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# THE HUMAN BEING IN THE MYTHOLOGICAL SPACE OF MEDIA CULTURE REALITIES AND PROSPECTS

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## **Abstract**

The author examines the special role of media culture as a phenomenon in the age of information, which has a serious influence on education and upbringing. Mass media have created a new sociocultural environment for a human being - a parallel, 'virtual' world. The author proves that the artificially created media reality is essentially mythological. This shows that myth remains a kind of control mechanism. Penetrating the inner world of a person, it 'programs' it and affects the conscious and subconscious spheres. Therefore, the 'ecology of culture' in the media space becomes a matter of great significance today. It has an important factor - the system of media education, whose object and subject are a 'media person' - a new type of personality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Keywords:* communication, technologies, media environment, cyberspace, myth

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## **1. Introduction**

The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries is notable for the intensive distribution of information and communication technologies, which contribute to the creation of a global media environment and influence the development of the society and international cultural connections. An urgent problem is the growing role of media culture - a new phenomenon of the epoch, actively affecting public conscience as a powerful means of information, cultural and educational contacts, as well as a generator of personal creative evolution. Media culture is not only a culture of production and transfer of information but also a culture of its perception. It can appear as an indicator of the development of a person capable of analysis, evaluation of a particular media text, being engaged in media creativity and acquiring new knowledge through media. The latter is obvious, since the digital photo, film and television, multimedia technologies, computer channels, mobile communications and the Internet provide a person with an opportunity for individual interaction with the screen, aiming to both implement their creative ideas and learn the world around them.

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However, on the other hand, due to the increase in the amount of information, its randomness, which is becomes impossible to fully perceive, 'clip' (fragmentary) perception and consciousness are formed. The downside of this process is the loss of a holistic picture of the world. Clip thinking opens the way for destructive activities, permissiveness, which leads not only to Internet addiction, but also to cognitive distortions and alienation of the individual. That is why the study of the 'ecology of culture' in the media space, of which media education is an important factor, is acquiring great importance today.

Using the comparative-historical method, as well as the method of theoretical analysis, we aim to examine the interaction between the person and the myth in the space of media culture, the coexistence of the real and the mythological in the age of information, as well the role of media education as a factor of further development of personality and society.

## **2. Media reality as a mythological space**

Having emerged as a means of information transfer, mass media increasingly arrogate the function of creating a new sociocultural environment of a human being – a parallel, 'virtual' world, which is often perceived as an objective reality. As sociologist M. Castells notes, "the reality... is completely captured, completely immersed in virtual images, in a fictitious world..." [1]. One can agree with K. Razlogov that research on the 'information space', which has become an intellectual basis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, "is a culturological problem because it includes technological, social and artistic factors that intertwine precisely in the sphere of culture in its broad anthropological understanding" [2].

The cultural and educational environment has acquired a media character. Information and communication technologies have firmly taken their place in the educational process. A powerful distance learning network has been created. 'Virtual museums', electronic archives and e-books have become widespread. The preservation of cultural monuments increasingly occurs in the digital format.

Nevertheless, the media reality, created by the human and the entire course of the digital revolution, has an impact on the formation of opposite social, moral and aesthetic norms and values, existing in the society. Sociologist N. Luhmann pointed out this dual impact of mass media, arguing that "we are dealing with one of the consequences of functional differentiation in modern society" [3]. It seems that this also explains the contradictions between young people and the older generation, appearing in the process of mediatisation. The former rapidly develop the new media reality, while the latter focus on traditional spiritual values.

On the rise of attention to the problems of artificial reality, back in 1981, sociologist J. Baudrillard wrote his famous treatise 'Simulacra and Simulation'. In this work, he stated that humanity had embraced the era of 'total simulation', where the real sign is substituted by simulacra [4]. Following Baudrillard, philosopher V. Savchuk argues that "information lives simulating knowledge"

whereas ‘reality dissolves into hyperreality’. These results in the following: “a person retreats in the world of secondary images and any attempt to search for a referent refers directly or indirectly to the mass media reality” [5].

An artificially created media reality is nothing more than a communicative system, which connects a person with objective reality. Moreover, a modern person undoubtedly sees themselves as a rational being. However, regardless of them, their ideas about the world at the level of the ‘unconscious’ are of clearly mythological nature. Explaining this phenomenon, E. Cassirer noted that a person does not confront reality directly. They rather live among imaginary emotions, their hopes and fears, their own fantasies and dreams [6]. This means that there is a mediator between the reality and the person, which helps them to perceive it and to develop a particular attitude towards it.

