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The nature of mass media influence and the related threats in the light of the main theses of Marshall McLuhan's theory

Natura mediów masowych i zagrożenia związane z ich wpływem w świetle głównych tez teorii Marshalla McLuhana

Several decades have elapsed from the demise of Marshall McLuhan and, although various critical voices concerning his views on the media have raised in the world of communication sciences, his evaluations and his idea of the media nature remain extremely perceptive and still valid. The electric and electronic media of the 20th century proved the universally decisive role played by the light-speed communication that leads to the emergence of information society. People of the second half of the 20th century, using unprecedented technological inventions in the field of communication, such as radio and television, did not always fully appreciate, due to the nature of those media, their effects and widespread influence, especially on the social, moral and spiritual sphere of the human being. In the 21st century, the media in question underwent further transformation, evolving into the new media. In the era of computers, the Internet, and digital communication we all witness the change from a verbal-written culture into an audiovisual-interactive one. The contem-

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porary multimedia world is not only an additional element of the everyday life, but it provides a vector that determines the direction and rhythm of life and its continuous perception and experience. One may ask what in the world of the even more refined media, the world that Marshall McLuhan did not live to witness but whose advent he had foreseen, in the era of computers, digitalization and the global media with all the undeniable benefits resulting from their development and successful overcoming of time and space, may constitute a threat, imperceptible at the first glance, to the human spirit. To attempt answering this question, it is necessary to investigate afresh the claims of the great analyst of mass media – who lived at the beginning of the digital media era and analyzed their development from the perspective of universal history – looking at their nature. The words of St. Paul: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good,"[1] emphasize the need of an in-depth analysis of 'the yesterday,' in order to discover the present threats, or even those of 'tomorrow' that result from the process of the development of media technologies and from their nature.

The three main claims in Marshall McLuhan's scientific output describe the nature of media: "Media are extensions of the human senses," "The medium is the message," and "Global village." Let us analyze their meaning in order to capture in the current view of the media what is imperceptible at first glance.

Media as the extensions of the senses

The first of the fundamental theses the Canadian scholar proposed, investigating the nature of the media, is the claim that in the historical perspective of their development, an irresistible desire to extend the human senses was the cause of the subsequent mediamorphoses. From the beginnings of history and of the process of shaping human culture, spoken word effectively engaged all the senses. The later phonetic alphabet systematized this language to an even greater degree, becoming an extension of its meanings, feelings, emotions and experiences.[2] "Language does for intelligence what the wheel does for the feet and the body. It enables them to move from thing to thing with greater ease and speed and ever less involvement. Language extends and amplifies man but it also divides his faculties."[3] Writing, as the medium that emerged after the era of oral culture, has become the main extension of the visual sense, as – after many centuries of the development of writing – we are reminded by the photograph

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[1] 1 Thessalonians 5: 19–21.
[2] See M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts,1994, pp. 77-80.
[3] Ibidem, p. 79.

and the movie.[4] The original linearity, continuity and repeatability of writing caused another revolutionary division of human experience, extending the latter into a new form of perception: first of the static image, than of the moving one.[5] Earlier, however, throughout the centuries, other media used in everyday life also contributed their transformation-provoking meanings. Clothing, for instance, or housing became extensions of the skin and the mechanisms that protect and control body temperature. Emerging cities, their different architectures and cultures, became extensions of our organs whose function was to fulfil the needs of large social groups.[6] Radio and, in particular, television, with the golden age of their expansion in the second half of 20th century, were called by McLuhan the newest and most spectacular electronic extension of the human nervous system. All the media and technological novelties which, in the process of media transformation, extended the human body and, eventually, the nervous system, have aimed at an increase in the power and speed of human activity.[7] However, along with the creation of ever more perfect extensions of the senses, also hazards emerged as natural consequences of the process of media development.

