



# Media Literacy *and* Academic Research

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## About the Journal

Media Literacy and Academic Research is a scientific journal focused on the academic reflection of media and information literacy issues, media education, critical thinking, digital media and new trends in related areas of media and communication studies. The journal is devoted to addressing contemporary issues and future developments related to the interdisciplinary academic discussion, the results of empirical research and the mutual interaction of expertise in media and information studies, media education as well as their sociological, psychological, political, linguistic and technological aspects.

Media Literacy and Academic Research is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal published twice a year. The journal is international and interdisciplinary, inviting contributions from across the globe and from various academic disciplines of social sciences. It focuses on theoretical and empirical studies, research results, as well as papers related to the new trends, practices and other academic research areas. Also encouraged are literature reviews, innovative initiatives, best practices in online teaching, institutional policies, standards and assessment. The Journal welcomes the submission of manuscripts that meet the general criteria of significance and scientific excellence.

The members of the journal's Editorial Board are members of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), UNESCO-UNAOC UNITWIN Network for Media and Information Literacy, European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI), The Slovak EU Kids Online Team, Media Literacy Expert Group and International Association for Media Education.

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Digital platforms have significantly changed all areas of social life over the last two decades. They affect not only the economy and business but politics, culture, public discourse and virtually all aspects of our daily lives, including interpersonal relationships. The list of areas in which they are present and which have a significant impact would indeed be very long. Much more thinking would be required in naming parts of our lives where technology platforms are not vital. This list would obviously be shorter. Digital platforms come in various shapes and sizes, and their development continues at a pace that has no parallel in human history.

The digitalisation of society has many benefits, but it also has many negative aspects. On the one hand, technology corporations offer a wide range of valuable services that benefit commercial, individual and non-commercial users. To some extent, they support the building of online communities and replace less efficient and less flexible institutions that have failed to adapt in time to the new online ecosystem.

Although digital platforms often emphasize that they serve the public interest and are beneficial to users, they also present many risks and challenges. One of the most important is business models based on the commodification of user attention. They use complex algorithms and artificial intelligence mainly to distribute personalized content, which works in a sophisticated way with human emotions and tries to pay active attention to the offered content for as long as possible. The most important commodity of the digital age is not oil, gold, real estate or goods, but our attention, which technology platforms can commodify through the data they collect about us. Compared to other sectors of the economy, digital media employ a relatively small proportion of staff. However, their impact on the economy and society is enormous, in many cases more significant than the impact of politicians and institutions.

The attractiveness of digital ecosystems lies in the fact that they do not seem to impose anything on users. On the contrary, they act in the position of neutral actors whose interest is to fulfil all the desires of their users and to offer them space for entertainment and self-realization with an extensive range of opportunities. The structure of social networks constantly encourages us to engage, share, and create the impression of social responsibility and the elimination of inequality. This approach has its business logic - the more people use the platform, the more data their algorithms are allowed to mine. At the same time, this means that the data tracks we leave behind are the most valuable assets that platforms have at their disposal. Comprehensive knowledge of these contexts is one of the most current challenges of academic research and media literacy, to which we offer space in the latest issue of our journal.

Pleasant reading,

**Norbert Vrabec**  
Editor-In-Chief

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Danielle T. Ligocki

## Do We Dare Question Kindness? The Commodification of Becoming a Strong, Kind Female

### ABSTRACT

Neoliberalism and its focus on consumption, disposability, and individualism has managed to undercut ideals of female empowerment and kindness. This paper discusses the problematic approach to commercializing and incentivizing being kind and being strong, specifically as it relates to young girls and women. Through an analysis of clothing and commercials, this paper looks at the commodification of personality traits and empowerment. It is through these mechanisms that marketers commodify kindness -- it is palatable enough to sell, and just far enough away from the word feminism to not upset potential brand loyalists. By taking this soft approach, rather than working to bolster the identities of women and girls and to empower them, these companies in their commercial advertising and clothing options continue to center girls and women as consumers, while failing to challenge the dominant structures in place.

### KEY WORDS

Critical Media Literacy. Youth Culture. Commodification. Consumerism.

# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to question the ways in which kindness and female strength or, “girl power”, have now become goods for purchase, rather than personality traits or individual commitments. Through the lens of critical media literacy, I interrogate the concept of childhood for girls, specifically as it relates to the perpetuation of kindness and girl power. These words and phrases hold different meanings based on the individual, but far too often they are diluted to catchy slogans aimed at female buyers. While these messages may be intended to empower both young girls and women, instead these portrayals have the potential to work against them, because the messaging is not only relentless, but also shallow in nature. As Lamb and Brown<sup>1</sup> explain: “...the beginning of a genuine movement to give girls more power and more choice got co-opted and turned into a marketing scheme that reinforced age-old stereotypes”. It is because of this skewed messaging that I draw attention to the lack of critical media literacy in PK-12 curriculum in the United States, which contributes to children and adults alike being unable to identify and address hegemonic messages in all forms of text.

This study demonstrates the overabundance of messages grounded in girl power and kindness directed towards women and girls and is guided by the current literature that focuses on advertising, marketing, and the dominant discourse around girls and women. Based on the findings, I argue that dominant structures are not challenged by these superficial messages; that by commodifying girl power, girls and women are being recognized as consumers, not empowered people; and that when girl power is commodified, feminist ideals become a slogan, rather than a movement.

Advertisers have always looked at young people for their buying power, but I argue that society has reached a new level of consumption and commodification.<sup>2</sup> Shirley Steinberg<sup>3</sup> reminds her readers in *Kinderculture* that childhood is something that is now pre-fabricated and built upon the foundation of buying power and marketing. When one views this prefabricated childhood based on hyper-consumerism in a way that extends to ideas of kindness and strength, this practice of commodifying childhood becomes almost grotesque.

Steven Mintz<sup>4</sup> offers a similar critique of childhood, acknowledging the struggles that young people have always faced in our world and the ways they are compounded by the pressures and demands of society. Unfortunately, not everyone views young people in the same way Mintz does, as adults have the tendency to denigrate the younger generation. Because humans’ memories are biased, the dialogue quickly becomes “kids these days”, with a focus on putting down young people<sup>5</sup>. The older generation chooses to criticize the younger generation, instead of question their role in the framing of childhood. Rather than blame young people for their behavior or ignore the difficulties that are inherent to growing up in a neoliberal society, educators, researchers, and parents should instead cast a critical eye on the different forms of media and products that target young people, specifically girls.

With that in mind, this paper utilizes a contextual analysis of artifacts in order to unpack the messaging that besieges women and girls on a regular basis through different forms of media and imagery, specifically in marketing and clothing. Incessant messaging about what it means to be a girl, the perpetuation of constant kindness, and the supposed support for girl power are at the forefront of much of the marketing and products directed towards girls and

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<sup>1</sup> LAMB, S., BROWN, L. M.: *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers’ Schemes*. New York : St. Martin’s Press, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See: BAUMAN, Z.: *Consuming Life*. MA : Polity Press, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See: STEINBERG, S.: *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*. CO : Westview Press, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> See: MINTZ, S.: *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood*. MA : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> See: PROTZKO, J., SCHOOLER, J.: Kids These Days: Why the Youth of Today Seem Lacking. In *Science Advances*, 2019, Vol. 5, p. 1-6.

women. This analysis is framed using the lenses of critical media literacy and neoliberalism as a way to understand the effects of different types of texts and the impact of hegemony on girls and women. After analysis and discussion, this paper will conclude with recommendations for educators, parents, and researchers, as it is critical to understand how media and imagery leave lasting effects on young girls and women, and what can be done to combat these effects.

While all demographics are preyed upon by media and advertising, I contend that there is a pointed effort recently to push the idea of “girl power”.<sup>6</sup> Throughout this paper, the phrase “girl power” is used; however, this phrase does not only apply to children and teenagers, but it is also often used in reference to adult women. While there are many positives in acknowledging the strengths, attributes, and abilities of women and girls, there has become a toxic level of commodification of this idea. Robert Goldman<sup>7</sup> defined “commodity feminism” as “*the issue of rewriting feminism into the corporate world of consumer culture*” and this type of feminism is what permeates advertising and clothing marketed towards girls and women. Rather than perpetuating and embracing the idea of girl power in a holistic, authentic, and genuine way, it has instead been turned into another product for purchase, an idea for major marketing machines, and an easy way to make a profit. This is true as well for the concept of kindness. Instead of working to empower girls and women, the concept of kindness is repeatedly marketed towards females, enabling the concept of feminism to be softened and made more palatable, instead of being a rallying cry for women’s rights and equality.

The issue of softening feminist ideals is problematic in and of itself, as that assumes that there is one way to be a feminist. There have been many waves of the feminist movement, many of which have left out women of color, or pushed back on the politics of previous generations. Sandra Chang-Kredl<sup>8</sup> describes third wave feminism as exploding in the 1990s as a way to interrogate ideas of gender and sexuality. This third wave pushed back on what is described as the second wave of feminism from the 1970s and 1980s, which focused more on women striving to enter men’s spaces. This dichotomy is still troubling, however, as Catherine Rottenberg<sup>9</sup> explains. She notes that the feminist movement has taken an individual stance, running parallel to neoliberal policies and leaving women and girls to take full responsibility for their own well-being, leaving collective forms of action and support forgotten. With the issue of feminism so fluid and evolving, it is puzzling how marketers can take such a strong stance against it, especially when a neoliberal view of feminism is often the version that is most apparent in advertisements and products.

While consumers may view these advertisements and products as ones that are trying to empower and elevate women and girls, journalist and media critic Jennifer Pozner explains a different concept: the marketers themselves see this approach as a way to draw in brand loyalists from a very young age.<sup>10</sup> Brands may be drawing in buyers with messages of girl power, but this is not in the name of advancing a feminist argument. Instead, this messaging is in the name of profit. Becky Swanson, executive creator at Leo Burnett, a large advertising firm in Chicago, stated explicitly “*I don’t think anybody wants to talk about feminism anymore. It’s one of the most misunderstood and controversial words out there. [But] if you talk about it*

<sup>6</sup> See also: LAMB, S., BROWN, L. M.: *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers’ Schemes*. New York : St. Martin’s Press, 2006; LESKO, N. et. al.: *The Promises of Empowered Girls*. In WYN, J., CAHILL, H. (eds.): *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*, 1996, Vol. 28, No. 2, p.139-161.

<sup>7</sup> GOLDMAN, R.: *Reading Ads Socially*. NY : Routledge, 1992, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> See: CHANG-KREDL, S.: “The Toughest Chick in the Alien World”: “Girl Power” and the Cartoon Network. In MACEDO, D., STEINBERG, S. (eds.): *Media Literacy*. NY : Peter Lang, 2009, p. 395-404.

<sup>9</sup> See: ROTTENBERG, C.: *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. In *Cultural Studies*, 2014, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 279-297.

<sup>10</sup> See: CLARK, A.: *Let’s Hear It for the Girls*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.brittonmdg.com/blog/lets-hear-it-for-the-girls/>>.



as ‘girl power,’ that’s purely positive.”<sup>11</sup> It appears then that these advertisements are not purely about empowering young women and girls, but walking the line between embracing ‘soft’ elements of feminism in order to move merchandise while not alienating other consumers for whom the word feminism has a negative connotation. With that in mind, parents, educators, and researchers need to interrogate the ways ideals of kindness and female strength have been framed for young people, specifically in advertising and different forms of media. Once audiences learn to question and critique, they can then take the first step which involves pushing back against the commodification of qualities such as kindness and girl power in order to move towards a more authentic engagement with girls and women in a way that works to see all voices elevated, all personalities celebrated, and all presentations of what it means to be a girl or woman acknowledged and valued.

## 2 Literature Review

A review of the literature illustrates a variety of ways in which scholars view girls, women, feminism, and how the media plays a role in the presentation of each. While the literature explains the ways girlhood and feminism are shaped in and by society, this paper intends to fill the gap that exists in regard to how different forms of texts work to perpetuate the idea that kindness is for girls and women, while hiding behind a female empowerment approach. Additionally, because we live in a time of fierce neoliberalism, I contend that it is important to think about how society constructs childhood for girls in a world that is mediated by consumption and commodification.

### Politics of History and Kindness

When thinking about the advocacy for unwavering kindness, advertising messages and popular products make clear that this characteristic is one they push on girls and women, rather than on boys and men. When we are living in such a divisive time in history, why is this personality trait and behavior choice emblazoned on so many materials intended for girls and women, but not for everyone? Riverside-Webster’s<sup>12</sup> dictionary defines kindness as “*warm-hearted, friendly, or generous in nature*”. Other definitions of kindness often include ideas regarding being generous, helpful, or considerate. Some include an additional mention of being kind due to an expectation of reward. However, in all of the definitions I examined, there was no gendered expectation, no layer of gender identity and how that does or does not play a role in being kind. Yet, when looking at products and marketing, there is clearly a gendered approach to this concept.

Major corporations make a spectacle of promoting ideas of girl power and kindness, but it is not clear why these two ideas are often conflated, or at the very least, presented together. On the one hand, there is an incredible push for girl power on items marketed towards girls and women, but on the other hand, there is also a consistent message that girls and women are to “sprinkle kindness like confetti”. This raises the question of why this characteristic is promoted more heavily to girls and women. Additionally, it is helpful to try to define kindness, as the overuse of the term in recent years likely has caused folk to construct their own understanding. Shoshana Magnet, Corinne Lysandra Mason, and Kathryn Trevenen<sup>13</sup> define kindness as the ability to “*bear the vulnerability of others and that bothers to do the labor of being compassionate while not*

<sup>11</sup> ZMUDA, N., DIAZ, A. C.: *Female Empowerment in Ads: Soft Feminism or Soft Soap? Go-Girl Marketing is the Hot New Trend. But are These Ads Culture-Changing or Simply ‘Pinkwashing’?* [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://adage.com/article/cmo-strategy/marketers-soft-feminism/294740>>.

<sup>12</sup> KINDNESS. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kindness>>.

<sup>13</sup> MAGNET, S., MASON, C., TREVENEN, K.: *Feminism, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Kindness*. In *Feminist Teacher*, 2014, Vol. 25, p. 3. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.5406/femteacher.25.1.0001>>.

giving in to forms of leniency that make appraisal impossible.” The authors wrote this definition in the same vein as the work of Rowland<sup>14</sup> and Phillips and Taylor,<sup>15</sup> with the focus being on a commitment to social justice. While this definition is meaningful and critical, I would argue that most advertisers who are constantly pushing for kindness or girl power are not thinking of those terms in a way that conveys the ability to be vulnerable or compassionate. Instead, marketers continue to use these terms in relation to girls and women, without them being much more than a byline. Why is this message so heavily geared towards females?

Magnet, Mason, and Trevenen examined this question as well, taking a historical approach to discover the origins of kindness. During the Industrial Revolution, kindness was conflated with domestic lives and tasks, juxtaposed with the industrial work that was associated with men at the time. Because of this, kindness began to be assigned to women, which added an additional layer. Since then, rather than kindness being a universal value, it is instead associated with emotion and thus, devalued. This becomes further complicated when one examines the ways in which emotion is often performative, as illustrated by Magnet, Mason, and Trevenen’s explanation of “moral weeping”, a term used to describe the behavior of privileged women that deceives them into believing they are extremely tenderhearted and morally good people. This concept speaks to the process of socialization of women and girls, how society teaches them to put others before themselves, and to compromise their own needs and desires for the sake of others.

With this in mind, big business packages girl power and kindness together as a way to draw in lifelong brand loyalists and supposedly empower women and girls. However, these same companies are quite careful not to wade too far deeply into the waters of feminism, as that word is simply too divisive, too dangerous. It is at this point that kindness becomes commodified – it is palatable enough to sell, and just far enough away from the word feminism not to ruffle any feathers. By taking this soft approach, rather than working to truly bolster the identities of women and girls and to empower them, these companies, in their commercial advertising and clothing options, instead fall back on the overly emotive, feminized ideals of what it means to be kind.

This brings to mind the idea of respectability politics, and the character traits that many use to police and define what it means to be socially acceptable as a female. In 1993, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham<sup>16</sup> coined the term respectability politics in her book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Higginbotham explained that when groups of people who are traditionally marginalized are told or teach themselves to behave better in order to gain the respect of the dominant group, that is respectability politics. The problem with respectability politics is that it is a false narrative. No matter how kind (read: quiet, subordinate, etc.) girls and women behave, they simply will not be given equal billing with men. So from very young ages, all the way to adulthood, we see generations of women and girls socialized into these ideas, believing that the kinder they are the more likeable they will be, when really, that is not the case at all. This also calls into question the conflicting messages of empowering women, while still asking them to be kind. When fighting for equal rights, or choosing to be strong mentally, physically, and emotionally, or even choosing what it means to do something “like a girl”, kindness is not necessarily going to be the prevailing personality trait. Thus, society presents women and girls with conflicting messages and these messages are compounded for young people, who are often viewed through a deficit lens during their adolescent and teenage years.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See: ROWLAND, S.: Kindness. In *London Review of Education*, 2009, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 207-210.

<sup>15</sup> See also: PHILLIPS, A., TAYLOR, B.: *On Kindness*. NY : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> See: HIGGINBOTHAM, E. B.: *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. MA : Harvard University Press, 1994.

<sup>17</sup> See: MINTZ, S.: *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood*. MA : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.

### The Construction of Childhood and the Commodification of Girlhood

As referenced above, childhood has become a heavily constructed undertaking.<sup>18</sup> Not only do adults hold a very specific view of young people, but marketers work to reach young children from a very young age, going so far as to employ developmental psychologists to aid them in understanding what young people are drawn to and desire. Thus, there is a paradox here. While Mintz<sup>19</sup> reminds his readers that adults treat children as marginal subjects when it comes to viewing them as historical actors, this is not true when they are viewed as consumers. Children are viewed for their buying power, with Chang-Kredl<sup>20</sup> explaining: “One way of understanding the branding and structuring of television networks as specifically for kid consumption is to see this as an effort to erect a clear distinction between the culture of children and the culture of adults, in order to emphasize an every-younger audience of consumers.”

When looking at the buying power of children and the construction of hegemonic messages, one can see what Lesko, Chacko, and Khaja-Moolji<sup>21</sup> describe as a progress narrative. For girls, this progress narrative is one of girl power, as it “entices, energizes, and focuses attention”. Society continues to push a promise of happiness on girls through the element of girl power, but this rhetoric is often one that is individualized and aligned with the neoliberal belief system. Not only that, but as girl power continues to be appropriated by the mainstream media and big marketers, we see more of the commodification of girlhood and less of a disruption in inequitable structures.

### Adolescence and the Dominant Discourse

The narrative surrounding the time of adolescence has always been one that frames young people in a negative light.<sup>22</sup> Often the framing follows the same refrain repeatedly; namely, that adolescence is a time of out-of-control behavior, with young people driven by hormones and peers, unable to manage their own emotions and make sound decisions. Nancy Lesko<sup>23</sup> tries to debunk that thinking by pushing back on the ways in which scholars “naturalize” what it means to be an adolescent and instead question what counts as “normal” when defining the time of adolescence. She argues that this misconception of youth as dangerous plays a role in the thinking and assumptions that teachers make about young people, which contributes to adults constantly working to control the behavior of all young people, rather than see adolescents in an individual light.

Gayle Kimball’s work<sup>24</sup> echoes this same thinking. Kimball posits, even in scholarly work that claims to center youth voice, young people are still viewed through a deficit lens, and their voices are rarely amplified or centered in work that is written about them. Kimball argues that there is an entire population of young people – adolescent girls and young women specifically – who are activists in their own right, and not passive, emotional consumers of media who need to be controlled and contained. This issue of control and containment constantly rises to the surface, working to silence the voices of young people, rather than recognize the meaningful

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<sup>18</sup> See: STEINBERG, S.: *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*. CO : Westview Press, 2004; LESKO, N.: Denaturalizing Adolescence: The Politics of Contemporary Representations. In *Youth and Society*, 1996, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 139-161; LAMB, S., BROWN, L. M.: *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers’ Schemes*, NY : St. Martin’s Press, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> See: MINTZ, S.: *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood*. MA : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> See: CHANG-KREDL, S.: “The Toughest Chick in the Alien World”: “Girl power” and the Cartoon Network. In MACEDO, D., STEINBERG, S. (eds.): *Media Literacy*. NY : Peter Lang, 2009, p. 399.

<sup>21</sup> LESKO, N. et al.: The Promises of Empowered Girls. In WYN, J., CAHILL, H. (eds.): *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*. NY : Spring, 2015, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> See: ALTIKULAC, S. et. al.: The Teenage Brain: Public Perceptions of Neurocognitive Development During Adolescence. In *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 2019, Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 339-359.

<sup>23</sup> See: LESKO, N.: Denaturalizing Adolescence: The Politics of Contemporary Representations. In *Youth and Society*, 1996, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 139-161.

<sup>24</sup> See: KIMBALL, G.: Media Empowers Brave Girls to be Global Activists. In *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 2019, Vol. 20, No. 7, p. 35-56.

work that young people, and specifically young women, are doing. Kimball shares a list of young women who are working to raise their voices and bring light to a number of causes, yet the media rarely highlights these types of stories. Young women such as Malala, who is a champion of female education, and Mari Copeny, who is advocating for clean water in Flint, Michigan are just two of the many names Kimball highlights in order to draw attention to the inequity between the behavior of young people and the way the media portray them. When readers look at these examples, on one hand they see true leaders who are working as social activists at very young ages, which is both commendable and remarkable. On the other hand, they also see two individual voices, working to rally people around their causes that are far bigger than they are. Lesko, Chacko, and Khaja-Moolji<sup>25</sup> describe Malala as “*ideal personage of an empowered, postfeminist Muslim girl. Hers is a story of individual triumph to be replicated by other Muslim girls*”. So here again, we see the element of one individual in a neoliberal world, versus collective action and support. These two voices in a sea of many speak to the deep hold that neoliberalism holds on our world. Why is a teenager still fighting for clean water more than 5 years later? While there has been support for her cause, clearly there has not been enough if this fight is not over. When we push the responsibility on individuals to make big social changes, the weight of individualism becomes almost too much to bear.

