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IDEOLOGICAL PRODUCTION IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL MEDIA CAPITALISM

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Abstract

Acknowledging the recognition of the media as international actors, this article discusses their role in the process of ideological production in contemporary democracies. The interconnection between the global media industry and market configuration emerges as the structural link of this process, which determines the conditions of reproduction and dissemination of ideas and the construction of the reference frames that allow defining the positioning of voters-consumers. Following Downs' theory, this paper examines the conceptual relationship between *social positioning* and *political positioning*, proposing the introduction of a third variable in Downs' analysis, *media positioning*, in order to define and update its postulates. Finally, the stages, processes and outputs involved in the process of ideological construction in three different market configurations are identified. The conclusion is that there is a qualitative change in the action of global media, which have evolved from being informal actors in the democratic process to formal actors.

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IDEOLOGICAL PRODUCTION IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL MEDIA CAPITALISM[1]

Luísa Godinho

The deep relationship between global media and ideology (Postman, 1990; Flew, 2007; Croteau & Hoynes, 2012) is a recurring theme in the scientific literature, and today there is consensus that the media have a political function side by side with actors such as the parties and institutions of the State (Paletz & Entman, 1980; McNair, 2000, 2003, 2012; Mancini, 2013; Robertson, 2015).

In this sense, the relationship between these two concepts will depend on the conditions of each one's existence, the economic context in which the media operate, which is of particular importance not only in defining the number and type of agents that structure the public debate, but also in the selection of the terms of the latter, conditions that directly impact on pluralism and democracy.

The central position occupied by the media in the life of democracies is well-studied, the former normally acting as catalysts of the dynamics that take place within the *public sphere* (Calhoun, 1992; Hauser, 1999, Sparks 2001, Edgerly et al., 2015), the metaphor proposed by Habermas to describe the space that allows the circulation of ideas among the members of a society. It is the symbolic area where the semantic negotiations take place and culture is disseminated and in which the global media play a central function as agents defining the terms of this debate and of opinion and deliberation.

This article aims to deepen the understanding of this relationship between global media and ideology, examining it particularly in recent historical contexts. Can one speak of an ideological production process? And if so, what is the role of global media? What sub-processes and what stages are involved in this process? What results do they produce? These are some of the questions this paper tries to answer by adopting a conceptual approach and using the descriptive and explanatory methods based on bibliographic research.

Ideology and media: a theoretical approach

It would be useless to attempt to list the theories that until today have examined the concept of ideology, so many are the approaches and the voices. One can, however, identify among the studies of ideology two broad lines of analysis: a line of Marxist heritage marked by a pejorative view of the phenomenon; and a second line based on a sociological approach.

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This paper follows this second theoretical line, approaching the trend that studies ideology as a discursive phenomenon, following the legacy of authors like Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977, 2001) and Foucault (Foucault, 1971), who first identified power systems centred on word and representation, the former seeing the educational system as a basic form of ideological power, the latter analysing ideology from the viewpoint of the text and its context and proposing even the replacement of that signifier by the word *discourse*.

The discursive conception of ideology, however, has long been considered insufficient for the practice of a *sociology of knowledge* to identify the concrete processes that guarantee the existence of the life cycle of ideas, their creation, circulation, reproduction and death. The communication dimension has necessarily assumed a prominent place in the scientific literature, a dimension that allows us to identify the agents and dynamics that guarantee the transition of an enunciation from being a mere proposition generated in any individual context to becoming a theoretical body shared by an extended community, so that it can be recognized, accepted, criticized, and refuted.

This transition from the individual to the collective phase is guaranteed by the passage through a communication network that exerts a double effect by amplifying and transforming the ideas generated.

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of understandings about the consequences of the communication network on the life cycle of ideas, there seems to be some consensus as to the existence of these effects, and therefore, as to the power that agents and communication processes have not only in the selection of enunciations that will acquire social dimension as well as in the very identity of these propositions.

The recognition of the role that the media occupy in the life cycle of ideas inevitably refers to the sociological approach to ideology, in the line of authors such as Manheim, Ricoeur, Seliger, Thompson, Gellner, Gouldner, Roig and Van Dijk, thus refusing the Hegelian roots, based on the binary reasoning around the opposition between physical objectivity/universalism. As Roig writes,

> *"(…) ce qui est aujourd'hui remis en cause est la visée universaliste et, donc, impérialiste des modèles antérieurs tant hégélien que scientiste. A la prétention métaphysique d'une unité de la connaissance succède une diversité des modèles cognitifs admis ou, si l'on préfère, des paradigmes explicatifs."[2]*

Among the sociological approach to ideology, several sub-trends are identified, and the ideology that is the product of the articulation between language and communication system, which has Gouldner, Roig and Van Dijk among its main authors, is particularly suitable for this question.

Gouldner analysed the ideology as a *language variation*, a text that presents a certain autonomy in terms of the content and a certain stability in terms of support. It is a metalanguage that distinguishes itself from the common language by being autonomous in relation to the social context in which it operates, in this sense presenting some

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[2] idem, p. 44

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similarity with the *elaborated codes* Bernstein talks about, characterized by self-reflexivity and independence.

Notwithstanding the importance Gouldner recognises in the linguistic dimension of the phenomenon, the author identifies it primarily as a consequence of the *mass communication system* and thus of phenomena such as industrialization and mediatisation, avoiding all explanations centred on man as the main driver of thought.