Disorders in the equilibrium of the senses

A disorder in the equilibrium of the senses is one of the first possible consequences of the development of electronic media that convey various contents and meanings. "The word 'metaphor' is from the Greek *meta* plus *pherein*, to carry across or transport. … Each form of transport not only carries, but translates and transforms, the sender, the receiver, and the message. The use of any kind of medium or extensions of man alters the patterns of interdependence among people, as it alters the ratios among the senses."[8] For instance, the extension of the sense of sight, claimed McLuhan, as a result of the powerful influence of television with its multiplied precision of the transfer of form and contents, may result in disrupting the balance of the senses caused by a decrease in the ratio of other senses, such as touch or hearing.[9] This disequilibrium subsequently affects also the mental dimension and leads to a further loss of balance among the faculties: reason, imagination, memory, emotions or the will, which constitute in man a certain whole and function as a system of communicating vessels.

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[4] See ibidem, p. 114.
[5] See ibidem, pp. 84-85.
[6] See ibidem, p. 123.
[7] See ibidem, p. 90.
[8] Ibidem, pp. 89-90.
[9] See ibidem, p. 107.

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This process is due to disequilibrium between the real (spiritual, physical) world and the virtual one: the latter has been artificially created by various media and is targeted both at the individual and the society. McLuhan observed that under the influence of mass media "consciousness, complex and subtle, can be impaired or ended by a mere stepping-up or diming-down of any one sense intensity, which is the procedure in hypnosis. And the intensification of one sense by a new medium can hypnotize an entire community."[10] What would happen if one began to juggle with different senses and their intensification can easily be foreseen.

Games as extensions of man

Games are a privileged space for the activities to extend the human spirit. Games were known already in Antiquity as popular art forms that secured direct participation in the entirety of community's life for each player in the way such participation could not be guaranteed by any individual role or job. According to the Canadian scholar, games we play stem from tribal games, based on the ritual of war games that allow a dramatic enactment of the outer cosmic struggle,[11] thus being particularly similar to electronic media and sharing their spectacular character, suspense or personal involvement. McLuhan believed that "games are popular art … like institutions, are extensions of the animal organism."[12] Various manual or group games are not a field reserved exclusively for young players: children and youth. A special example of a game that enjoys unchanging popularity is 'immortal' poker – a game that shows all the traits of a perfect medium leading to a permanent dependence of the player. "It calls for shrewdness, aggression, trickery, and unflattering appraisals of character. … Poker is intensely individualist, allowing no place for kindness or consideration."[13] Unfortunately, in the Western world, gambling and alcohol that often accompanies gambling are, as McLuhan observed, a social bond, as well as a means facilitating festive involvement, at the same time being "destructive of all social pattern and […] even used as a means to mystical experience,"[14]

Describing the deepest interdependencies between media and the human psyche, McLuhan claimed that „any game, like any medium of information, is an extension of the individual or the group. Its effect on the group or individual is a reconfiguring of the parts of the group or individual that are not

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[10] Ibidem, p. 112.
[11] See ibidem, pp. 236-237.
[12] Ibidem, p. 235.
[13] Ibidem, p. 240.
[14] Ibidem, p. 234.

so extended. A work of art has no existence or function apart from its effects on human observers. And art, like games or popular arts, and like media of communication, has the power to impose its own assumptions by setting the human community into new relationships and postures."[15] This is the case due particularly to the fact that, as an extension of a popular response to the stress of a working day, games have become a durable model of culture.

Searching for the deepest truths of the human spirit, the Canadian author observed: "Much of the scholarly effort of the past century in many fields has been devoted to a minute reconstruction of the conditions of primitive art and ritual, for it has been felt that this course offers the key to understanding the mind of primitive man."[16] Moreover, shedding light on the research conducted in the space of human imagination, he added: "For more than a century now artists have tried to meet the challenge of the electric age by investing the tactile sense with the role of a nervous system for unifying all the others. Paradoxically, this has been achieved by 'abstract art,' which offers a central nervous system for a work of art rather than the conventional husk of the old pictorial image."[17] Unfortunately, however, as the media scholar wrote in the 1980's: "Now that man has extended his central nervous system by electric technology, the field of battle has shifted to mental image-making-and-breaking."[18] In this connection, the human psyche, so delicate in its inner structure, is especially exposed. The point is that "play goes with an awareness of huge disproportion between the ostensible situation and the real stake."[19] What greater stake may there be than man as an individual, his dignity and his spiritual value?

