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FORMS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF THE POWER OF MEDIA

The term „the power of media” can be understood primarily as a direct influence of media centres or companies on users, their frame of mind, lifestyles, choices and decisions they make. Secondly, the media involve using new information and communication technologies by different entities (e.g. social movements, political parties, governmental institutions) and broadcasters themselves for the purposes of social mobilisation, organising protests and shaping the public opinion. The latter approach entails such categories as „networked social movements”, „e-mobilisation”, „e-democracy”, voting over the Internet, political campaigns in the web, „cyber-politics”, etc. The above aspects of the power of media are addressed in the present text.

THE PHENOMENON OF MEDIOCRACY

Undoubtedly, the category of „the power of media” is defined in different ways. Some treat the media to be the fourth estate, others – considering the impact and efficiency of the media – rank it as the prime branch of the power. These abilities and the power of the media, together with their control over the public life are termed as mediocracy (or mediation of the public life). The term means that the media become a driving force for events, determine the image of politicians or even shape certain processes in politics and influence the distribution of power at state and local levels. Information policy of the media tends to determine political preferences of the society, e.g. by present-

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ing the results of polls in a given manner or commenting them suggestively. Undoubtedly, the media shape certain knowledge in receivers' minds, their imagination and views. They also promote certain behaviours and manipulate them. By promoting a specific „model of discourse” the media form a certain climate for the development of given views and opinions in the public debate. On the other hand, using the method of „acceptance and exclusion” the media induce the presence of one entity or a view and ban others out of the public. Moreover, the „perspective of capital” is used by the media and other groups to put pressure on state institutions. Along with the information technology revolution and the increasing role of global media we can observe new functions of governments. Generally, they concern forming – e.g. by politicians and diplomats – a favourable image of a state and its citizens in the media and in international institutions. The efficiency of a modern state is measured by its ability to shape this positive atmosphere around a given political group and by influencing the global media coverage that is involved. Influencing the media by a given country and forming the public opinion of the international community so that it fits the needs of the nation's interests are becoming a basic instrument of achieving political objectives at global scale.

The media are frequently tools of broadly understood power by managing (directing) citizens in a their political and economic decisions, preferred values, modes, behaviours and habits¹. Understandably, such influences and their results differ depending on the medium, journalist's personality or the area of social activity. Undoubtedly, the new media (e.g. the Internet) offer opportunities to form specific interpersonal interactions, bonds and “virtual societies”, on the one hand, and contribute to building antagonisms with certain individuals and social groups, or even excluding them from the social life by their „stigmatization”, on the other hand. All in all, there are different models of integration and separation with relation to the functions of the new media².

The „power of the media” concerns certain malfunctions. They can be experienced, e.g. when a given medium is prioritised and becomes a tool to promote „the one and only” proper vision of the world; when the media are concentrated in a given holding or political group. If such institutions publish a magazine, it must be purchased by the subordinate institutions (e.g. public offices, schools, university libraries). Such „mainstream” media tend to be

¹ Comp. T. G o b a n - K l a s, *Granice wolności mediów*, w: *Dziennikarstwo i świat mediów*, eds. Z. Bauer, E. Chudziński, Kraków: Universitas 2000, p. 411.

² Comp. S. Martelli, *Władza mass mediów nad władzą. Oddziaływanie TV na system polityczny i Kościół*, „Społeczeństwo” 1996, No 4, p. 683.

„favourable” for the government and befriended with its members. This is why governmental institutions give them significant financial resources for advertisements, notices or even obituaries, which are ordered by ministries. On the other hand, the media which are critical towards government cannot count on such orders³.

The phenomenon can be termed as „hegemony of media corporations”. It disturbs the functioning of the media in a democratic state⁴. The phenomenon is also evident at the level of Polish local democracy. One may observe the instances of monopolising media houses, what results in elimination of pluralism and „free market of ideas”⁵ from the society and the public discussion. It happens that different newspapers in one city belong to the same owner, what deprives readers of choice between different ideological profiles of the media. If the media house is additionally related to local authorities in the city, the media start playing various functions in the structures of local authorities. Therefore, at the level of local and regional structures we witness the connection between the government, business and the media that is dangerous for the quality and transparency of public life, its institutions, and consequently, the inhabitants-receivers and readers. Such examples of „Bermuda triangles” can be observed in many Polish local societies⁶.