In this perspective, the ideological phenomenon, born with the end of traditional society based on the values of predictability, certainty and immobility, emerges precisely as an alternative proposal based on a new interpretation of society and on new projects of social change.

According to the author,

> «*Ideology thus entailed the emergence of a new mode of political discourse; discourse that sought action but did not merely seek it by invoking authority or tradition, or by emotive rhetoric alone. It was discourse predicated on the idea of grounding political action in secular and rational theory (...). Ideology separated itself from the mythical and religious consciousness; it justified the course of action it proposed by the logic and evidence it summoned on behalf of its views of the social world, rather than by invoking faith, tradition, revelation or the authority of the speaker*» (Gouldner, 1976: 9).

As a linguistic and communication phenomenon, for Gouldner ideology is also the product of an evolution in which societies become complex as a result of modernization, creating new explanatory schemes that guarantee its own self-understanding. According to the author, it is the specificity of these schemes that justifies the emergence of discourses based on a particular language and that are disseminated through the available media system.

Along the same lines, Roig associates the ideological phenomenon with a Manichean symbolism established through a communication network which, despite its strategic nature, fulfils two particular functions: it provides a moral framework that allows agents to place themselves among multiple core political choices, namely on a "left-right scale" (Roig, 1980: 58) and favours the coalition of leading groups and factions or tendencies among institutional elites. The very organization of social systems is only possible, according to the author, through the use of a language articulated with a communication network.

> «(...) *ce qu'on appelle idéologie ne doit pas être recherché dans un contenu sémantique quelconque mais dans un impact sur un réseau de communication déterminé (...), en bref : un effet de réseau.(...) Les rapports entre idéologie et réseau de communication peuvent être ramenés à des rapports entre moyens et fins. Les fins concernent les réseaux qu'il faut soit créer (...), soit actualiser lorsque le réseau est potentiel, soit renforcer comme c'est le cas*

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> *pour la plupart des messages de légitimation, soit maintenir ou changer en provocant des divisions, des unions (...) soit enfin supprimer (...). Les moyens mis en œuvre pour obtenir ces divers résultats recouvrent toute une source d'ambiguité dans la conceptualisation. (…) L'idéologie caractérisée par la vision manichéiste qu'elle offre du monde est un de ces nouveaux moyens, et parmi les plus économiques»* (Roig, 1980: 57)

As a communication phenomenon, Roig sees ideology also as an economic device in the sense that it facilitates individual choices and reduces the degree of uncertainty by limiting the two alternatives to behaviour, but also as a decisive means for perpetuation and suppression of the communication network itself.

The discursive approach to ideology has been extended to the field of psychology with Teun van Dijk's theoretical proposal, who understands the concept in a multidisciplinary way, seeing it as a product that is simultaneously social, discursive and cognitive.

According to van Dijk, the social nature of ideology derives from the fact that man, as a subject of reason, is a social animal that participates in social conflicts by managing the interests and struggles of groups according to his own reference frameworks. In this sense, the study of the social organization and manifestations consists above all in the study of ideology, understood as a precondition of human action, which cannot exist outside the sphere of meaning.

As for the discursive dimension of the phenomenon, van Dijk places it in the field of linguistics, understanding it as a discourse produced in the context of a certain strategy aimed at producing a set of effects.

As a social, linguistic and cognitive phenomenon, ideology is, for this author, «the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group»[3], whose work consists in an attempt to explain the structures and strategies that relate discourse and social cognition.

> *«In most cases, ideologies are self-serving and a function of the material and symbolic interests of the group. Among these interests, power over other groups (...) may have a central role and hence function as a major condition and purpose for the development of ideologies. Ideologies thus operate both at the overall, global level of social structure, for instance as the socially shared mental monitor of social competition, conflict, struggle and inequality, and at the local level of situated social practices in everyday life.»[4].*

Van Dijk's work can, moreover, be interpreted as a true theory of ideology, since the author is interested in the entire life cycle of ideas, addressing stages such as the

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[3] Idem, p. 8
[4] Idem, p. 8

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formation, development and circulation of the phenomenon and placing the elites and the media at the epicentre of this process, as creative and diffusing agents, respectively.

Configurations of the Global Media System

The discursive-communication nature of the ideological phenomenon presupposes its articulation with the media system and its functional structure, a condition that makes ideology and economy to relate directly, since they are historically interconnected. This relationship, in turn, translates into the interaction between economic model, ideological production and political structure, the first seeming to exert, as we will show next, a significant influence on the second and third dimensions.

As Chan-Olmsted and Chang write (Chan-Olmsted e Chang, 2003:214)