"That games are extensions, not of our private but of our social selves, and that they are media of communication, should now be plain. If, finally, we ask, 'Are games mass media?' the answer has to be 'Yes.' Games are situations contrived to permit simultaneous participation of many people in some significant pattern of their own corporate lives."[20] The question remains, however, who is the main creator of this corporate life and what are their goals. Moreover, considering that, as the author states, "like our vernacular tongues, all games are media of interpersonal communication, and they could have neither existence nor meaning except as extensions of our immediate inner lives,"[21] another question arises: Who is it that extends our inner lives and what is the direction of this extension? A variety of games and plays actually unmask an axiology

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[15] Ibidem, p. 242.
[16] Ibidem, p. 237.
[17] Ibidem, p. 107-108.
[18] Ibidem, p. 103.
[19] Ibidem, p. 244.
[20] Ibidem, p. 245.
[21] Ibidem, p. 237-238.

and, sometimes, even man's whole inner world. In addition, "the games of a people reveal a great deal about them. Games are a sort of artificial paradise like Disneyland, or some Utopian vision by which we interpret and complete the meaning of our daily lives. … A game is a machine that can get into action only if the players consent to become puppets for a time."[22] How dangerous to children and youth some contemporary virtual games of the computer and the Internet era (game consoles, playstations and others) may be if they are, according to McLuhan's theory, not only extensions of the human senses, but also – which is most dangerous – of the central nervous system?

The problems of involvement and organization

Potential disorders in the equilibrium of the senses and not always a positive influence of games on its participants may also cause other side effects. McLuhan observed: "Our electric-extensions of ourselves simply by-pass space and time and create problems of human involvement and organization for which there is no precedent."[23] Man begins to organize his life and time in a different way than before, differently arranging and formulating the scale of things that are necessary, needed and pleasant. He very often reverses this order, which leads to a lack of inner discipline and failures in the professional and social fields. This is especially frequent under the influence of digital-virtual media, with their extensive worlds at the junction of illusion and reality. Dynamic, hypertextual and interactive communication carriers fill the reality with millions of images, which deepens the prevalence of the activity of sight over that of hearing. The viewer easily becomes addicted to seeing, looking and admiring. Creating pictorial innovations, new conventions, leads to the emergence of new life attitudes, moral and spiritual. Those attitudes are transferred directly onto the sphere of personal, family, social and professional life.

The medium is the message

The medium is the message. What does this thesis mean – the thesis that hides a double bottom of the understanding of the effect of communication technology on its message taken as a whole? The substance of this statement is an observation that the communication medium is of greater importance that the message. McLuhan claimed that all media recipients in a way first 'consume' the 'form'

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[22] Ibidem, p. 238.
[23] Ibidem, p. 105.

of communication of a given medium, its 'melody,' and only subsequently its 'content.' This is the case because "the 'messsage' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affaires."[24] This "anticipatory" form, manifesting itself in the above three elements, is hidden behind the cover of every medium: speech, phonetic alphabet, press, radio, television, Internet, and all other media brought along by history.