As it was noted above, one of these forms is the media. Another form is a myth understood as fiction, illusion, in which reality might be ‘packed’. This function was emphasized by R. Barthes in his book ‘Mythologies’: “Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no ‘<<substantial>>’ ones... The Universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions...” [7]. N. Boltz, a researcher of cultural communication, believes that “the mass media replace myths as the horizon of the world”, performing for us “a preliminary choice of things that exist... This way, a world of simplified cause-and-effect relations appears for the consumer.” [8] It is the mass media that create myths, which help the person to make sense of the real world. However, myths create the human themselves. M. Mamardashvili, one of the brightest philosophers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, identified myth as a ‘machine of culture’. He believed that “a human being is an artificial being, born not by nature, but self-created through culturally invented devices, such as rituals, myths, magic and so on, which are not a theory of the world, but a way of construction of a human being from the natural, biological material” [9]. Therefore, myth is not just a mediator between the human and the reality. Myth, in a way, is a control mechanism: it manipulates the human, penetrating their inner world, as well as into their conscious and subconscious spheres. Myth ‘programs’ the human, allowing them to ‘organize their worldview’, adapting them to the conditions of life.

Philosopher and theologian P. Florensky once noted that a human being is “the centre of the ideal world and the real world” [10]. However, the media reality as space, where the person lives today, is unlikely to be called ‘ideal’.

The explosive development of the media industry and spontaneous, chaotic introduction of a person from an early age to media products (video games, films, animation, comics, shows, video clips, etc.), focused mainly on entertainment and ‘consumption’, do not contribute to the formation of media culture of an individual. The question is: What kind of phenomenon is this? Homo medium – ‘one-dimension person’ [11]? ‘Homo ludens’ [12]? Mediamaniac (by analogy with ‘bibliophile’, ‘melomaniac’, ‘cinophile’) or an inter-subject of the new media reality? This question has no definite answer.

That is why the relationship between the person and mass media remains controversial both in theoretical and practical aspects.

### **3. The human being between reality and myth**

Throughout the history of human civilization, the society sought to improve the biological nature of the human being both spiritually and physically, searching for ways to settle the relationship between the human and the artificially created cultural environment.

All attempts by ancient philosophy to create ideal models of coexistence in the frames ‘man and nature’, ‘man and society’, ‘man and man’ and ‘man and culture’, were limited to the ideals of harmony, order and proportion. At the same time, the foundation of the ancient culture was ancient Greek mythology – a set of narrations about the man’s place in the Universe, the Universe’s creation, history and structure. Based on mythology, ethical norms were developed, which identified the role of the man in the existing world order. Every aspect of human life was a subject to divine laws. Social life, politics, art and entertainment – all of these were under the auspices of gods. Nothing happened without their knowledge, permission and help. The Olympian gods were distinguished, above all, by their immortality and eternal youth. They were powerful and could change the destiny of the man. ‘The Iliad’ and ‘The Odyssey’ by Homer (the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC) and ‘The Theogony’ by Hesiod (the late 8<sup>th</sup> – early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) remain the oldest monuments of Greek mythology. They narrate about the origin of the world and the birth of the Greek gods. A monumental work that describes the Greek myths is ‘The Metamorphoses’ by Ovid (the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC). In this poem, the author presented his own version of mythology and history from the birth of matter from chaos to the Roman emperor Octavian Augustus [13].

Christianity, which developed in the Early Middle Ages as a monotheistic religion, teaches that the man was created in the image and likeness of God. At the basis of Christianity is the faith in Jesus Christ as the God-man, the Saviour, who atoned the sins of people by his martyrdom. The ideological basis of Christianity is the mythological texts of the Bible, including the Old and New Testaments.

Therefore, mythology, both ancient and Christian, provided answers to questions arising in one’s life and mind and resolved one’s urgent problems.

In the Middle Ages, when the ideas of Christianity were cultivated, the essence of the man was determined by their spiritual dimension – the degree of their proximity to the divine principle. The Renaissance formed the concept of an ‘ideal’ as the harmony of spirit and body, intelligence and morality. Later, at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the apologist of idealistic philosophy and the author of the theory of dialectics, Hegel developed his formula: “The ideal is a special, recognized being” [14]. Unfortunately, today humanity practically abandoned the concept of ‘ideal’, which leads to a number of social problems.

Regarding the evolution of the relationship between the human and myth, one should pay special attention to the aspects of sociocultural reality, which were determinant for individual development in different historical periods. Thus, academician D. Likhachev in one of his later works focused on the problem of preservation of the cultural environment: "If nature is essential for a man for his biological life, then the cultural environment is just as necessary for his spiritual, moral life..." [15]. Likhachev's anxiety is understandable: the modern person exists in a rather contradictory, to some extent even aggressive to him media environment.