> *"Considering the significant role media corporations play in the production of culture and the delivery of important news and information and the fact that corporate structure, strategy management and behavior ultimately impact the nature and supply of content (Hollified, 2001), a better understanding of the patterns and determinants of media diversification strategies would contribute to the body of knowledge in the potential effects of media globalization."*
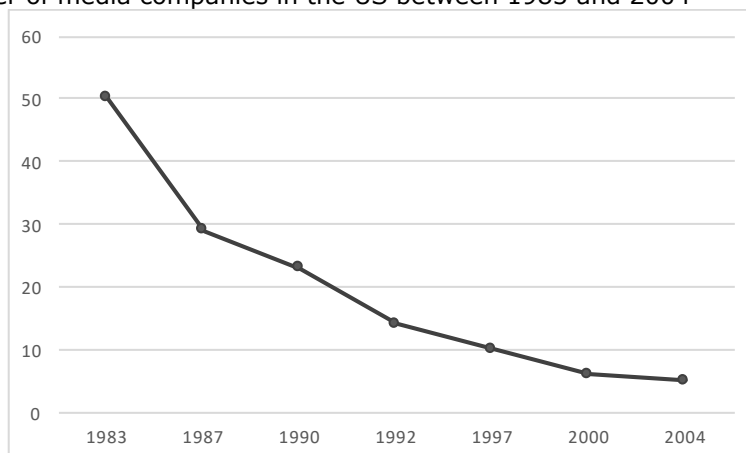
The economic model that has been present since the emergence of what we can call the media system is the business model, which demonstrated, in the nineteenth century, the lucrative potential of a new type of investment based on the sale of texts and images printed on paper and whose production was increasingly optimized thanks to the thriving technological innovation then witnessed and the new financing systems then created, as was the case with advertising.

The nineteenth-century atomized business model remained until the middle of the following century, when a new configuration was established, characterized by the increasing gathering of media companies into groups, generating a gradual but effective decrease in the number of economic agents in the media market. (Figure 1)

> *"In 1983, fifty corporations dominated most of every mass medium and the biggest media merger in history was a $340 million deal. (…) In 1987, the fifty companies had shrunk to twenty-nine. (…) In 1990, the twenty-nine had shrunk to twenty-three. (…) In 1997, the biggest firms numbered ten and involved the $19 billion Disney-ABC deal, at the time the biggest media merger ever. (…) (In 2000) AOL Time Warner's $350 billion merged corporation (was) more than 1,000 times larger (than the biggest deal of 1983)."* (Bagdikian, 2000: 20-21)

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Figure 1 – Number of media companies in the US between 1983 and 2004
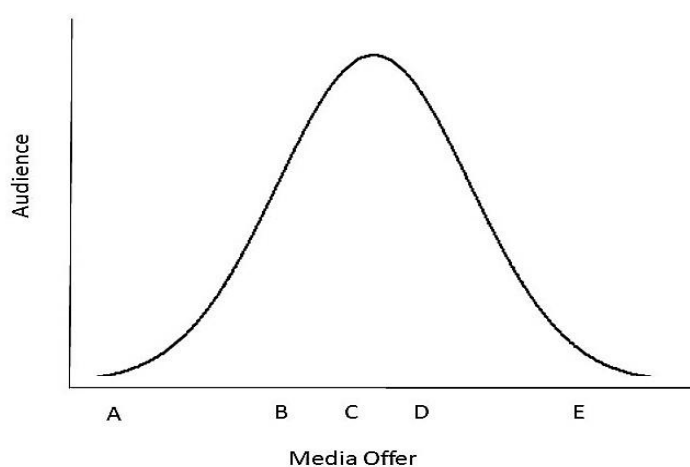

Source: author's own based on data of the Media Reform Information Center

This trend towards business concentration, which began in the 1980s, deepened in the 1990s and has continued to this day. It has generated a market characterized by a smaller number of economic agents in the form of groups of organizations that dominate the media offer, a model known as oligopoly that consists in an evolved form of monopolization in which the involved agents are not companies but groups and the competition occurs mainly due to factors like quality, the image of the products and the loyalty of the clients in detriment of the price factor (Chan-Olmsted and Chang, 2003).

The oligopoly generated a concentration of audiences and financing in the hands of a small number of agents, provoking a situation of not uncommon control of the media market.

Figure 2 represents this type of market, where the concentration of the audiences in the media represented by the letters C and D can be observed, the means A, B and E corresponding to almost residual values.

Figure 2 – Representation of the oligopoly type media market

Source: author's own

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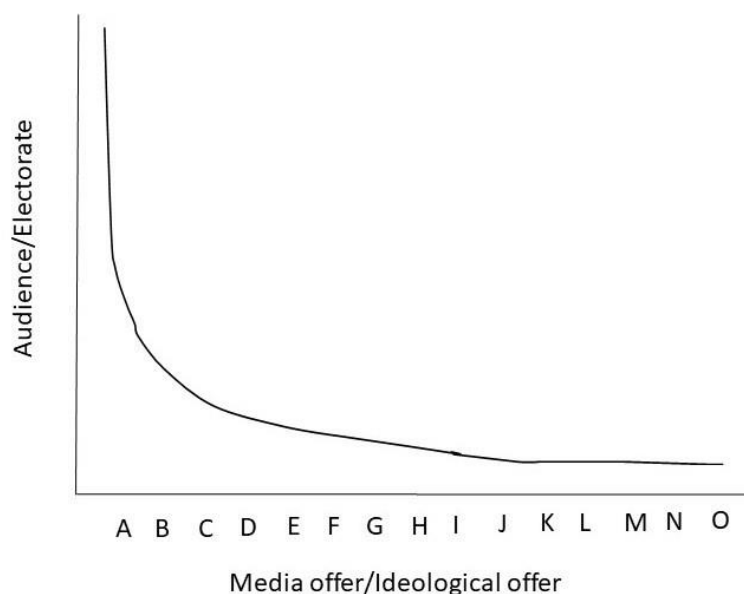*Ideological production in the era of global media capitalism*
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This oligopoly model of the media industry has become global through the evolution to another model called *conglomerate*, a change achieved through the merger of various oligopolies and which has been strongly criticized for constituting an acceleration of the process of media and cultural homogenization. It has also been critiqued for being a very serious threat to democracy, to which the proponents of the model, who are in favour of the economic approach, have responded by reducing the danger of monopolization and by creating economies of scale in the competition in the global market (Mandel-Campbell, 1998; Shearer, 2000).