The change of pace

Every technology, and especially communication technology, out of the very nature of its expansion, strives to "be ahead of time," shortening its distance. To be able to deliver a given message content, the form of a given communication medium was the first to alter. One of the manifestations of the change has been the pace or rhythm of communication. The change in the pace of communication was an effect of reduction in time and space, especially by the electric and electronic media, but it had also occurred earlier, for instance during the time when the periodically published press had emerged. When books, and later the press, became generally available, the rhythm of social communication visibly altered. Especially from the time when Johannes Gutenberg invented print, the frequency of repetition of information and communications has changed. Since then, "the principal factors in media impact on existing social forms are acceleration and disruption. Today the acceleration tends to be total, and thus ends space as the main factor in social arrangements."[25] Arnold Toynbee, whom McLuhan cites in his *Understanding media*, sees the role of acceleration as "translating the physical into moral problems."[26] In the past, carts and rickshaws, due to limited speed and traffic, did not generate such a big threat of accidents. With time, however, technological development accelerated and the situation changed. "The physical problem is translated into a psychological one as the annihilation of space permits easy annihilation of travellers as well. This principle applies to all media study. All means of interchange and of human interassociation tend to improve by acceleration. Speed, in turn, accentuates problems of form and structure. The older arrangements had not been made with a view to such speeds, and people begin to sense a draining-away of life values as they try to make the old physical forms adjust to the new and speedier movement."[27] However, quantity not always transforms into quality, and the

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[24] Ibidem, p. 8.
[25] Ibidem, p. 94.
[26] Ibidem.
[27] Ibidem, p. 94-95.

change of pace, rhythm and speed of life may, under certain circumstances, result in derailment, which leads not only to road accidents, but also to personal, moral and spiritual failures. It may be seen particularly in the new media, where the overwhelming spin is one of the most frequent ways messages affect recipients of the contemporary media. Observing some messages, their form and content, it is easy, even today, to foresee the consequences the recipients may have to face of excessive acceleration of life pace and psychological unsteadiness, surpassing human endurance.

The change of scale

The change of scale is another effect of media metamorphosis – the effect that may be observed by looking at the functioning of each of them, but it is particularly pronounced in the history of wheel transport since the steam age. Taking this period as an example, it can be clearly seen how distances were obliterated and scales of reference altered. "The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure."[28] As a result of the development of those and other, new media, local scales extended further, changing into national scales which, in turn, transformed into continental and global ones, to finally become, in the era of inter-satellite communication, the scale of the whole world. In consequence also the scales related to time, culture and morals were transformed. Nowadays, within several or several dozen hours virtually everybody can move, travelling by plane, to any place on Earth, thus changing his or her scale of reference concerning language, culture, morals and beliefs. In various spaces of human communication and goods circulation also the scale of opportunities of human cooperation has extended. The development of industry, trade and services achieved the global scale – the scale about which man of the previous century, as manufacturer, seller and recipient, could only dream.

However, the electric light is the medium that has most altered the scale of communication in the recent decades. It is the medium that, as McLuhan observed, "escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no 'content.' … For electric light and power are separate from their uses, yet they eliminate time and space factors in human association exactly as do radio, telegraph, telephone, and TV."[29] The Internet functions within the same speed

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[28] Ibidem, p. 8.
[29] Ibidem, p. 9.

limits as radio or television, but changes the scales and references of its users' lives to an even greater degree. It is no longer necessary to travel personally in order to participate in meetings, discussions and conferences on the global scale, enjoying excellent quality sound and image. Here, the scale of the new media influence crossed its last limit, and it happened due to the communication medium, as "'the medium is the message' because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action."[30]

Unfortunately, while the world of the physical "space and time" can be narrowed, the mental and spiritual world has its own, well-defined distances and its own time necessary for it to mature. The lack of symmetrical compatibility between the scale and pace of human development and media development causes problems in both external and internal life of man at its different stages.