Kimball also discusses these social movements led by youth, and specifically by young women, when she shares the work of MIT media professor Sasha Costanza-Chock. Costanza-Chock described youth movements as being invisible and indicative of the ways in which the mainstream media repeatedly misrepresents young people in a global context. Again, when the dominant discourse has the power to affect how people think about and view young people, it often falls short of amplifying their voices and celebrating their achievements and instead falls back on the same tired trope of youth as dangerous or “at-risk”. As a society, not only are neoliberal policies that govern young people’s existence completely ignored, but adolescence is viewed through a deficit lens, rather than as an asset and this is a very dangerous hegemonic device.

### **Critical Media Literacy for Women and Girls**

In order to push back on the hegemony that is at work in the dominant discourse around young people, there is a very real need for critical media literacy. As mentioned above, when constructing the narrative of young people, and specifically girls and young women, there are often conflicting approaches. On one side, we see marketers and advertisers working hard to push the narrative of “girl power” and kindness. There are plethoras of books that support what it means to be a girl or how to be kind in today’s world, in addition to the endless number of commercials that support the image of strong females. On the other side, as Lynn Mikel Brown<sup>26</sup> explains, there is often a grotesque amount of attention paid to the idea of “girlfighting”. This attention to “girlfighting” runs in direct contradiction to the push for kindness and empowerment. How can girls and women be kind and lift each other up if they are constantly fighting? This is a prime example of the ways in which narratives are created to fit the image one wants to project. Brown pushes back on this narrative, writing that girls and women are often told to “be nice”, which is often simply code for be passive, be feminine, be less angry, etc. Instead of telling girls to be nice, Brown suggests we instead encourage them to identify their own feelings and the catalysts that make them feel that way. She goes on to support the idea of bringing media criticism into the classroom so that girls and young women can question imagery, media, and product messages. This approach is not only beneficial for the students, but Brown mentions that educators can benefit from this approach as well, as many are often not educated on current issues involving girls, so instead they fall back on the stereotypical messages about what it means to be a girl.

<sup>25</sup> LESKO, N. et al.: The Promises of Empowered Girls. In WYN, J., CAHILL, H. (eds.): *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*. NY : Springer, 2015, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> See: BROWN, L. M.: *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection Among Girls*. NY : NYU Press, 2004.

However, what it means to be a girl seems to be subject to a variety of conflicting messages. As mentioned above, Brown<sup>27</sup> posits that being a girl is framed as being in constant conflict with other girls. However, as marketing would have you believe, being a girl means being empowered and being kind, but definitely not being a feminist. Yes, producers of apparel want to project the image of strong women and yes, producers of feminine products want to bolster the idea of taking ownership over what it means to do something “like a girl”, but they all fall short of sharing or celebrating an explicitly feminist message. Part of this, as Sandra Chang-Kredl<sup>28</sup> explains is because girls are seen as “media commodities”. She writes: “*The process of appropriating a social movement (such as girl power) into capitalist, mainstream media requires a watering down of the movement so that its commodification can mean something to all.*” With that said, we see again how the concept of girl power is more about selling merchandise and less about feminism.

For most advertisers, feminism is a dirty word, and one they will not explicitly use in their advertising. Emilie Zaslow<sup>29</sup> examined this idea in the text *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*. Zaslow explains how media and marketers simply use diluted ideas of feminism and, when situated in a neoliberal world, become more about individual change or status, rather than about a collective group working together to embrace and uphold ideas of feminism. Interestingly, Zaslow learned that participants in a study she conducted had two conflicting concepts of what it means to be a feminist. The young women in her study described being a feminist as either an active role or a performative role. When in an active role, feminists fight for equal rights for women; however, in a performative role, women and girls must be completely independent and self-sufficient. These conflicting ideas of what it means to be a feminist demonstrates the power and influence media has in how this identity is constructed and understood, and also speaks to how neoliberalism’s conception of the individual above all now even plays a role in how people see and define the idea and practice of feminism.

This notion of how media and marketing portray the idea of feminism matters, as there appears to be a conflation of the concepts of feminism and girl power. As mentioned above, Becky Swanson, executive creator at Leo Burnett, made clear that it simply is not popular to talk about feminism anymore. However, for these major marketing firms, apparently it is acceptable to use the phrase girl power and conflate this with working to empower and protect women and girls in the same way that feminist activism is working to elevate all women. Additionally, when girl power messages in the form of products and advertising often sit side-by-side with products perpetuating constant kindness, not only have marketers drastically watered-down concepts of feminism, but they have also aligned girl power with kindness, which as discussed earlier is often code for being meek and quiet. When the core concepts of a movement that is aimed at equity is diminished to oversimplified ideas of girl power or kindness without any real fight behind them, the media has now taken a necessary message and bastardized it for profit.

### 3 Theoretical Framework

I use two main theories to frame the understanding of the commodification of kindness and girl power. The first, critical media literacy, offers a critical lens through which to view various forms of texts and media. This approach to literacy suggests a need to critically question and analyze the messages and dominant voices that are portrayed in all types of texts, working to understand and analyze elements of power. The issue of power leads to the lens of neoliberalism, as folk

<sup>27</sup> See: ROWN, L. M.: *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection Among Girls*. NY : NYU Press, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> CHANG-KREDL, S.: “The Toughest Chick in the Alien World”: “Girl Power” and the Cartoon Network. In MACEDO, D., STEINBERG, S. (eds.): *Media Literacy*. NY : Peter Lang, 2009, p. 397.

<sup>29</sup> See: ZASLOW, E.: *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*. NY : Palgrave, Macmillan, 2009.

in the neoliberal world no longer use their individual power as a means of helping others and building community, but instead they take an “all people for themselves” attitude that breaks down a communal approach to living and instead embraces a capitalist approach.

### Critical Media Literacy

Marcel Danesi<sup>30</sup> explained that “*the spread of youth culture as a ‘cool culture’ is often explained as a commodification of youth by the media, advertising, and marketing industries*”. When one examines the ways in which the media advertises specifically to children, it becomes clear that it is no coincidence that companies capitalize on buying power as a means of seemingly celebrating women and girls. With that in mind, the approach to this paper was a contextual analysis of artifacts, viewed through the lens of critical media literacy in a neoliberal world. When one looks at Danesi’s comment regarding how youth has been commodified by media, combined with Ernest Morrell’s<sup>31</sup> remarks that “*media are, for today’s youth, their primary cultural influence, surpassing the family and the school*”, it should become clear that different forms of media, including commercials and advertising, need to be inspected through the lens of critical media literacy. Without this inspection, parents, students, and educators run the risk of wholly embracing the messages with which they are inundated on a daily basis.

Critical media literacy, while not addressed in curriculum standards in the United States, is a method of looking at the dominant discourse found in all types of media. Its goal is to question and critique media messages, all while focusing on the idea of who has power and who does not. Who is represented and who is not? Who has a voice and who does not? Specifically, Kellner and Share<sup>32</sup> defined critical media literacy as an approach to teaching literacy that “*focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality; incorporating alternative media production; and expanding textual analysis to include issues of social context, control, resistance, and pleasure*”. As Kellner and Share’s definition articulates, this approach focuses on elements of power, questioning, and critical analysis. This means that viewers have to see themselves as active participants with the different forms of media, rather than as passive onlookers. People must critically question all of the various texts that they interact with if they are to begin to understand the power that is inherent in media. This is especially critical when big corporations are using their voice supposedly to empower girls and women – is this really the goal, or is this a great distraction to help sell goods?

Kellner and Share continued their work with critical media literacy in their 2019 text, *The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education*.<sup>33</sup> In this text, the authors provide a thorough breakdown of what critical media literacy is and is not, how the politics of representation play a role in critical media literacy, and what this theory looks like when it is put into practice. While the authors acknowledge that critical media literacy is still a relatively new concept in education, they work to define six key conceptual understandings that can act as a guide for both educators and students. These six conceptual understandings are social construction, language and semiotics, audience and positionality, politics of representation, production and institution, and finally, social and environmental justice. Critical questions can help support these understandings in order to guide teachers and their students in deconstructing different forms of text and media and thinking critically about the material that they interact with on a regular basis.

<sup>30</sup> DANESI, M. The Symbolism of Cool in Adolescence and Youth Culture. In IBRAHAM, A., STEINBERG, S. (eds.): *Critical Youth Studies Reader*. NY: Peter Lang, 2014, p. 38

<sup>31</sup> MORRELL, E.: *Critical Literacy and Urban Youth: Pedagogies of Access, Dissent, and Liberation*. NY : Routledge, 2008, p. 156.

<sup>32</sup> KELLNER, D., SHARE, J.: Critical Media Literacy is Not an Option. In *Learning Inquiry*, 2007, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> KELLNER, D., SHARE, J.: *The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education*. MA : Brill Publishing, 2019, p. 6.

While critical media literacy works to teach students “to learn from media, to resist media manipulation, and to use media materials in constructive ways,” this is not the only purpose that critical media literacy serves. In addition to these skills, critical media literacy also encourages students to become active participants in different forms of media and to use this participation as a way to both understand the world and to be a part of a democratic society. By helping people think critically and find their voice, these skills can be the building blocks for becoming active, critically conscious citizens in a democratic world.

### Neoliberalism

Neoliberal policies and different modes of control have been embedded in our society for years and they have aided in making the public compliant and pliable. Because the neoliberal mindset has become so commonplace, adults often unknowingly pass on these policies and practices to young people. Neoliberal ideas include an “every man for himself” mentality, along with the commodification of everything and a rampant level of consumption. In a neoliberal world, corporations and banks hold political power and power is concentrated in the hands of few. In addition to power aggregating in the hands of few, under neoliberalism, social services are slashed and we see an irrational dismissal of ideas such as “fairness, quality of life, and how we create a sustainable future”.<sup>34</sup> According to neoliberal beliefs and practices, hardships become a result of individual choice and lack of effort, instead of an epidemic of the failing system. Because these hardships are a result of lifestyle choices, the ill fate of certain people is decidedly deserved and should have to be faced by the individual. This focus on the individual also aligns with the concept of individual success – if someone is kind or powerful, it must be due to something inherent in that individual, rather than societal structures that may aim to develop those characteristics.

Under the neoliberal regime, there is no moral obligation to care for those who cannot care for themselves or to provide quality schooling or services to those who are undesirable. Either these institutions then cease to exist in specific communities, or they continue to exist at a subpar level. Henry Giroux<sup>35</sup> explains in Truth Out:

As these institutions vanish – from public schools to health care centers – there is also a serious erosion of the discourses of community, justice, equality, public values, and the common good. One does not have to look too far to see what happens in America’s neoliberal educational culture to see how ruthlessly the inequality of wealth, income, and power bears down on those young people and brave teachers who are struggling every day to save the schools, unions, and modes of pedagogy that offer hope at a time when schools have become just another commodity, students are reduced to clients or disposable populations, and teachers and their unions are demonized.

When the only moral imperative that exists anymore is that of neoliberalism, it should become clear that people no longer mean anything to those who hold the power. With that said, while an individual as a human being may no longer mean anything, a person’s buying power most certainly does – so while those who ascribe to the neoliberal belief system do not care at all about girl power or kindness, they are more than happy to sell it to anyone who has the means.

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<sup>34</sup> HURSH, D.: The Crisis in Urban Education: Resisting Neoliberal Policies and Forging Democratic Possibilities. In *Educational Researcher*, 2006, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> GIROUX, H.: *Marching in Chicago: Resisting Rahm Emanuel's Neoliberal Savagery*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://truthout.org/articles/marching-in-chicago-resisting-rahm-emanuels-neoliberal-savagery/>>.

## 4 Data Sources, Methods and Methodology

The data sources for this paper are a combination of media sources, some in print form and others in video form. These data sources support the idea that the commodification of kindness and ‘girl power’ is everywhere and that these messages often go unquestioned or worse, celebrated blindly. Numerous YouTube videos archive commercials from some of the largest companies that appear to have embraced a celebration of female strength. I examined T-shirts in girls’ clothing sections from two stores in addition to viewing and analyzing commercials for popular companies. Because T-shirts are a form of self-expression, with seemingly a shirt to represent any cause or idea, they are a reasonable choice when examining the commodification of kindness and girl power. Consumers have the decision-making power to purchase items that reflect their personal belief systems, and companies are looking to capitalize on that, in order to make a profit. There is an additional layer here as well, since the clothes that young children wear are often chosen, or at least purchased, by an adult.

When gathering data sources for this study, I first looked at the top clothing companies in America,<sup>36</sup> followed by the ten biggest retail companies in America.<sup>37</sup> Based on the information, I chose to focus on Target (10th biggest retail company) and Old Navy (third biggest clothing company). These two stores provide affordable alternatives to some of the other, more expensive stores that earned places on these lists. With the stores chosen, I completed searches that first focused on girls’ clothing, then on graphic T-shirts, as these pieces of clothing speak to the messaging I discuss in this paper. It is important to note that these results are specific to one small moment in time (October 2020), as online merchandising changes rapidly. However, this search does parallel the results found in an initial search conducted previously. Table 1 shows the data sources that were included in this analysis sold under the girl label and Table 2 shows the data sources that were included in this analysis and sold under the boy label.

Store	Original Number of Artifacts	Artifacts Remaining after Exclusion Criteria	Number with Messages in Question	% of Artifacts with Messages in Question
Target	407	96	12	12.5
Old Navy	155	88	19	21.6

TABLE 1: Data Sources for Analysis, Labeled “Girl” on Shopping Site

Source: own processing, 2022.

Store	Original Number of Artifacts	Artifacts Remaining after Exclusion Criteria	Number with Messages in Question	% of Artifacts with Messages in Question
Target	625	92	7	7.6
Old Navy	174	204	1	0.5

TABLE 2: Data Sources for Analysis, Labeled “Boy” on Shopping Site

Source: own processing, 2022.

When determining inclusion and exclusion criteria, the focal point was the messaging on the shirt, and whether or not it perpetuated either a “girl power” message or one focused on being kind. With that in mind, inclusion criteria included the words “girl”, “strong”, “kind”, “love”, and “peace”. Exclusion criteria included messages focused on voting, holidays, or corporate- owned characters.

<sup>36</sup> HANBURY, M.: *These are the Biggest Clothing Companies in America*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.businessinsider.com/biggest-clothing-companies-in-america-2018-10>>.

<sup>37</sup> JOHNSTON, M.: *10 Biggest Retail Companies*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.investopedia.com/articles/markets/122415/worlds-top-10-retailers-wmt-cost.asp>>.



Along with an analysis of girls’ T-shirts, I also conducted an analysis of popular commercials, specifically from brands who aired longer spots during the 2015 Super Bowl. This particular Super Bowl had the largest audience of all time, with 114.4 million viewers (Basch, Kernan, & Reeves, 2016)<sup>38</sup> and 30-second advertising spots were priced at nearly 4.5 million dollars. This means that the companies who chose to advertise during this game had a vast audience and were willing to spend a large amount of money in order to get their message out. There were three major brands that year that put a spotlight on girls and women: Always, Dove, and Nike. In addition to these brands being present during the Super Bowl, they also have a large social media presence. When inspecting their presence on YouTube, it was possible to find archived commercials, as well as playlists each company had devoted to a message of ‘girl power’. Table 3 illustrates the sources found on YouTube.

Company	Total Videos	Total Playlists	Number with Messages in Question	% of Artifacts with Messages in Question
Always	83	15	22	26.5
Dove	189	26	32	16.9
Nike <sup>39</sup>	180	25	6	3.3%

**TABLE 3:** *Commercials viewed for analysis (Posted 2014 - 2020)*

Source: own processing, 2022.

## 5 Results

I conducted a contextual analysis of artifacts as a method for analyzing and questioning the messages – both implicit and explicit – that are found in different forms of media marketing. Contextual analysis is an approach that involves looking at texts in all forms and asking questions such as what does the text reveal about itself or its audience, or what was the author’s intention?<sup>40</sup> This type of analysis allows the research to characterize the text and consider circumstances around the text. These types of questions go hand-in-hand with the approach to critical media literacy that was described earlier in the paper. During the viewing and reading of these materials, overt and covert categories were used as a way of analyzing the different texts. Overt categories were composed of explicit messages regarding kindness and female strength. The covert categories included stereotypes regarding what it means to be female. I used Carspecken’s <sup>41</sup> concept of low-level coding to help generate themes and patterns that were found in the different texts.

When I examined the T-shirts marketed towards girls, it was evident that there is a deliberate focus on marketing ideas of kindness and strength towards them. For example, in the two stores examined, after exclusionary criteria were put in place, 12.5% of the shirts included these messages at one store, while the other store had 21.6% of the shirts with a message supporting girl power, kindness, or a similar idea. This is in direct contrast to just 0.5% and 7.6% respectively of boys’ shirts at those same stores. Words and images associated with love, peace, kindness, and strength were emblazoned on the girls’ shirts at both stores, while one store boasted just a single boys’ shirt that mentioned kindness.

<sup>38</sup> See: BASCH, C. et al.: Family Fun or a Cultural Free-For-All? A Critique of the 2015 National Football League Super Bowl Commercials. In *Health Promotion Perspectives*, 2016, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 37-44.

<sup>39</sup> Author note: The Better for It Campaign was not found on Nike’s YouTube page, but rather only found when searching for Better for It.

<sup>40</sup> BEHRENDT, S.: *Using Contextual Analysis to Evaluate Texts*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<http://english.unl.edu/sbehrndt/StudyQuestions/ContextualAnalysis.html>>.

<sup>41</sup> See: CAR SPECKEN, P. F.: *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. NY : Routledge, 1996.

In addition to the high percentage of T-shirts marketed towards girls that push the ideas of kindness and girl power, there was also a high percentage of videos that supported these messages. Percentages of video messaging that perpetuated these ideas are even higher than the percentages of the T-shirts embracing these ideas for two of the three companies analyzed. Always devotes more than one fourth of its videos on YouTube to messages of female empowerment or kindness, while Dove devotes almost one fifth. These findings indicate the amount of resources big brands are willing to use in order to sell ideas of girl power and kindness.

## 6 Discussion

The analysis of data brings up three main points for discussion, all of which play a role in the continued commodification of female empowerment. First, as female empowerment continues to be commodified, feminist ideas become a slogan, rather than a movement. Next, by commodifying the idea of girl power, girls and women are recognized as consumers, rather than as empowered people. Finally, structural barriers and inequities that are already in place are not challenged by messages found on T-shirts and mugs, or in commercials and YouTube videos.

### Marketing

While one could argue there is a need for these positive messages, and while society must do a better job supporting and uplifting women and girls, I argue that it is important to question why these messages have become commodified, rather than deeply entrenched in societal structures and institutions. When girl power is repeatedly commodified, feminist ideals become a slogan, rather than a movement. Not only that, but we also must question what the data showed: the concept of kindness is more heavily marketed towards girls and women, often unquestioningly.

I assert that the ways in which advertisers are going about this push for “girl power”, kindness, and equality reeks of commercialism and neoliberalism. A prime example of this is the mega-brand Nike, who has aired numerous commercials linked to the idea of “girl power”. While these videos are meant to be inspiring, many of them often are questionable in the messages they are sending. One of the most troubling, however, is the one called “Better for It – Inner Thoughts”,<sup>42</sup> which aired in 2014. While it is meant to show that women are “better for it” after working out, the commercial really just airs the “inner thoughts” of the women involved – most of which are catty, superficial, or full of self-doubt. The most glaring one that comes to mind is a woman in a spin class who remarks as a group of women joins the class, “*Oh good, a bunch of models right in front of me.*” Nike also presents a woman lifting free weights, saying in her head, “*Don’t mind me with my baby weights and my baby arms.*” If this is meant to be a strong indication of what it means to be powerful and confident, then it appears as though marketers have a skewed view of what these terms mean as they relate to women. Rather than empowerment being about lifting each other up, it instead remains a slogan.

Even more interesting than the “inner thoughts” that were shared in these ads is the thought-process that went into creating them. According to Roo Ciambriello,<sup>43</sup> in an April 14, 2015 publication of Ad Week, Nike views this campaign as, “*the less aggressive (but maybe equally motivating) alternative to “Just do it”.*” I contend this suggests a stereotypical view of the female experience. Aren’t these advertisements trying to undo the notion that girls and

<sup>42</sup> *Better for It: Inner Thoughts*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WF\\_HqZrrx0c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WF_HqZrrx0c)>.

<sup>43</sup> CIAMBRELLO, R.: *Nike Turns Can’t into Can in its Largest Women’s Campaign Ever*. [online]. [2015-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.adweek.com/creativity/nike-turns-cant-can-its-largest-womens-campaign-ever-164059/>>.

women need to be soft and passive? If so, what was it that made Nike and their creative team believe that women needed a less aggressive approach to advertising? Again, are these media sources trying to empower women and promote being strong and powerful, or are they trying to sell merchandise? While the obvious point of marketing is to make money and elevate brand recognition, this should not come at the expense of diluting ideas of feminism and power.

In addition to the Nike ad, the 2015 Super Bowl featured an ad by Always, a company that produces feminine care products. This advertisement worked to question what it means to do anything, “like a girl”.<sup>44</sup> At first glance, it felt truly educative, the way that the directors and producers on set spoke to the boys about whether or not their sister or their mom runs or fights in the same ridiculous way that they had just mimed. At first glance, this video appeared to be genuinely pushing for girls and women to be recognized for being strong, brilliant, and capable. After some time passed, however, I had to revisit this initial reaction and question what was at play here. Why did it take a huge feminine care product brand and a prime slot in the Super Bowl to support this message? Where has this support always been?

Since then, I have not seen similar ads come out of the Always brand, at least not on mainstream television or during prime marketing times. There was, however, one advertisement in 2016 that despaired about how emojis do not reflect the lives of girls (Emojis, 2016).<sup>45</sup> The video begins with girls talking about the emojis they like to use, with one of the first statements being about the “poop emoji”. After this discussion, the girls scroll through their phones, looking at the emojis available to them. Some mention that most of the girl emojis are wearing pink while others complain that there are not enough women in the jobs section of their emojis. The text laid over the video states that emojis limit girls to stereotypes, and then a narrator asks the participants in the video what types of emojis they would like to see. The video bordered on ridiculous, and the remarks in the comments section illustrated that many who watched the video ended up slamming the idea of feminism as catty and ridiculous, due to this advertisement. Rather than promote an idea of feminism, even a soft version of feminism, the advertisement instead brought ridicule. I argue that this video missed the mark on trying to promote what life is #likeagirl, and in the process, did damage to the other struggles for equity and equality that women and girls are fighting. This reiterates the idea that when “girl power” is commodified, feminist ideas become a slogan or catchphrase, rather than a movement.