According to Chan-Olmsted and Chang (Chan-Olmsted and Chang, 2003), three structural factors lie at the basis of this model transformation: the privatization of the television sector in many European and Asian countries; the deregulation of media ownership; the increasing homogenization of lifestyles in a broad set of metropolises; the saturation of demand in the US media market and the rampant advance of the so-called new technologies.

The media conglomerate faced its biggest challenge with the massive expansion of the Internet, a phenomenon that has affirmed itself in the 21st century and that decisively impacts on the way content is produced, disseminated and consumed. This new economic practice has increased the number of producers, raising it to an unprecedented scale in the history of the humanity and generating a paradoxical effect in the consumption pattern, simultaneously increasing the total volume of media consumers but distributing them by a multitude of producers who do not cease to emerge. The result of this new situation can be represented by the so-called *long tail,* a curve that symbolizes the hyper-dispersion of consumers by an increasing number of means (figure 3), consequently reducing the number of consumers by mean and rendering traditional financing and management models inadequate.

Figure 3 – Representation of the *long-tail* type media market

Source: author's own

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The scientific debate around this new configuration of the media market tends to focus on two distinct but complementary phenomena (Napoli, 2003: 77): on the one hand, fragmentation; on the other, the autonomy of the audiences. The fragmentation phenomenon affects the media and the audiences, referring to the "technological processes that increase the range of content options available to media consumers". In turn, the *autonomy of the audiences* phenomenon is, according to the author, "the extent to which media audiences increasingly have control over when, where and how they consume media; and how increasingly they have the power to affect the content they consume and to become content producers and distributors in their own right".

Currently, we are witnessing an overlap between the two realities described above. The media oligopoly remains the dominant economic configuration in capitalist democracies, despite the deep crisis in which it is plunged due to the unstoppable and accelerated emergence of new producers in the age of fragmentation (Mancini, 2013; Nelson-Field & Riebe, 2011).

This overlap is a transitional phase that is believed to end in the hyper-fragmentation of the media system, a trend whose contours and effects are still difficult to predict, despite the vast literature dedicated to it. Notwithstanding the difficulty of accurately predicting what may be the future trend, it seems consensual that there is an increase in cultural processes, facilitated by low production costs and technological accessibility.

Global ideological and media configurations: convergence

The creation of any ideology inevitably presupposes reflection on its own praxis, a strategic conception that allows moving from the intellectual theorization stage to the dissemination and concretization of ideas phase, the interaction with the media being the decisive factor in those second and third moments.

In order to take place, the dissemination of ideas implies, in turn, a degree of acceptability on the part of those who receive them and this will depend on the construction and participation, by emitters and receivers, in a *symbolic space*, a reference domain that allows the sharing of meaning and emotional exchange. This reference domain, in turn, materializes itself in the form of signs, that is, signs endowed with meaning that allow the sharing of an imaginary and the construction of identity, which are essential factors in the construction of social life. It is in the capacity of creation of this symbolic space that the economic value of the media lies.

In order to characterize the intervention of the media in this process of democratization of ideas, the concept of *participatory disseminator* is proposed with regard to the fulfilment by the former of two structural functions: a transportation function and an identity creation function.

The media's transportation function is accomplished on the basis of their integration into distribution networks that guarantee the placement of ideas in an increasingly wider area, today global, at an increasingly lower cost and in an increasingly shorter time, embodying what David Harvey called *time-space compression* (Harvey, 1990).

The identity creation function concerns the media's capacity to participate in the construction of the identity of the actual objects they deal with, a function guaranteed by a set of selective processes such as *agenda-setting* and *framing*, designed to produce

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a certain discursive construction of reality that can be accepted by a broad set of people with a certain economic-cultural profile, strategically defined as the *target audience*.

This acceptability, in turn, is explained by the creation of a discourse characterized, according to Wolton (Wolton, 1991), by being based on images, simplified and personalized, characteristics that are, however, contrary to the nature of the social problems that ideology conceptualizes, which are real and not image-based, complex and not simple, collective and non-personalized.

Notwithstanding this insurmountable contradiction between reality and media language, it is in these characteristics and in the infinite plethora of linguistic and visual combinations that embody them that the identity of the media discourse, its economic value and its cultural power lie.

The relation between economic system, cultural system and ideological production seems unavoidable, the former creating the material conditions for the development of the second in a symbolic framework that will allow the generation of the third.

The dominant economic-cultural system in capitalist democracies, previously described and identified as *media capitalism* (Nutt & Schwartz, 2008), *turbo-capitalism* (Luttwak, 1998) and *cognitive capitalism* (Parikka, 2014), has had a decisive impact on ideological production in these societies, and it can be said that each media configuration will correspond to a certain ideological configuration.

This part analyses this correspondence by focusing on the two dominant media configurations - oligopoly and fragmentation - and pointing out the ideological configurations that correspond to them. The next part will examine in detail the process of ideological production in presence, identifying the agents and processes that allowed the correspondence between media configuration and political configuration to take place.

Let's start with the media oligopoly.

