

## EDITORIAL

### *Faculty of Mass Media Communication as an honourable partner of scientific discourse in Slovakia*

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The representatives of the academic community, media theorists and media professionals met for the tenth time in April 2015 at the international *Megatrends and Media* professional conference held at Smolenice Castle. The primary theme of the conference, organised annually by the Faculty of Mass Media Communication, was 'Media Farm – Totems and Taboo'. The driving force behind our decision to focus on this central concept is the fact that the media scene is undergoing a process of transformation from serious opinion-forming print to a populist tabloid format. Despite the transformation, some limits of good taste and morality as formulated by psychoanalysts and behaviourists when examining totems and taboos of traditional cultures should remain. An elitist approach and the efforts of media creators to reach the educated audience have fallen significantly by the wayside in current media landscape. Tabloid media, and now more frequently serious media, attempt to attract and keep the attention of mainstream recipients at any cost. The intellectual, cultural or economic elites are no longer their primary target group. Conversely, the elites are subjected to a lack of interest and ignorance in the best case, while in the worst case they are the object of scandal, negativism and the satisfaction of the voyeuristic tendencies of the mass public. An accompanying phenomenon of this development is the stereotyping and standardisation of human needs, wishes, principles, preferences and desires, thereby allowing the media to ensure the flexible and efficient commoditisation of the attention of members of the public and facilitate the sales of advertising to clients thanks to this artificially generated attention.

More than half a century ago, Conrad Black, the former owner of The Daily Telegraph said: "What good is owning a newspaper if you don't have any say in what it covers?" This statement remains contemporary in any era in which media has and continues to dominate, include the ages of print, radio, television and new media. The essence of this proclamation remains the same regardless of political changes, ownership matters or the metamorphosis of creative principles within the production of media content. It highlights the basic principles of the biased handling and processing of information and the mercenary interests of ownership structures. Just as we were witness to the application of blatant censorship practices that facilitated the production of coarse propaganda for centralised power in the era of large autocratic regimes, we are now witnessing

the contradiction of two different realities in this age of democratic regimes. We reflect the nearly dogmatic dissemination of the textbook ideology regarding the freedom of the media and uncensored practices, the independence of media entities and content creators and strict compliance with the codes of journalistic ethics, etc. However, more and more researchers are also taking a critical stance with respect to the activities of contemporary and primarily private media. They emphasise the dangerous influence that ownership structures have on the decision making processes of media management as the most serious defect in media and journalistic production. Other manifestations include, for instance, servility towards the owner, corrupt conduct and practices, the application of refined manipulation methods and techniques when working with information, plagiarism, knowingly disseminating rumours, withholding the facts, defamation, slander, and more.

The virtual space provided by information technologies and the Internet in particular has put society into a completely new situation that has forced us to reassess the definition of what is right and what is wrong. The constraints of the physical world disappear on the Internet in a fog of new opportunities, the virtual essence of commodities, individual consumption without social control and anonymity. While the use of another person's property without their knowledge is not tolerated in the physical world, this has become common practice online. Behaviour on the internet is the same as any other form of behaviour, but there are no relevant parallels in the physical world for many of our activities.

Our world is more real than it has ever been before. That statement is not to be taken superficially or with any hint of irony. We are not trying in any way to generate criticism of reality or take anything from its status. The basic essence of our time is that it is free of any dogmatism. This may first appear a paradox as opponents note that our thinking in this contemporary age is so deformed by these influences that reality as a term has lost its seriousness and adequacy. Our historical epoch is an age of opportunity that remains unused. We can choose one future over another. However, we live under the social microscope of 'those others', which changes our perception of the world, and identity is no exception.

The Faculty of Mass Media Communication decided to bring a new dimension to scientific and practical discourse. We will not rest in our efforts and continue to raise topics that contribute to such advancements and are happy to continue presenting them in international forums. The *Megatrends and Media* conference has become the forum for our faculty's presentation activities. The conference is also the traditional event for awarding the *Marián Matyáš Pomegranate* award to students who made major contributions to the development of the faculty or who conducted significant media work. We began publishing the creative *MUUZA* almanac in 2009 and it has been recognised several times over with the *Most Beautiful Slovak Book* award. In the same year we created *Communication Today*, which has become an internationally recognised scientific periodical indexed in a number of prestigious databases. Every communication channel or medium has its users and audience and forms

of communication naturally integrate the process of furnishing and obtaining new knowledge. The Faculty of Mass Media Communication is aware of these aspects and strives to satisfy the needs of its supporters. The establishment of the scientific periodical transformed the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at UCM in Trnava into a site where the spirit of science systematically developed and the results of this scientific work are furnished in the form of a representative medium. The challenge for us was the fact that such a scientific periodical had never existed in Slovakia and probing efforts into the environment indicated that we had to offer readers and the professional public something more in order to succeed and to endure.

The faculty also has its own motto: 'Be better!' No limits are placed on knowledge or on imagination and we open doors to resolve the problems that exist in the areas that suffer from a lack of critical mass underneath the layer of consumption accepted by the majority. Criticism is only the first step as interpretation, application and a final step, normativity, are all important within methodology. This also represents a reference point for our faculty's efforts. We continue to strengthen our standing internationally. It does not, however, allow us to accept the status quo as many more milestones and dimensions to be achieved remain in front of us.

The University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius and its Faculty of Mass Media Communication are the embodiment of the inspirational example offered by Ss. Cyril and Methodius: being diplomatic in the proclamation of new postulates, and being clear, constructive and beneficial to the construction of the ideological concept of contemporary society.

## **Dr. Martin Solík**

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