Change of pattern

The change of pace or rhythm of communication, the change of scale of its references eventually leads to the change of a pattern or model of life of the recipients of given media. McLuhan rightly observes that "a principle of acceleration at all levels of human organization … concerns especially those extensions of our physical bodies that appear in wheel and road and paper messages."[31] Steam ships, cars or electric railway effectively accelerated the model of community life. "The movie, by sheer speeding up the mechanical, carried us from the world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configurations and structures. The message of the movie medium is that of transition from lineal connections to configurations."[32] Later, "the airplane … by accelerating the rate of transportation, tends to dissolve the railway form of city, politics, and association, quite independently of what the airplane is used for."[33] However, the greatest acceleration of communication and information changes is accomplished by the additional flow of information, at the speed of light, through the nervous system; as a result "what emerges is a total field of inclusive awareness. The old patterns of psychic and social adjustment become irrelevant."[34] Under the influence of the media that carry information at the speed of light, the relationships and social functions change not only for individuals, but for whole communities. Media shape the image of reality they mediate. Canons, patterns, and paradigms alter. Templates, conventions, practices and ideals in the life of

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[30] Ibidem.
[31] Ibidem, p. 103.
[32] Ibidem, p. 12.
[33] Ibidem, p. 8.
[34] Ibidem, p. 104.

the individual and the community are transformed. Unfortunately, the change occurs in the recipient without an appropriate and conscious self-control on his part. It is in this form that the contemporary generation acquires the patterns they do not question, absorbing them, directly and indirectly, mainly from media messages. This happens imperceptibly, yet the effects may be surprising and, in some cases, terrifying. "The medium … of our time – electric technology – is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of personal life. … Everything is changing – you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, … your relation to 'the others.' … All media work us over completely … they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. … Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the ways media work as environments. All media are extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical. … The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act – the way we perceive the world."[35] The rhythm and scale of the media influence change, feelings and emotions change, customs and habits that consolidate those changes also change. One of the most effective ways to deepen our habits or transform them into other ones, new and old, is an appropriate number and frequency of repetitions. As scientific research confirm, about 40% of human activities undertaken every day are habitual and thus do not follow from consciously made decisions.[36] It can safely be said that "habits, as much as memory and reason, are at the root of how we behave. We might not remember the experiences that create our habits, but once they are lodged within our brains they influence how we act – often without our realization."[37] If this is the case, the conclusion is straightforward: Using the media, it is very easy to impose and change the patterns of behaviour and habits, and thus, in the long run, to transform models and patterns of life of the individual and the society. McLuhan stated: "any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary. Prediction and control consist in avoiding this subliminal state of Narcissus trance. But the greatest aid to this end is simply in knowing that the spell can occur immediately upon contact, as in the first bards of a melody."[38]

If in 1980's the Canadian scholar observed that the cultural matrix was changing and "our Western values, built on the written word, have already been

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[35] M. McLuhan, Q. Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, Random House, New York 1967, pp. 10-40. See also: K. Loska, *Dziedzictwo McLuhana – między nowoczesnością a ponowoczesnością*, Wydawnictwo Rabid, Kraków 2001, pp. 74-75.

[36] See D.T. Neal, W. Wood, J.M. Quinn, "Habits – A Repeat Performance," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol. 4 (2006) No. 15, pp. 198-202.

[37] C. Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*, Random House, New York 2012, p. 25.

[38] M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, op. cit., p. 15.

considerably affected by the electric media of telephone, radio, and TV,"[39] the question arises: What would he say today about the pattern-changing power of the global media of today?

The global village

Since the 1960's man has moved about in the world of electronic media and gadgets with greater assurance every day. It was enough, already then, to press the 'start' button, and the world of television or radio "belonged to us." Since then, thanks to the media, analogue or, currently, digital, the world has become very small. Thank to them, we are in a neighbourly relationship everywhere – even in the planetary perspective. In an instant we learn about an imminent hurricane in Florida, in the next – we can participate in a papal audience, and soon after find out about the best coffee in Paris, close to the Champs Élysées, and even order it on the phone or via the Internet. Not only has the world become small, but it is also more accessible and closer – closer to our minds and emotions on the extended scale. We have moved into the world of a global village. Why? After Johannes Gutenberg's revolutionary invention of print, for centuries the book was the most important medium. All the information and education was based on it. Many a man lived, ate, and died accompanied by the spirit of the book. Reading a book, page by page, an individual came into contact with experiences and feelings he or she attempted to actualize in his of her personal life. That world was changed by television, the medium which, due to its form of transferring messages, transformed the world of individual persons into that of one "tribe," interconnected by TV and living in the "global village."[40] In the already new world of the electronic media, where the media do not increase man's spatial powers, but rather abolish the spatial dimension,[41] man does not receive messages for himself, but is continuously bombarded with them. The 'tribal" man, as McLuhan describes him, is no longer interested in finding his "self-definition," but prefers to identify himself with a group. In the past, the teaching machine was the book, i.e. the information medium, today there are millions of such machines. In the past, an individual focused on one thing, now, through the multiplicity of the media, in an instant we are given millions of synchronized, distributed and controlled things and pieces of information. The world of the global village is emerging as the scales and reference centres are being altered. "Land powers can more easily attain a unified center-margin pattern than sea