The fact that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the age of the information 'explosion', while "the Earth compressed by the force of electricity became no more than a village", has become an axiom [16]. These images were introduced by sociologist G.M. McLuhan to justify the onset of a new era in the history of mankind. Namely, the information age, in the context of which the total power of mass media is established. A new sociocultural civilization resulted in the emergence of 'mass culture', 'mass society', 'mass consciousness' and 'mass man', which were actively criticized in the works by H. Ortega-Gasset [17], the representatives of the Frankfurt school T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer [18], G. Marcuse [11], E. Fromm [19] and J. Habermas [20]. Their criticism of the social order was propelled by not only world wars and the misfortunes caused by but also by the influence of mass culture on public consciousness as a kind of drug that leads a person away from reality and contributes to personal levelling.

The myths of mass culture presuppose unification and simplification of the global picture, a focus on the stereotypes of being. If the classical myths intended to explain both reality and the motives of human behaviour, modern myths completely replace reality with an artificially created matrix. Directors L. and E. Wachowski imaginatively showed the essence of this phenomenon in their cyber-thriller 'The Matrix' (USA–Australia, 1999). This popular to this day film aims to prove that the person has long been living in a virtual world created by powerful artificial intelligence controlling people's existence.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated that the main and most successful media channels for distribution of myths are cinema and television. They pumped into society both political and social myths, including the hero myth, the myth of Superman and myths of success, which fitted into the context of time. The digital revolution, the integration of computer and the Internet into everyday life, as well as the multimedia systems, have strengthened the mythological component of the media reality, urging an individual to 'balance' constantly between the artificial and the real world.

The question is: What are the mechanisms of interaction in the semantic triangle 'man – media reality – society'? In other words, how is the media person formed?

A human being is a product of the cultural environment. The environment is integral to their socialization and enculturation. In this framework, the individual is both the object and the subject of social relations. As for the media environment, it can be a mechanism of targeted socialization (through the

system of preschool, school and university education and upbringing). However, a media environment that combines several macro- and micro- levels (global, national, regional, etc.) is more free and chaotic. It offers to the individual a broader scope for the formation of their identity.

A virtual reality (cyberspace) today is an important factor in the sociocultural environment for children, teenagers and young people. On the one hand, it includes interactive educational programs, electronic simulators, textbooks and books. On the other hand, it includes a variety of interactive entertainment and services, manifesting itself through various video games, video clips, commercials, TV shows, etc. The virtual environment forms a special type of communication, which is carried out via the Internet, which, according to M. Castells, is a “universal social space of free communication” [21]. This communication has its own specific features, including negative ones:

1. It is associated with the limitation of emotional impressions related to meeting other people in cyberspace.
2. Anonymity and plurality of the I-representations lead to the fact that the recipient often strives to become ‘an invisible person’ in order to ‘peep’ into a virtual ‘keyhole’, to be called by any name, to put on any virtual ‘mask’, etc.
3. The blurring of the spatial boundaries enables users with asocial motivation to find each other and unite.
4. Long-term ‘meditation’ in front of the computer screen contributes to the formation of computer and Internet addiction on the background of sociophobia.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries all over the world, first, under the influence of cinema and then under the influence of television, video, computer and the Internet, the so-called ‘screen generation’ appeared. Describing the extraordinary power of screen culture over the minds and souls of millions, K. Razlogov introduced a metaphorical image: “Screen as a meat grinder of cultural discourse” [22].

One can agree with D. Likhachev, who believed in the great importance of the ‘ecology of culture’ [15] in artistic creation, that is, in the active sociocultural regulation of the communication system, including its perception and impact. One of the factors regulating the impact of the media on the person is a complex system of media education. This is consistent with the objective of our study – to prove that one of the factors regulating the impact of media on a person is a complex system of media education.

#### **4. Media person as an object and subject of media education**

Media education, whose role is growing in the era of globalization, is one of the most pressing issues in the modern humanities. In post-Soviet Russia, the experience of media education has been accumulated and the Russian Association of Film and Media Education was created. Moreover, various scientific studies by E. Vartanova and Y. Zassursky [23], N. Kirillova [24],

A. Novikova [25], A. Fedorov [26-28], I. Chelysheva [29] and A. Sharikov [30] appeared. The idea of media education is actively supported by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Program 'Information for All' in Russia. From time to time, Russia hosts conferences on this issue. UNESCO regards media education as a priority direction in the pedagogics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and considers information factor as the leading factor in the process of training and education of young people [31]. The European media education system identifies a number of its focus areas and goals.