³ Rządowe reklamy tylko dla życzliwych mediów. Głównym beneficjentem – „Gazeta Wyborcza”, <http://wpolityce.pl> (Accessed on: 28.10.2013).

⁴ J. D. McCarthy, C. McPhail, J. Smith, *Images of Protest: Dimensions of Selection Bias in Media Coverage of Washington Demonstrations 1982 and 1991*, „American Sociological Review” 1996, No 61, p. 48-481.

⁵ The Office of Competition and Consumer Protection allowed Polskapersse (German media house that is active in Poland) to purchase all local newspapers, weeklys and Internet portals. from Media regionalne, owned by British company Mecom. So far Polskapersse has had 49.8% of regional newspapers and portals. After the decision of the Office they took over another 36.8% of the market. (*Niemiecki koncern medialny Verlagsgruppe Passau działający w Polsce pod nazwą Polskapersse stał się właścicielem 90 procent gazet i portali regionalnych*, <http://wpolityce.pl> (Accessed on: 30.10.2013)).

⁶ J. Szymczyk, *Elementy interakcji: media lokalne a władza samorządowa*, w: *Społeczeństwo – przestrzeń – rodzina. Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana profesorowi Piotrowi Kryczce*, ed. M. Szyszka, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2009, p. 206 nn.

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS
OF INFORMATION SYSTEM

If the possibility to popularise information is an important issue in the functioning of the media, it is justified to discuss its structural elements. Information is collecting and popularising the news. The publication should be precise, bona fide, deprived of subjective conditioning and maximally objective to emphasise its cognitive functions. Thus, informing is providing the receiver with objective knowledge of the world⁷. Therefore, each fault in this „service activity” should be considered a manipulation. It is equally important what is ignored, trifled or written in small font in the media coverage and what is written in bold in the first column of the newspaper or given as the first release in the radio or TV news. There is a danger of partial, deformed or one-way information that is imposed on the receiver or stimulated by the market or advertisements⁸.

Consequently, the core of information depends on the type of transmission, mode of speaking, presentation of the content, accompanying circumstances, and finally the receiver to whom the information is addressed. It is surely not easy to edit the news that is coherent, objective and true about the facts, without bias and political preferences. However, it is worth avoiding evident one-sidedness or simplifications in the media coverage. One remedy for this type of situations is developing a system or order of the media in a state that gives the receivers a chance to benefit from authentic pluralism and diversification of the media. The process of informing, which does not equate to the process of communication, requires the content to be true. In this sense, truthfulness should be understood as the highest possible coherence of the content with facts and events which are presented in the news. This is a *sine qua non* condition of the information process. The conveyed information should be not only truthful but also communicative. It should be understandable and clear for the receiver.

Communication process should concern primarily the people in power. In other words, everyone who plays an important role in the society (by election

⁷ J. Liberek, *Informacja czy manipulacja? Jak „Gazeta Wyborcza” pisze o Kościele*, „Więź” 1992, No 11, p. 24.

⁸ J. Szymczyk, *Między wolnością a tendencjami uniformizacyjnymi. Z problematyki funkcjonowania mass mediów w demokracji*, w: *Między unifikacją a dezintegracją. Kondycja wiedzy we współczesnym świecie*, eds. A. Jabłoński, M. Zemło, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2008, p. 262.

or nomination) must be prepared that their private life will be the subject of public interest. Needless to say that the higher social function, the lower is the range of their privacy⁹. This ascertainment results from the rule of transparency which implies that being a president, prime minister, member of parliament or mayor is not man's rudimentary obligation. If one decides to accept such a function or public position, they should take into consideration the fact that the society they serve and which pays taxes for their maintenance wants to know virtually everything also about their private life (e.g. if there is something in their life that should not have happened, unlawful nomination to the position or office, etc.).