The close relationship between the media system and the ideological system seems to have had as consequence, as in the case of the oligopoly market, a similar configuration in terms of the creation and diffusion of ideas, in the form of a reduced number of ideologies or even a single dominant ideology.
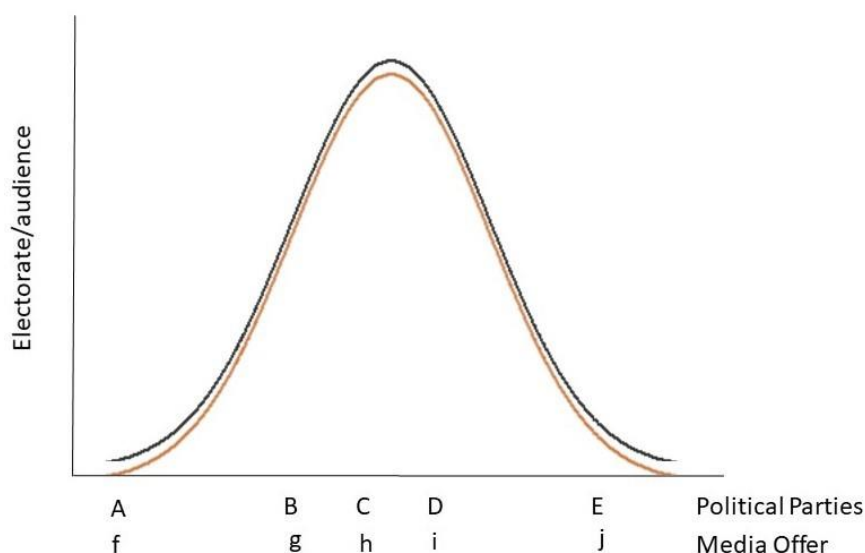
In dictatorial regimes, the media oligopoly is often detained by the state or by companies cooperating with it, resulting in almost absolute control over the symbolic production and hence over the generation and circulation of ideologies. This control happens to a lesser extent in the so-called liberal democracies, since the ownership of the mass media is access free, enabling the private sector to participate in ideological production, which in principle will become pluralist, the degree of this pluralism determining the very nature of the democratic regime in question.

The media oligopoly thus corresponded to a phase of oligopolization of the political space, with the affirmation of phenomena close to bipartisanship, concentrating the governmental power on a scarce number of parties that exercise it alternately. This is the phenomenon that Anthony Downs had already identified in 1957 (Downs, 1957) when, in the wake of Hotelling (Hotelling, 1929), he published *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, identifying the existence of a centripetal force in democratic regimes caused

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by the parties' trends to approach the so-called average voter, opting to centralize their positioning in order to capture more votes.

Figure 4 – Convergence of media, social and political positioning in democratic regimes in oligopoly type markets

Source: author's own

This phenomenon is represented in figure 4, where we can observe that the vast majority of the electorate, represented by the black line, is located at the centre of the ideological spectrum, attracting political parties wishing to win elections (in this case represented by the letters C and D) and leaving parties A, B and E off the majority curve. In the same image, we can also observe the analog configuration of the media positioning, represented in orange, with the means h and i concentrating the majority of the market, thus demonstrating the said convergence between the two configurations.
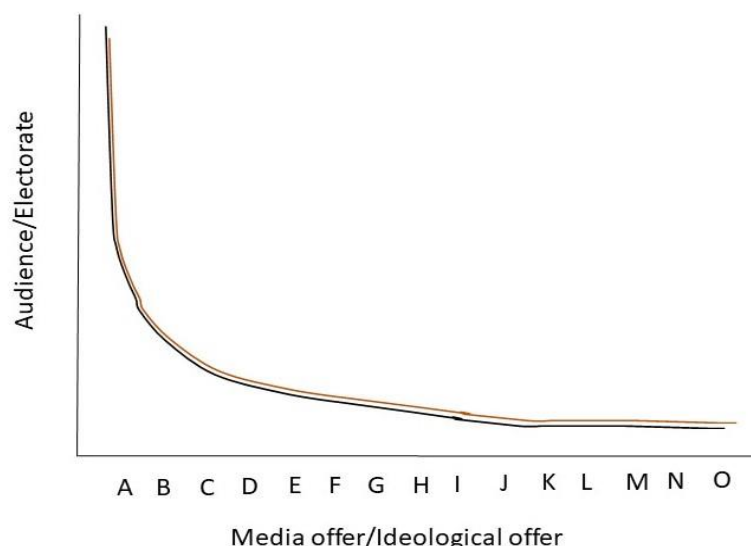
This trend towards the concentration of votes in a small number of political forces located at the centre of the political spectrum is, in our view, the strategic positioning of the media oligopoly, which is also centralized, resulting in phenomena close to *bipartisanship*, *de facto rotativism* or, if we prefer, of the so-called *alternation*.

In this sense, electoral majorities arise from the convergence between three factors: media positioning, the positioning of the electorate and the positioning of political parties, the first factor arising as the structural dimension on which the second depends, which, in turn, will generate the third.

Let us turn to the analysis of the media and ideological configurations in the case of the fragmented market, whose characteristics were already described earlier.

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Figure 5 – Convergence of political and media spaces in democratic regimes,
in fragmented type markets

In this type of economic configuration, represented in figure 5, media production and consumption are dispersed by a multitude of new producers/consumers who do not cease to appear, so it is expected that the circulation of ideas will follow this process, equally spread by an increasing number of producers. Such a market presents fewer barriers to ideological dissemination than oligopoly, since access to the means of media production is virtually straightforward, at most depending only on the level of digital literacy.