While there are other parts to the Always “Like a Girl” videos, not many of them have reached the mainstream media, so it appears as though Always is not invested in promoting images of strong, powerful females. Instead, it is all about the bottom line – selling their product to whomever may have seen the commercial and felt moved by it. This is evidenced by the fact that this entire marketing campaign (case study:always#like a girl, n.d.)<sup>46</sup> grew out of the need to make Always relevant as a brand to millennials. Always saw their competitors using social media as a way to draw the attention of millennial girls, so they felt the need to reach that audience in a new way. Ian Heinig<sup>47</sup> notes that millennials represent nearly 30% of the US population as well as a lifetime value of \$10 trillion, so it makes sense that a corporation would want to reach that segment of the market. The use of YouTube videos for marketing was born out of that need, and since this campaign started, it has won Emmy awards, as well as advertising awards. While the message may be well intended, it is steeped in consumption and commodification.

<sup>44</sup> *Like a Girl*. [Full Video]. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs>>.

<sup>45</sup> *Like a Girl: Girl Emojis*. [Full Video]. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXuYPOXIH4>>.

<sup>46</sup> *Always #LikeaGirl*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.dandad.org/en/d-ad-always-like-a-girl-campaign-case-study-insights/>>.

<sup>47</sup> HEINIG, I.: *5 Effective Ways to Advertise to Millennials*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://themanifest.com/advertising/5-effective-ways-advertise-millennials>>.

As women and girls continue to be viewed for their buying power, there is another main point for discussion; namely, the idea that dominant structures and hegemonic ideas about girls and women are not challenged by the messages in products and commercials. An example of this type of advertising speaks to the ways in which big brands continue to perpetuate stereotyped views of what it means to be beautiful. While Dove's "Real Beauty Sketches"<sup>48</sup> was seeking to get the message across that 'you are more beautiful than you think', I argue instead that it was off-base, focusing solely on hegemonic notions of beauty and the ways that others see girls and women, rather than promoting messages about female strength. The ad features a sketch artist who does not physically see the women, but who creates two sketches of them – one based on the ways in which the women describe themselves and the other based on the ways someone who met them that day describes them. Toward the end of the video, a woman remarks, "*I have some work to do on myself*" and then the male interview voice asks her if she thinks she is more beautiful than she says. Another woman comments that she looks so 'fat' in the sketch that was based on her description, while another mentions how tired she looks in her first sketch. Again, while advocating for body confidence is important, I contend this advertisement is not doing anything to promote body positivity or female empowerment. Instead, it gets viewers to tear up and make an emotional connection to the women in the video, which is ideal for selling products.

This leads to a final point of discussion: by commodifying girl power, girls and women are recognized as consumers, but are they actually being empowered? Since many of these videos claim to promote girl power and equality of the sexes, it is worth examining who is behind them. After all, if the message is that we are looking for equality for all and seeking to amplify the voices of women, then women should be the driving forces behind this marketing. When researching the Always "Like a Girl" campaign, I found that a female documentary filmmaker, Lauren Greenfield, was asked to be producer of the film. It was encouraging to see a female behind the camera in this regard. However, a man named John Casey produced the Dove commercials that worked with the idea of real beauty and the creative lead was also a man – Anselmo Ramos.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, the creative directors behind all of Nike's "Better for It" commercials are all men: Alberto Ponte, Ryan O'Rourke, and Dan Viens.<sup>50</sup> Again, if the purpose is to center the voices and experiences of life as a female, why are three men the ones in charge of creative direction? If big name companies do not have women on the creative team or behind the camera of advertisements that intend to build up women and girls, center their voices and experiences, and give them the chance to be recognized for their strength and ability, then these companies are not as invested in female empowerment as they claim to be. Kat Gordon, founder of the 3% Conference echoed this thought when she said: "*As someone who truly cares about female leadership, I'd rather you put someone on your board than pay lip service to this issue.*"<sup>51</sup>

In addition to commercial advertising, print advertising and the clothes available for young girls and women all echo the idea of kindness and 'girl power' being in style right now. A search of two popular stores illustrates this idea. At one store, of the 155 graphic T-shirts for sale, 20 of the shirts have a message regarding female strength or kindness, including the simple

<sup>48</sup> Dove Real Beauty Sketches: *You're More Beautiful Than You Think*. [Full video]. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=litXW9IUauE>>.

<sup>49</sup> GROSE, J.: *The Story Behind Dove's Mega Viral "Real Beauty Sketches" Campaign*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.fastcompany.com/1682823/the-story-behind-doves-mega-viral-real-beauty-sketches-campaign>>.

<sup>50</sup> CIAMBRELLO, R.: *Nike Turns Can't into Can in its Largest Women's Campaign Ever*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://www.adweek.com/creativity/nike-turns-cant-can-its-largest-womens-campaign-ever-164059/>>.

<sup>51</sup> ZMUDA, N., DIAZ, A. C.: *Female Empowerment in Ads: Soft Feminism or Soft Soap? Go-Girl Marketing is the Hot New Trend. But are These Ads Culture-Changing or Simply 'Pinkwashing'?* [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://adage.com/article/cmo-strategy/marketers-soft-feminism/294740>>.

“Girls Rule” in all capital letters, covered in sequins and “Girls Empower Girls” in hot pink, capital letters (Old Navy).<sup>52</sup> At another, shoppers find messages such as “Fueled by Kindness” or “A Little Kindness Can Change Everything” as just two of many options offered on young girls’ T-shirts (Target).<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, a look at boys’ T-shirts at the same stores reveal just one “Be Kind” shirt at the first store, and seven at the second. Again, while all of these messages are admirable and important, and while the world has seen action in the movements such as #MeToo or the taking down of Dr. Larry Nassar, the push for power and strength cannot simply skim the surface. When these messages stay surface level, they only act to bastardize ideas of feminism, fail to challenge the dominant discourse, and continue to see women and girls solely as consumers.

When one digs a bit deeper into the strategies and mindsets of big brands and their marketing strategies, it becomes clear that the path to female empowerment is not an altruistic one. As mentioned earlier, the “Like a Girl” campaign that Always began grew out of the need to make the brand recognizable to millennials. Additionally, Nike was looking for brand loyalists by appealing to women’s interests in sports and Dove was looking to redefine beauty as a means of making an emotional connection with women and thus, amplifying their products. While companies may be operating under the guise of supporting women, make no mistake – they actively choose to soften their language and not push too far in one direction, to avoid alienating any of their other customers. As mentioned earlier, advertisers and marketers consider “feminism” a dirty word and companies will not run the risk of losing revenue in order to explicitly support female empowerment and equality. These major corporations are less concerned with supporting and uplifting women and more concerned with keeping as large of a customer base possible, as happy as possible.

### **Critical Media Literacy in the Classroom**

When thinking about critical media literacy in the classroom, it is clear that schools in the United States do not implement these skills and practices, nor are teachers being adequately prepared to teach these concepts. While Canada mandates media literacy in every grade from 1-12,<sup>54</sup> the same is not true for students in the United States. Stuhlman and Silverblatt<sup>55</sup> found a rise in media literacy courses offered at the university level, but this does not seem to trickle down into PK-12 education for most students. One can speculate about why US schools do not teach these skills regularly, but there is not one simple answer. For example, many teachers do not feel equipped to address these topics; these skills are not found in curriculum standards, so they get overlooked; or some educators find the idea of critical media literacy to be ‘political’ and thus do not want to address it in their classrooms. However, while there are some teachers not doing this work in their classrooms, many others are working to implement critical media literacy practices in their classrooms and creating meaningful, thoughtful moments for their students in the process.

One example is the work done by GERALYN BYWATER McLaughlin. She became aware of how heavily popular culture appeared to be influencing her students, so she chose to bring it into her classroom. In her chapter, “Six, Going on Sixteen”, Bywater McLaughlin recounts her years as an early elementary school teacher and how she saw first-hand the deep impact that popular culture – specifically advertising – had on her very young students. She recounts stories of children fighting over wearing the “right” brand of sneakers and explains to her

<sup>52</sup> *Old Navy*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://oldnavy.com>>.

<sup>53</sup> *Target*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://target.com>>.

<sup>54</sup> See: KELLNER, D., SHARE, J.: *The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education*. MA : Brill Publishing, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> See: STUHLMAN, L., SILVERBLATT, A.: *Media Literacy in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education: Survey to Explore the Depth and Breadth of Media Literacy Education*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<http://www.webster.edu/medialiteracy/>>.

readers how “child development experts now work with marketing firms to optimize the impact of commercials according to the developmental stage of the target audience”.<sup>56</sup> This focused, deliberate approach to targeting kids through advertising results in childhoods being shaped by corporations and value being assigned to young children and teens based on what brands they can wear, all without the benefits of critical media literacy to help them think about the constant media messages that surround them.

Instead of ignoring what she was seeing, Bywater chose to explore the media imagery and texts her students were bringing into the classroom regarding stereotyped views of toys and advertising messages about the “right” brands to wear. She worked with colleagues to form a media study group and then worked across the school to encourage families and her peers to inspect the influence that media has in their lives and to take a step back to think about how media influences might be shaping their worlds and views. Through this work, Bywater was able to help her students think critically about the imagery they were interacting with, help families engage in activities that did not involve a screen or popular culture, and encourage her peers to consider how media was a constant force in the lives of their students and think about how to inspect those messages in the classroom.

As another example, Bakari Chavanu found similar issues with advertising and a lack of criticality in his own classroom, this time a high school classroom. When working with 11th graders, Chavanu took an approach to literacy that not nearly enough students get to experience; he wrote a unit based on critical media literacy and advertising. While working with his students to deconstruct advertising practices, they questioned what messages advertisements perpetuated, the techniques advertisers use to sell products, and even issues of race, gender, and class as they appear in advertising. Chavanu’s students were “reluctant to admit advertising’s influence on their own values and decisions as consumers”,<sup>57</sup> which is common, given the lack of critical media literacy instruction in both formal and informal education. However, by the end of the unit, Chavanu felt the unit had been successful, and that his students started to see themselves as “critically conscious citizens rather than manipulated consumers”.<sup>58</sup>

While these two examples represent just a small sample of how critical media literacy can be brought into the classroom, there are options for every grade level and every content area. The point is that teachers need to be interacting with students in a way that views them as active thinkers, rather than passive consumers. By drawing students into conversation about the media they interact with, the images they see, and the messages they receive, teachers can draw the concepts of critical media literacy into every classroom. When working with students in the area of critical media literacy, it is imperative that educators must first be media literate themselves. This includes being “prepared with a framework and pedagogy to guide their students to critically question and create alternatives to the messages they are seeing, hearing, and using every day”.<sup>59</sup> While this may feel challenging when teachers are already under so much pressure, the reality is that implementing critical media literacy in classrooms can help support many of the Common Core State Standards.<sup>60</sup> These practices open the door to so many possibilities for both students and teachers at a time when critical thinking is of the utmost importance.

<sup>56</sup> BYWATER-MCLAUGHLIN, G.: Six, Going on Sixteen. In MARSHALL, E., SENSOY, O. (eds.): *Rethinking Popular Culture and Media*. WI : Rethinking Schools, 2016, p. 31.

<sup>57</sup> CHAVANU, B.: *Seventeen, Self-Image, and Stereotypes*. In MARSHALL, E., SENSOY, O. (eds.): *Rethinking Popular Culture and Media*. WI : Rethinking Schools, 2016, p. 23.

<sup>58</sup> CHAVANU, B.: *Seventeen, Self-Image, and Stereotypes*. In MARSHALL, E., SENSOY, O. (eds.): *Rethinking Popular Culture and Media*. WI : Rethinking Schools, 2016, p. 27.

<sup>59</sup> KELLNER, D., SHARE, J.: *The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education*. MA : Brill Publishing, 2019, p. 79.

<sup>60</sup> *Common Core State Standards*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSL\\_Math%Standards.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSL_Math%Standards.pdf)>.

This is the power inherent in critical media literacy. Many approaches to literacy are all missing the elements of power, questioning and critical analysis. Educators must move beyond that, in order to help young people learn how to be critical of the various texts that they interact with if they are to begin to understand the power that is inherent in media. We must ensure that all of our students get the chance to learn these skills and understand the ways in which media mediates their understanding of the world. This is true not only for students, but for adults as well. In today's media-saturated world, this should seem like an obvious – if not imperative – skill for all youth. Not only should schools expose students to critical media literacy, but they should also support students in becoming proficient with these skills. Unfortunately, unlike scholars and educators in places such as Canada, Great Britain, and Australia, the United States views critical media literacy as something that is seen as optional, at best and unnecessary, at worst.<sup>61</sup>

Considering the capacity that media has to present images and meaning to youth and, thus, to understand their world, educators must rise to the challenge of helping students understand the multicultural society that they now inhabit. Because so much of what is presented to students is either what they choose to see or what the mainstream media allows them to see, it is imperative that educators help young people become sensitized to topics that are not brought to light in the classroom, including social inequities and injustices. Critical media literacy that acknowledges media texts of all types that students are engaging with needs to be included in the formal school curriculum. Without some guidance and dialogue, the relationship that youth and media share will be one of stereotypes and discriminatory views based on gender, race, class, and sexuality. As educators work to help students manage all of this, however, it is important not to view students as being passive in this process. Children need to become active in the meaning-making process and as Beverly Daniel Tatum reminds us: “*children need to be able to recognize distorted representations, they also need to know what can be done about them*”.<sup>62</sup> This is especially important, given how much advertising is directed towards young people. By exposing both youth and adults to critical media literacy, they can be given the opportunity to explore ideas that are not otherwise discussed with them, to work with these messages and experiment with what they mean to them and how these hegemonic and stereotypical images and messages affect their own identities and thoughts. These moments of exploration and understanding can prove very powerful in the lives of youth and allow them the freedom and agency to decide how media will affect their lives in the future.

The effect that media has on young people needs to be examined and critiqued, and that is what critical media literacy strives to do. Kellner explains that by working to teach critical media literacy in our schools, educators can work toward the goal of critiquing mainstream media and examining the ideology, power, and domination that are in play in all forms of text that young people are interacting with on a daily basis. This examination of media, technology, and even products in popular stores can then allow students to gain a greater understanding of both the reality that they are experiencing, as well as the social realities of the world around them. In this way, not only are students working to understand the ways in which they receive media and make meaning of it, but they are also becoming active members in a neoliberal society that needs to challenge the dominant discourse and the messages disseminated to the public.

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<sup>61</sup> See: KELLNER, D., SHARE, J.: Critical Media Literacy is Not an Option. In *Learning Inquiry*, 2007, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 59-69.

<sup>62</sup> DANIEL-TATUM, B.: “*Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” And Other Conversations About Race. NY : Basic Books, 2017, p. 49.

## 7 Conclusion

The key is, can advertising get to a point where women are in leadership [roles], where women's perspectives inform the ads, and the products aren't actively dangerous to the health, safety or equity of women? Until Donna Draper is making as many decisions over the content of advertising as Don Draper, and the products being sold don't sell women out, then this trend is nothing more than another selling tool – and that tool won't work very well in the long run.

Zmuda and Diaz<sup>63</sup> highlighted the work of journalist Jennifer Pozner above when they shared this message. As Pozner made clear, this trend of girl power and kindness will simply entrench itself as a marketing ploy that will eventually fizzle out when it no longer draws huge revenue. If there is no substance, no belief system, no women behind the advertising and marketing decisions, kindness and girl power will continue to be commodified, girls and women will be viewed as consumers first, and the current structures in place will fail to be challenged. However, it is important to realize that simply having a Donna Draper making decisions in the boardroom does not ensure what is necessary here; namely, an authentic engagement with girls and women, and a level of support that is intended to empower and uplift women and girls, rather than simply draw in lifelong brand loyalists.

In order to move beyond a check-listed version of gender equity and equality, there need to be efforts from schools, universities, corporations, and the media to center and uplift the voices of women and girls. Rather than commercials that share the supposed inner thoughts of women, instead more companies can follow the route of Brooks Running and Dick's Sporting Goods. Whenever a customer makes a purchase from their Empower Her line of shoes and clothes, a percent of proceeds goes to Girls on the Run, which is a non-profit organization focused on supporting girls to lead healthy lives.<sup>64</sup> Another example of working to empower and support women and girls in an authentic way would be to examine decision-making processes across institutions. Who has power and who does not? Who sits at the head of the table and who works in a support role? Is success and power defined as a few individuals who made it to the top, or is there collective action and support for all? It is not enough to say that a woman is present in the boardroom, as Pozner suggested. Instead, that presence needs to come with improving conditions for all females in the workplace, not just a few women who climbed the ladder. As Catherine Rottenberg reminds her reader: *"This amorphous "ambition gap" very quickly comes to stand in for inequality, radically reducing inequality to the absence of women in positions at the top."*<sup>65</sup> When companies continue to take a superficial or neoliberal approach to empowerment and support, they will not achieve fundamental change.

The lingering issue here is, when the neoliberal world works so pervasively to commodify and individualize everything, ideas as simple but as imperative as kindness and girl power become perverted. Rather than big brands working to support and uplift women and girls, they are instead searching for brand loyalists. Instead of working to challenge hegemonic ideas of what it means to be a girl, companies continue to see girls and women as consumers, rather than as part of a community. With this in mind, schools, parents, educators, and the mainstream media need to be mindful of the ways in which they address certain concepts. Rather than make kindness and girl power seem like something that is very in style right now, they need to continue to push for basic human decency, which includes social justice and equity in all settings. In schools, educators and administrators need to stop giving out rewards for every

<sup>63</sup> ZMUDA, N., DIAZ, A. C.: *Female Empowerment in Ads: Soft Feminism or Soft Soap? Go-Girl Marketing is the Hot New Trend. But are These Ads Culture-Changing or Simply "Pinkwashing"?* [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://adage.com/article/cmo-strategy/marketers-soft-feminism/294740>>.

<sup>64</sup> *Empower Her Collection*. [online]. [2022-03-26]. Available at: <<https://support.brooksrunning.com/hc/en-us/articles/360055848312-Empower-Her-collection->>.

<sup>65</sup> ROTTENBERG, C.: The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism. In *Cultural Studies*, 2014, Vol. 28, No. 3, p. 425.



single act of kindness and turning kindness into a competition, where kids can fight to see who displays the most acts of kindness. Instead of these approaches, educators need to continue to make these ideas explicit for children – all children, not just girls. Part of making these ideas explicit for all children lies in deep discussions about what it means to be kind and strong and powerful and how that can take on many different shapes and forms, depending on the person. Another part of this speaks to the need to teach children and adults what it means to be an ally, to raise up the voices of others, and to ensure that those who are traditionally marginalized are empowered and supported. A final part of making these ideas explicit for all who view them lies in critical media literacy, and encouraging viewers to interrogate the messages that they are bombarded by on a regular basis. Society cannot blindly buy into marketing campaigns that seem strong or equitable on the surface; there is a need to question, critique, and think about media and advertising in order to push back on commodification and challenge dominant structures. If big brands can tap into children as huge revenue, we can tap into children's hearts and minds early. And we don't need a T-shirt to do it.

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Jana Radošinská, Lucia Magalová

# Supes, Inc.: Episodic Television Drama *The Boys*, Antiheroism and Society of Performance

## ABSTRACT

In this study, we would like to address the issue of antiheroism in relation to the popular episodic television drama *The Boys* (Amazon Prime Video, since 2019). The television antihero is discussed quite frequently, but more often in a rather general manner than based on specific case studies. The study outlines the related terminological axis and then applies the individual theoretical frameworks to a specific episodic television drama that presents an axiologically and morally determined conflict between fictional characters of superheroines and superheroes and their counterparts, ordinary citizens, direct or indirect victims of amoral decisions made by people with superhuman abilities. As we believe, applying the given body of knowledge to the selected television drama via a case study allows us to explain the contemporary understanding of antiheroism in relation to fictional characters with superhuman abilities and, at the same time, outline the specific aspects of so-called society of performance on basis of theoretical reflection on the issue, followed by a qualitative content analysis of the episodic television drama *The Boys* focused on its selected narrative and discursive aspects.

## KEY WORDS

Antihero. Episodic Television Drama. Superhero. *The Boys*. Society of Performance.

# 1 Introduction

At present, stories involving superheroines and superheroes are a well-established part of media culture, possessing exceptional commercial potential. Audiences are able to encounter them in many different shapes and forms, via generically diverse media products – especially in the sphere of audiovisual media production. The first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century certainly witnessed the increased popularity of feature films, i.e., blockbusters depicting superheroines and superheroes, but this development trend actually reaches far beyond the boundaries of cinematic production. The viewer can also seek and consume a variety of episodic television dramas which offer their audiences non-traditional and, in a way, more controversial variations of superheroic characters. We also have to acknowledge that the outlined creative tendency is especially relevant in terms of original production offered by Internet-distributed television providers, e.g., Disney+, Amazon Prime Video, HBO Max or Netflix. Episodic dramas that are – directly or indirectly – associated with already established and highly profitable movie franchises; for example, Marvel's *WandaVision* (Disney+, 2021) or *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (Disney+, 2021) are immensely popular, along with other television shows which obviously define and present their main protagonists with superhuman abilities as antiheroic. We may mention the episodic television dramas *Loki* (Disney+, 2021) or *The Boys* (Amazon Prime Video, since 2019); we intend to address the latter in detail.