From this point of view, the functioning of authentic and diverse media is necessary in democracy, so that pathological situations could be revealed to the public and the society could know about their representatives' affairs. This requirement concerns not only their current actions but also their past. Thus, the inspection of elites is necessary so that the people who take part in elections know what kind of person they cast their votes for. This is particularly important for such a country as Poland, which is still experiencing the transformation of the system and which is still under the influence of former communist special forces on different sectors of public life. Therefore, those journalist who inform the public opinion about the public lives of people in power should be excused, to some degree, if their information is relevant, true and obtained without infringing law. What happens frequently is a reverse phenomenon, i.e. the creation of, the so called, „charismatic personae” with the use of media, techniques of political marketing, advertisements and PR specialists¹⁰. This concerns such modelling of person's image, e.g. a candidate running in elections, to hit the current moods of the electorate. This means that the source of the legitimacy of power is still the elections, but the actual power is gained from the right image in the media and media's favourable attitude to a given politician.

Researchers also describe the phenomenon of „media terrorism”. It concerns causing social disturbance and panic on a large scale by the media. One of important tools that are used by the media is the „production of news” and

⁹ R. D. Grabowski, *Konflikt między prawem do intymności i życia prywatnego a prawem do informacji*, w: *Dziennikarski etos. Z wybranych zagadnień deontologii dziennikarskiej*, eds. Z. Kobylińska, R. D. Grabowski, Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Lux Mundi 1996, p. 188 nn.

¹⁰ A. Jabłoński, *Technokratyzm jako zagrożenie dla integralnego rozwoju ludzkiego*, w: *Spoleczeństwo, gospodarka, ekologia. Perspektywa encykliki społecznej „Caritas in veritate”*, red. S. Fel, M. Hulaś, S. G. Raabe, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2010, p. 153-172.

running information campaigns, which are more and more commonly based on the, so called factoids, i.e. concise statements that are considered true but are not supported by any evidence (or only by weak ones). This is why the media people and commentators use manipulation techniques using such phrases as „most of the society want”. Sometimes politicians „exploit” journalists who are fond of sensations in order to use their media content to eliminate their political opponents from public life by revealing their weaknesses.

FORMS OF MEDIA MANIPULATIONS

The power of the media is manifested by the phenomenon of manipulation, inter alia. The media have significant technical and information capacities which give them the features of power or influence of specific significance. Apparently insignificant, distorted information (e.g. slander) is sufficient to „destroy” a given man. For this reason, this phenomenon of manipulation may be manifested in a number of forms. One of them is the so called hyperbolism (exaggeration) which involves both the expanded range of informing (manifested not only in the amount of information on the topic but also the variety of language species) and using the surplus of marked vocabulary (e.g. the characteristics of people, groups, events, etc, with vocabulary from informal language or literally „tabloid” vocabulary, frequently without reporting the source of origin)¹¹.

Another manifestation of manipulation is „unjustified generalisation”¹². This type of generalisation can be easily found at the occasion of presenting the results of surveys. We may frequently witness lack of criticism in presenting or commenting inconclusive explorations and sided interpretations which are favourable for certain political options or philosophies of life. Consequently, we can observe the emergence of simplified view of the world in some environments, groups, social categories in such issues as moral or historic nature. It also happens that the basis for unjustified generalisation is randomly selected scraps of speeches or opinions. This sort of „gathering” is used, among other, to secure journalist’s position as the one presenting the objective state of affairs, rather than his/her own views. This manipulation concerns utilising the collected opinions for biased generalisation. Frequently,

¹¹ Liberek, *Informacja czy manipulacja?*, p. 31; T. Goban-Klas, *Spoleczeństwo informacyjne: szanse, zagrożenia, wyzwania*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo FPT 1999, p. 48.

¹² Liberek, *Informacja czy manipulacja?*, p. 33.

out of the information gathered on a given topic, e.g. through TV, radio or press surveys, only those which fit the profile or the framework of a given newspaper, radio or TV station.

