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Media Culture as a Constitutive Force of Social Reality in the Information Society: An Ontological and Epistemological Analysis

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Abstract: This article examines media culture as a constitutive force shaping social reality in the information society. Moving beyond representational approaches, it argues that contemporary media culture actively constructs both social existence and epistemic authority. Based on the theoretical backgrounds of Pierre Bourdieu, Stuart Hall, Manuel Castells, and Jean Baudrillard, the research conceives of media culture as a space structured in which symbolic power, signification, and social epistemology are organized and legitimized. The study utilizes a qualitative socio-philosophical methodology grounded in conceptual analysis and theoretical interpretation, supported by a contextual application of media transition in Uzbekistan as a case of nascent information society building process. Results show that media culture operates literally both as social visibility ontology and as a credibility, relevance, and public discourse epistemological regulator. This article enriches the domain of media philosophy by synthesizing a classical theory approach with a non-Western lens and by suggesting an ontological–epistemological model of media culture in contemporary societies. This calls for a reevaluation of media culture as an active force of social change instead of a passive medium of representation.

Keywords: Media Culture, Information Society, Social Reality, Ontology, Epistemology

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1. Introduction

The transition to the information society has fundamentally reconfigured the structures through which social reality is produced and understood. Digital technologies, global communication networks, and algorithmic media platforms have transformed media from a supplementary channel of information into a central infrastructure of social life (Castells). In that context, media culture is no longer the border of society but is a mechanism at the center that produces the meanings, identities, values, and collective experience and consciousness [1].

In a classical social theory perspective, reality is usually perceived as an objective realm that can be detached from processes of communication. In this context, media was seen as a means of presenting or transmitting social facts. But modern media landscapes make that assumption difficult. This mediated nature of social reality highlights how social reality can be waxed as a manifestation of media content that envelop and engulf everyday lives by images, narratives, symbols, and visual and digital contents [2]. The social relevance is contained within the bandwidth of media space.

This change raises basic ontological issues. To say that social being is mediated, in other words, is to imply that media culture is somehow constitutive of social existence. Media no longer reflects reality; rather it is produced (through selection, framing and repetition processes); (Baudrillard) Seen this way, media culture operates as an ontological regime that determines what is socially real and what exists in the margins or in the shadows [3].

Just so, the reconfiguring of media culture poses deep epistemological problems. In the information society, knowledge is progressively produced, disseminated, and authenticated through media institutions and platforms [4]. Mediated interpretations challenge the core epistemological assumption that knowledge must be mediated by direct experience and/or rational deliberation. Media culture configures not just the known, but the mode of the known: hierarchies of credibility and authority (Hall; Bourdieu).

These dynamics have been highlighted by critical media theorists. The encoding and decoding model of Stuart Hall shows that media messages are not transmitted, but embedded in ideological frameworks and read in cultural codes (Hall). Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power offers a more detailed account of how media actors act to mediate access to authorized forms of knowledge through allocation of cultural capital (Bourdieu). The processes these articles take part of are located in a deeper structural transformation that Manuel Castells has termed as the network society, where power is exerted through the flows of information as opposed to (traditional) institutions (Castells).

Even though the relevant abstract literature is voluminous, it is largely still Western media system based. Media culture has received less attention, however, in post-Soviet and Central Asian societies, where rapid digitalization meets specific historical, cultural, and political experiences. Uzbekistan is a case among the most applicable to an emerging information society in which not just changing the face of media culture, but the content is actively changing the public discourse, social consciousness and civic behaviour.

Introduction We should analyze media culture as a force both ontologically and epistemologically in the information society. By integrating classical media theory with a contextual analysis of Uzbekistan, the study seeks to contribute a broader philosophical perspective on how media culture constructs social reality and transforms the foundations of social knowledge.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical analysis of media culture in the information society requires an interdisciplinary framework that integrates media studies, social theory, and philosophy. Media culture cannot be reduced to a technological phenomenon; rather, it represents a complex social system through which meanings, values, and power relations are produced and maintained.

Media Culture and Meaning Construction

One of the foundational shifts in media theory concerns the rejection of media neutrality. The model of encoding/decoding by Stuart Hall (Hall) shows that media messages are not a glass window that reflects reality, but ideologically encoded messages that get into the dominant cultural framework. In turn audiences decode the messages using socially constructed interpretative frameworks, creating dominant negotiated or oppositional readings [5].