The aim of the study is to reflect on different forms and variations of antiheroism which are related to the episodic television drama *The Boys*. The given product presents a morally questionable group of superheroic protagonists. Due to their repulsive acts or at least controversial decisions and opinions, these characters are confronted with the anger and contempt expressed by a group of common people, including victims of superheroines and superheroes' indifference and misconduct. The television drama in question thus deliberately violates the ordinary conventions of stories about superheroism. Even though these often present a wide variety of character flaws associated with superhuman individuals in order to diversify the considerably exhausted narration schemes, they eventually tend to emphasise these characters' clearly apparent humanistic qualities. However, the episodic television drama *The Boys* purposely ignores this strategy, depicting superhumans as calculative and mentally disturbed individuals who abuse their exceptionality for their own benefit, regardless of the serious social consequences of their actions. It is necessary to mention that the TV show is one of the most successful original products of the company Amazon Prime Video to date. In September and October 2021, the second season of *The Boys* reached a massive streaming viewership of 891 million minutes a week, becoming as successful as the most watched products offered by Netflix, Amazon Prime Video's direct competitor.<sup>1</sup> The given data suggests that the target viewers are interested in this particular portrayal of superhumanity. It is thus not too surprising that Amazon Prime Video plans to further utilise this episodic drama to establish a multifaceted media franchise. The first two seasons will be followed by new episodes (scheduled to be released in summer 2022) and also by a formally autonomous animated series titled *Diabolical*, which intends to focus on the business with superheroic figures, specifically on teenage superheroines and superheroes crossing all the existing moral, sexual and physical boundaries in order to sign lucrative contracts.

The discussed issue refers to the need to re-evaluate the existing concepts of antiheroism in relation to superheroic characters, who have usually been considered as fictional protagonists protecting the weak and helping those who need to be saved. However, the axiological relativism present in *The Boys* and the amoral acts of most of its protagonists lead us towards a theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> TASSI, P.: *'The Boys' Ratings Are So Strong It's Challenging Netflix's Top Hits*. Released on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020. [online]. [2022-01-10]. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2020/10/02/the-boys-ratings-are-so-strong-its-challenging-netflixs-top-hits/>>.

reconsideration of the available body of knowledge. This theoretical framework is then applied to the analysed television drama with an ambition to determine the nature of these new trends in audiovisual production centred on superheroism. Our theoretical reflection on the relevant problems employs multiple strategies of logical reasoning – analysis and synthesis, comparison, giving examples and inductive and deductive reasoning. The second part of the study offers a set of empirical findings. A case study focused on the episodic television drama *The Boys* aims to offer a qualitative interpretation of the portrayed characters and their relationships based on a narrative and discourse analysis. The individual parts of the analysis reflect on the presence of antiheroism in *The Boys* and the television show's ability to depict the principles of so-called society of performance, as determined and explained by the philosopher Byung-Chul Han.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Antiheroic Superhero and Society of Performance

Audiovisual works involving superheroines and superheroes have become significant bearers of secularised myths associated with late modern culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Malíček even notes that contemporary media culture is, as a whole, strongly dependent on creation of late modern myths.<sup>3</sup> Radošinská sees film and television stories about superheroines and superheroes as refined, visually attractive entertainment sources based on 'recycled' themes and heavily standardised narrative structures. Their popularity is conditioned by the presence of physically attractive people possessing abilities that reach way beyond what a common person is capable of.<sup>4</sup> Considering the related body of knowledge in the field of psychoanalysis, Malíčková et al. argue that superheroism represents, at least in terms of psychoanalytical reasoning, the highest grade of heroism that can be experienced by our *psyche* while establishing and creating Self.<sup>5</sup> Dantzler claims that the primary reason why superheroines and superheroes are so popular lies in their ideological roots. Their stories are usually built upon universally comprehensible narrative formations which reflect Christian and Jewish allegories in relation to American cultural values and mythological elements present in contemporary art.<sup>6</sup> Based on these fundamental ideological aspects, the current popularisation of superheroic stories in the sphere of television production may be explained not only in the context of the dynamic development of Internet-distributed television services, but also in terms of today's tendency to utilise the principles of episodic storytelling in feature film production. Considering Berger's opinions on iteration and schematisation of media content and the extent of redundancy present in current media production, we have to agree with the author's claim that this trend has established a new aesthetic framework of episodic production.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the same topics and ideas are applied repeatedly, across diverse types of media. Creating multiple sequels to feature films that no longer possess an autonomous narrative value, i.e., using the principles of seriality (that is, episodic storytelling) thus leads to seamless and smooth adoption of these specific narrative schemes in the field of episodic television production.

The contemporary scholarly reflection on superheroines and superheroes necessarily considers the ideological, thematic and production-related convergence that blurs the once clear boundaries between the form and content of film and episodic television drama. Many renowned

<sup>2</sup> See: HAN, B.-C.: *Vyhořelá společnost*. Prague : Rybka Publishers, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> MALÍČEK, J.: *Vademecum popkultúry*. Nitra : UKF, 2008, p. 54-55.

<sup>4</sup> RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> MALÍČKOVÁ, M. et al.: *Obrazy hrdinu v kultúrnej pamäti*. Nitra : UKF, 2017, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> DANTZLER, P.: Multiliteracies of the MCU: Continuity Literacy and the Sophisticated Reader(s) of Superhero Media. In CHAMBLISS, J. C., SVITAVSKY, W. L., FANDINO, D. (eds.): *Assembling the Marvel Cinematic Universe: Essays on the Social, Cultural and Geopolitical Domain*. Jefferson : McFarland & Company, 2018, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> BERGER, A. A.: *Popular Culture Genres*. London : Sage Publications, 1992, p. 48-49.

media professionals, actresses and actors are equally interested in both of these production spheres; the presumption that episodic television dramas are, compared with film production, automatically qualitatively and aesthetically inferior is no longer valid. The industrial convergence of these once separate production fields is significantly deepened by (nowadays very common and commercially interesting) application of the principles of franchise filmmaking. Schatz defines the term “franchise filmmaking” as a complex way of building a narrative universe. The original storyline expands and unfolds; this process results in a number of mutually interconnected tales which aim to enrich, follow and/or extend the previously existing stories. This narrative principle necessarily leads towards intensifying target audiences’ emotional ties, but not to a specific segment of a story, but rather to a narrative universe comprised of the individual stories.<sup>8</sup> In other words, similar narratives are naturally episodic, which makes them strikingly similar to ‘traditional’ episodic television dramas in terms of both their form and content. Acknowledging this fact, Eco reminds that consumption of episodic entertainment involves a considerable number of different opportunities to perceive and interpret already popular stories and standardised narrative structures that differ from each other, but only slightly, on basis of irrelevant details.<sup>9</sup> Given that, we may claim that film stories centred on (or at least associated with) superheroism are a serialised kind of audiovisual media production which utilises creative strategies typical for episodic television dramas. In other words, most movies about heroines and heroes are meant to continue, some of them becoming trilogies or full-fledged film sagas, other moving to the small(er) screens, i.e., to the field of episodic television production.

The outlined attractiveness of superheroism is associated with the significant amount of importance we tend to ascribe to the ephemeral and unreal idea of ‘superhumanity’. Reflecting on this problem, Stableford notes that today’s media audiences are fascinated by the motives of superhumanity and immortality. Moreover, this fascination involves fantasising about ‘latent superhumanity’ that is especially typical for teenagers, i.e., the primary target group of science-fiction. According to the author, this adolescent dream about discovering and exploring one’s own (as yet hidden) superhuman abilities is subject to calculative decisions of media producers, resulting in a surge of stories in which heroines and heroes find out who they truly are and abandon their ordinary lives in favour of assuming secret identities. The entertainment industry thus offers these characters as ‘a cure’ for existential discontent and anxiety, as a means of escapism.<sup>10</sup> However, the episodic television drama *The Boys* partly modifies this communication strategy, precisely because its story is not primarily designed for teenagers. Heroines and heroes appearing in the TV show are allegedly born with their superhuman abilities, but later it is uncovered that their superhumanity results from unauthorised lab experiments on selected newborns. However, those possessing superhuman abilities do not acknowledge this fact (some of them are not even aware of it) and consider themselves as ‘the chosen ones’, as individuals destined to success, fame, wealth and admiration of ‘the ordinary mortals’. Almost none of them hides their true identity. Along with many other expressions of bad temperament typical for the individual figures, this shared character trait defines the drama’s protagonists as antiheroines and antiheroes.

Malíček reminds that, considering our conventional understanding of what is moral and what is immoral, practically all heroic figures of contemporary popular culture could be defined as antiheroic.<sup>11</sup> According to Radošinská, the increasing popularity of antiheroic behaviour results from the sociocultural framework of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, axiological orientation of hypermodern

<sup>8</sup> SCHATZ, T.: New Hollywood, New Millennium. In BUCKLAND, W. (ed.): *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies*. New York, London : Routledge, 2009, p. 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> ECO, U.: *Meze interpretace*. Prague : Karolinum, 2005, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup> STABLEFORD, B.: *Science Fact and Science Fiction: An Encyclopedia*. New York, London : Routledge, 2006, p. 509.

<sup>11</sup> MALÍČEK, J.: Hl’a, popkultúrny hrdina. In MALÍČEK, J., MALÍČKOVÁ, M., ZLATOŠ, P.: *Zborník o populárnej kultúre: Popkultúrny hrdina vo virtuálnej realite*. Nitra : UKF, 2008, p. 24.

man is expressed within the processes of transforming the hero(ine) archetype, turning this role model worthy of admiring and following into superheroic and antiheroic characters who are funny to watch and utterly indifferent towards the once firm ideas of morality and noble-mindedness. Not only superheroines and superheroes, but also practically all late modern heroic figures lack a unique set of values or beliefs. However, they are still able to stand out and attract our attention, because they possess superhuman abilities, technological, economic and/or material superiority, along with the capability of assuming a leading position and the tendency to solve problems or conflicts by acting violently.<sup>12</sup>

The term “antihero” has many different (sometimes contradictory) definitions. Danesi’s explanation of “antihero” defines such a character as an archetype included in a story “*who lacks the traditional qualities of the adventure-story hero*”. The antihero is typically a coward; some antiheroes might be clumsy, unskilled and often express comedic or ironic traits. The author also underlines the fact that “*the emergence of the antihero as a stock figure is seen by some critics as evidence that pop culture is a pastiche culture, mixing the heroic and the antiheroic, myth and irony, legend and satire, and thus breaking down the classic narrative categories drastically*”.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Lotz replaces the term “antihero” with a seemingly less provocative expression “flawed protagonist”, claiming that the term refers to a character who is mentally unable to fulfil its heroic role.<sup>14</sup> Malíčková et al. explain that our current understanding of antiheroism is based on reception practices typical for popular culture. “Antihero(ine)” is, on the one hand, a binary opposition against a hero(ine), i.e., their adversary personifying evil. However, on the other hand, “antihero(ine)” may be a heroic character with a morally problematic profile. To put it differently, the authors argue that many antiheroic protagonists are heroines and heroes who are, at the same time, bad people.<sup>15</sup> If an antihero(ine) opposes a hero(ine), it is common to see that they are not so different from each other, at least at the beginning. There are many different examples of antiheroines and antiheroes who originally worked with the main protagonists and/or were their friends. The conflict begins when the antihero(ine) uses dangerous and extreme ways to fulfil their goals. These acts and methods then inevitably change their thinking and personality. As a result, a conflict between the hero(ine), the antihero(ine) and the society is established.<sup>16</sup> The outlined definitions also suggest that antiheroism is a complex, multifaceted communication phenomenon and thus, we have to reflect on it in a complex way, by applying various points of view.

Bruun Vaage explains that in fact, “*the intended effect of engaging with an antihero story is to both like and dislike the antihero*”.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the spectator feels conflicted about the antihero, as intended by the story’s creators. However, as the author suggests, there are also several groups of viewers who see the antihero as a heroic character, because they truly believe in the morally problematic values the antihero stands for. Moreover, some of them also fail to reflect on the implications of the antihero’s unacceptable actions, i.e., they are unable to understand how extreme, dangerous and socially disturbing these actions would be if experienced personally (in real life). In other words, antiheroic figures are often perceived as sympathetic despite their numerous character flaws. As noted above, some antiheroines and antiheroes assume antagonistic roles. On the other hand, the audiences tend to root for them especially when they are situated in the position of ‘the good person’ who fails to represent

<sup>12</sup> RADOŠIŇSKÁ, J.: *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> DANESI, M.: *Concise Dictionary of Popular Culture*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London : Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, p. 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> LOTZ, A.: *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York : New York University Press, 2014, p. 61-63.

<sup>15</sup> MALÍČKOVÁ, M. et al.: *Obrazy hrdinu v kultúrnej pamäti*. Nitra : UKF, 2017, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> RADOŠIŇSKÁ, J.: *Obraz superhrdinu v súčasnej filmovej tvorbe*. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MAGÁL, S., PLENCNER, A. (eds.): *Vrtieť psom: Metafora s médiách. Megatrendy a médiá 2013*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2013, p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> BRUUN VAAGE, M.: *The Antihero in American Television*. New York, Abingdon : Routledge, 2016, p. XVI, 91.



the axiological framework we perceive as 'moral'. According to Plencner, antiheroic figures often strive to obtain something which does not belong to them, nor it should. Thus, their claims are illegitimate. While trying to obtain whatever they desire, they are able to do almost anything. These 'everyday heroic figures' then have to face their own failures, but still hope that eventually they will experience their moments of fame and glory. The recipient subconsciously sympathises with them. Antiheroic characters tend to be charismatic and if they are not, their popularity largely results from the recipient's intrinsic moral superiority over such protagonists.<sup>18</sup> Plencner also argues that some antiheroic figures are modelled so suggestively and attractively that they are admired by their audiences regardless of their amoral behaviour. This capability allows them to represent the darker aspects of human nature.<sup>19</sup> We may presume that antiheroic characters are much more than villains whose actions need to be condemned. In fact, these figures are strategically created, able to establish emotional connections with their audiences despite representing immoral ideas and acts; often just because antiheroines and antiheroes are entertaining, charming, witty and cynical. Mišíková has a similar opinion, seeing antiheroic figures as morally volatile characters the audiences tend to sympathise with.<sup>20</sup> It is necessary to underline that at least some antiheroic protagonists do not want to represent evil; in many cases they desire to do good (or rather to fulfil their idea of doing good), but the ways in which they solve conflicts are amoral, undignified, twisted. Antiheroines and antiheroes are deeply convinced that they are right, accepting no other perspective. They also tend to use any means necessary, ignoring all possible consequences others may experience as a result of these deeds.<sup>21</sup> This character trait is obvious in relation to most (not only superheroic) figures present in the episodic television drama *The Boys*.

According to Malíčková et al., we can observe at least three different variations of antiheroines and antiheroes. The first model is represented by the **fundamental** antiheroism. This concept involves antagonists, i.e., villains, figures who personify a moral code which is in sharp contrast with everything the main protagonist stands for. In order to succeed, the main character has to eliminate, defeat, destroy this evil. Fundamental antiheroines and antiheroes do not want, cannot and will not change. They are convinced that their views are the right ones; they face no existential dilemmas, and thus are 'complete'. Their moral code is different than ours. None of their acts are chaotic or random; they see their own goals as 'moral' just because they have no true moral code.<sup>22</sup> In the episodic television drama *The Boys* this concept is best represented by the character of Homelander, the leader of The Seven, a morally compromised group of elite superheroines and superheroes. The authors further explain that the second variation consists of **latent** antiheroines and antiheroes. These people encounter a wide spectrum of different reasons why to become amoral and/or violent. However, we tend to 'forgive' them, because they often regain their moral consciousness and change, or at least question, their immoral behaviour. This kind of antiheroism is thus temporary and volatile. Latent antiheroic figures fail repeatedly; when confronted by diverse existential pitfalls and fears, they react by becoming antiheroic. Yet, this does not mean that they do not fight back; on the contrary, they continuously oscillate between good and evil, knowing that one has to become monstrous in order to defeat 'true' monsters. Therefore, some of these characters are tragic, unable to accept the past.<sup>23</sup> Billy Butcher, the main character of the television drama *The Boys*, is a fitting

<sup>18</sup> PLENCNER, A.: I. Archetyp hrdinu. II. Súčasný obraz hrdinu. In MATÚŠ, J., PRAVDOVÁ, H. (eds.): *Médiá na prahu tretieho milénia*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2006, p. 73-74.

<sup>19</sup> PLENCNER, A.: Filmový hrdina s mesianistickými črtami. In *Communication Today*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> MIŠÍKOVÁ, K.: Čierny (anti)hrdina v tieni podozrenia. In *Kino-Ikon*, 2007, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 88-98.

<sup>21</sup> PLENCNER, A.: I. Archetyp hrdinu. II. Súčasný obraz hrdinu. In MATÚŠ, J., PRAVDOVÁ, H. (eds.): *Médiá na prahu tretieho milénia*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2006, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> MALÍČKOVÁ, M. et al.: *Obrazy hrdinu v kultúrnej pamäti*. Nitra : UKF, 2017, p. 43-44.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

example. Once confronted with his wife's presumed death, he is determined to avenge her by trying to kill Homelander, the fundamental antihero who is allegedly responsible; however, not only Homelander, but also any other superheroic figures affiliated with him. As determined by Malíčková et al., the third type of antiheroism is **pragmatic**. This concept is used most often, but it is also the least interesting one in terms of morality. While fulfilling their objectives, pragmatic antiheroines and antiheroes do not consider whether their behaviour is moral or not, even though they do know the difference. If they think it is necessary, they do not hesitate to lie, cheat or kill. In other words, these individualists always favour their own ambitions over the generally accepted value frameworks, regardless of any possible consequences (that do not directly affect them). Aiming to achieving their goals as quickly and efficiently as possible, they know too well that violence is usually the easiest way how to do so.<sup>24</sup> In *The Boys*, pragmatic antiheroism is personified by Madelyn Stillwell, a top manager who does not hesitate to lie and manipulate to preserve her position. Using Homelander's deviations against him, Stillwell tries to control the superhero and inconspicuously motivates him to pursue her own goals. As most pragmatic antiheroes, even Madelyn Stillwell is, in the end, perceived with a certain degree of empathy, as she does not handle her manipulative strategy well and is exposed to the repulsive behaviour of the fundamental antihero Homelander.

Unlike feature films, episodic television dramas may present antiheroic figures more extensively and ambiguously. Bandirali and Terrone explain this fact by saying: "*The main characteristic of the television antihero is the possibility of going from being good to bad to good and bad again.*" In contrast, cinematic antiheroes can oscillate between the two states, but eventually have to choose one.<sup>25</sup> To put it differently, the episodic nature of television dramas allows them to present antiheroic protagonists in more surprising and unexpected ways. Scheg and Girardi see this tendency as a result of systemic changes in the television industry: "*In recent years, television shows have grown tremendously in scope, graphics, and viewer expectations. To retain viewers a show must have mystery, intrigue, and, typically, plot twists no one ever saw coming.*" That is why we look for relatable characters with many mental layers who react believably in their unique fictional situations.<sup>26</sup> Given that, antiheroic figures are often perceived as more interesting, multidimensional, able to diversify the story and differentiate it from similar narratives included in other episodic television dramas. Mittell remarks that many complex television series share one particularly important trait, "*the narrative prominence of unsympathetic, morally questionable, or villainous figures, nearly always male*". The author further explains that the term "antihero" may not be applicable per traditional literary definition. However, it has become "*the common cultural moniker for this style of characterisation*".<sup>27</sup> As noted by Damico and Quay, antiheroism is "*the signature characteristic of early 21<sup>st</sup>-century television dramas*". The rise of the TV antihero reflects the cultural *zeitgeist* of the new millennium. However, 'antihero fatigue' has become evident over the last decade, which is why other types of antiheroic figures have evolved, including women and married couples.<sup>28</sup> For example, we may say that Carrie Mathison, the main character appearing in *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011 – 2020) is most definitely a pragmatic antiheroine. In the case of *You* (Netflix, since 2018), which explores obsessive and compulsive behaviour, heavy stalking and erotomania, we can identify an antiheroic married couple – Love and Joe who both oscillate between fundamental and pragmatic antiheroism.

<sup>24</sup> MALÍČKOVÁ, M. et al.: *Obrazy hrdinu v kultúrnej pamäti*. Nitra : UKF, 2017, p. 45-46.

<sup>25</sup> BANDIRALI, L., TERRONE, E.: *Concept TV: An Aesthetics of Television Series*. Lanham, London : Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2021, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> SCHEG, A. G., GIRARDI, T.: Introduction. In SCHEG, A. G., GIRARDI, T. (eds.): *Hero or Villain? Essays on Dark Protagonists of Television*. Jefferson : McFarland & Company, 2017, p. 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> MITTELL, J.: *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York, London : New York University Press, 2015, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup> DAMICO, A. M., QUAY, S. E.: *21<sup>st</sup>-Century TV Dramas: Exploring the New Golden Age*. Santa Barbara : ABC-CLIO, 2016, p. 93.