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[39] Ibidem, p. 82.
[40] See M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2011, p. 36.
[41] See M.McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, op. cit., p. 255.

powers … Electric speeds create centers everywhere. Margins cease to exist on this planet."[42] All the recipients are given a package of standardized evaluations, feelings and similar impressions. McLuhan believed the task of the new media was providing the recipient with a fullness of sense experience by combining the audial, tactile and visual impressions, thus creating a situation in which involvement in the message was encouraged.[43] The senses, however, are a means, or a way to something more. The visionary of the media future wrote: "Our new electric technology that extends our senses and nerves in a global embrace has large implications for the future of language. Electric technology does not need words any more … Electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself, on a world scale, and without any verbalization whatever. … Language as the technology of human extension, whose powers of division and separation we know so well, may have been the 'Tower of Babel' by which man sought to scale the highest heavens. Today computers hold out the promise of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language."[44] McLuhan's technological predictions have been fulfilled, and the potential consequences have actually followed.

The extensions and threats of the contemporary media

The sixth information revolution, i.e., the information highway revolution, with an increase in the importance of computer and the Internet in 1990's, confirms the accuracy of McLuhan's insights into the nature, effects and 'striking power' of digital media. Today, to a much greater degree that in the Canadian scholar's time, we bathe in the sea of electromagnetic waves and clouds, surfing across sites, images and millions of changing pieces of information – which are changing us simultaneously – on the wave moving at the speed of light. The quantitative factor related to the effect of instantaneous media deepened and extended even more clearly towards the quality of reception and possibility of feedback information. After World War II less than 1% of American households had TV sets, in 1954 they were present in 50% of the households, to reach 90% in 1962,[45] whereas the first two decades of the 21st century, in America, Europe, Asia, but also in war-engulfed Syria, among the refugees, and in the Middle East, are characterized with almost full media saturation and general accessibility of the Internet, also via mobile phones. This exerts an accumu-

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[42] Ibidem, p. 91.

[43] See K. Loska, *Dziedzictwo McLuhana – między nowoczesnością a ponowoczesnością*, op. cit., p. 80.

[44] M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, op. cit., p. 80.

[45] See M. Giec, *Guerilla TV i wideo art jako narzędzia w walce z telewizyjnym establishmentem Stanów Zjednoczonych*, Images, Vol. 18, No. 27, Poznań 2016, p. 186.