On the other hand, for the proper functioning of interpersonal relations what gains importance is „degradation of communication and information system”, as a result of both the domination of the media, especially the electronic ones, and malfunctioning of other means of communication, and deliberations, which are significant for human life, e.g. actual interpersonal relationships¹³. Well-established communication tools based on the Internet start being used in communication in communities, and frequently displace traditional face-to-face communication. Consequently, inter-subjective „classical” interpersonal communication that takes place in the real world (family, neighbourhood, academic discussions at universities) was supplemented by „virtual communication”. The latter becomes a dominant form of communication and information in some circumstances. Consequently, even if some individuals broaden their view of global problems, other entities develop a sense of inability in specific issues and, at the same time, quit participating in the lives of their families, neighbourhoods, local communities, etc.¹⁴. For this reason, the democracy of the era of multimedia and the Internet brings the problems of a discrepancy between „consumption of politics” and participation in political life. Consumption of politics is generally a passive form of participation in a „show” that politics provides¹⁵. As a result, individuals are not fully engaged in different forms of actual participation (social, public). Thus, it can be concluded that the development of the Internet causes the popularisation of new type of communities: „personalised communities” (so “called third generation communities”)¹⁶. They are different from the two other categories (discussed in classical sociology): communities (*Gemeinschaft*), based on unity with the group and associations (*Gesellschaft*) of contractual character which are aimed at the implementation of specific interests

¹³ Comp. G. Dal Ferro, *Mass-media i demokracja*, „Społeczeństwo” 1996, No 4, p. 669.

¹⁴ J. Mazur, *Od kerygmatu do Ewangelii życia. Dzieje katolickiej myśli społecznej w zarysie*, Radom: Wydawnictwo Polwen 2003, p. 307-320.

¹⁵ K. Krzysztofek, *Społeczeństwo inteligentne czy inteligentnie rządzone*, w: *Władza i obywatel w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, Warszawa: IPWC 1999, p. 29.

¹⁶ M. Budyta-Budzyńska, *Socjologia narodu i konfliktów etnicznych*, Warszawa: PWN 2010, p. 279.

THE MEDIA AND NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

One example of a positive use of new communication and information technologies (apart from the aforementioned functions of the state) is the activities of social movements. In a situation when trust to traditional politics, e.g. party politics, seems to deteriorate, it is the development of new social movements that proves not all citizens to be indifferent, but they are interested in social, political and cultural topics. In this respect, these movements frequently revive stiff representative democracy. They are the element of civil society. These movements use modern communication technologies to stimulate the society, organise protest, and build bottom-up organisations, what makes the main difference between the old and the new political movements. The former promoted their aims in books, newspapers, leaflets and manifestoes. Spreading the ideology was based on „paper culture”, whereas the latter function in the sphere of „multimedia culture”. The links between contemporary democracy and different forms of participation with modern means of communication and information seem to be more evident than ever. This is why analysing the influence of new communication technologies on democratic system has become an important area of sociological explorations. The object of researchers’ interest is also the role of the media, including the Internet, in the processes stimulated, initiated and organised by new social movements¹⁷.

More and more frequently these movements grab the opportunities that are offered by applying new communication technologies. The media, as we have already indicated, are powerful instruments of articulating, forming and uniting views, forming and propagating ideological messages and shaping the public opinion. With the use of the new media we are able to compare our lives with other individual’s lives and learn about other entities’ views and opinions, what frequently builds favourable climate for the development of a new social movement. On the basis of media coverage people break their „pluralistic ignorance”¹⁸ and find out they are not solitary in their views, dissatisfaction or even fear. On the other hand, the success of actions undertaken by social movements depends on how attractively they are presented in the media. Their „media attractiveness” is apparently influenced by the attitude of a given media house to the social movement, and by the relevance of

¹⁷ D. Rucht, *Wpływ kontekstów narodowych na strukturę ruchów społecznych: przekrój porównawczy według typów ruchu i krajów*, w: *Aktorzy życia publicznego. Pleć jako czynnik różnicujący*, ed. R. Siemieńska, Warszawa: Scholar 2003, p. 201.

¹⁸ P. Szto m p k a, *Socjologia zmian społecznych*, Kraków: Znak 2005, p. 261.

their ideas for the needs and interests of the broadcaster or publisher. Defining the behaviours of movement participants as an act of vandalism, rather than a socially-relevant action in the media interpretations may influence their future development¹⁹.