Brost claims that the popularity of (television) antiheroism is not surprising *per se*. According to the author, it can be credited to a variety of different circumstances such as the increasing availability of a wide spectrum of programming options spread across various media. 'Traditional' broadcasters now have to face competition from streaming services that are not obliged to comply with the same content restrictions and regulations. Moreover, viewers have so many different options to watch whatever they like that television producers are willing to seek *niche* audiences and further explore their economic viability.<sup>29</sup> Nochimson notes that the term "antihero" is well suited to the concept of "TV 2.0" which evolved in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Episodic television dramas associated with this '2.0 upgrade' are (allegedly) more socially responsible, representing a diverse variety of races, ethnicities and genders. However, many of their antiheroic characters are charming former criminals "*who band together to save ordinary people from the abuses committed by the rich and privileged*". In fact, television antiheroism refers to a villainy with no discontinuities, fragmentations or paradoxes. Antiheroines and antiheroes are either eccentric outsiders in conflict with a problematic social structure or they have to survive in an almost corrupt society, which makes them appealing and interesting.<sup>30</sup> Expressing a similar opinion, Lotz argues that the wide acceptance of television antiheroines and antiheroes indirectly results from considerable character depth that has emerged as an attribute of episodic television production in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many episodic television dramas involve important backstories saying more about their characters, which adds growing complexity to their behavioural patterns and acts: "*Profound character depth increasingly became a hallmark of a subset of television storytelling.*"<sup>31</sup>

Bruun Vaage explains that this development trend is related to the growing economic importance and cultural prominence of quality TV, also called high-end television. High-end TV tends to be much more surprising and edgy than 'traditional' (linear, network) television which needs to appeal to mass viewers. In order to appear distinctly different from regular TV, quality TV offers thought-provoking complexity and a wider spectrum of antiheroic characters to more specialised, sometimes even *niche* audiences.<sup>32</sup> It is necessary to mention that the adjective "high-end" is, as Nelson writes, derived from the media industry's general tendency to indicate that such a product is expensive and that it possesses high production values. However, this kind of television drama is, above all, multi-layered and generically hybrid, able to appeal to audiences situated beyond its primary target market.<sup>33</sup> Following the same line of thought, Petridis sees the current surge of television antiheroism as a result of the rise of quality television: "*American quality television regenerated the medium and reinvented the norms of the audiovisual narrative (...) One of its innovative norms was the establishment of the antihero archetype as a leading character of a show.*"<sup>34</sup> Bandirali and Terrone argue that the antihero phenomenon may be explained from multiple perspectives, understanding it as a viable production strategy associated with the episodic television drama. As they explain, an audience-oriented approach is particularly important, since today's television viewers are not predominantly families who

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<sup>29</sup> BROST, M. J.: *The Anti-Heroine on Contemporary Television: Transgressive Women*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London : Rowman & Littlefield, 2021, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> NOCHIMSON, M. P.: *Television Rewired: The Rise of the Auteur Series*. Austin : University of Texas Press, 2019, p. 211-212.

<sup>31</sup> LOTZ, A.: *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York : New York University Press, 2014, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> BRUUN VAAGE, M.: *The Antihero in American Television*. New York, Abingdon : Routledge, 2016, p. XVI.

<sup>33</sup> NELSON, R.: *State of Play: Contemporary 'High-End' TV Drama*. Manchester, New York : Manchester University Press, 2007, p. 2. Remark by the authors: The term "quality television" was first coined by Thompson. His publication *Television's Second Golden Age* was published in 1996, stating that "*quality TV is best defined by what it is not. It is not 'regular' TV*". See: THOMPSON, R. J.: *Television's Second Golden Age. From Hill Street Blues to ER*. New York : Syracuse University Press, 1996, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> PETRIDIS, S.: "In Need an Antiheroine": Female Antiheroes in American Quality Television. In SCHEG, A. G., GIRARDI, T. (eds.): *Hero or Villain? Essays on Dark Protagonists of Television*. Jefferson : McFarland & Company, 2017, p. 82.

regularly gather in front of the TV screen: “*Conversely, in contemporary communication, a successful product is characterised by its ability to create strong conflicts (...) it is no longer important how many people gather in front of the screen to watch a series, but how many are discussing it.*” Thus, antiheroines and antiheroes, being morally flawed characters, are able to divide people’s opinions, which inevitably leads to intensive (especially online) discussions on their morality and likability.<sup>35</sup> In other words, antiheroic figures do not exist to represent messages concerning (im)morality, but rather to represent the audiovisual stories they appear in and make them more interesting.

Recently, television scholars have discussed the notion of “antihero” quite extensively. However, only a small portion of these discussions and publications also focus on the female antihero (that is, antiheroine). Hagelin and Silverman explain that if a female character should be positioned as antiheroic, she has to defy the norms of civilisation: “*And yet, the very fact of her gender transforms this dynamic. For women are not expected to rescue society, as men are; they are expected to showcase it, to demonstrate its values and commitments.*” Thus, many female television characters are often mischaracterised as antiheroic just because they occasionally renounce the conventional ideal of femininity. ‘Antiheroines’ are often depicted as apathetic mothers, avaricious schemers, bellyaching nags and pursuers of their own sexual gratification. In addition, they can be deeply narcissistic, which seems to be a problem for a patriarchal society that wants women to remain selfless and that regards narcissism, as a character trait, as “*an especially damning female pathology*”. However, as the authors explain, ‘antiheroic’ female characters essentially affirm the values of late capitalist society instead of disturbing them, despite the ways they represent unconventional womanhood. Moreover, most of them embrace marriage, family, heterosexuality, feminine performance and consumerism. This category includes seemingly antiheroic television characters such as Carrie Bradshaw from *Sex and the City* and its recent sequel *And Just Like That...* (HBO, 1998 – 2004, sequel since 2021) or Piper Chapman from *Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013 – 2019). Therefore, “true” antiheroines need to destabilise the society they live in or at least try to do so, like Cersei Lannister in *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011 – 2019) who repeatedly expresses her resistance to the *status quo*.<sup>36</sup>

According to Hagelin and Silverman, most truly antiheroic female television characters are either childless or lose their children during the course of the series, like Cersei Lannister or Daenerys Targaryen, another prominent female protagonist of *Game of Thrones*. Thus, this absence of motherhood allows the antiheroine to reject the standards of female virtue and decorum. To put it differently, it is obviously easier for these characters to refuse their social responsibility (that is, to break the law, drink, kill, pursue sexual pleasure, etc.) if they are childless. Strangely enough, fatherhood may redeem the male antihero in the eyes of the viewer, making him more sympathetic – because the audiences are effectively reminded of his ties to humanity. However, if an antiheroine neglects or abandons her child(ren), the spectator perceives this decision as unforgivable. Regarding race, the current antiheroine is predominantly white, because white women are traditionally expected to represent idealised civilisation. Thus, their unwillingness or refusal to comply with the *status quo* is perceived as much more problematic than in case of, for example, African American antiheroines. Television antiheroines are products of contemporary feminist ideology, showing their physical prowess, professional success and resistance to male authority. However, they often do not seek justice, but rather vengeance, greed, pleasure and self-promotion. And, in the end, they are rarely successful.<sup>37</sup> One of the very few examples of ‘successful’ television antiheroines is Ally Mayfair-Richards

<sup>35</sup> BANDIRALI, L., TERRONE, E.: *Concept TV: An Aesthetics of Television Series*. Lanham, London : Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2021, p. 94.

<sup>36</sup> HAGELIN, S., SILVERMAN, G.: *The New Female Antihero: The Disruptive Women of Twenty-First-Century US Television*. Chicago, London : The University of Chicago Press, 2022, p. 1-7, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

in *American Horror Story: Cult* (FX, 2018), a lesbian woman who, amongst other criminal acts, does not hesitate to poison and murder her unfaithful spouse while seeking vengeance for adultery and full custody of the couple's son.

The trend of female antiheroism on television has existed for more than two decades. Pinedo claims that the figure of the female antihero (antiheroine or the difficult woman) is related to the male antihero of serial narratives crafted by Home Box Office (HBO) in the late 1990 and then adopted by other cable channels after 2000. The antiheroine's pattern has shifted from the side-lined wife of the antihero (*Sopranos*, HBO, 1999 – 2007), through the pathologized female antihero (*Homeland*, Showtime, 2011 – 2020), the female and male antihero collaborators (*House of Cards*, Netflix, 2013 – 2018), to the normalised female antihero (*Marvel's Jessica Jones*, Netflix, 2015 – 2019) and, eventually, the difficult woman hero who transgresses the norms of femininity unapologetically and systematically (*Sex/Life*, Netflix, since 2020).<sup>38</sup> In the latter case, which is a bit outstanding because the drama's main character is a mother of two children, we are able to see a rather unflattering portrayal of a housewife who is trapped between her uncontrollable urge to seek a troublesome former lover and trying to keep her family together – the very same family she is destroying methodically with her behaviour.

The general appeal of television antiheroism, male and female, is certainly financially convenient. According to Bruun Vaage, the television spectator often perceives the antihero(ine) as morally preferable partly due to the episodic drama's long-term economic viability. The long duration of a commercially successful television series may lead to the effect of partiality, which means that the drama's loyal viewers establish long-term alignment with the antiheroic figure included in the story: *"The spectator is blinded by familiarity with him, and perceives other as morally worse."* However, the audiences do not merely sympathise with the antiheroic protagonist; the character's 'bad sides' offer enjoyable attractions as well. One of these attractions is the fact that acting immorally often allows such a character to be in power. Thus, the viewer may favour *"the enjoyable experience of empathising with someone in power (...) In addition, watching those whom we perceive as even morally worse than the antihero get what we feel they deserve, is inherently gratifying for us as pro-social punishers."* In other words, many television antiheroes may be perceived as pro-social agents of justice/vengeance who keep us safe by eliminating criminals and deviants. Good people do not have to worry about them, because they only kill, threaten or otherwise confront individuals who are, at least from our point of view, much worse than they are.<sup>39</sup> Damico and Quay express the same opinion, explaining this contradictory perception of television antiheroes in relation to Dexter Morgan in *Dexter* (Showtime, 2006 – 2013) and *Dexter: New Blood* (Showtime, 2021 – 2022). The character's methodical approach to murder (his 'trophy' collection, taking a drop of the victim's blood) might be deplorable, but the viewer still feels a strange allegiance to him, because his actions might be seen as a twisted, yet logical desire for justice (Morgan only kills other serial killers). Moreover, the spectator is well aware of the character's numerous moments of self-doubt.<sup>40</sup> In this case it is also remarkable that the viewer may keep justifying Dexter's actions just because he is a father who would protect his son Harrison under any circumstances, which partly redeems him in the viewers' eyes.

Nowadays, some television antiheroines and antiheroes cross any of the remaining boundaries between antiheroism and villainy. Stewart reminds that many of them are mafia bosses, other are serial killers or meth producers. HBO's 2014 episodic drama *True Detective* crossed an important line as well, portraying homicide detectives Rustin Cohle and Marty Hart as antiheroes 'inside the law system'. The drama is, above all, a psychological study of two

<sup>38</sup> PINEDO, I. C.: *Difficult Women on Television Drama: The Gender Politics of Complex Women in Serial Narratives*. Abingdon, New York : Routledge, 2021, p. 2-4.

<sup>39</sup> BRUUN VAAGE, M.: *The Antihero in American Television*. New York, Abingdon : Routledge, 2016, p. 90.

<sup>40</sup> DAMICO, A. M., QUAY, S. E.: *21<sup>st</sup>-Century TV Dramas: Exploring the New Golden Age*. Santa Barbara : ABC-CLIO, 2016, p. 92.

morally flawed policemen. Cohle is depicted as a philosophising outsider, not as a tough man. Hart, on the other hand, represents toxic masculinity expressed through adultery, mendacity and indifference. Much like watching the mentioned homicide detectives, seeing superheroes as antiheroic characters is particularly interesting as well, because we are usually “drawn to antiheroes specifically because they are not superhuman and do not have entirely virtuous qualities”. Thus, it is even more important to understand television characters who are definitely superhuman, but still antiheroic, maybe even villainous, like Homelander in *The Boys*.<sup>41</sup>

As we believe, morally flawed heroic and superheroic figures present in *The Boys* cross any remaining boundaries between antiheroism and villainy due to the fact that they exist in a greedy and impersonal corporate environment established by the conglomerate named Vought Industries. Thus, their public image and behavioural patterns can be interpreted in terms of Byung-Chul Han’s “society of performance”. All superheroic characters accompanying Homelander are practically ‘owned’ by Vought; their public engagements are strictly regulated by ‘employment contracts’ with the given enterprise, even though most of the time they are presented more like celebrities and movie stars than public guardians and warriors. Han’s publication *The Burnout Society* explains that transformation of all interpersonal relationships to the form of ‘employment contracts’ inevitably leads to the need to fully comply with the expectations of the ‘employer’ and achieve the best possible ‘performance’.<sup>42</sup> In this particular case, the ‘contracts’ involve attractive looks, eye-catching displays of superhumanity and charismatic image; that is why Homelander and his companions are admired by most ordinary people. The author’s musings about “the society of performance” help us explain why many superheroic protagonists depicted in *The Boys* express various traits of antiheroic behaviour. Han claims that the most serious problem “the society of performance” has to face is so-called systemic violence. This type of violence is not violent in the primary sense of the word. However, it can be characterised by the constant pressure individuals have to endure – our surroundings, like managers and employers, force us to increase our performance, to put up with more work than ever before and flexibly move across various specialisations. This kind of violence is not physical; it is intangible and thus hard to realise, suppress or resist. The society of performance leads us to the compulsive effort to succeed, stand out, maximalise our performance. In fact, it is a highly sophisticated system, because while trying our best to succeed, we do not tend to think that this pressure is external.<sup>43</sup> For instance, the young superheroine Annie January (better known as Starlight) in *The Boys* partly abandons her ideals and character traits while trying to fulfil the expectations of her employer, Vought. Even though Annie is first introduced as a compassionate person with moral integrity, she later expresses multiple antiheroic tendencies. The superheroine is well aware of the fact that if she fails to fulfil her anticipated role, she will be immediately and smoothly replaced by another attractive young woman who will take on the position of a superhuman beauty destined for a show business career.

Like other generically and ideologically similar audiovisual works, the episodic television drama *The Boys*, the object of our follow-up analysis, portrays superheroic figures as people whose sole existence and social value is expressed by money. This results in the further marginalisation of ‘real-life heroism’ and *de facto* degrades its existence. Supported and shaped by “the society of performance”, these quasi-heroic protagonists fully adapt their behaviour to the given circumstances, which are unattainable for ordinary people. Their mutual conflicts are usually resolved by graphic violence. Therefore, these flawed, distorted heroic images are subject to psychological narcissism and intense individualisation.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> STEWART, R.: Editor’s Introduction. In PETERS, F., STEWART, R. (eds.): *Crime Uncovered: Antihero*. Bristol, Chicago : Intellect Books, 2016, p. 3-5, 13-15.

<sup>42</sup> HAN, B.-C.: *Vyhořelá společnost*. Prague : Rybka Publishers, 2016, p. 221-222.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17-25, 65.

<sup>44</sup> See: RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2018, p. 43.

### 3 Methodology

The present case study is focused on the episodic television drama *The Boys* (both already released seasons consist of eight episodes), specifically on different models of antiheroic behaviour depicted in the story. The individual categories of antiheroines and antiheroes are specified on basis of the taxonomy proposed by Malíčková et al.,<sup>45</sup> i.e., the selected protagonists are divided into three types of antiheroism – fundamental, latent and pragmatic. The analytical framework included in the case study is inspired by the essential principles of narrative and discourse analysis. Reflecting on the characters' behavioural patterns and the ways they act in different situations allows us to obtain a set of qualitative data which is further elaborated based on discursive interpretations of depicted antiheroism in terms of the principles of so-called society of performance. According to Rusňáková, narrative analysis is always followed by synthesis of the acquired knowledge. This means that synthesis of the obtained qualitative findings allows us to interpret and compare the findings. The given methods of inquiry are clearly dominated by inductive reasoning.<sup>46</sup> The synthesis of the knowledge resulting from narrative analysis intersects with the procedures of discourse analysis; thus, we work with simultaneous triangulation of two different analytical approaches.

The discourse analysis is inspired by sociologically oriented analysis of context (i.e., we are interested in the cultural aspects of the conflicts, plotlines and messages included in the analysed episodic drama).<sup>47</sup> This analytical strategy reflects on various questions associated with the social, cultural and other aspects influencing the audiovisual work's thematic structure and meanings. We also intend to define and interpret the analysed episodic drama's coherence, or rather its morally controversial nature.<sup>48</sup> Discourse analysis gives us the opportunity to discuss the moral and value-based controversy of the TV show in question, helping us to uncover a complex network of social meanings and a set of (possibly) alternative interpretations of media content.<sup>49</sup> More specifically, we utilise Rose's tradition of discourse analysis. As noted by Sedláková, this particular tradition is able to identify and examine the strategies of social production of images, letting us determine their social position.<sup>50</sup> In other words, using the given analytical approach helps us to explain the connections between antiheroic behaviour of the episodic drama's protagonists and the sociocultural situation associated with hypermodern society. The aim of the case study is to identify different forms of antiheroism in relation to specific characters, along with the ways in which *The Boys* reflects the principles of performance society that are the driving force of the drama's narrative. As explained above, the given objective is fulfilled based on narrative and discourse analysis. Acknowledging the study's aim and purpose, we seek answers to the following research questions:

*RQ1: Which forms of antiheroism are present in The Boys and which characters represent them?*

*RQ2: Which traits of performance society are related to public activities of superheroines and superheroes in the episodic television drama The Boys?*

<sup>45</sup> MALÍČKOVÁ, M. et al.: *Obrazy hrdinu v kultúrnej pamäti*. Nitra : UKF, 2017, p. 43-46.

<sup>46</sup> RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: Naratívna analýza a jej miesto vo vedeckom diskurze mediálnych štúdií. In RADOŠINSKÁ, J. et al.: *Empirické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2019, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> See: POLÁKOVÁ, E., SPÁLOVÁ, L.: *Vybrané problémy metodológie masmediálnych štúdií*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2009, p. 80-81.

<sup>48</sup> BUČKOVÁ, Z.: Diskurzívna analýza ako nástroj poznávania stereotypizácie filmových superhrdinov. In RADOŠINSKÁ, J. et al.: *Empirické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2019, p. 232-233.

<sup>49</sup> HENDL, J.: *Kvalitativní výzkum. Základní teorie, metody a aplikace*. Third Edition. Prague : Portál, 2008, p. 267-268.

<sup>50</sup> SEDLÁKOVÁ, R.: *Výzkum médií. Nejužívanější metody a techniky*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2014, p. 456.

## 4 Results

Like most other audiovisual media products focused on characters with superhuman abilities, the examined work is a loosely accurate adaptation of the comic book series of the same name. We can consider Billy Butcher, a seemingly common man who hates all superheroes, to be the main protagonist of the episodic TV drama *The Boys*. The main conflict is based on Butcher's long-term and persistent initiative aimed at publicly revealing the amoral nature of superheroic figures and, ideally, participating in their physical elimination (termination). His main binary opposition is Homelander, the generally accepted and well-liked leader of superheroines and superheroes who work for Vought Industries. Proud and stubborn, Butcher intensifies his conflict with Homelander by building his own group of loyal followers – 'the boys', positioning himself as the leader of the revolt against the seemingly unattainable and untouchable superheroic figures protected by a conglomerate operating in the fields of show business, advertising, marketing, but also militarism. The conflict between Billy Butcher and Homelander develops in the presence of other characters; virtually each of them exhibits certain antiheroic tendencies, albeit in different ways and for different reasons. The following part of the text serves to categorise the individual protagonists in terms of the theoretical frameworks discussed above.

### **Fundamental Antiheroism: Homelander, The Deep, Translucent, Stormfront**

The group of fundamental antiheroines and antiheroes is practically limited to people with superhuman abilities. Most of them are male characters who are convinced of their own superiority and uniqueness. While realising their goals and desires, they know no moral constraints and express no doubts. Homelander, The Deep, Translucent and Stormfront represent misanthropic figures without any moral principles. Each of them suffers from a set of mental disorders and sexual deviations.

Homelander, who is one of the key protagonists of *The Boys*, is a crooked caricature of other superheroes known from comics, films and television stories – specifically DC's Superman/Man of Steel and Captain America created by Marvel. A clear connection between the two mentioned superheroes and Homelander is also evident with regard to his iconographic elements, i.e., details of his superheroic clothing he wears permanently (style, colours). Homelander even shares a part of his superhuman abilities with Superman – he is immensely powerful, able to fly and has a destructive laser sight that overcomes any physical obstacles. The character often uses the latter ability to satisfy his voyeuristic urges, most often while secretly watching the Vought manager and his boss, Madelyn Stillwell, with whom he shares an unhealthy relationship. Like Captain America, Homelander publicly appears to be an unwavering patriot and supporter of the 'American way of life', a God-fearing titan of conservative values. He constantly emphasises these beliefs during his speeches and public appearances, assuming a position of an honest and admirable philanthropist. However, Homelander's public image is just a well-crafted pose, a kind of mask under which this psychopath with no empathy and social intelligence hides very efficiently. In case anyone tries to prevent him from fulfilling his goals, he does not hesitate to intimidate or kill the opponent. Like many other highly intelligent and functional psychopaths, Homelander can be perceived as charismatic and friendly, easily gaining the attention of others. However, the character's infantile nature is evident during his private communication with Stillwell, who is the source of his deviant sexually motivated addiction. Homelander, a product of laboratory experiments, grew up without parental authority and looks for a kind of surrogate mother in Stillwell. Being a middle-aged woman, Stillwell eventually decides to become a mother. Homelander loathes her infant son and his emotional infantility is fully manifested when he is unable to suppress the manifestations of his Oedipus complex and repulsively seeks Madelyn's 'motherly' attention.



Homelander is extremely focused on preserving his position of power in relation to The Seven, a prominent group of superheroines and superheroes affiliated with the Vought Industries, who are favoured by the media and celebrated by most ordinary people. If Homelander identifies any signal that may lead to disrupting his employer's public image and/or economic performance, he reacts brutally and with no remorse (for example, he does not hesitate to murder a local politician who does not support Vought's operations while the victim is aboard a private jet, and does not care about other people present inside the plane who will die as well). Since this psychopathic superhero is often manipulated by Madelyn Stillwell, he reacts extremely when he is forced to acknowledge this fact; preserving his stone-cold, calm demeanour, Homelander murders Stillwell and does not care that she is a single parent of a toddler, not does he care that she used to be his confidant.

The second season situates Homelander into a new role – he finds out that Butcher's wife Becca, a victim of Homelander's sexual assault who was presumed to be deceased, is alive and lives with Homelander's son named Ryan. However, the protagonist is unable to fulfil his newfound role of a father, at least not in an acceptable manner. Although he seems to do anything to gain his son's attention and affection, this father/son relationship is as pathological as the rest of Homelander's social ties. Homelander cannot accept the fact that his son is raised to become a common child without superpowers and forces him to fly or use the laser sight. When confronted with the fact that Ryan is no psychopath and that the boy experiences trouble while trying to cope with Homelander's presence and popularity, the superhero reacts violently, ignoring Ryan's panic and confusion. Although Homelander's reputation is disrupted due to controversial public speeches unveiling a part of his true nature, he still possesses enough charisma to fascinate his fans and supporters. His position of power also attracts other members of The Seven, most notably Translucent, The Deep and Black Noir; the latter is a quiet, blunt and brutal murderer.