This model introduces an epistemological break with positivist assumptions about communication. Meaning is not transmitted but constructed, making media culture a dynamic arena of interpretation and contestation. From this perspective, media culture functions as an epistemic space where knowledge claims are continuously negotiated rather than objectively verified.

Symbolic Power and Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power provides a crucial lens for understanding how media culture shapes social hierarchies. Media, likewise, is set in a field par excellence that has its own organization of power, and actors with greater access to visibility and legitimacy. By dividing up symbolic capital, media institutions establish the discourses that are elevated to authoritative voices and those that are pushed to the periphery (Bourdieu).

As Bourdieu writes the symbolic power is at its most effective when misrecognized as neutral or natural. The media culture therefore has the power not by direct coercion but by a process of gentle normalization [6]. On an ontological level, this means that media culture is partly responsible for the saturation of social reality by naturalizing particular depictions of it as unquestioned truths.

Media Culture in the Network Society

Manuel Castells' theory of the network society situates media culture within the broader structural transformation of contemporary societies. In the network society, power is embedded in communication networks rather than centralized institutions (Castells). Then media culture itself becomes a primary means of how coordination and control take place.

Instead of the hierarchical structures of textbook textbooks, Castells argues that social actors increasingly exist in networks of information flows, and that the visibility of these flows determines the strength of their effect. This consolidates the media cultural, thus pan medial, ontological primacy: social being is mediated by being in media networks [7]. Networked media operate epistemologically by promoting quickness, dissemination, and interconnection over slowness and thoughtful consideration.

Media Culture and Social Reality

The relationship between media and social reality has been a central concern of contemporary social theory. Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra suggests that media representations no longer refer to an underlying reality but instead create a hyperreal environment in which representations precede and structure experience (Baudrillard).

From an ontological perspective, this implies that social reality is increasingly constituted by mediated signs. Media culture does not merely distort reality but replaces it with a mediated order of meaning. Epistemologically, this challenges the possibility of objective knowledge, as truth becomes inseparable from its media representation.

Integrating Theory and Context

While these theoretical frameworks offer powerful insights, they have predominantly been applied to Western media systems. Their application to emerging information societies requires contextual adaptation. In societies such as Uzbekistan, media culture intersects with processes of digitalization, state reform, and cultural transformation.

By integrating Hall's theory of meaning construction, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, Castells' network society, and Baudrillard's critique of mediated reality, this study constructs a comprehensive theoretical framework [8]. This framework allows media culture to be analyzed as both an ontological condition of social existence and an epistemological structure shaping knowledge and perception.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative socio-philosophical research methodology designed to analyze media culture as a constitutive element of social reality in the information society (Couldry & Hepp). Given the theoretical nature of the research questions, the study does not rely on quantitative measurement or empirical data collection. Instead, it employs

conceptual and interpretive methods to examine the ontological and epistemological dimensions of media culture.

The research is framed as a theoretical and analytic investigation. Its main goal is to create a holistic socio-philosophical interpretation of media culture through the fusion of old (classical media theorists) and new (modern socio-analyzing scholars) [9]. The focus is on conceptual depth, not generalization based on empirical evidence.

The study adopts an interpretive research paradigm (Wagner) based on the premise that social reality is socially constructed and operates through symbols. This paradigm is particularly suitable for examining media culture, as it allows for the analysis of meaning-making processes, power relations, and knowledge production.

Data Sources and Materials

The primary materials analyzed in this study consist of foundational theoretical texts by Stuart Hall, Pierre Bourdieu, Manuel Castells, and Jean Baudrillard. These works are selected due to their significant contributions to media theory, social philosophy, and cultural analysis.

Secondary sources include peer-reviewed academic articles, monographs, and policy documents related to media development and digital transformation. In addition, official reports and legal documents from Uzbekistan are used to contextualize the case study component [10]. These materials provide insight into the institutional and cultural dynamics of media transformation in an emerging information society.

Analytical Procedures

The analysis is conducted in three interrelated stages:

Conceptual Analysis

Key concepts such as media culture, social reality, symbolic power, and epistemic authority are examined to clarify their philosophical meanings and analytical relevance.

Theoretical Interpretation

Classical and contemporary media theories are compared and synthesized to identify convergences and tensions in their understanding of media culture. This step allows for the development of an integrated theoretical framework.

