
MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR FOSTERING VALUES IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

The media have an important role in shaping social consciousness. The media influence our perception of the world and thus the value structure that we create. Contemporary culture is dominated by images of electronic media. The audience is confronted with a world of real and invented events, stories and finally values that belong to the space and time that do not concern it. Humanity as well as an individual inherits a network of socio-cultural and moral traditions. Contemporary media transmit them as if truth has lost its value as a moral decision and exhausted its logic and importance. Our time is different. The nature of communications and media from the recent past is being replaced by a new and different reality which has been enabled by the new technology of electronic media. The values are reduced to a minimum or completely lost. The authors of this paper seek to provide insight into the possibilities of using media in the process of disseminating the moral values. At the same time, they reflect the change in the anthropology of communication caused by the rapid development and implementation of new types of electronic media.

Keywords: media, values, secularization, self-reflection

1. Introduction

The scientific and technological progress and the rate of change in all spheres of human society that we have witnessed, especially in the last century, have permanently marked the direction of social and cultural processes taking place in it. Global changes affect human - the individual thinking, the moral and spiritual dimension as well as the interpersonal relationships. Communication is an essential part of a person's life activity and creates a clear distinction with one's natural environment as V. Flusser stated: "... forget the loneliness and meaninglessness of life to death, and thus make his life worth living" [1] and also allows him/her to relate to the world, by joining a new, massive structure. This new dimension changed the social, political and economic structure of society during the 19th and early 20th century which was significantly dependent on satisfying the information needs of individuals and groups reflecting the

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transformation of the political and socio-cultural reality [2]. The Industrial Revolution with its main goal to produce material goods, by mechanization of production gave birth to a class of industrial workers possessing specific personal and social relationships. Its members were mostly people from rural environments, where they could not find a job and came to the cities to find it. "Slow, traditional and gregarious ways of life receded faster, secularized urban life and at the same time it strongly developed social activities" [3] which re-worked intensively on the character and quality of life of individuals. It began as a result of changes in perception of their status in society and had an important transformational affect. The world of the survival through family closeness and immobile social roles or classifications gradually began to disappear.

The gradual secularization of the 21th century in the Western World is projected mainly on the social capital of individuals, which are understood to be a set of relationships held by the family and the individual himself. We can say that this is actually a social network that can be used as needed [4]. In contemporary world, the social network is in most cases associated with the use of the Internet and multimedia, in which there is an absolute absence of body and absolutely no need of the physical presence of the sender/receiver.

2. The lost significance of values

Internet and new media exploiting advances in information and communication technology came into our lives and quickly changed the 'old' values and the models of humans' relationship to themselves. We are tired of an electronic culture and images [5]. We are dealing with real and invented stories and events that our mood naturally values outside of space and time, which would not otherwise touch us.

Value is characteristic to social or natural phenomena, which has a positive or negative relevance to human society. Value phenomenon results from the fact that the bearer of certain social relations is linked to human interests and acts as a landmark, governing everyday practical work. Nowadays issue of moral values can also be described in terms of absence/loss. In other words, values do not have to refer to what because a media reality is the actual reality. We live in a 'context without reality' that means that new media have begun to build relationships through the screen (television, computer). People do not longer socialize in person, but through the monitor.

Old contexts are not reformulated, but often deformed. Historical development of the concept of value dates back to ancient Greece where they used the term 'Axia' (value). Axiology (the science of values, H. Lotze, F. Brentano) is a philosophical discipline that deals with defining the system and the hierarchy of values and their relationship to society and the individual. According to H. Lotze, values affect the human perception and cognition [6]. However, it is necessary to take into account the various sciences, such as Ethics which is viewed in terms of the values of morality, Aesthetics in terms of aesthetic experience, and so on. The values that a person recognizes and follows

reflect his/her character and his/her overall mindset. Values express the relationship of objective reality to our needs and interests, and we appreciate them whether are able to satisfy our natural and societal needs and interests [7].

Values evolve over time, that is, are socially and societal variable. In childhood we learn how we should behave, what is appropriate and what is not - we learn the value patterns. Values are related to our nature, but their true meaning is determined in the actual environment. We are born with our character and nature, but values are gradually learnt. In Philosophy, in general, we understand the importance we attach to a thing, or action, on the basis that we can satisfy our needs.

