



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### MEDIA AND THE PHENOMENON OF SPECTACLE

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#### ABSTRACT

Spectacle is a recognized phenomenon in our hypermedia society and one which has become a subject of interest in research, especially in the social sciences. Spectacle is a creation, empowered by technology, which has intended consequences, significance, a role and a measurable impact on society. According to some authors, especially in the field of mediology, spectacle is not only décor of the modern world, but also the heart of its unreality.

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## INTRODUCTION

Should we still talk about the immeasurable influence of modern media on society, and the presence of media in our everyday lives, when people move in that virtual world every day? can the boundaries of the real and the virtual can be set all? Together they seem to create, in a fusion and overflow, a very specific amalgam of special reality and virtuality, as elaborated by Bauman (2005) in *Liquid Life*. A special world of spectacle is revealed through the glare of media and the culture of the screen. For Debord (1967), the spectacle is not just the décor of the modern world, but also the heart of the unreality of society. It is an unreality that is voluntarily entered into. to which one voluntarily agrees. It indisputably has its seductive power given to it and enabled by technique; there is no doubt that the “strategy of storytelling” is increasingly recognized (Salmon, 2008). It is simply a specifically and specially created reality. An escape from reality. An unreality-virtuality-illusion enabled by technology. Why do we need an illusion? Some authors answer that it is because reality itself is no longer enough. Our everyday reality is so routine that it has the characteristic of fatigue, exhaustion, and satiety about which Sloterdijk (1995) wrote so enthusiastically. This author sought to raise awareness of the whirlwind routine of everyday life that eludes life itself.

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Routinizing everyday life and performing daily actions amounts, symbolically speaking, to “bending life” like an ear or grain. This bending, in the sense of escaping and moving away from the unfettered fullness of life itself and putting it into certain norms, rules, patterns and matrices, suffocates and obscures the virtuality of human existences involved in the system. In such a tired and routine reality, a spectacle is needed to illuminate a fading reality, to open a new décor, a great media stage for modern man after a whirlwind of routines ... Why all this glare? We see human monads the lonely islands of Turkle (2011), everywhere, and the media undoubtedly have, as we said at the beginning of the text, a storytelling strategy (Salmon, 2008). the media have created a magical moment for modern man. They are not just one of the aspects, but precisely the dominant and determining element of the postmodern age. The magical moment of the media is visible everywhere—people constantly staring at screens, at a parallel world in the culture of the screen. We do not look at any human face as much as we look at the screen. The media creates reality, educates, entertains, and takes on more and more roles that the family once had; its content is both a lullaby and an alarm clock, a symbolic kaleidoscope in its multiverse. It is almost impossible to speak to modern media, the hyperreality created by the media. Jean Baudrillard makes this clear, as does Turkle (2011), who refers to Baudrillard when talking about the postmodernist culture of simulation we have long stepped into. Simply put, hyperreality has erased the reality we knew, but has not developed a technology that has irreversibly changed our reality at all levels of experience. Technology is also a medium in the literal sense (Cacinovic-Puhovski, 2001).

**Understanding media:** A medium can be defined as a method or tool of storing and delivering information. Media can include, but are not limited to, radio, newspapers, TV, and various social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. If we scroll through present-day media in attempt to find information about current events, we will most likely run across a whole spectrum of different information, ranging from local political news and weather forecasts all the way to the global news that includes information about draughts in Niger, a recently failed coup d'état in Turkey and a Rolling Stones concert. We will most likely run across numerous news segments that are likely to make us emotional rather than informed: commercials and "breaking news" that in a short period of time may no longer be "breaking," but forgotten; interviews that turn abusive, in which the interviewer and the interviewee engage in heated debates, coverage of various scandals involving political and celebrities; and other similar information that may not matter in long run. Recently, many of us have seen individuals involved in media, such as celebrities and political candidates, opt out of ordinary behavior and adopt scandalous and provoking postures on media channels, with the aim of generating an emotional response in viewers. This type of behavior is very often exposed political elections, when viewers' attention is needed in substantial quantities.