The Deep, or Kevin Moskowitz, is one of Homelander's closest associates, even though the men are not close friends and they do not particularly like each other. Anyway, Homelander cares about The Seven's public image and The Deep's repulsive actions influence this image significantly. The Deep is a physically attractive young man who is, on the other hand, also mentally unstable and short-tempered. His membership in The Seven is conditioned and driven by his handsomeness and the ability to charm women. Like DC's superhero Aquaman, The Deep is able to spend an unlimited amount of time under water, given the fact that he has gills on his chest, carefully hidden underneath his costume. This young man with no empathy often and gladly uses his attractiveness in order to gain women's attention; the initial contact is usually quickly followed by The Deep's sexual advances (ideally, these women do not tend to protest, because they perceive the superhero's pretended interest in them as flattering). However, The Deep eventually encounters Annie January, also known as Starlight, who is disgusted and horrified by his harassment. As the young woman is not afraid to publicly discuss her experience with The Deep and uncovers his true personality in front of the media, the superhero is no longer a member of The Seven and his new posting is second-rate, located in a rather 'inferior' part of the United States. This change of the previous paradigm is orchestrated by Madelyn Stillwell who always protects Vought's public image and the enterprise's corporate identity at all costs.

Being supercilious and narcissistic in his nature, The Deep expresses a certain range of empathy towards aquatic animals instead of people. Multiple scenes focused on the character involve absurd moments when he talks to lobsters, dolphins or whales, using inappropriate or straightforwardly offensive language (one of his superhuman abilities is the ability to communicate with aquatic fauna). The true extent of the protagonist's inner emptiness and insecurity is obvious in the scene when he is sexually violated by a woman. Convinced that this casual acquaintance is interested in him and that he is in control of the situation as always, The Deep is attacked; the woman focuses her attention on his carefully hidden gills, inflicting both pain and humiliation upon him. Trying to rebuild his reputation, The Deep later joins a sect

called the Church of the Collective. His initially redeeming motivation (to learn how to accept and love his own body, especially the gills, and treat women with respect) is quickly replaced by more acquisitive and calculative objectives. The Deep even marries a fellow believer named Carol in order to acquire a new reputation of a faithful and loyal husband, even though he barely knows his wife and does not even like her. Convinced that the Church will help him to return to The Seven, the protagonist eventually finds out that the true purpose of the sect he joined is diametrically different. Corrupt and manipulative himself, The Deep blames the organisation for using psychological manipulation and unfair business practices.

Fundamental antiheroism is also typical for Alex Hassell, alias Translucent, who is initially another member of The Seven. This vulgar, arrogant and excessively self-confident middle-aged man is able to become invisible. His superhuman repertoire also includes unbreakable skin, so it is quite problematic to physically hurt him in any possible way. Translucent is presented as Homelander's companion and servile admirer. While experiencing any crises or critical moments, he expects that Homelander will return this faked affection and protect him. Very much like Homelander, Translucent is a shameless voyeur. While invisible, he often lurks around female bathrooms and spies on women's most intimate moments without their knowledge or consent. His deviation is complicated by the fact that he has to be completely naked in order to turn invisible. Translucent's path is crossed by Billy Butcher and his companions, which also means that the plot includes numerous bizarre attempts to harm him in any way possible. Even though Butcher's 'boys' spend a lot of time by testing truly creative methods of taking a person's life, the only strategy that actually proves to be useful is also the most humiliating one – Translucent is killed by an explosive device placed inside his rectum. Paradoxically enough, Vought's managers and employees are not too concerned about their superhero's well-being; what makes them angry is the negative publicity related to the suddenly missing member of The Seven.

The second season of the episodic drama introduces a new fundamentally antiheroic character – Stormfront, formerly known as Liberty, whose real name is Klara Risinger. The superheroine initially replaces Translucent, also becoming Homelander's rival/challenger and later his sexual partner. She is able to manipulate with electricity and weaponize electrical energy. While using electricity as a murderous weapon, Stormfront also creates electrical fields in order to 'fly', or rather levitate. When introduced to the public and fans of The Seven, she portrays herself as a confident and rebellious feminist, a champion of all suppressed women who questions male leadership and its legitimacy and efficiency. However, the viewer quickly finds out that Stormfront is a violent, racist woman, a person who acts crudely and sarcastically. While she keeps insulting, criticising and humiliating Vought's employees, her rivalrous relationship with Homelander takes a different turn. Acknowledging that Stormfront is as violent and heartless as he is, Homelander is attracted by Stormfront's heinous actions (she uses her position in The Seven to commit a series of unpunished racially motivated murders). The superheroine also seeks sadistic encounters and violence excites her sexually. While Homelander briefly tries to redeem himself in the eyes of the viewer by becoming a father figure, Stormfront does the same by talking about her past. It becomes clear that she was a real Nazi back in the 1940s; however, she also used to be a loving wife and mother and all her relatives are already dead, because she ages very slowly. She is a skilled actress and has no trouble coping with contemporary social norms, means of communication and cultural frameworks in order to conceal her true age and identity. Homelander's son Ryan is an important source of Stormfront's interest; she sees Homelander and his son as her potential new 'family', even though she is no longer capable of true love and affection. That is why the superheroine attacks Ryan's biological mother, Becca Butcher. All the identified personality traits of the mentioned characters are outlined in Picture 1 below.



**PICTURE 1:** Characteristics of fundamental antiheroines and antiheroes

Source: own processing, 2022.

### **Latent Antiheroism: Billy Butcher, Hughie Campbell, Starlight, Queen Maeve, Kimiko**

The most significant portrayal of latent antiheroism in *The Boys* is associated with the character of Billy Butcher, a peculiar and eccentric man who despises all superheroines and superheroes. Once a loving husband, Butcher blames superheroic protagonists for his wife Becca's sudden disappearance and presumed death. Given that he saw camera footage strongly suggesting that Homelander had raped his wife, Butcher aims to avenge Becca's death by pursuing, attacking and, if possible, killing any superheroine or superhero he can get his hands on. Butcher keeps repeating that all superheroic figures are morally corrupt and they should be feared and hated. Butcher's hatred is, however, primarily centred on the one who destroyed his family and changed his life forever, (presumably) the mightiest superhero, Homelander; i.e., the superhuman person who is strictly protected, hard to wound and ultimately violent. Doing anything in his power to kill Homelander and compromise the Vought Industries, Billy Butcher uses his companions, their personal tragedies and abilities to fulfil these particular objectives. That is why he seeks and befriends Hughie Campbell, a traumatised young man whose girlfriend was murdered senselessly by a rapidly running superhero; right in front of him. Butcher later uses Hughie's friendship with the superheroine Starlight, a new member of The Seven, to get closer to Homelander. While planning his next moves, Butcher contacts some of his former companions, 'the boys'; a paranoid criminal and gunrunner called Frenchie and a former military man Marvin Milk, also known as 'Mother's Milk', now a model husband and father. Butcher's bravery, straightforwardness and cynicism are in sharp contrast with his recklessness related to the effort to destroy Homelander. As a latent antihero, Billy Butcher often fails to fulfil his ultimate purpose and decides to save his companions' lives instead; Frenchie, Mother's Milk and Hughie are his true friends and while watching the ultimately important moments of Butcher's conflicted decision-making, the viewer is able to see certain glimpses of the protagonist's past personality and true nature. Butcher's mistrustfulness, cynicism and personal vendetta repeatedly collide with his tactical thinking, humanity and the remaining bits and pieces of his empathy. In fact, this character is, above all, tragic and broken.

What ultimately re-humanises Butcher is the moment when he actually finds out that his wife Becca is alive and hidden, along with her (and Homelander's) son Ryan. That is partly why Butcher's reunion with his wife turns out to be awkward and conflicted. The character lies to his wife about accepting Ryan and his willingness to raise the boy as his own; instead, Butcher

intends to hand Ryan over to Vought and live with Becca as they used to, as a childless couple. Nevertheless, his remaining humanity comes back to light when he decides to protect Ryan from Homelander and Stormfront. Even though Becca Butcher does not survive this violent confrontation, Butcher eventually embraces the role of a father to fulfil his wife's dying wish. Moreover, not only Butcher feels obliged to respect Becca's desperate last request, he is also driven by his hateful conflict with Homelander; by 'adopting' and protecting Ryan, Butcher is able to rob Homelander off the most precious aspect of his life – his son and heir to his extraordinary powers.

Butcher's newest companion and ideological counterpart is Hughie Campbell. Originally a loyal fan of all superheroines and superheroes working for Vought, Hughie sees his fiancée die absurdly and violently. The young woman is smashed into pieces by Reggie Franklin, or rather A-Train, supposedly the fastest superhero in the world (while running, A-Train collides with Campbell's girlfriend and devastates her body without even slowing down). Intelligent, sensitive and nervous Hughie expresses naivety which remarkably counterbalances Butcher's rigidity; unlike Hughie, Butcher has enough experience and tragic moments behind him to mock Hughie's faith in people and justice. Hughie finds it very hard to accept that most of the superheroines and superheroes he used to admire so much are, in fact, cruel and indifferent towards any 'collateral damage', i.e., the personal tragedies and victims they often leave behind when using their superhuman abilities. Hughie Campbell's antiheroism lies in his hesitancy and lack of determination. This ordinary man was raised by a cautious, restrained father; after the experienced personal tragedy, he suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder, facing surges of anger followed by panics and hysterical fear. Hughie's anger is largely associated with A-Train's ignorance and mockery; the superhero barely recognises the fact that a young woman is dead because of him, seeing the tragic event as an interesting story to share with other superheroic figures. Vought offers Hughie an insignificant financial compensation in exchange for his discretion; however, he sees this proposal as an expression of cynicism, disrespect and disdain. He cannot understand how the involved people can think and talk like that about a human being who was so close to him.

Nevertheless, shortly thereafter, Hughie shows interest in Starlight, a young superheroine crossing his path. This awkward and confused antihero, on the one hand, warns Butcher that his actions are rather extreme and illegal. On the other hand, Campbell himself murders Translucent and other people; yet, he fails to fulfil his personal revenge and even saves A-Train's life. Hughie Campbell is then forced to live on the run, and does not cope well with this new reality. His relationship with Starlight is complicated for multiple reasons, one of them being the fact that Hughie's actions are often contradictory and driven by toxic emotions. However, his relationship with Billy Butcher deepens, as it seems that Butcher sees Campbell as a younger brother whom he tends to protect and guide. Hughie eventually decides to return to 'the right path' and change things for the better 'officially' – as an assistant working at an influential politician's office.

Hughie's female counterpart is Annie January, a young superheroine nicknamed Starlight. Starlight's ability is to manipulate with light and energy; this superpower is spectacular and eye-catching, which means that the attractive woman wielding it is practically destined to a career in show business. That is why she stands out during Vought's casting and becomes one of The Seven. Naïve, but lovely Annie represents the image of an ambitious small-town girl raised in a rural part of the U.S. Despite her initial enthusiasm, she is intelligent enough to notice that her new occupation and The Seven membership only result from her youth and physical appearance; her persona is thus used as an efficient marketing tool able to popularise superheroic figures amongst teenaged girls. Starlight thus becomes a purposefully utilised role model of a superheroine setting fashion trends. Her true purpose is not to save people, but rather to promote products designed for young girls and increase their popularity. Nevertheless, she is not comfortable with a rather provocative new costume proposed by Vought's marketing specialists. The character faces not only objectification, but also a series of sexual assaults

by two different male members of The Seven – Translucent (the deviant voyeur) and The Deep (the arrogant harasser). Annie also defies her employer's commands and tries to help common women who are in danger. Starlight's highly intuitive and emotionally driven approach to her 'job' proves to be successful, because her actions gain massive (and, most of all, positive) publicity. The general public also positively reacts to her public statement regarding The Deep's sexual harassment. However, as a result, Vought has to address this scandal by removing The Deep, once a fan favourite and ladies' man, from The Seven.

More experienced and free from her previous naivety, Starlight manifests certain extent of cynicism towards other superheroines and superheroes and people in general. She becomes Hughie's friend and then his girlfriend, although only for a short time. As the story goes by, the viewer may observe Starlight's growing tolerance in relation to acts or decisions of others she once would not have accepted or let happen. For example, she is in sharp conflict with A-Train who is addicted to a chemical substance called Compound V that increases abilities and overall performance of superheroic characters. Even though Annie/Starlight does not approve of Butcher's actions and the way his associates solve problems, her sympathies towards Hughie lead to a number of morally controversial decisions she makes, including extortion and vengeance inflicted upon Vought. Whether voluntarily or accidentally, Starlight keeps cooperating with 'the boys' in order to destroy Vought. She is particularly disillusioned after finding out that superheroines and superheroes are not born like that, as she has always thought, but rather made in laboratories. This shocking revelation further disrupts her already problematic relationship with her overly ambitious and conservative mother who did everything possible to turn her into a beauty queen and superhuman 'princess'. Starlight's key role in defeating Stormfront eventually helps her to preserve the previous occupation within The Seven; however, she is torn between fulfilling her dreams (serving as a superheroine who helps the weak and endangered) and volatile loyalty towards Hughie and his friends.

The character of Maggie Shaw alias Queen Maeve represents a remarkable binary opposition to Annie January/Starlight. Her visual portrayal is partly inspired by DC's Wonder Woman. This dehumanised superheroine, also affiliated with The Seven, is older and much more experienced, which also means that she is deeply cynical and apathetic. Aware of the rules of show business and commerce, Queen Maeve is publicly presented as Homelander's life partner, even though their previous intimate relationship exists no more. This antiheroine is a one generation older version of young Annie; Queen Maeve used to be idealistic and full of energy just like Starlight. However, after years spent as a Vought employee, Queen Maeve does not express any idealism and often appears to be indifferent and bored. This experienced adult woman has always complied with her employer's commercial expectations and appears to be a balanced, elegant, perfect female version of Homelander. Queen Maeve's apathetic attitude combined with fear of retaliation are manifested practically each time she should oppose Homelander or expose his actions. She does not intervene when Homelander leaves all people aboard a falling plane without even trying to save them and then publicly confirms his interpretation of the events. Her carefully managed image of an independent woman and feminist warrior thus collides with her hidden flaws – Queen Maeve is emotionally empty, she drinks too much and it appears that she is, in fact, a lesbian. When talking to Starlight, Queen Maeve expresses certain amount of interest in her feelings and personality. However, these interactions are rather shallow and all outline the same thing – Annie is warned repeatedly that her fate will be similar to Queen Maeve's. Queen Maeve may be a superheroine, but she resembles, most of all, a tired and resigned wife who mostly observes her 'husband's' (Homelander's) unspeakable actions. Her attitude is partly conditioned by convenience, partly by misplaced loyalty and partly by fear.

When Homelander publicly unveils that Queen Maeve is a lesbian just to complicate her life and retaliate, the superheroine is forced to speak publicly about the most intimate aspects of her life. Maeve's secret female partner Elena is now exposed as well and uncomfortable with her new role. Queen Maeve has to star in kitschy motion pictures involving LGBTQ topics. Moreover,

both women have to face Homelander's ill nature and threats. These moments reduce Queen Maeve's indifference towards crimes and cruelty all round her. Her re-humanisation is marked by the moment when she decides to uncover Homelander's role in the previously mentioned plane crash. However, this decision also means that her girlfriend is no longer able to stand by her side. To her own surprise and shocking everyone around her, Queen Maeve eventually cooperates with Butcher and his 'boys' in order to eliminate Stormfront.

Kimiko Miyashiro is a tragic figure protected by Butcher and his companions, especially Frenchie. 'The boys' find her locked up in a cage like an animal, under strict surveillance. Later it is revealed that Kimiko is of Asian descent and she was taken from her family as a child. After that, she was used as a test subject – she received Compound V in order to develop superhuman abilities. Once imprisoned, abused and beaten, Kimiko is highly suspicious, secretive, but, most importantly, dangerous, unpredictable and mentally unstable. Her superhuman ability is based on enhanced physical power combined with speed; her killing is therefore feral, fast and brutal. On the other hand, Kimiko loves her brother, who possesses superhuman abilities as well, although his are notably different from hers (as children, they shared the same fate). She does not speak and uses a very specific type of sign language. Butcher's companion Frenchie is intrigued by Kimiko's presence and unclear personal history; however, she does not return his affections. Kimiko's brother is murdered by Stormfront who particularly enjoys killing non-Caucasian people. However, this act of violence is the driving force leading towards cooperation between 'the boys', Starlight and Queen Maeve. The mentioned cases of latent antiheroism are summarised in Picture 2.



PICTURE 2: Characteristics of latent antiheroines and antiheroes

Source: own processing, 2022.

### **Pragmatic Antiheroism: Madelyn Stillwell, A-Train, Frenchie, Mother's Milk, Stan Edgar**

The category of pragmatic antiheroism is primarily represented by the cynical personality of Madelyn Stillwell. This successful woman in her late forties is one of Vought's top managers responsible for public presentation of superheroines and superheroes affiliated with the conglomerate. She is able to partly regulate Homelander's psychopathic behaviour. Stillwell makes good use of the fact that Homelander suffers from the Oedipus complex; she is the object of his sexually motivated, but at the same time strangely childish feelings reminiscent of an adult man's unhealthy connection to his own mother. As a successful businesswoman, Madelyn decided to become a mother at an advanced age. Therefore, Homelander assumes the

position of an 'older sibling' who is jealous of a new addition to the 'family' and does not want to accept his presence. Stillwell has shown a great deal of calculation and sophisticated tactics on many occasions, especially during mutually unpleasant conversations with Billy Butcher about his missing and allegedly dead wife (Becca Butcher used to work for Vought). Stillwell manipulates Homelander's behaviour in accordance with her intentions, but, on the other hand, she is obviously afraid of him; given her high intelligence, she is well aware what a dangerous psychopath he is. Madelyn Stillwell seemingly acts as a capable manager, professional and loving mother, but she often uses her motherly role in order to achieve the expected career advancement. After losing control she held over Homelander's behaviour, Stillwell tries to use her intellect once again and influence the situation, but this time without success. She thus becomes an antiheroine towards whom the viewer eventually feels a certain degree of understanding and sympathy, at least because she ends up as a murdered single mother of an infant boy.

Madelyn Stillwell's sudden absence in Vought's management chain is effectively filled by the company's CEO Stan Edgar. Once ready to resign and name Stillwell as his successor, Edgar now decides to manage the company's superheroines and superheroes personally. Stan Edgar is a remarkable man who reduces his communication with other people as much as possible, focusing on business talks exclusively. Edgar is not afraid of Homelander, even though he is aware of the superhero's distorted personality and deviations. On the contrary, Stan Edgar's conversations with Homelander tend to end up with Edgar humiliating Homelander and mocking his previous actions. It is Edgar's decision to employ Stormfront and present her as a new member of The Seven replacing publicly disgraced The Deep. He does so even though it turns out that he knew about Stormfront's past and true identity. Stan Edgar is ambitious and self-confident, able to lie convincingly and deny any information which can be denied or at least challenged. When facing public outrage regarding Compound V and corporate 'production' of superheroines and superheroes, he simply blames Stillwell, who is no longer alive and thus cannot defend herself.

A-Train, or Reggie Franklin, is immensely proud of his reputation as the fastest human being alive. He appears to be overly self-confident, even arrogant. However, the superhero is an intrinsically insecure and complexed man who is afraid of any relevant competition. His concerns are mostly related to the possibility of encountering any superheroine or superhero who will be younger and faster than him. This is why he has become addicted to Compound V, the true reason why people with superhuman abilities even exist. While under the influence of the drug, A-Train loses control over his powers and behaviour, which leads to tragic death of Hughie's fiancée. A-Train is thus a despised and regrettable superheroic protagonist, the object of Hughie Campbell's vengeance. The superhero repeatedly declares his feelings towards a fellow superheroine named Popclaw, but he does not support her when it matters most and lies to her constantly. Given that, he represents ordinary people addicted to various substances who lie to their closest relatives and friends in order to borrow money or hide their addictions. A-Train's internal uncertainty leads him to the need to constantly reaffirm his value through external appreciation. He longs to be admired and maintain or improve his existing speed records. In order to achieve these goals, he is able to do almost anything – even risk his own health or kill others, e.g., his girlfriend Popclaw. Facing the consequences of his addiction, A-Train suffers a heart attack, which almost kills him. When trying to return to The Seven, even though he is unable to run as he used to and seriously ill, the character, again, does not hesitate to lie, steal and even join The Deep's sect.

Pragmatic antiheroism is also portrayed by both of Billy Butcher's old friends and companions, Frenchie and Mother's Milk. Although it is clear that Frenchie is a criminal involved in several murders and cases of weapon trafficking, he is presented as a sympathetic, funny character, although the viewer is able to see the essence of his 'work' very clearly. Given that Frenchie often communicates with gangsters and members of the organised crime, he is highly suspicious towards anything and anyone, even paranoid. He always thinks about an

escape route and follows a series of security protocols of his own making. On the other hand, Frenchie is strangely attracted to Kimiko, the victim of illegal experiments with Compound V. The protagonist sometimes expresses his regrets in association with his previous actions and decisions, but this does not change the fact that when facing a crisis, he acts intelligently and relentlessly. He is the one who discovers how to murder Translucent, whose skin is seemingly unbreakable and resistant towards all kinds of attacks, and spends a lot of time testing different weapons and instruments. When working on the most efficient solutions and exploring his talents, Frenchie does not acknowledge any moral boundaries. However, he respects a certain code related to his friends and people who helped him in the past.

A different variation of pragmatic antiheroism is represented by Mother's Milk who pretends to be a perfect husband and father, even though it is clear that his past actions are far from honourable. Being a former member of special forces, Mother's Milk cannot exactly cope with his present occupation's monotonous nature and boredom he experiences on a daily basis. This is why Billy Butcher is able to convince him to join 'the boys' once again and restart his previous 'career' filled with violence. When in danger, Mother's Milk uses his military experience – any aggressive stimulus makes him react automatically and reciprocally, i.e., violently. Like Butcher himself, Mother's Milk is driven by the need to achieve justice, or rather vengeance, because he blames Vought for his father's untimely passing. Paradoxically enough, re-joining Butcher's 'boys' endangers his wife and daughter and it is not easy for him to keep the family together and secure. Picture 3 includes the characteristics of pragmatic antiheroism present in *The Boys*.