Therefore, it seems plausible to speak of an increase in ideological production and dissemination, notwithstanding the fact that, in the case of a fragmented market, unlike oligopoly, the impact of disseminated ideas has diminished considerably thanks to the parallel decline of audiences by means. This reduced impact ideological dissemination, in turn, should allow an increase in the ideological process and a refreshing of the political references, although, in institutional terms, it can generate phenomena such as difficulty in attaining political majorities.

Process of ideological production in the era of global media capitalism: agents and processes

The ideological production previously addressed in a systemic perspective will now be understood through a micro-analysis that allows identifying the agents and processes that integrate it, as well as the steps that it traverses.

However, this process should vary according to the type of market in question, whether oligopolistic, fragmented or mixed, for which reason the productive process of ideas in each of these contexts will be analysed.
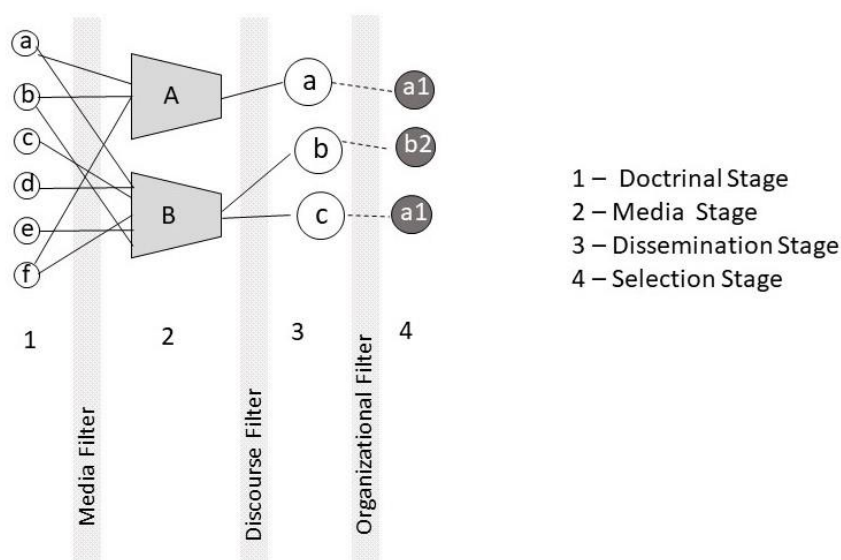
As we can see in Figure 6, the process of ideological production in an oligopolistic media system goes through four stages with distinct characteristics: a doctrinal stage; a media stage; a dissemination stage, and a selection stage.

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The doctrinal stage corresponds to the moment of the germination of ideas and their systematization and discursive deepening between a more or less restricted group of agents.

Once the passage to praxis has been decided, it is necessary to widen the field of reception, the contact with the oligopolized media being decisive in this process. Still, this passage to the media field depends on a selection process - the *agenda-setting* - which we call media *filter*. In fact, it is the media's application of the so-called news-values, conceptual constructions, that allow defining the subjects that will be the target in the light of the ethical-professional and business objectives.

Figure 6 – Process of ideological production in an oligopolistic media system

1 – Doctrinal Stage
2 – Media Stage
3 – Dissemination Stage
4 – Selection Stage

Source: author's own

This media filter is a decisive moment in the life of any ideology, since it determines the possibility of sending the message to a large number of recipients. The passage in the media filter facilitates the ideological growth; the non-passage determines restraint and, not infrequently, the death of the ideology.

Notwithstanding the crucial importance of the media filter, it is only the first regulatory instrument in the life of an ideology. In case a body of ideas is accepted to integrate the media agenda, what we call the *media stage*, a second instrument starts operating, this time regulating both the prioritization that will be given to it in the face of the news of its competitors (*priming*) and the perspective in which it will be approached (*framing*). This is what we call a *semantic filter*, since it operates on the content to be published.

Once disseminated in the form of a media text constructed according to the processes described above, the ideology finally goes through a third filter capable of leading it to become praxis. This is what we call the *organizational filter*, which consists of the organizational configuration of agents capable of creating the social dynamics that will not only support the ideas already disseminated by the media but also broaden their base of support through the creation of a set of communicative strategies inserted in campaign

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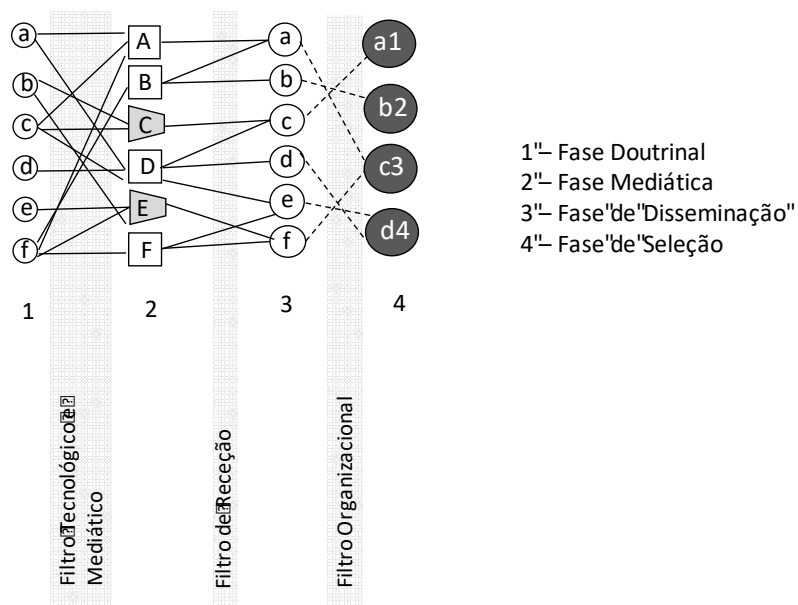*Ideological production in the era of global media capitalism*
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actions. The size and motivation of this *organizational filter* will directly impact on its effectiveness, i.e. the possibility of changing ideology into political action. We call this final stage the *selection phase*.