Psychology applies a different approach to values. Its task is to detect mental phenomena, which include processes, properties and conditions that determine or help to form, reshape or change the values. They are closely related to our interests, attitudes and needs. While interest implies a value, the value can exist in the absence of the interest.

Sociology divides the value between environmental and cultural. The basic life values are considered to be health, prosperity, recognition, family happiness, interesting work, etc. [8]. Life values are very subjective and vary from case to case. Hierarchy of life values generated during the life of an individual is based on his experience and the society, in which the individual moves, and therefore the environment in which they can develop values. Reasonable basis of classification values performs quite naturally in compliance with the essential areas of contemporary social life, for which the area is considered material (socio-economic), social-political, spiritual and everyday life.

Before becoming Pope, John Paul II talked about the media as forms of social communication. In 2005, as Pope, John Paul II began to talk about 'culture' that is born from the mere fact of the existence of new forms of communication and unprecedented techniques and means of expression rather than the particular content message. John Paul II found that our epoch is the epoch of global communications, in which many moments of life intersect with media processes, or they must have at least confront [9]. He also mentions the formation of personality and the conscience, the interpretation of emotional ties or dissemination of cultural phenomena.

Fading values and their need for re-entry into the life of a person existing in this postmodern era brings new challenges in terms of search for truth. In order to become familiar with reality and find the right path, the individual has various sources and teachings of the Church with a long tradition. We are witnessing a renaissance and implementation of Eastern teachings (such as Buddhism), but also a tendency to modify the Christian doctrine, founded by Jesus Christ. Comparing Eastern and Western religions, however, brings us to the elementary and constant basis:

- building, maintaining and developing a relationship with God,
- love of parents (family), neighbours and all the people,

- respect for oneself, doing good and living in accordance with the rules of the faith.

The Universal Code, which defines and summarizes the points over two thousand years of professed Christians, is represented by the Ten Commandments. And what could be more valuable for an individual whose existence is based on the context of Christian-Jewish tradition? Not everyone is able to spread and adhere to live the Ten Commandments. The current values are considered to be dependent on the context, which includes the media. The nature of the functioning of the media is to make profit and not to form values. In hyper reality, we tend to lose all the old links associated with the values and virtues (one quality has been replaced by a new, completely different one).

What would be the space around us, if we did not refill it by ideologies, religions, and orientations? The whole world could be re-designed. The system of signs is also made up of the decision of man. The world is not only an objective illusion but it is a picture of an individual. The basic requirement is to learn self-reflection, which in turn allows the evaluation the outside world. Influence on him/her may be only marginal. The problem arises because we all know that the model is not self-reflection.

The ongoing crisis will affect not only the economic and financial spheres. In principle, it is the cultural and anthropological crisis. The individual is in crisis - having believed that he/she reached the age of maturity but is no longer able to find myself. Secularism means prioritizing your life in a world without God.

Personal life is built, regardless of religious perspective that is kept into the private sphere and does not affect the personal, social and civic relationships in life [10]. Media content is no longer governed by any doctrine that would warrant values. Commercial channels broadcast their programs with the prospect of the biggest audience that is associated with advertising. Television doesn't broadcast high-quality programs in prime-time, because it could lose profit. It seems that only newsy or interactive program can guarantee the audience.

Media products can perform the following values: cognitive (epistemological), semantic, heuristic, diagnostic, inspirational, motivational, etc. This means that television products can spread the cultural, aesthetic and religious values. Media practice shows that the values are distributed, but they are not always accepted by the urban audience. A common problem is an uninteresting content, which could carry as reference value. We all live in mutual relations and interactions. The media are trying to dissolve old relationships and traditional values. Every relationship carries a greater freedom, but also a greater uncertainty. Human relationships seem easy to change and allow the media to enter more easily into our lives.

In the traditional society, our decisions were always determined by past experience. Our traditions looked like the same experience of humankind. Traditions should protect and guarantee the continuity and transmission of values. Nowadays individual is marked by a vision of his own independence. Individual thoughts and actions are limited only at this moment. There is a

completely new situation in which to replace the existing values, particularly those that express Christianity. A man without God loses himself. The only face he sees is his/her, but it is too little so we can be considered free.

According to J. Baudrillard we do not only live in a time of rituals and rules, but we do not live even in the era of the act and the validity of contracts concluded. According to him, we have no term to describe what came and replaced the actual social conscience of people and “now we live in the real minimum and maximum feeling of social simulation” [11].