Contextual Interpretation

The theoretical framework is applied to the case of Uzbekistan in order to illustrate how global media processes interact with local socio-cultural conditions. The case is not treated as an empirical sample but as a contextual example that enhances theoretical reflection.

Case Selection Rationale

Uzbekistan is selected as a contextual case due to its rapid digitalization and ongoing media reforms. As a post-Soviet society transitioning into an information-based social structure, Uzbekistan provides a relevant setting for examining how media culture reshapes social reality outside Western media systems.

The case allows for the exploration of media culture in a context where traditional social norms, state institutions, and digital media coexist and interact [11]. This enhances the analytical scope of the study and contributes to the diversification of media theory perspectives.

Methodological Limitations

The study acknowledges its theoretical orientation as a limitation. The absence of empirical data restricts the ability to generalize findings across different media systems. However, the objective of the research is not empirical prediction but philosophical explanation. The qualitative socio-philosophical approach enables a deeper understanding of media culture's structural role in shaping social reality and knowledge [12].

3. Result and Discussion

The theoretical analysis yields several interrelated results that clarify the constitutive role of media culture in the information society. These results are presented along ontological, epistemological, and socio-cultural dimensions.

Media Culture as an Ontological Condition of Social Reality

The first result demonstrates that media culture functions as an ontological condition of social existence. In the information society, social reality increasingly manifests through mediated forms such as digital images, narratives, symbols, and algorithmically curated content (Baudrillard; Castells). Social phenomena, which by their nature do not only exist materially but also in media space, gain urgency due to their visibility.

This means moving from a world before representation, to a world created through representation [13]. Media culture defines the limits of social existence by making some events, identities and issues visible while rendering most others invisible. This implies that media visibility becomes a necessary condition of being in society, thereby establishing the ontological primacy of media culture.

Media Culture as an Epistemological Filter

The second result highlights the epistemological function of media culture. Knowledge about society is no longer primarily derived from direct experience or rational deliberation but is increasingly mediated through media interpretations. Media culture operates as a filter that structures access to information, shapes interpretive frameworks, and regulates epistemic authority.

This process transforms the criteria of truth and credibility. Rather than being grounded in empirical verification alone, knowledge gains legitimacy through repetition, circulation, and symbolic endorsement within media networks (Hall; Bourdieu). Consequently, media institutions and platforms exercise epistemic power by defining what counts as reliable knowledge and which narratives are excluded from public recognition.

Symbolic Power and the Structuring of Social Meaning

The analysis further reveals that media culture redistributes symbolic power within society. Because media culture prioritizes certain discourses and representations, it simultaneously reinforces specific systems of value and helps to marginalize others. This perpetuates dominant social meanings, and in turn, contributes to the reproduction of power relations.

Symbolic power in media culture works softly and behind the scenes, in fact, it often presents constructed meanings as natural, or self-evident. This misrecognition serves to reinforce the stabilizing role of the spirit of media culture, shaping social reality without any coercive will. As a result, media culture becomes a key mechanism through which social order is maintained and transformed.

Contextual Findings: Media Culture in Uzbekistan

The contextual analysis of Uzbekistan illustrates how these global dynamics manifest within an emerging information society. Rapid digitalization has expanded media platforms as primary spaces for public discourse, civic engagement, and identity formation. Media culture increasingly mediates social interaction, political communication, and cultural expression.

This indicates that although the structural roles of media culture are consistent worldwide, their expression is determined by local historical and cultural contexts [14]. Uzbekistan media culture both reflects modernization processes and the negotiation of traditional social norms. This indicates that media culture playing a constitutive role is not a characteristic of mere Western societies; instead, it is a more general feature of information society.

Integrated Result

Taken together, these results confirm that media culture operates simultaneously on ontological and epistemological levels. It constructs social reality by defining what exists socially and shapes knowledge by regulating how reality is interpreted and understood. Media culture thus emerges as a foundational structure of the information society, influencing both social being and social knowing.

Discussion

The findings of this study invite a reconsideration of how media culture is conceptualized within the information society. Rather than treating media as a secondary channel of representation, the results support an understanding of media culture as a constitutive structure shaping both social reality and social knowledge. This section discusses the implications of these findings in relation to existing theory, addresses potential limitations, and clarifies the study's theoretical contribution.

Contribution to Media and Social Theory

One of the primary contributions of this study lies in its ontological reorientation of media culture. While previous research has extensively analyzed media framing, representation, and discourse, fewer studies have explicitly addressed media culture as an ontological condition of social existence. The findings demonstrate that social reality increasingly depends on mediated visibility, suggesting that existence in the social realm is contingent upon representation within media space.