At the basis of a discursive power like that of Wolton (Wolton, 1991), described above, the media oligopoly serves as a compressor of the ideological process, acting as a filter that determines which doctrines may be diffused and which should be silenced or even killed, consubstantiating what Schlesinger describes as "the exercise of power through the interpretation of reality" (Schlesinger, 1972).

Thus, it seems logical that the media-cultural fragmentation stage will generate the fragmentation of the political space with the emergence of new political forces capable, if not of destroying the political oligopoly, at least of weakening it through the force of innovation or simply through the competitive effect.

However, getting to this stage will imply passing through an intermediate one characterized by the accumulation of aspects of the oligopoly stage as well as of the fragmented type (figure 7). It is a mixed media system in which the oligopoly, identified here by the letters C and E, still remains, although it now faces competition from a profusion of new non-oligopolized media agents (here designated by the letters A, B, D and F) born in the so-called *era of convergence* or *fragmentation*. This profusion of new media generates a cultural process that directly impacts on ideological production by allowing the hyper circulation of a greater number of ideas (here designated by the letters a, b, c, d, e, f) among an increasing number of people.

Figure 7 – Process of ideological production in a mixed media system

1" – Fase Doutrinal
2" – Fase Mediática
3" – Fase de Disseminação
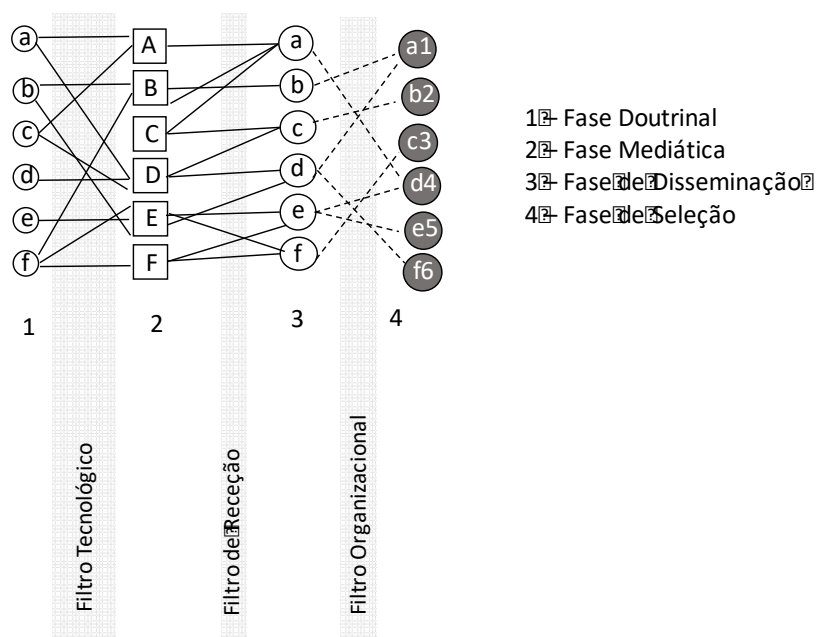4" – Fase de Seleção

Source: author's own

In turn, this new process will lead, depending on the effectiveness of each of the organizational filters in place, to the emergence, disclosure and affirmation of a greater number of ideological forces, which may want to move to a power stage through access

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to the political-institutional system by means of free elections. The number of ideologies selected in this type of mixed market tends to be higher than that of the oligopoly (in the representation proposed here, the oligopoly allows the selection of three ideologies, while the mixed market allows four), since the so-called *new media* ensure the affirmation of new references and facilitate the dissemination of new ideas.

Finally, the fragmentation stage will come, in which the media oligopoly will have succumbed to the strength of the so-called *hyper-fragmentation* of the audiences, leaving media-cultural production in the hands of individual agents.

Figure 8 – Process of ideological production in a hyper-fragmented media system

1 – Fase Doutrinal
2 – Fase Mediática
3 – Fase de Disseminação
4 – Fase de Seleção

Source: author's own

This last stage is a typical configuration that did not have real correspondence but that seems to be congruent with the logical evolution of the media systems we have witnessed in recent decades.

In a stage with these characteristics, represented in figure 8, cultural production is characterized by niche contents directed to an increasing number of audiences dispersed by an ever-increasing variety of platforms (here identified by the letters A, B,C,D,E and F) causing a ideological fragmentation (here identified by letters a, b, c, d, e, f, the largest number of ideas circulating among the three market types analysed) in a increasing free access framework but also of increasing uncertainty and instability, generated by the absence of monopolization. In this sense, the *niche-media* will tend to generate *niche-ideologies* and *niche-parties*, the latter already characterized by Bimber as "post-bureaucratic structures" (Bimber, 2003, 2009) anchored in their communicative capacity that generates social support.