## Pragmatic antiheroes

Madelyn Stillwell, A-Train, Frenchie, Mother's Milk,  
Stan Edgar

- cunning, cynical, manipulative personalities,
- willing to lie to preserve their reputation,
- intelligent, highly skilled,
- seemingly arrogant and confident, intrinsically complex, insecure.



PICTURE 3: Characteristics of pragmatic antiheroines and antiheroes

Source: own processing, 2022.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion: The Boys and Ethos of Performance Society

The episodic television drama *The Boys* works with a wide spectrum of antiheroic characters. However, diverse antiheroic tendencies can be identified not only in association with the decisions and personal stories of corrupt and morally flawed superheroines and superheroes, but also in relation to their 'ordinary' counterparts – common people, victims of arrogance expressed by the individuals possessing superhuman abilities or intelligent manipulators benefitting from



superheroines and superheroes. The group of 'ordinary' antiheroines and antiheroes led by Billy Butcher is, considering our common perception of moral values, as problematic as the superheroic community The Seven, which represents indifference and arrogance of those gifted with supernatural talents (moreover, the viewer eventually finds out that these people are not chosen by God, but rather grown, created in laboratories).

Fundamental antiheroism – personified by Homelander, The Deep, Translucent and Stormfront – communicates a diverse variety of psychiatric diagnoses and deviations. However, these protagonists are still able to fascinate the viewers. Homelander is obviously charismatic and hard to overlook, The Deep is physically attractive, which automatically catches the eye, and Translucent personifies the carefully hidden desire of many ordinary people – to be able to become invisible and move around unnoticed, gaining access into heavily guarded areas or getting close to the object of one's (sexual) interest. Stormfront is first defined as a rebellious feminist popularised by social media and driven by neotribalism, but her true nature is much more pathological; she is an extremist, a Nazi. The viewers are necessarily interested in these characters' personal history and previous motivations; on the other hand, they despise these psychopaths and deviants for legitimate reasons, thereby affirming their own moral superiority.

The group consisting of latent antiheroines and antiheroes, i.e., of Billy Butcher, Hughie Campbell, Starlight, Queen Maeve and Kimiko Miyashiro, involves cynical veterans (Butcher, Queen Maeve), but also portrayals of youthful naivety and traumas caused by first confrontations with the cruel reality of adulthood (Hughie Campbell, Starlight, Kimiko Miyashiro). The tragic character of Billy Butcher is obviously centred on achieving personal vendetta hidden underneath a wider and seemingly nobler objective – the effort to purge the world from the harmful influence of superheroic figures. Traumatized Hughie would like to achieve justice in the name of his tragically deceased fiancée. Even though he obviously lacks Butcher's purposefulness and cruelty, Hughie eventually acknowledges that no morally superior decisions and legal methods will ever disrupt the *status quo* and Vought's calculative business practices which aim to consciously cover and deny all the psychopathic traits, deviations and repulsive actions of superheroines and superheroes who earn the company billions every year. Another tragic character, Kimiko, is much more careful than Hughie and deeply mentally disturbed, which results in her violent outbursts and secretiveness. Although Queen Maeve has lost her initial vision of dignified representation of femininity, along with her position of a female role model which thus continues to exist only *pro forma*, Starlight's personal story is full of youthful ideals and high expectations. However, this does not change the fact that even Starlight needs to adjust to the cruel corporate environment she now represents; the young superheroine is forced to suppress her compassion and empathy. Her ambitions are thus in clear conflict with the former ideals and she doubts whether she can (and should) be a role model for teenaged girls.

Favouring their own objectives over any conventional ideas of morality, pragmatic antiheroic figures represent rational aspects of the analysed episodic drama. Madelyn Stillwell, a highly capable and efficient manager, openly utilises Homelander's mental instability to achieve her ambitions. Stillwell might be calculative and cunning, but she chooses her strategy deliberately, mostly because these management models have proven to be most effective in the long run. At certain moments, she also expresses fear – whether for her own life or her son's safety, which inevitably arouses the viewer's sympathy towards her. Similar elements, if not sympathies, can be identified in relation to the drug-addicted superhero A-Train, an internally insecure and complex man with strong narcissistic tendencies whose characteristics include shallow emotions and constant fear of competition. Billy Butcher's companions, a former arms dealer Frenchie and a former military man Mother's Milk, can be perceived as sympathetic for their willingness to help Butcher to achieve 'justice' (or rather their shared idea of justice that is, in fact, revenge). Although Frenchie is a paranoid gunrunner and assassin, he is also a devoted protector of Kimiko. Mother's Milk embodies a relentless man with extensive military training who is ready to kill or torture, but also a devoted husband and caring father.

Vought Industries, which frames the ideological background of the story, represents and embraces the principles of performance society. The company exists within a relentless competitive environment in which people who absolutely lack moral restraint and character – people like Madelyn Stillwell or Stan Edgar – perform best. In this context, the presumed absence of empathy is not only sought after, but also highly valued and necessary. Seeing positive economic indicators as more important than anything and anyone else, the corporation does not care about the moral credit of its superheroines and superheroes, but rather about their bankability, public image and commercial potential. Members of the elite superheroic circle (The Seven) and other employees of the conglomerate with superhuman abilities are presented externally as role models for various groups of people. Homelander is a fearless and proud protector of conservative and traditional values, a patriot, lover of the ‘American way of life’. Queen Maeve is a feminist superheroine. The Deep is loved by girls and women thanks to his attractive looks and boyish charm. Starlight represents an inspirational life story of unlikely success, a positive role model for teenage girls and young women living in cities, smaller towns and rural areas. Stormfront initially portrays a rebellious and independent young woman, a cosmopolitan and sassy personality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is absolutely ironic, given the fact that she is a Nazi supporter born more than a hundred years ago. The individual superheroines and superheroes are modified and ‘optimised’ with regard to the needs of the corporation. They lose their value not at the moment when they fail morally, but only when it is no longer possible to hide, or at least trivialise, their moral failures, mental disorders and unforgivable actions.

The given pressure leads superheroines and superheroes towards different kinds of actions – Starlight tries to challenge the *status quo* and publicly shares the details about sexual violence she has experienced, Queen Maeve uses her indifference and apathy as defence mechanisms and Homelander does not hesitate to do anything possible, even the most repulsive things to protect Vought’s public reputation. As a result, a complex portrayal of late modern society is created; this society piously admires and follows fictional stories involving superheroines and superheroes (‘real’ superheroic figures in *The Boys* are just as fictional as any other similar superhuman characters present in comic books or available on silver and television screens). The episodic drama thus cynically turns the generally admired (and unattainable) idea of superhumanity into a source of conflict, into a compulsive effort to succeed and dominate under any circumstances, which concerns both superheroic characters and their fans and opponents, i.e., the ordinary people.

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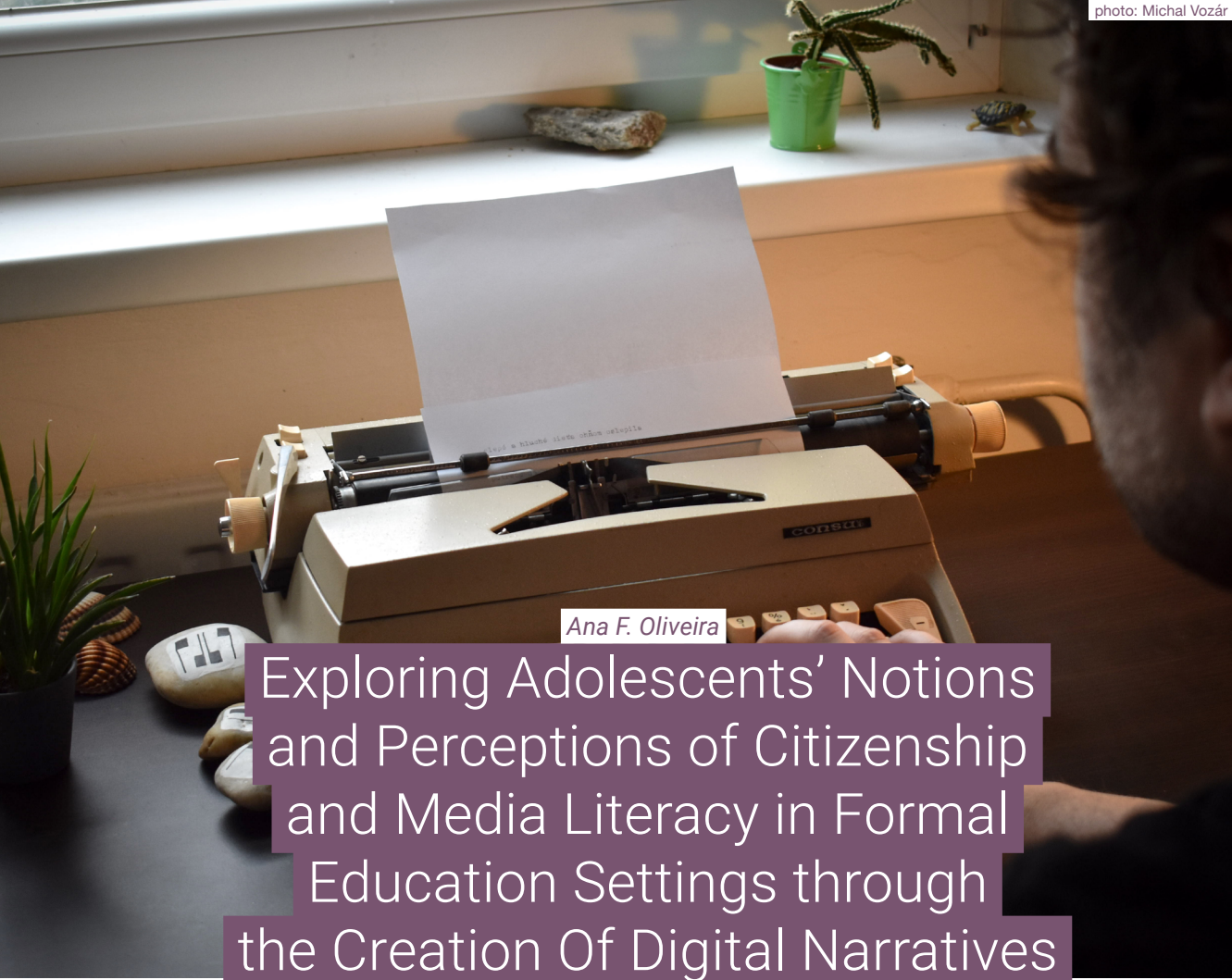
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Ana F. Oliveira

# Exploring Adolescents' Notions and Perceptions of Citizenship and Media Literacy in Formal Education Settings through the Creation Of Digital Narratives

## ABSTRACT

Critical thinking, media literacy (MIL) and digital and creative competencies are essential for young people to thrive. School can play a fundamental role in raising awareness towards conscientious and creative media usage, particularly considering today's adolescents – Gen Z. This is not only the generation most exposed to online contents, but also the one that makes the most use of mobile media to connect, learn, express and actively engage in causes. This research conducted media production activities based on secondary school curricula to explore and promote discussions about citizenship and MIL topics. Digital narratives (DNs) creation activities were co-designed with teachers of various subjects and carried out in two Portuguese schools, involving about 190 students aged between 15 and 18. The results of the exploratory questionnaire to students and the DN's content analysis point out that the creation of DN's acts as a lever to promote discussions about citizenship in formal settings and that, despite difficulties related to tools and basic literacies, students appreciate activities that engage them in critical reflection and transformative learning. However, the findings suggest that young people don't believe that using these languages contributes to making a change or to their voices being heard by adults and institutions.

## KEY WORDS

Citizenship. Digital Narratives. Formal Education. Media Literacy. Young People.

# 1 Introduction

Today's media environment is marked by endless possibilities to access, build and deconstruct content, and share ideas. Critical thinking, media literacy and digital and creative competences are therefore essential for people to thrive, particularly young people. School can play a fundamental role in raising young people's awareness of using media in a proper, conscientious and creative manner. If we consider today's adolescents, members of Generation Z, it is becoming clear that this is not only the generation most exposed to the contents disseminated on the Internet,<sup>1</sup> but also the one that makes the most use of mobile digital media to develop and maintain connections, to express themselves and actively engage in causes<sup>2</sup> and to learn.<sup>3</sup> Several studies highlight that this generation learns in different ways as media becomes more present in all areas of their lives, learning by doing becomes a trend and informal learning spaces gain importance.<sup>4</sup> The school is thus challenged to integrate new practices and to value the knowledge that children and young people acquire with and through the media. Although there has been an effort in recent years to promote media literacy within school contexts, a mismatch between theory and practice has been noted – curriculum proposals frequently deviate from the goals of media education.<sup>5</sup>

This article focuses on the results of a PhD research that analysed the potential and tested the integration of media production activities within secondary school curricula to explore and promote discussions around citizenship and media literacy topics. By co-creating digital narratives creation activities with secondary school teachers, it aimed to promote a critical reflection on the curricula of several subjects and on the ways digital media can be used within the classroom to promote knowledge, to stimulate critical and media competencies, and to promote discussions and reflections about citizenship and the role of young people as citizens.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Creation as a Media Literacy Dimension

Since the 1990s, UNESCO has stressed that the ability to create, recreate, produce, and reproduce enables individuals to discuss and convey their views about information from the media, as well as to share their own realities.<sup>6</sup> Until then, and as Kafai and Peppler explore

<sup>1</sup> PÉREZ-ESCODA, A. et al.: Fake News Reaching Young People on Social Networks: Distrust Challenging Media Literacy. In *Publications*, 2021, Vol. 9, No. 2. No pagination. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/2304-6775/9/2/24>>.

<sup>2</sup> See: JENKINS, H. et al.: *By Any Media Necessary. The New Youth Activism*. New York : New York University Press, 2016.; BENNETT, S., MATON, K., KERVIN, L.: The "Digital Natives" Debate: A Critical Review of the Evidence. In *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 2008, Vol. 39, No. 5, p. 775-786. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2465&context=edupapers>>; SEEMILLER, C., GRACE, M.: *Generation Z - A Century in the Making*. London : Routledge, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> See also: PÉREZ-ESCODA, A., CASTRO-ZUBIZARRETA, A., FANDOS-IGADO, M.: Digital Skills in the Z Generation: Key Questions for a Curricular Introduction in Primary School. In *Comunicar*, 2016, Vol. 24, No. 49, p. 71-79. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://www.revistacomunicar.com/index.php?contenido=preimpreso&doi=10.3916%2FC49-2016-07&idioma=en>>.

<sup>4</sup> See: PÉREZ-ESCODA, A., CASTRO-ZUBIZARRETA, A., FANDOS-IGADO, M.: Digital Skills in the Z Generation: Key Questions for a Curricular Introduction in Primary School. In *Comunicar*, 2016, Vol. 24, No. 49, p. 71-79. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://www.revistacomunicar.com/index.php?contenido=preimpreso&doi=10.3916%2FC49-2016-07&idioma=en>>.

<sup>5</sup> PESSÔA, C.: *Educação para os Media em Contexto Escolar: investigação-ação com crianças do Ensino Básico*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Braga, Portugal : Universidade do Minho, 2017, p. 110. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<http://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/handle/1822/54322>>.

<sup>6</sup> See: UNESCO: *World Declaration on Education for All*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://www.ie.uminho.pt/pt/Instituto/PublishingImages/Paginas/Nucleo-de-Educacao-para-os-Direitos-HumanosNEDHIEUM/declaracaoEducacaoTodos.pdf>>; UNESCO: *New Directions in Media Education*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://milunesco.unaoc.org/mil-resources/new-directions-in-media-education-unesco-1990/>>.

in *Youth, Technology, and DIY: Developing Participatory Competencies in Creative Media Production*, the role of media production, especially in educational contexts, was an undervalued issue<sup>7</sup> and its contribution to learning and knowledge production was believed to be low. Today, in a *society of creation*,<sup>8</sup> in which digital media have great weight, new opportunities are arising for individuals, especially the younger and most connected ones, to create and share content and views, interact with peers and other individuals<sup>9</sup> but also to engage and gain strength in a world where they previously had few rights.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore argued that media production is a central part of Media Education<sup>11</sup> and a key element to promote a participatory culture.<sup>12</sup>

In the literature, various meanings are attributed to creativity. Authors such as Klimenko point out that, depending on the field of reflection, “*creativity acquires a dual importance and meaning: as a cultural value which enables effective solutions to contemporary issues to be generated and as a fundamental human need*”.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, whether creativity is perceived through the prism of economics and marketing<sup>14</sup> or through the prism of education<sup>15</sup> different meanings are attributed to it. From another point of view, creativity – creation – can also be understood as a characteristic that manifests itself in everyday life and reveals itself through the use of media tools. Burgess<sup>16</sup> suggests that this type of creation is part of everyday practices, using the concept of *vernacular creativity* to describe the documenting and sharing of everyday life, experiences that have taken on new forms in the course of the growth of the digital. She identifies, for example, the creation of family albums, storytelling or diary writing as forms of creation and creative expression that were already forms of media creation and which, due to the growth and greater availability of digital tools, have become increasingly visible, no longer restricted to the private domain, but have become dynamic elements of the cultural public sphere.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See: KAFAI, Y. B., PEPPLER, K.: *Youth, Technology, and DIY: Developing Participatory Competencies in Creative Media Production*. In *Review of Research in Education*, 2017, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 89-119. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/>>.

<sup>8</sup> See: MARTINS, V. M. T.: A qualidade da criatividade como mais valia para a educação. In *Millenium*, 2004, Vol. 9, No. 29, p. 295-312. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/70643099.pdf>>.

<sup>9</sup> See also: GUERRERO-PICO, M., MASANET, M. J., SCOLARI, C. A.: Toward a Typology of Young Producers: Teenagers' Transmedia Skills, Media Production, and Narrative and Aesthetic Appreciation. In *New Media and Society*, 2019, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 336-353. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://repositori.upf.edu/bitstream/handle/10230/35436/Guerrero\\_new\\_towa.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repositori.upf.edu/bitstream/handle/10230/35436/Guerrero_new_towa.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)>.

<sup>10</sup> See: GOLDMAN, S., BOOKER, A., MCDERMOTT, M.: Mixing the Digital, Social, and Cultural: Learning, Identity, and Agency in Youth Participation. In BUCKINGHAM, D. (ed.): *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 2008, p. 185-206. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[http://sed.ucsd.edu/files/2015/02/2008-Goldman-Booker\\_McDermott.pdf](http://sed.ucsd.edu/files/2015/02/2008-Goldman-Booker_McDermott.pdf)>.

<sup>11</sup> See: BUCKINGHAM, D.: *Media Education: Literacy, Learning, and Contemporary Culture*. Malden, MA : Polity, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> See also: JENKINS, H. et al.: *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture : Media Education for the 21 Century*. Chicago, IL. : MacArthur, 2006.; PEREIRA, S.: *Crianças, Jovens e Media na Era Digital: Consumidores e Produtores?* Braga : UMinho Editora, 2021. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://ebooks.uminho.pt/index.php/uminho/catalog/view/45/80/891-3>>.

<sup>13</sup> KLIMENKO, O.: La creatividad como un desafío para la educación del siglo XXI. In *Educación y Educadores*, 2008, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 194. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://educacionyeducadores.unisabana.edu.co/index.php/eye/article/view/740/822>>.

<sup>14</sup> See: THROSBY, D.: *Economics and Culture*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2001.; HOWKINS, J.: *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money From Ideas*. London : Allen Lane, 2001; FLORIDA, R.: *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York : Basic Books, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> See also: CRAFT, A.: *Creativity in Schools: Tensions and Dilemmas*. London : Routledge, 2005; CRAFT, A., JEFFREY, B., LEIBLING, M.: *Creativity in Education*. London : Continuum, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> BURGESS, J.: *Vernacular Creativity, Cultural Participation and New Media Literacy : Photography and the Flickr Network*. Paper presented at AoIR 7.0: Internet Convergences. Brisbane, presented on 28-30<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>17</sup> BURGESS, J.: *Vernacular Creativity, Cultural Participation and New Media Literacy : Photography and the Flickr Network*. Paper presented at AoIR 7.0: Internet Convergences. Brisbane, presented on 28-30<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

According to authors, such as Buckingham and Reia-Batista, the relationship between media literacy and media production is inherent. To educate for media use and consumption means to educate for a competent and conscious authorship of media contents.<sup>18</sup> It also implies the interpretation and production of media, whether they are texts in written or visual format.<sup>19</sup> In this context, and because it is a broad idea, media creativity can be understood either as the most complex and professionalised media production or as a simple act of writing an email, posting a text or image on social networks, or even participating in online discussions or games.<sup>20</sup> Based on the concept of media literacy proposed by the OFCOM, Buckingham and team<sup>21</sup> suggest some general features to detail what is contemplated within this dimension of creation. According to the authors, it deals with the notion that media can be used as a means of communication and self-expression; it can contribute to the development of critical understanding of reality and media; it can be perceived through practices and products. These features suggest that the creation dimension concerns how media can be employed as tools to both make different readings of the world and to design products that allow individuals to communicate, express themselves and participate.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of purposes, media creation is the dimension that promotes the valorisation of the youngest's cultural knowledge, having an impact on their learning and self-esteem.<sup>23</sup> It is, also, the dimension that inspires them to express (and find ways to express) on social issues, with their peers or adults,<sup>24</sup> and a way to share their voice on a variety of platforms.<sup>25</sup> Alongside this, it is the dimension that drives a better understanding of the ways and reasons why media and media content are created,<sup>26</sup> in a process reflecting on the role of media in society, that incites media use and critical thinking.

According to Lopes, the current multimedia societies and environment require citizens to be more “*proactive, critical and participatory*”.<sup>27</sup> Developing these media creation skills is also a way to empower citizens, encouraging a more critical reading of the world and the content disseminated by the media.<sup>28</sup> Leurs and team<sup>29</sup> even mention that participation is a goal

<sup>18</sup> See: REIA-BATISTA, V.: Literacia dos Media como Resultado de Multi-Aprendizagens Multiculturais e Multimediáticas. In MIRANDA, G. (eds.): *Ensino online e aprendizagem multimédia*. Lisbon : Relógio d'Água Editores, 2009, p. 1-16.