What if the values are inherited with the genetic code and so they are a part of our heritage? What will be passed on to our future generations? Or else what will they inherit from the digital media world? Can we only agree with J. Baudrillard, that we live only the balance of the world in which it was executed the perfect crime? According to J. Baudrillard, it was a crime so perfect that we see only the ‘perfection’ all around us [12]. Nobody noticed that the reality has been gone. Of course, we see it every time humans change and when the Social Sciences are developed through breakthroughs. But today is only a simulation game. Values are finding themselves in the simulation and their original historic importance is being marginalized.

3. Communication and interpersonal relations in the era of multimedia

A possible way out of the frustrating reality simulation and resolving vanishing values is rediscovering the power of Christ’s gospel and its dissemination through the media. Postmodern era dominates the world of information of which the society has become dependent. The key elements for this transfer are electronic media and multimedia [13]. The removal of space-time boundaries allows immediate exchange of information and it has been replaced by the social relations between people, as when using the Internet and the mobile phones, people can not only hear, but also see each others.

In the electronic age of instant communication, the electronic media almost instantly transform culture, values and relationships. According to M. McLuhan, the electronic media change the psycho-social conditions of life and human behaviour, becoming the extensions of the human senses. By extending its senses through the media, the human nervous system is being changed/shaped, as well as all the aspects of our social and psychological existence, including the area of relationships [14].

As J. Lohisse explains : “L’informalité est le système de communication où un langage machiné privilégie et est privilégié par une société à mentalité collective virtualisante et à structure sociétale cellulisée.” (*L’informalité* is a communication system where the machine language privileges and is privileged by a virtual collective mentality and a cellular society structure.) [15]

J. Lohisse puts a fundamental question: Is the advent of new technology able to shake the fundamental configuration of relationships between people? The technical and technological aspects of communication, according to him, are reflected in the spectrum of social relations, which are becoming ‘cellular’: “the

individuals alone with their computer monitors engage in dialogue in the world only through the commands entered on the keyboard” [15, p. 180].

Communicating through electronic media constructs cyberspace (Technopole), which blurs the traditional notions of time and space and the links between them. The cyber technology with artificial intelligence, ability to act and the self-reproducing prospects shapes the virtual reality. According to J. Lohisse, cyberspace brings the ‘cellular’ company and its configuration within the interpersonal relationships, where individuals are linked to each other by electronic or photonic informatics bonds without the physical presence of the communicating entities.

The social structure of ‘l’informalité’ leads to the birth of a new individualism, which is only slightly based on social consensus. An individual is torn from the social structure and enclosed in an abstract virtual world, which reduces the meaning and function of social relations to a minimum. Mediated communication despite advantages such as speed, efficiency, saving time and energy heads to the depersonalization of humans and a weakening of social ties. Experience shows that the emergence of new media causes negative feelings such as worries among people.

4. Conclusions

The first means of evangelization is the witness of Christian life in which a person devotes to God, yet with unlimited zeal loves the neighbour. New technologies certainly will not replace the testimony of life in fidelity to Christ - but may help spreading this testimony. We live in the information society and we cannot predict what changes will bring the new media within the society, social relationships, thoughts and actions of human beings. The highest representatives of the Catholic Church attributed to new media a great power and a potential that could be used in spreading the Gospel of Christ, witness and, not at least, values.

Pope John Paul II during the pontificate was aware of the need to use the Internet and to integrate it within the communication efforts of Church: “The Church is not only invited to use the media to spread the Gospel, but more than ever before to integrate the message of salvation to the ‘new’ culture that is spreading through the media.” [9, p. 24]. Benedict XVI urges young people to the responsibly use of Internet, but the philosophy and the context of his own thinking leaves us an important message: the search for Truth is the highest sense of social communication. “Effect of communication on the life of contemporary man raises vital questions that require immediate responses and decisions. [...] You might even say that the search for truth and transmission of man is the highest sense of social communication.” [9, p. 15].

Communication between people as well as communication within social structures is now carried out mainly through electronic media and multimedia. Despite numerous criticisms of this form of communication by experts, new media have an important role in the private and public life of individuals [16].

The values of media products depend primarily on their producers. On the other hand, the content of media products reflects the requirements and tastes of the audience. The virtual world created by multimedia doesn't deprive us of the obligation to know the complexity of reality in the information society. New media make a new sense of hope. They shape a new generation of tools that can be used for the development of education and transfer of values as well.

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