Instead of the previous configurations, in the hyper-fragmented market the previously called *media filter*, which consisted in the set of news selection processes developed by traditional media, is replaced by the technological one, since ideological agents now have

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access to new media technology platforms and digital networks that allow them to disseminate ideas.

As for the semantic filter, it will be the fundamental instrument that will guarantee the acceptability of ideas, consisting of a set of writing techniques that can create interest and generate audiences, broadening the reception base of ideology.

Notwithstanding the semantic centrality of the ideological production process in the hyper-fragmented market, it seems congruent that, even at this stage, a minimum of organizational strength is needed to transform any ideological agent into power, for which reason maintaining the so-called *organizational filter* is proposed, although it has residual importance compared to the others.

Finally, among the three scenarios analysed, this type of media configuration should allow the passage to the selection stage of the largest number of ideological forces (comparatively, six oligopoly forces, four in the mixed market and three in the hyper-fragmented passed to the selection stage), since it is characterized by an even larger and freer media system.

Conclusion

This article aimed to reflect on the phenomenon of ideological production in the present time, examining at it as a result of a strategic process catalysed by global media capable of simultaneously responding to financial profitability and ideological-cultural affirmation objectives.

In this sense, the interconnection between market configuration, cultural industry and ideological production plays a central role in current capitalist democracies. This interconnection has roots in the history of the press itself and its deep relation with the domains of politics and economy.

This industry-ideology alliance has constituted the structure of ideological production since the nineteenth century, although today it is at the heart of a deep global systemic crisis resulting from technological evolution and its massification. This crisis is now giving way to a new atomization and amateur usage of ideological and cultural production and consumption based on new discursive techniques, new standards and new values.

Notwithstanding the procedural changes we are witnessing in ideological production, it is clear that in the process of ideological production, the metamorphosed media industry - whether it is embedded in an oligopoly-type, fragmented or mixed market - always appears as a "system of power"(Gans, 1980) based on a set of productive processes such as agenda setting, framing and prioritization, and discursive techniques such as nominalization and conceptual metaphors. These editorial processes constitute the discrete but effective guarantee of maintaining a form of hegemony (Gramsci, 1990; Lears, 1985; Barbero & Fox, 1993; Artz & Murphy, 2000) of a functional type consisting of the domination of a class or group through the inculcation of a definite set of ideas and assumptions which, by force of habit, become natural and common sense. Once transposed to the realm of common sense, the media-based reference frameworks undergo a legitimation process, and the ideas and assumptions that do not conform to them become perceived as deviant and, consequently, repudiated.

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This functional hegemony of the media and corresponding integration into Downs' theory through the phenomenon here called *socio-political-media convergence*, graphically represented in figures 4 and 5, constitute the main contribution of this article. Downs' important identification of the correlation between the *positioning of the electorate* and the *positioning of political parties* in the democracies, the latter following the former, lacks, in our opinion, an extension to the field of Communication, an extension that integrates the *media positioning* variable, thereby deepening the explanatory framework of the structural dynamics of democratic regimes.

The integration of this last variable allows a significant enrichment of Downs' model, introducing the phenomenon of *media hegemony* in the analysis and, through it, explaining the processes triggered in the following ways: media hegemony creates the reference frameworks of the audience-consumer, references which, in turn, will be the basis of the definition of the positioning of the electorate and, consequently, of the political parties, thus determining the political selection. It is a sequential process which, in the case of the oligopoly type market, promotes political stability by facilitating the formation of majorities, although it limits innovation by expelling, through its dynamics, the whole body of ideas that do not follow the references promoted by the media and the true pillars of the ongoing process. The opposite tends to happen in the fragmented market, since the gatekeeping effect of the media is nullified by technological accessibility, which creates the conditions for the ideological agents' direct control of the dissemination of their own ideological discourse.

This media centrality of the ideological production process, which here emerges as a structural and permanent factor of capitalist democracies, presents variations depending on the configuration of the media market being an oligopoly, fragmented or mixed. These variations affect, in particular, the volume of ideological discourses in circulation, with the first type of market promoting the bottleneck of the ideological offer in the public space, the second the spraying and the third a relative expansion.

Notwithstanding this variable process, this article clearly demonstrates the existence of a political-ideological function occupied by the media systems in what we can call a global democratic process, a function that began to be performed at informal level, but which the convergence phenomenon has been formalizing and institutionalizing through the creation of social movements and political forces organized from media experiences. These were the cases of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and the so-called "Arab Spring", the former elected prime minister after a phase of establishing his own media oligopoly, the second creating a political movement through the dominance of a media sub-system such as online social networking. Examples of this reconfiguration of political actors are multiplying with cases like the *Pirates* in Sweden, who, after about four years of ideological affirmation on the Internet, acquired electoral legitimacy in 2010, having been elected to the European Parliament and obtained 8% of the votes in the regional elections in Berlin; or that of Beppe Grillo and the Movement *5 stelle,* which obtained wide social support through a blog denouncing political corruption in Italy.

There are several examples of the media's penetration of the political system, something that goes in the opposite direction to the one that traditionally existed. Scientific research has been evidencing not only the weakening of the traditional mass bureaucratic parties but also the emergence of a new global politics anchored in technology and developed by new agents who emerged due to easy access to technology and control of the discursive devices that guarantee the loyalty of the attention of the global consumer-

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voter. This profound transformation of some of the democratic agents and processes means the reconfiguration of global democracy, implying new forms of negotiation and scrutiny, and, necessarily, the management of increased complexity.

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