lative quantitative and qualitative influence on us, although not all of us are aware of the fact. The foreseeable effect? The extension of electronic media by digital, interactive and hypertextual ones – as another and still higher degree of extending the human senses – results in a potentially higher possibility of their disequilibrium. As observations and different researches confirm, the 21st century men – but especially children and adolescents, particularly susceptible to those media – more and more often move from the real world into a virtual one, spending there several hours[46]. On the one hand, the change of pace, scale and pattern, accelerating even more, usefully keeps reducing space and abolishing "time distances;" on the other hand, however, it generates new and increasingly deeper social, moral, and spiritual problems. Unfortunately, in extreme cases, too frequent and imprudent use of those media imperceptibly leads to dependencies and pathologies, generating various habits; as a result, we no longer have to do with the problem of games, gambling or psychosomatic dependencies, but with the so-called Internet addiction, or pathological computer use[47]. Dependencies and various addictions that result from the uncontrolled use of media are numerous, especially as they are continuously fuelled by the contents and images offered free of charge on the Internet. The scenes of violence, aggression and pornography degrade the dignity of man and his integral development[48]. The consequences include intellectual impoverishment, foreshortening and reduction of thoughts limited to the vocabulary drawn from movies, TV series, or computer games. The crisis of moral-spiritual values leads to an unavoidable fall in the sense of beauty and aesthetic qualities. The virtual world is so easy, illusory and problem-free that media users become discouraged from doing anything but absorbing contents and patterns provided by those media. Through stationary and mobile screens (smartphones, mobile phones, other gadgets) the world of real communication is replaced with that of virtual communication. Losing control over the time spent in front of a computer or smartphone, people show less and less involvement in the life of their communities. In such a way this digital-virtual revolution that from the beginning of 21st century has been transforming human social and individual life at all its levels, exposes man to imperceptible, hidden, institutionalized communication--information hegemony, where the Internet and new media become – to a much greater degree than television or other, earlier electronic media – an extremely effective instrument of ideological discourse, persuasion, and even control over

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[46] See M. Jędrzejko, D. Morańska, *Cyfrowi Tubylcy (socjopedagogiczne aspekty nowych technologii cyfrowych)*, Wydawnictwo ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2013. p. 233.

[47] See ibidem, pp. 252-255.

[48] See A. Wrona, Cyberseks – ciemna strona sieci w: Człowiek w świecie rzeczywistym i wirtualnym, pod red. A. Andrzejewskiej, J. Bednarka, S. Ćmiel, Wydawnictwo WSGE, Józefów 2013, pp. 123-124.

public opinion and individuals. The final effect of a sustained influence of this type of messages on man is not only a decrease in the sensitivity of the recipients, but also their encapsulation in an artificially created world of aesthetic illusions, which, as Marshall McLuhan observed, leads to deep changes in the human ego and the emergence of technological consciousness.[49] Sadly, this is a process of appropriating minds and manipulating public opinion, calculated at achieving diverse, often hidden goals.

Conclusions

It is true that one cannot blame the achievements of science and technology for the sins of those who use them incompetently. Communication technology products, also contemporary ones, are axiologically ambiguous, i.e., they are neither good nor bad in themselves; their value depends on how and for what purpose they are used. However, if their goal is to be the real good of man, their recipient – not only in the case of the medium of television where, already during its golden years, the broadcaster aimed at an effective change in the recipients' attitudes and behaviours, but even more so in the case of the contemporary, new media – should be aware of their nature, and especially of their hidden modes of influence. The recipient must not forget that those media, being valuable and useful extensions of his senses, are also, starting from a certain point, an extremely accurate and sensitive extension of his nervous system, and consequently of his whole inner world: his consciousness, memory, imagination, emotions, and will. Every recipient of those media should remember that, in the long perspective, the impact of the form of those media, which imposes a definite pace, scale, and pattern of life model, is even stronger that the influence of a given content.

The contemporary world – in which we are completely, on a global scale, enveloped with various nets and transmitters, both at home, at work, and in our leisure time, surfing on the broadband Internet – constitutes an entirely new life environment, changing the current rules, principles, and patterns. The 21st century-media, characterized not only by immediate action, but also by digital quality and interactive communication, may border – and, unfortunately, this is often the case – on deliberate, while concealed, spiritual engineering, imperceptibly creating a virtual world that effectively confines the recipients in the cell of various customs, habits, and dependencies. Considering such hypotheses and the observations that confirm them, one can sadly repeat the claims Max Horkheimer made in 1960's, suggesting that the promises, i.e.,

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[49] See M. McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, Beacon Press, Boston 1967, p. 33.

scientific progress, rationality, and the development of the idea of human freedom, often change man's life into a nightmare. Regrettably, also science itself, technological achievements, and even the most perfect communication media may successfully be used to suppress human freedom, consciousness, and true, complementary development.