The new media are particularly often used in protest actions. These movements organise protests because they do not have any other communication channels with the authorities and decision-makers. All attempts to exert influence through official institutions are often impossible and do not show prospects for reaching the objectives. Participants of social movements are pressed to attract the attention of the public opinion directly through selected forms of protest, in order to convince them into their ideology and, in this manner – to smaller or larger extent – legitimate the proposed postulates. For this reason, media and different means of communication are important for the movements to pass their message down to the public opinion and persuade them to the appropriateness of their demands or the sense of the organised protest²⁰. Street manifestations or other types of spectacular protests (especially the innovative forms), which attract the media eye, create opportunities to trigger public interest in a given movement and the ideas they promote. These media forms of protest include such phenomena as *netstriking*²¹, Internet actions similar to a march or road blockade. It involves visiting a target website by a number of users in order to disable other Internet users from accessing the page. Similar strategy of „e-mail bombarding” involves sending loads of messages to a given address or server in order to overload and block it. Some movements use the Internet for consumer boycott. In order to undermine given producer’s reputation, some movements set up a website with similar address and look, as if it was the official website. It is made to attract Internet users’ attention and then publish critical opinions on company’s products or their strategies²².

Additionally, the place of protest is also undergoing changes. In the age of globalisation and relative ease in the movement of people and information, protest also diffuses: they move across borders and gain trans- it extra-national character. Globalisation of protests may have a direct character (interactions,

¹⁹ J. Szymczyk, *Specyfika nowych ruchów społecznych*, w: *Wartości – interesy – struktury społeczne. Uwarunkowania ludzkiej kreatywności i partycypacji w życiu publicznym*, ed. J. Szymczyk, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Norbertinum 2010, p. 64.

²⁰ D. della Porta, M. Diani, *Ruchy społeczne. Wprowadzenie*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ 2009, p. 185 [D. della Porta, M. Diani, *Social Movements. An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2006].

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 194-195.

interpersonal contacts at international scale) and direct (through the media)²³. The latter offer unprecedented possibilities for immediate reactions to current events, access to information and allow to exert pressure on multinationals, governments and international institutions in the framework of the campaigns they organise. Local leaders can contact one another with the use of different media, in order to exchange experience and coordinate common actions. This is also a term for the significance of modern technologies in social movements' activities – „electronic support”²⁴. Undoubtedly, the development of modern communication technology facilitates efficient and effective visibility during different spectacular actions, even if the movement is not seen on daily basis.

This new means of communication and informing people as well as their ability to organise is related to the concept of the so called „network society”, whereas the new movements that use this „electronic support” are termed as „networked social movements”²⁵. As freely organised networks, they are often set up and stimulated by small institutions and organisations²⁶. A small group of activists is able to mobilise numerous social groups to spontaneous actions in a short time by using the Internet, mobile phones, satellite connections, etc. With the popularity of this type of media, the number of „international social movements” is growing. The participants of social movements share their emotions, make contacts, develop strategies and make decisions in cyberspace.

Manuel Castells termed this type of decisions as „individualised mass communication”²⁷. The popularity is related to sending or processing information „from many to many”, or to reach a number of receivers both locally and globally. Individualised character of communication means that the message is written by specific individuals, who determine possible addressees of the content and that the information is individually searched in the Internet. Information technologies allow individualising services, i.e. each user's service may be fed with different content. In longer perspective, the phenomenon may

²³ Comp. H. Kriesi, *The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements. Its Impact on Their Mobilization*, w: *The Politics of Social Protest*, eds. J.C Jenkins, B. Klandermans, Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press-UCL Press 1995, p. 185.

²⁴ S. Hick, J. McNutt, *Communities and Advocacy on the Internet. A Conceptual Framework*, w: *Advocacy, Activism and the Internet*, eds. S. Hick, J. McNutt, Chicago: Lyceum Books 2002, p. 8.

²⁵ M. Castells, *Sieci oburzenia i nadziei. Ruchy społeczne w erze Internetu*, Warszawa: PWN 2013, p. 15 [M. Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press Ltd. 2012].