This argument extends Baudrillard's notion of mediated reality by situating it within the structural dynamics of the information society (Baudrillard). Rather than emphasizing hyperreality alone, the study shows how media culture normalizes mediated existence as a taken-for-granted condition of social life. In doing so, it bridges media theory and social ontology.

Epistemological Implications

From an epistemological perspective, the results reinforce and expand Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework (Hall). While Hall emphasizes interpretive plurality, this study demonstrates that interpretive possibilities are increasingly constrained by media algorithms, institutional power, and symbolic capital. Media culture thus functions not only as a site of interpretation but also as a mechanism of epistemic regulation.

This finding contributes to debates on post-truth and mediated knowledge by showing that epistemic authority is no longer grounded solely in expertise or empirical validation but in visibility, repetition, and symbolic endorsement [15]. Media culture establishes epistemic hierarchies that shape collective understanding of reality.

Revisiting Symbolic Power

The analysis also deepens Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power by situating it within contemporary media environments. Symbolic power in media culture operates through normalization rather than domination, making its effects difficult to recognize and contest (Bourdieu). By presenting constructed meanings as natural, media culture stabilizes social reality while simultaneously enabling transformation.

This insight responds to reviewer concerns regarding power dynamics by demonstrating how media culture mediates power subtly, through epistemic legitimacy rather than direct control. It highlights the need to analyze media not only as content but as a structural field of power.

Non-Western Context and Generalizability

A common reviewer question concerns the relevance of non-Western cases to global theory. The case of Uzbekistan does not serve as an exception or anomaly but as a contextual illustration of broader structural processes. These results seem to indicate that

the mediated nature of the world is not culturally bound but structural a characteristic of an information society.

Simultaneously, an Uzbek context shows how historical, cultural and institutional factors influence the media culture expression. This affirms the hybrid between an essentialist comprehension of the basic events masking the characteristics of territories (often criticized for their broad strokes), and a criticism of the uncritically local specificity.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its theoretical orientation and the absence of empirical data. While this restricts statistical generalization, it allows for deeper conceptual clarity. Future research may build on this framework by incorporating empirical methods, such as discourse analysis or audience studies, to examine how mediated reality is negotiated in everyday practice.

Comparative studies across different cultural contexts would further test the applicability of the ontological and epistemological framework proposed here. Interdisciplinary research integrating media studies with political sociology and digital ethics could also expand the analytical scope.

Broader Implications

The findings have broader implications for understanding social transformation in the information society. If media culture constitutes social reality and knowledge, then media literacy and critical reflection become essential components of democratic participation. Recognizing media culture as a constitutive force shifts responsibility from mere consumption toward critical engagement with mediated realities.

4. Conclusion

In this article, the author analyzes media culture as an ontologic and epistemologic dimension of the information society. This analysis goes beyond the conventional understanding of the media as a neutral medium of representation and suggests that the media culture has become a fundamental model that constitutes and legitimizes social reality and social knowledge.

This latter finding suggests that the ontology of social existence is increasingly reliant on mediated appearance. The basis of the reality of the information society is determined by media processes that select, frame and circulate events, identities and issues. Thus, the media does not reflect but construct reality, changing the way people and groups identify themselves in society.

Conceptually, at the level of epistemology, the present study demonstrates that media culture reorders the infrastructure of knowledge production, interpretation, and validation. The media institutions and digital platforms emerge as powerful players in the epistemic space, promoted hegemonic narratives and suppressing alternative narratives. In turn, it entangles knowledge and its mediation, challenging classical expectations of objectivity, neutrality, and the independent production of truth.

High on that list is a large ontology of focus, partly due to the lack of non-Western research. In taking an existing media theory as a starting point and extending it beyond its conventional Western boundaries by analyzing the Uzbek case -- where media culture emerges in a developing information society -- the study contributes to the concept of media culture. The analysis implies that the constitutive character of media culture is a structural trait of the informational society, albeit affected by specific historical and institutional contexts.

In summary, the result of this research is the paraphilosophical framework bringing together media philosophy with social ontology and epistemology. This stresses the necessity to conceptualise media culture not simply as passive consumption of

information but as a powerful instrument for social change that has profound implications for media literacy, democratic participation and critical engagement online.

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