To oppose those tendencies and to withstand the great striking force of the contemporary media – that are even more attractive, precise, three-dimensional than the earlier ones – it is necessary to develop even greater vigilance and a critical, penetratingly conscious approach to using them. This meta-awareness, indispensible in dealing with all the levels of messages transmitted by various media, must concern both their content and their form. It is necessary to be able to read their messages in depth, understand their nature, and stay in contact with the true spiritual-material reality for which the media should remain a mere instrument and means to higher goals. What is at stake here is the development and the real good of man and society – the true good of every one of us.

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Summary:

The hidden, at first glance imperceptible nature of the 20th-century electronic media, and, to an even greater degree, of the digital media of 21st century, often becomes a cause of threats that may bring painful results. Such results, generated by the uninformed use of the media, are related not only to the transmitted contents, but also, in particular, to the form of the media influence. This is due to the fact that, as Marshall McLuhan observes, the media constitute special extensions of the human senses that, by nature, are part of the nervous system. If the equilibrium of the human

senses is purposefully disturbed in the way controlled by those media, e.g., through various games, the effects on the user are easy to foresee. Together with the claim that "the medium is the message," the Canadian media scholar shows that a change in the form of a given medium entails a change in the pace, scale, pattern, and model of life related to this medium. All those change accelerations produce a definite yet imperceptible effect, transforming patterns of behaviour and habits, and by the same token converting the model, routines, conventions, paradigms, practices, and ideals present in the life of an individual and a society. Therefore, in a long perspective, it is the form of a medium that exerts a generally much more determining influence on the changes than the contents transmitted. If we consider the global scale and a growing potential for manipulation, especially in the context of the new media, the perspective of their impact becomes immense and, as it opposes the complementary development of the human being, may generate far-reaching threats.

Keywords: mass media, communication, form, scale, model.

Natura mediów masowych i zagrożenia związane z ich wpływem w świetle głównych tez teorii Marshalla McLuhana

Streszczenie:

Ukryta, niedostrzegalna na pierwszy rzut oka natura mediów elektronicznych XX wieku, a tym bardziej cyfrowych XXI wieku, staje się niejednokrotnie przyczyną bolesnych w skutkach zagrożeń, jakie te media, nieświadomie używane, mogą generować z perspektywy nie tylko treści, ale szczególnie formy oddziaływania. Bierze się to stąd, że jak zauważa Marshall McLuhan, są one szczególnym przedłużenie ludzkich zmysłów z natury swej przechodzących w system nerwowy. Gdy w sposób świadomy i zamierzony przez te media reżyseruje się zaburzenie równowagi zmysłów za pomocą np. gier, efekty u odbiorcy są łatwe do przewidzenia. Wraz z tezą: „*medium is the message*" (środek przekazu sam jest przekazem) kanadyjski medioznawca uzasadnia, że zmiana formy określonego medium pociąga za sobą zarazem zmianę tempa, skali, wzorca i modelu życia, jaki to medium wnosi. Wszystkie powyższe zmiany i ich przyspieszenia przynoszą określony, ale niezauważalny skutek, zmieniając wzorce zachowań i nawyków, a przez to konwertując model, szablony, konwencje, paradygmaty, praktyki i ideały życia jednostki i społeczeństwa. Dlatego w dłuższej perspektywie to właśnie forma medium jest ogólnie o wiele bardziej determinująca zmiany niż treść jego przekazu. Gdy dodamy do tego skalę globalną oraz jeszcze większe możliwości manipulacyjne szczególnie nowych mediów, perspektywa ich oddziaływania staje się olbrzymia i może to generować daleko idące w skutkach zagrożenia, stojące w opozycji do komplementarnego rozwoju człowieka.

Słowa kluczowe: media, komunikacja, forma, skala, model.