²⁶ I. Krzemiński, *Wprowadzenie*, w: *Wolność, równość, odmiennność. Nowe ruchy społeczne w Polsce początku XXI wieku*, ed. I. Krzemiński, Warszawa: WaiP 2006, p. 12.

²⁷ Castells, *Sieci oburzenia i nadziei*, p. 18.

lead to, in a negative sense, even the disappearance of social and national bonds and building social distances (people who live side by side can participate in different realities)²⁸. On the other hand, the phenomenon can be discussed – due to horizontal interactive communication networks and multi-direction communication²⁹ – as the one facilitating cooperation and solidarity within the movement, and limiting bureaucracy and the need of formal leadership. At the same time, this type of network protects the movement from external repressions and influence from different opponents by facilitating communication between them and social environment.

Virtual social networks allow free discussion and coordination of actions for the participants of social movements. This is why Castells terms these movements as „viral movements”³⁰. The name corresponds to the mechanism of functioning the Internet. This means that the demonstrations and protests appear in one place (country, region, city) and stimulate other entities located in different countries or even continents. Thus, the area of activities of new social movements has a double scope: real (e.g. gatherings of people in cities) and virtual (activities in the cyberspace). However, these networks (real and virtual) are closely linked, if it comes to the structure of affairs in new social movements. Obviously, neither the Internet nor wireless communication is sufficient to network social movements. This is because the aetiology of a given movement is frequently of complex character. Nevertheless, the new media are, interactive communication networks allow building mutual relationships, sharing indignation, experience of personal injustice, etc. They play a significant role in the process of social mobilisation or organising protest or a given social movement.

CONCLUSION

In democracy, the functioning of authentic and different media are necessary, so that different phenomena, also the ones concerning the power, could be revealed and the citizens had a chance to learn about their representatives' affairs in government, parliament and local authorities. Still, observing contemporary democracies, one can notice how often the media fail to be critical against the system of power and its different centres. For this reason, social

²⁸ B u d y t a - B u d z y ń s k a, *Socjologia narodu i konfliktów etnicznych*, p. 291.

²⁹ C a s t e l l s, *Sieci oburzenia i nadziei*, p. 18.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 215.

movements in some countries supplement „the fourth estate” (the media), when it comes to social control over the judicial, legislative and executive.

FORMS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF THE POWER OF MEDIA

Summary

The term „the power of media” can be understood primarily as a direct influence of media centres or companies on users, their frame of mind, lifestyles, choices and decisions they make. Secondly, the media involve using new information and communication technologies by different entities (e.g. social movements, political parties, governmental institutions) and broadcasters themselves for the purposes of social mobilisation, organising protests and shaping the public opinion. Along with the information technology revolution and the increasing role of global media we can observe new functions of governments. Generally, they concern forming – e.g. by politicians and diplomats – a favourable image of a state and its citizens in the media and in international institutions.

FORMY I PRZEJAWY WŁADZY MEDIÓW

Streszczenie

Pojęcie „władzy mediów” można rozumieć – po pierwsze – jako bezpośredni wpływ ośrodków czy koncernów medialnych, w takiej czy innej formie, na odbiorców, ich mentalność, style życia, podejmowane wybory, decyzje. A po drugie – chodzi o wykorzystywanie przez różne podmioty (np. ruchy społeczne, partie polityczne, instytucje państwa) nowoczesnych technologii informacyjnych, komunikacyjnych, ale także samych nadawców – w zakresie choćby mobilizacji społecznej, działań protestacyjnych, kształtowania poglądów opinii publicznej. Wraz z rewolucją informatyczną i wzrastającą rolą globalnych mediów mamy coraz bardziej do czynienia z nowymi funkcjami państwa. Generalnie polegają one na kształtowaniu – np. za sprawą polityków, dyplomatów – korzystnego wizerunku państwa i jego obywateli w mediach i instytucjach międzynarodowych.

Słowa kluczowe: mediokracja, system informacji, manipulacje medialne, nowe ruchy społeczne.

Key words: mediocracy, information system, media manipulations, new social movements.