

The Implementation of the Liberal Model of Journalism in Croatia: Exploring the
Influence of Cultural Values and the Level of Democracy

Extended Abstract

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The United States started exporting its way of journalism, the so-called Anglo-American or liberal model of journalism, which has been generally accepted as an ideal of professional journalism in the late 1960s (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This model is shaped by the early development of the commercial press in the United States in the 1830s. Its core values are the concept of press freedom and neutral professionalism. (Jakubowicz & Sukosd, 2008).

The liberal model eventually had a powerful influence on media cultures across the world, especially in Western Europe (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The fall of communism at the end of 1980s opened up a new market of some 450 million consumers in Central and Eastern Europe. Western media corporations took for granted that the countries in Eastern Europe would adopt professional values and standards of the liberal model of journalism. Thus, efforts were made to export it to the new democracies in East-Central Europe.

This expansion, however, did not go so well because the western media corporations did not take into consideration traditions and history of local journalism. Countries in Eastern Europe fall under the Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model of journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The mass media in these post-communist countries were state owned and used for government propaganda. After the democracies were consolidated, media remained government owned and served various political forces.

Commercial markets were weak and developed rather late, which meant that the media under the influence of the government had the monopoly (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the implementation of the liberal model of journalism in Croatia by exploring the influence of cultural values and the level of democracy acceptance on attitudes and perceptions towards the news program on the Croatian Public Television station, owned by the state, and the commercial television station Nova TV, owned by an American corporation.

Research about news programming on the commercial and public broadcast programs has shown considerable differences in the formats and the content. The news program on the public channels broadcasts mainly hard news, defined as, “reports about politics, public administration, the economy, science, technology, and related topics.” The news program on the commercial channels, on the other hand, was meant to be a distraction and pleasure, broadcasts mostly soft news, defined as, “reports about celebrities, human interest, sport and other entertainment-centered stories” (Curran, Iyengar, Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009, p. 9). These findings were supported by the research on the news program of the public broadcaster and commercial television stations in Croatia.

To evaluate attitudes and perceptions of Croatians towards the implementation of the liberal model of journalism, this study takes into account the level of acceptance of democracy and cultural dimensions in Croatia. These variables could help to predict attitudes towards the model of journalism studied.

A theory that could be used to explain the implementation of democracy in post-Communist countries is diffusion of innovation developed by Everett Rogers (Rogers,

1995). Diffusion of innovation theory postulates that there are several adopter categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, with innovators having the ability to cope with a high degree of uncertainty about innovation, and laggards being suspicious of innovations (Rogers, 1995). Thus, if democracy is viewed as innovation, the acceptance rate of democracy could indicate attitudes towards the liberal model of journalism. Research has shown that the change to democracy was not well accepted and that people in post-Communist countries distrust their new democratic governments (Waldron-Moore, 1999), which could indicate that the acceptance rate of democracy in Croatia, being a post-Communist country, would be low.

Research has also shown that cultural values influence the adoption of innovation (Herbig, & Dunphy, 1998), specifically two of Hofstede's (2005) cultural dimensions: power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Power distance is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 28). It can range in value from zero for a culture with a low power distance, to 100 for culture with high power distance. Low power distance societies are more open to accepting innovation than high power distance societies. For this dimension, Croatia scored 73, which ranks relatively high and means that Croatian's can be categorized as laggards according to the diffusion of innovation theory and as a high power distance society.

H1: The greater the acceptance of democracy, the greater the preference towards commercial broadcast news.

H2: High power distance will be positively correlated with the preference for public broadcast news.

Uncertainty-avoidance measures the degree by which people are threatened by unknown. It can range in value from zero for a culture with a low uncertainty-avoidance, to 100 for culture with high uncertainty-avoidance. For this dimension, Croatia scored 80, which ranks relatively high. Hofstede (2005) found that high uncertainty-avoidance societies resist innovation.

H3: High uncertainty avoidance will be positively correlated with the preference towards public broadcast news.

H4: Acceptance of democracy will mediate the relationship between power distance and the news preferences.

H5: Acceptance of democracy will mediate the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and the news preferences.

The study will survey a convenience sample of 350 students at a large, public university located in Zagreb, Croatia. The data will be collected in December 2011. All the measures used in the study have been derived based on information from previous studies. The control variables employed in this survey include the gender, age, and geographic location, overall television viewing, and overall news viewing. To analyze the survey data multiple-regression will be used. The effect size will also be calculated using beta weights.

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