Media has been subject to change throughout the history, and is still today. Older baby boomers would most likely agree that the media that they grew up with is no longer the same. The present-day media run non-stop, and are spectacular and more emotional in nature. The information those media serves up is more likely to make viewers amused, angry, curious, sad, and afraid than objectively informed. Making media spectacular rather than informative is not a new strategy that emerged in the twenty-first century. Examination of spectacle in media has been elaborated by Guy Debord in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Debord (1967) takes Marxist stance on the role of spectacle in media, and sees this phenomenon as the "autocratic reign of the market economy." To Debord, the use of spectacle in media is to attract as many as possible viewers and to keep them engaged. Debord's reading of spectacle's sociological aspects can also be applied to its psychological aspects. Psychologists may argue that spectacle, or excitement, has effects on the human body that are similar to those of certain drugs. When humans, or viewers in this case, are struck by emotions caused by certain spectacle on media, our sympathetic nervous system will increase our heart rate, breathing, temperature, and blood pressure. All these changes in our homeostasis are most likely caused by a tiny part of brain known as the amygdala, which is associated mostly with fear and pleasure (Breiter et al., 1997; Davis and Whalen, 2001; Fanselow and Gale, 2003; Hurlmann et al., 2010; Ritcheck et al., 2011). Emotions created by spectacle in media can also be explained as the consequence of stimulus by the endocrine system, which creates readiness for action. Once the spectacle produces certain emotions, once we become emotional, our decision-making abilities will become limited and our behavior will change significantly. As Paloma Vasquez, the author of *The Psychology of Social Shopping*, stated, people think irrationally when they are in state of excitement and arousal, and with irrational thinking and excitement, consumers are more likely to buy certain products. Vasquez's claim is strongly supported by the data presented by Zinn, Eitzen, and Wells (2015) in their book *Diversity in Families*, in which they

note that the average number of commercials an average child in the United States sees is around 40,000 a year, or about one million by the time they reach the age of twenty-one. Spectacle and media, one can argue, are partners in business and profit. Has it always been like that or is the union of spectacle and media a new phenomenon? Most likely spectacle became incorporated into media with the appearance of the mass media.

**Historical overview of the mass media:** As stated earlier, media can be defined as tools for storing and delivering information. One can argue that media are as old as the human species, and that the first forms of media appeared in prehistoric times, when the early humans drew the first shapes on cave walls. Storage and exchange of information significantly increased with the invention of the first forms of alphabet and items that could permanently preserve written information such as papyrus and clay tablets. The first historical event that significantly affected modern media was the invention of the printing press in 1440, which began the Printing Revolution and production of different written materials that kept information stored for extensive periods of time and that could reach larger population. However, the invention of the printing press did not turn media into for-profit business. The first newspapers, or handwritten news sheets, began to circulate in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century under heavy censorship and with limited news that only covered basic information that did not contradict the authorities of that time. It is worth noting that the early newspapers were published weekly rather than daily. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, newspapers began to modernize and to be published several times a week. A good example is *The London Gazette*, which began to publish not only stories that related to the events of that time but also some early forms of advertisements, that could both inform and amuse its readers.

This dynamic became very visible in newspapers with the invention of the camera, which could capture live pictures from the scenes of the events. For example, prior to the Civil War in the United States, newspaper readers could only read about certain events, but with the help of cameras, citizens of the United States could not only read about the horrors of the Civil War but also see the photos depicting dead soldiers on the battlefields. Soon, the media experienced another change with the invention of the radio receivers. Now large populations could not only read about certain events, but also hear the voice of speakers who read the news. A further change came with the invention of video cameras and modern television. Technology progress correlated strongly with the progress and transformation of the media; whose function shifted from "to inform" to "to inform for profit." After the World War II, we could see significant transformation of different types of media, such as the newspapers, radio, television, and later social media, toward for-profit business dominated by corporations such as CNN, BBC, Fox News, MSNBC, and other broadcasting networks.

**Call for further research:** What is the future of new technologies? What is the future of new media that multiply the spectacle, and what does it bring to modern men? How does it change his reality and transform the world? These are questions that we must necessarily ask in order to see a "future present" (Habermas, n.d.).

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