion in its development. The success of the tactical movements depends, often, on the success of convincing the affected people not to go against the change. In the case of Venezuela, the supposed *coup d'état* would imply to accept the global capitalist system as it comes, and also the authority of a foreign country over the national economy, as happened when Cuba decided to upset the North American pretensions in the control of the island; these are two conditions that a warmonger, rising ex-colony would hardly approve of.

In a mass-media² society, it was necessary for the United States (and also for the Hugo Chávez's part) to lead a battle with the aim of controlling the information fluxes, owing to the media the power of defining the reality, and that definition has a chance of becoming real itself. As Thomas Theorem explains: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." (Merton; 1995)

This representation about what is happening could still just as a fiction, limited by the television's screen frame or the dynamic range in the radio but, as Jean Baudrillard defends on *Simulacra And Simulation* or *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, the broadcast multimedia messages usually build kind of a alternate, virtual reality (in advance, hyper-reality) that is presented to the audience as the true one, and that usually replaces the real references by models or versions from the cultural industry. And so, those that control those "versions" control what the people understand as real or false.

In a worldwide context, this becomes a struggle for controlling the worldwide zeitgeist³. In short, we are back to the fabled Marxist idea that those who control the means of production also control the whole system from its foundation. In this case, we might state that those who control the mass media (will probably) control the mass opinion.

From this point of view, the surreptitious army operations described in Chavez's documentary were the equivalent of a tool to control the opinion, and actions such as shooting against people according to a false flag operation became just a way of winning the support and approval of the public in order to stop the present government (to the detriment of the truthful information).

² I will not avoid this term due the USA objective consists in convincing the most as possible (a mass) of its citizens.

³ Or "noosphere": the ethic, politic, intellectual, spiritual and political beliefs that a group of people has in a certain time. "Zeitgeist" is also translated as "the spirit of the time".

By this time, it is necessary to ask about the owners of these media. In an economic-power based present, it is legitimate to assert that the truth will depend of those who hold this power.

Also, following the Political Economy of Communication paradigm⁴, the behaviour of the media is necessarily inspired by two basic pillars: the capital and the politics; both vectors maintain a constant tension that determines the shape of the final information. If we understand that the political interest in the United States are connected with its economical interests relating to the enormous benefits that a petroleum resources exploitation can give, that are also political in the way they give you more influential power; and that the stock markets involve all the big concentrations of capital (usually connecting big financial groups that could relate media, bankers, pharmaceutical, mining, etc., industries), we will be able to infer some connections between the media, the business class and the government interests.

The United States, according with this organic point of view, works as a whole capitalist body who defends its legitimacy by aiming all the elements that compose it (politics, army, business, media, people, etc.) into the same direction. On the other hand, Venezuela does the same with its own features (populism, extreme-left politics in the government, lack of a clear division between powers, etc.).

In the case of Venezuela the disconnection between capital and political interests seems supplied by some kind of despotism by the government in relation with the media (if some channel or journal dares to take part in the North-American interests, disregarding its own country struggle nor the “revolutionary” Venezuelan economical interests, it deserves to be punished). Nevertheless, we also should consider the USA low blow could provoke this kind of movements by Hugo Chavez, that are re-interpreted by Occident media in the benefit of the OTAN community⁵.

After all, the media ecosystem becomes an information warfare territory, in which a war of beliefs takes part, with both sides fighting to impose a previously-desired vision of the reality. And we should ask about what the media do all the time, in war or not, by imposing some kind of vision about what should be the correct way of doing and living. Just think about the “American Way of Life” represented in Hollywood productions, or the early socialist Soviet cinema. In some way, our perception of truth depends on our perception of the media,

⁴ More information in all the articles uploaded at the *Portal de la comunicació*, a website hosted by the Communication Institute of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (InCom of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).

⁵ In extension, for the benefit of all those who are aligned with the United States of America geopolitical, economical and social interests.

sometimes ignoring the process of making the news and the underlying, background interest.

The “agenda-setting” paradigm describes that

as a consequence of the journal’s, television and the rest of the communication media action, the public is conscious or ignores, pays attentions or does not care, emphasizes or skips, specific elements of the public scenario. People tend to include or exclude in their own knowledge what media include or exclude from their own content. Also, the public assigns relevancy to the contents they include in order of how much relevant those events, problems, people were in the mass media. (Wolf; 163)⁶

We could also expect, due to the longing to be more represented than the opponent, a fast counter attacking technique, producing in the spectator’s understanding a crazy desktop full of contradictory press clippings, as a deep and complex cloud that oozes confusing ideas. And what could be the result of this? Only a volatile public opinion, a social neurosis for or against something, whatever it was: easy-way people for the winner, hard-to-move mass for the loser.

In conclusion, it is not possible to expect a pure, objective media, at least if it depends on the money or the politics. If we talk about a commercial media, we should expect it to act in order to the money’s behaviour (no money, no interest); and if we talk about a public one, it will not be possible to talk about an analog representation of the reality if it is not possible to prove that no individual parties take part in the decisions. In other words, it will not be possible to expect a media to be objective if we are not able to demonstrate its democracy is not corrupted.

To jump over the fair game can also hinder the democracy process, because by the time the media lose credibility, citizens are not able to make well founded decisions.

What we can expect after the Hugo Chávez incident is that media, far from being a naive business, are a profitable, sometimes dangerous weapon in the war of the control of the truth.

⁶ This is my own Spanish-English translation from the original book quote: “como consecuencia de la acción de los periódicos, de la televisión y de los demás medios de información, el público es consciente o ignora, presta atención o descuida, enfatiza o pasa por alto, elementos específicos de los escenarios públicos. La gente tiende a incluir o excluir de sus propios conocimientos lo que los media incluyen o excluyen de su propio contenido. El público además tiende a asignar a lo que incluye una importancia que refleja el énfasis atribuido por los mass media a los acontecimientos, a los problemas, a las personas.

Sources

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