Foreign studies of the late 20<sup>th</sup> – early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries consider the introduction of media into the education system, as well as in the practical approach to teaching various classes. One of the first western researchers whose works attracted attention in post-Soviet Russia was L. Masterman, an English media educator. His attitude was clear and well-defined: "Representation is the central and integrative concept of media education. Media do not reflect reality – they represent it. The main goal of media education is 'denaturalization' of media. First and foremost, media education is a research process." [32, p. 24] This theory proves that media education aims at fostering learner's critical thinking. Many foreign media educators of the 1980s-1990s, such as D. Buckingham, C. Bazalgette, C. Worsnop, J. Gonnet, R. Ferguson, A. Hart and others, shared Masterman's point of view.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the priorities dominating media education changed. Within this concept, R. Berger and J. McDougall raised the main question of professional media education: "how we teach ought to change, as well as what we teach" [33]. The authors believed that this approach would subsequently allow students to find – in theory vs. practice – their place on the labour market.

J. Potter in his 'Digital Media and Learner Identity: The New Curatorship' suggested a model of teaching about digital media, based on 'new curatorship' [34]. This idea has become popular among educators across countries as the most fruitful. It promotes rethinking on how the relations between "expertise, apprenticeship and participation" work in the process of designing new environments, which contribute to the development of students' critical thinking and media literacy [33].

E. Morrell and J. Duncan-Andrade use the term "critical media pedagogy" [35]. In the authors' opinion, it is a goal-oriented effort of educators and students to develop critical thinking skills that would help the latter to approach and interpret media-generated messages (as well as messages from other sources) (in their communication with their peers, families, etc.) critically.

In the article 'Media literacy and transmedia storytelling', English researchers A. Weedon and J. Knight note that "Media studies have claimed the realms of television, newspapers, cinema, radio and audiovisual texts, their forms, the industries that produce them and the means of distribution and consumption as its object of study. New media researchers have added identity, interactivity, geolocation, engagement, affectivity, sharing, creativity and fan crowd and other forms of online and real-life community building through new

communications technologies.” [36] At the same time, according to S. Ashley, the challenges faced by media educators in Europe and in the USA are generally typical. They relate mostly to the educational setting (limited time, a large number of students and the gap in their skills). That is why many surveyed educators “aim to foster engagement with media and civic life through a focus on current events and media consumption. Several noted a focus on the role of media in democracy and the importance of accessing information from a variety of sources. Diverse perspectives such as those generated by differences in race, gender, and politics did not seem to be a problem for those surveyed.” [37]

Contemporary foreign researchers clearly focus on the practical aspect in relation to competitive advantage and professional self-realization of prospective specialists.

As described by A.V. Fedorov in his book, Russian media education focuses mainly on the development of media literacy and media culture of students. However, in recent years, this author has increasingly tended to define the goal of media education as ‘media competency’, which, in his opinion, “better describes the nature of individual-based skills required to use, critically analyse, assess and transmit media texts in their various types, forms and genres, and to analyse complex processes by which media functions in society” [27, p. 78]. In his view, media literacy (media competency) has to be interpreted as a “key element in a concept of global citizen” [27, p. 78]. The above-mentioned examples prove that the majority of foreign educators are pragmatic. They aim at the socialization of young people in a democratic society, while Russian educators, following A. Fedorov, pay more attention to media literacy. In other words, they consider the language of media, as well as the development of the student's ability to perceive, evaluate, understand and analyse media texts. At the same time, both Russian and foreign researchers equally and with high priority aim at the development of critical thinking in students. S. Gálík and D. Čmehýlová-Rašová published interesting considerations of this issue in the *European Journal of Science and Theology* [38, 39].

Media education is a complex process, involving not only Pedagogics and Psychology but also Cultural studies, Philosophy, Sociology, Political science, Legal studies, Journalism and art criticism. For the author of this article, an employee at a humanitarian, media education also means ‘a cultural project’, which is actively involved in the theory and history of culture [24, 40].

Since media education is a synthetic process of social and psychological interaction (dialogue) between a media lecturer and a recipient, one can identify the purpose of media education as follows: “media education is the formation of a culture of mediatized social communication in people” [41].

## **5. Conclusions**

Following the analysis of the problem ‘The human being in the mythological space of media culture: realities and perspectives’, one can conclude that positive predictions, related to the further development of the

person and society, depend on the modern media education system. The latter should be closely linked with world art history and the basics of Christianity.

Media education should be considered not only as a priority direction of Pedagogics but also as a priority for the entire system of sociocultural development. In the context of the current Russian modernization, launching of a comprehensive media education program, which would cover various disciplines and approaches to education and training of young people (including the basics of religious cultures and secular ethics), is essential more than ever.

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