<sup>19</sup> BUCKINGHAM, D.: *Media Education: Literacy, Learning, and Contemporary Culture*. Malden, MA : Polity, 2003, p. 49.

<sup>20</sup> See: BUCKINGHAM, D. et al.: *The Media Literacy of Children and Young People: A Review of the Research Literature on Behalf of Ofcom*. London : OFCOM, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>22</sup> See: PEREIRA, S.: *Crianças, Jovens e Media na Era Digital: Consumidores e Produtores?* Braga : UMinho Editora, 2021. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://ebooks.uminho.pt/index.php/uminho/catalog/view/45/80/891-3>>.

<sup>23</sup> See: BURN, A., DURRAN, J.: *Media Literacy in Schools: Practice, Production and Progression*. London : SAGE Publications, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> See also: FRIEZEM, E.: A Story of Conflict and Collaboration: Media Literacy, Video Production and Disadvantaged Youth. In *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 2014, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 44-55. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1140&context=jmle>>.

<sup>25</sup> See: TOMÉ, V. et al.: Active Citizenship and Participation Through the Media: A Community Project Focused on Pre-school and Primary School Children. In *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 2019, Vol. 36, p. 101-120. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://revistacomsoc.pt/index.php/revistacomsoc/article/view/2347/2480>>.

<sup>26</sup> See: REIA-BATISTA, V.: Literacia dos Media como Resultado de Multi-Aprendizagens Multiculturais e Multimediáticas. In MIRANDA, G. (eds.): *Ensino online e aprendizagem multimédia*. Lisbon : Relógio d'Água Editores, 2009, p. 1-16.; BRENNAN, K., MONROY-HERNÁNDEZ, A., RESNICK, M.: Making Projects, Making Friends: Online Community as Catalyst for Interactive Media Creation. In *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2010, Vol. 128, p. 75-83.

<sup>27</sup> LOPES, P.: *Literacia mediática e cidadania. Práticas e competências de adultos em formação na Grande Lisboa*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Lisbon, Portugal : ISCTE - IUL (Instituto Universitário de Lisboa), 2013, p. 169.

<sup>28</sup> See: SHARE, J.: *Media Literacy is Elementary - Teaching Youth to Critically Read and Create Media*. New York : Peter Lang Publishing, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> See: LEURS, K. et al.: Critical Media Literacy Through Making Media: A Key to Participation for Young Migrants? In *Communications*, 2018, Vol. 43, No. 3, p. 427-450. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/commun-2018-0017/html>>.



of media literacy, referring to the individual's ability to choose to participate in the knowledge economy, democracy, lifelong learning, cultural expressive activities and personal fulfilment. For this reason, they emphasise visual media production, critical engagement, and critical awareness as key elements in a plural concept of media literacy education.<sup>30</sup>

While it cannot be considered the salvation for an era defined by profound evolutions and transformations such as the one we live in, the literature leaves clear clues that suggest that the creation dimension is essential for the expression and full participation of individuals in society and democracy,<sup>31</sup> especially the youngest ones. Pereira in *Children, Youth and Media in the Digital Age: Consumers and Producers?*<sup>32</sup> discusses the importance of developing expression skills (creation and production) so that democratic participation in and through the media takes place; the author also stresses that for that to happen, more than knowing the technological tools that allow to produce and create, the ethical issues that underlie production and that concern knowing how to be and publish in the – increasingly digital – public space must be understandable to different audiences. Media creativity stands out, then, as a driving force for social transformation, a key competence ensuring that “*all citizens may actively participate in the construction of alternatives*”.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.2 Youth and Participation in the Digital Era

Citizenship implies the assignment of rights and duties to individuals. Therefore, the concept denotes the “*ethics of participation*”,<sup>34</sup> as it entails “*social interaction and participation in community life*”.<sup>35</sup> According to Bordenave, participation concerns the act of “*taking part, being part or having part*”.<sup>36</sup> It also mirrors the commitment, involvement, presence<sup>37</sup> of people or an individual to public life or to their community(ies),<sup>38</sup> and may take various forms. Magalhães and Moral<sup>39</sup> suggest a distinction between conventional and non-conventional forms of participation. In conventional modes they include actions, such as voting and collaborating with parties; as non-conventional acts of participation they point to participation in demonstrations or even collaboration with voluntary associations or organisations. Brites<sup>40</sup> also proposes a differentiation

<sup>30</sup> See: LEURS, K. et al.: Critical Media Literacy Through Making Media: A key to Participation for Young Migrants? In *Communications*, 2018, Vol. 43, No. 3, p. 427-450. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/commun-2018-0017/html>>.

<sup>31</sup> SEFTON-GREEN, J.: *Mapping Digital Makers: A Review Exploring Everyday Creativity, Learning Lives and the Digital*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<http://www.julianseftongreen.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/NT-SoA-6-FINAL.pdf>>.

<sup>32</sup> PEREIRA, S.: *Crianças, Jovens e Media na Era Digital: Consumidores e Produtores?* Braga : UMinho Editora, 2021. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://ebooks.uminho.pt/index.php/uminho/catalog/view/45/80/891-3>>.

<sup>33</sup> KLIMENKO, O.: La creatividad como un desafío para la educación del siglo XXI. In *Educación y Educadores*, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 192. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://educacionyeducadores.unisabana.edu.co/index.php/eye/article/view/740>>.

<sup>34</sup> NEVES, B.: Cidadania Digital? Das cidades digitais a Barack Obama. Uma abordagem crítica. In MORGAGO, I. S., ROSAS, A. (eds.): *Cidadania Digital*. Covilhã : LabCom Books, 2010, p. 145.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>36</sup> BORDENAVE, J.: *O que é participação*. São Paulo : Brasiliense, 1983, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> DEMO, P.: *Participação é conquista: noções de política social participativa*. São Paulo : Cortez, 1996, p. 19-20.

<sup>38</sup> See: RIBEIRO, A. B., MENEZES, I.: Os Jovens e a Internet : novos meios de participação cívica e política. In *Sociedades desiguais e paradigmas em confronto: livro de actas do X Congresso Luso-Afro- Brasileiro de Ciências Sociais*. Braga : Universidade do Minho, 2009, p.127-132.

<sup>39</sup> See: MAGALHÃES, P., MORAL, J. S.: *Os jovens e a política: Um estudo do Centro de Sondagens e Estudos de Opinião da Universidade Católica Portuguesa*. Lisbon : Cesop, 2008, p. 1-52.

<sup>40</sup> BRITES, M. J.: *O papel das notícias na construção da participação cívica e política dos jovens em Portugal: Estudo de caso longitudinal (2010-2011)*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Lisbon : Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2013, p. 23-24. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://run.unl.pt/handle/10362/10383>>.

between conventional and unconventional participation, with “actions such as voting, being part of a political organization, participating in party actions, associating the decisions of a community or a country with politicians” fitting within the first category.<sup>41</sup> The author portrays, in turn, unconventional participation as “actions, such as participating in voluntary organisations or associations, in blogs or other online pages, in demonstrations, in illegal protest activities, helping the community, artistic manifestations”.<sup>42</sup> Crowley and Moxon advocate a simpler reading, referring that if traditional participation is voting, membership in a political party or engagement with a formal political process, an alternative form is anything other than this.<sup>43</sup> The authors share the idea that although alternative forms of participation are often described as new, they are not always so, such as demonstrations, volunteering and community activism.

Communication is at the basis of participation processes. Although the relationship is not guaranteed, in current contexts the link between media and democracy is even more relevant, since the internet and digital platforms provide great spaces for political participation,<sup>44</sup> allowing decision-makers and political elites to connect to citizens<sup>45</sup> and to create opportunities to include marginalized or more distant groups, such as young people, in democratic processes.<sup>46</sup> Buckingham even stresses that media is inevitable in modern life and for democracy, since “a healthy democracy requires media users to be well informed and capable of discernment; it needs active citizens participating in civil society; it needs skilled and creative workers”.<sup>47</sup>

For a long time, younger generations found themselves excluded from mainstream notions of citizenship. Young people were described as disconnected from political life and duties, their skills, knowledge and interest in social and political issues were doubted,<sup>48</sup> and access to the public sphere was barred on the basis of arguments, such as immaturity, inability to reason and even to express themselves in discussions.<sup>49</sup> Despite the disbelief in the role and interest of young people in political life, there are signs in the literature that underline their involvement in civic issues and in the processes of change in contemporary society. In the second half of the 20th century, specifically in the 1960s and 1970s, student movements

<sup>41</sup> See: BRITES, M. J.: *O papel das notícias na construção da participação cívica e política dos jovens em Portugal: Estudo de caso longitudinal (2010-2011)*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Lisbon : Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2013. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://run.unl.pt/handle/10362/10383>>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> CROWLEY, A., MOXON, D.: *New and Innovative Forms of Youth Participation in Decision-making Processes*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://rm.coe.int/new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-pro/1680759e6a>>.

<sup>44</sup> See: DAHLGREN, P.: *The Political Web. Media, Participation and Alternative Media*. London : Palgrave McMillan, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> See: DELLI CARPINI, M. X.: Gen.com: Youth, Civic Engagement, and the New Information Environment. In *Political Communication*, 2000, Vol. 17, No. 4, p. 341-349. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1350&context=asc\\_papers](https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1350&context=asc_papers)>.

<sup>46</sup> See also: RIBEIRO, A. B., MENEZES, I.: Os Jovens e a Internet : novos meios de participação cívica e política. In *Sociedades desiguais e paradigmas em confronto: livro de actas do X Congresso Luso-Afro-Brasileiro de Ciências Sociais*. Braga : Universidade do Minho, 2009, p.127-132.

<sup>47</sup> BUCKINGHAM, D.: *After the Death of Childhood. Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media*. Cambridge : Polity Press/Blackwell Publishing, 2000, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> BARBER, T.: ‘Choice, Voice and Engagement’. An Exploration of Models and Methods which Promote Active Youth Citizenship in the New Europe. In DOLEJSIOVA, D., LOPEZ, M. A. G. (eds.): *European Citizenship - In the Process of Construction - Challenges for Citizenship, Citizenship Education and Democratic Practice in Europe*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261662/Choice\\_Voice\\_and\\_Engagem.pdf/64fbc475-df02-4455-935a-d85f5661544b](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261662/Choice_Voice_and_Engagem.pdf/64fbc475-df02-4455-935a-d85f5661544b)>.

<sup>49</sup> See: LOADER, B. D., VROMEN, A., XENOS, M. A.: Performing for the Young Networked Citizen? Celebrity Politics, Social Networking and the Political Engagement of Young People. In *Media, Culture and Society*, 2016, Vol. 38, No. 3, p. 400-419. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284273880\\_Performing\\_for\\_the\\_young\\_networked\\_citizen\\_Celebrity\\_politics\\_social\\_networking\\_and\\_the\\_political\\_engagement\\_of\\_young\\_people](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284273880_Performing_for_the_young_networked_citizen_Celebrity_politics_social_networking_and_the_political_engagement_of_young_people)>; PASCAL, C., BERTRAM, T.: Listening to Young Citizens: The Struggle to Make Real a Participatory Paradigm in Research with Young Children. In *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 2009, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 249-262.

called for social transformation. Young people mobilised in large demonstrations and protests to defend social causes, to contest more and better rights and to demand the end of armed conflicts.<sup>50</sup> The struggles led by student movements were repeated in the decades that followed. Currently, ecology, sustainability, human and animal rights are some of the causes young people demonstrate for,<sup>51</sup> organising themselves in social movements, especially mobilised through digital platforms, opting for non-traditional (or unconventional) models of participation.<sup>52</sup> In opposition to the idea that there is a generalised disinterest and alienation of younger citizens from democratic participation,<sup>53</sup> counterarguments emerge suggesting that what is happening is a disinterest of these generations in mainstream forms of participation.

Several studies developed at the European level focus on these issues. The *European Youth in 2016 – Special Eurobarometer* study by the European Parliament reports that although young Europeans believed that voting in European elections was the best way to actively live European citizenship, there were other ways of participating that they considered important, such as participating in debates through the European institutions' digital platforms (21%), taking part in demonstrations (19%) and associations or NGOs (18%), or even getting involved in citizens' initiatives (17%). Data from *Flash Eurobarometer 455* showed that the trend was continuing, highlighting an increase in young people's involvement in electoral participation and volunteering actions. More than half of the nearly 11,000 young Europeans aged 15-30 surveyed – youth and young adults – reported having participated in an election in the previous 3 years and being involved in groups or organisations, and 31% had been involved in volunteering activities in the previous year. However, national results from the *Eu Kids Online* project and the *Transmedia Literacy* project pointed in a different direction. In both cases, the children and young people involved in the projects – who were aged between 6 and 19 – reported using the media preferably for leisure activities, or to communicate with family and friends or visit social networks. The data collected show higher consumption values, compared to production and participation.<sup>54</sup> These findings indicate that, although it is not possible to generalise and assume that all young people participate in civic and political activities and/or seek alternative ways to do so – since within the same youth group distinct practices and interests are found –, youth participation has been taking on more fluid, creative and less institutionalised forms.<sup>55</sup> In *By any Media Necessary*, Jenkins speaks of a generation engaging in new forms of political

<sup>50</sup> See: GARCIA, A. D., MACEDO, E., QUEIRÓS, J.: Routes of Construction of Knowledge, Expression and Participation: How Do Young People (Re)create Citizenship? In *Praxis Educativa*, 2019, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 1230-1250.

<sup>51</sup> See also: BRIGGS, J.: *Young People and Political Participation. Teen Players*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> See: GARCIA, A. D., MACEDO, E., & QUEIRÓS, J.: Routes of Construction of Knowledge, Expression and Participation: How Do Young People (Re)create Citizenship? In *Praxis Educativa*, 2019, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 1230-1250.

<sup>53</sup> See: PONTES, A. I., HENN, M., GRIFFITHS, M. D.: Youth Political (Dis)engagement and the Need for Citizenship Education: Encouraging Young People's Civic and Political Participation through the Curriculum. In *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 2019, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 3-21. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1746197917734542>>.

<sup>54</sup> See: PEREIRA, S. et al.: Media Uses and Production Practices: Case Study with Teens from Portugal, Spain and Italy. In *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 2018, Vol. 15, No. 33, p. 89-114. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<http://www.comunicacionysociedad.cucsh.udg.mx/index.php/comsoc/article/view/7091/599>>; PONTE, C., BATISTA, S.: *EU Kids Online Portugal - Usos, competências, riscos e mediações da internet reportados por crianças e jovens (9 - 17 anos)*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<http://fabricadesites.fcsh.unl.pt/eukidsonline/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2019/03/RELATO%CC%81RIO-FINAL-EU-KIDS-ONLINE.docx.pdf>>.

<sup>55</sup> See: GARCIA, A. D., MACEDO, E., QUEIRÓS, J.: Routes of Construction of Knowledge, Expression and Participation: How Do Young People (Re)create Citizenship? In *Praxis Educativa*, 2019, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 1230-1250.; BANAJI, S., MORENO-ALMEIDA, C.: Politicizing Participatory Culture at the Margins: The Significance of Class, Gender and Online Media for the Practices of Youth Networks in the MENA Region. In *Global Media and Communication*, 2020. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1742766520982029>>.

participation. Drawing on examples such as the Occupy Wall Street movement and others that marked the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, Jenkins et al.<sup>56</sup> analyse organisations and communities whose alternative practices of democratic engagement have been captivating younger sections of society. The authors conclude that digital media have played a crucial role in these dynamics, contributing to the expression of social movements and the young people who are part of them and to the creation of media content as a way of participating. “*These young people seek to change the world through any media necessary.*”,<sup>57</sup> they state.

The opportunities for expression and participation arising from digital media are also recognised by other authors. Crowley and Maxon<sup>58</sup> explain that, alongside actions, such as volunteering and face-to-face protests, young people tend to express themselves more through digital platforms, in the form of online activism, and that these (collective) actions are important to shape their political identity. Bennet et al.<sup>59</sup> add that digital spaces have also contributed to young people developing social awareness and the ability to develop solutions to face worldly challenges. In turn, Harris, Wyn and Younes point out that many young people, despite their social and political concerns, shy away from traditional forms of participation because they do not feel heard by institutions. Not neglecting the importance of the collective movement, they refer, many young people assume individualized practices of participation, valuing their voice as individual beings, and not being guaranteed participants in activist or protest movements.<sup>60</sup>

Taking into consideration Crowley and Moxon’s reminder of the risk of generalising the positive contributions of digital media to participation and overlooking youngsters that aren’t studying or working, others with communication or learning difficulties, or with conditioned access to digital tools and the Internet,<sup>61</sup> the literature highlights the importance of digital media to promote young people’s active engagement in democracy. By providing new forms for expression, that go beyond demonstrations of engagement in the physical world<sup>62</sup> and that facilitate interaction and inclusion with peers with similar interests,<sup>63</sup> digital media have driven the emergence of new modes of social engagement.<sup>64</sup> Young people have discovered new ways to have and express their voice.

<sup>56</sup> See: JENKINS, H. et al.: *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21 Century*. Chicago, IL : MacArthur, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> JENKINS, H. et al.: *By any Media Necessary. The New Youth Activism*. New York : New York University Press, 2016, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> CROWLEY, A., MOXON, D.: *New and Innovative Forms of Youth Participation in Decision-making Processes*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://rm.coe.int/new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-pro/1680759e6a>>.

<sup>59</sup> See: BENNETT, L. B. et al.: At Home in the World: Supporting Children in Human Rights, Global Citizenship, and Digital Citizenship. In *Childhood Education*, 2016, Vol. 93, No. 3, p. 189-199. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301646014\\_At\\_Home\\_in\\_the\\_World\\_Supporting\\_Children\\_in\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Global\\_Citizenship\\_and\\_Digital\\_Citizenship](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301646014_At_Home_in_the_World_Supporting_Children_in_Human_Rights_Global_Citizenship_and_Digital_Citizenship)>.

<sup>60</sup> HARRIS, A., WYN, J., YOUNES, S.: Beyond Apathetic or Activist Youth: ‘Ordinary’ Young People and Contemporary Forms of Participation. In *Young*, 2010, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> CROWLEY, A., MOXON, D.: *New and Innovative Forms of Youth Participation in Decision-making Processes*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://rm.coe.int/new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-pro/1680759e6a>>.

<sup>62</sup> See: DAHYA, N.: Critical Perspectives on Youth Digital Media Production: ‘Voice’ and Representation in Educational Contexts. In *Learning, Media and Technology*, 2017, Vol. 42, No. 1, p. 100-111. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294720890\\_Critical\\_perspectives\\_on\\_youth\\_digital\\_media\\_production\\_%27voice%27\\_and\\_representation\\_in\\_educational\\_contexts](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294720890_Critical_perspectives_on_youth_digital_media_production_%27voice%27_and_representation_in_educational_contexts)>.

<sup>63</sup> See: BRIGGS, J.: *Young People and Political Participation. Teen Players*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.; LUVIZOTTO, C. K.: Cidadania, ativismo e participação na internet: experiências brasileiras. In *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 2016, Vol. 30, p. 297-312. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://revistacomsoc.pt/index.php/revistacomsoc/article/view/820/800>>.

<sup>64</sup> See: JENKINS, H. et al.: *By any Media Necessary. The New Youth Activism*. New York : New York University Press, 2016.; JENKINS, H.: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, London : New York University Press, 2006.; JENKINS, H.: *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York : New York University Press, 2006.

## 2.3 Media Literacy in Schools

Eccles and Roeser consider school to be an essential place for the development of individuals. It is the place where they acquire knowledge, where they create and nurture social relationships, where they shape their identities and where they prepare themselves to face the future.<sup>65</sup> It is also the place where young people spend much of their time, learning to make critical readings of the world, to communicate and to acquire skills that give them the necessary tools to act in the places where they live.<sup>66</sup>

In a time of rapid and profound changes, largely affected by the Internet boom and the growth of digital media, school faces several challenges. D'Oliveira Martins and colleagues, in a guide document developed for the particular Portuguese context, point out that the fast pace at which scientific and technological knowledge evolves and the transformations in the way knowledge is produced imposes a need for a reconfiguration of school. Considering these aspects, as a primary space for learning and acquiring skills, school is under pressure to adapt to the demands of the digital age.<sup>67</sup>

The urgency to readjust the school context and pedagogical practices is the topic of interest for other authors. Gutiérrez and Tyner underline that school cannot ignore social and cultural evolutions, since in doing so, it risks *“training students to develop as people and citizens in a society that no longer exists”*.<sup>68</sup> They add that the digitalization of information, the importance of social networks and digital media, and even multiculturalism are issues that are little addressed in school. This promotes a gap between the reality experienced and what is learned in the classroom.<sup>69</sup> Pérez Tornero expresses a similar concern noting that in a context – such as the current one – in which the media have an undeniable weight in everyone's lives, school is no longer the main holder of knowledge and intellectual power; this responsibility is shared with the media.<sup>70</sup> With the growth of the Internet and, more recently, with the massification of digital media, access to knowledge that was previously only transmitted in the classroom has become possible with a few clicks. In view of this, Tornero underlines that *“the school is running out of classrooms, that is, out of closed, controlled and reserved spaces, in which knowledge flowed vertically from the teacher to the students”*.<sup>71</sup> In line with these authors, García-Ruiz and Pérez-Escoda also stress that the Internet posed unprecedented opportunities for education and for the development of new ways to teach and learn. According to them, we are hyperconnected citizens, who share knowledge through the Internet, and who resort to multiple languages and media to learn and disseminate learnings by all. By perceiving, analysing and producing messages that are conveyed in different media, citizens guarantee their fundamental rights. It is therefore important to favour the development of these skills in the school

<sup>65</sup> See: ECCLES, J. S., ROESER, R. W.: Schools as Development Contexts. In ADAMS, G. R., BERZONSKY, M. D. (eds.): *Blackwell Handbook of Adolescence*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

<sup>66</sup> See: LOPES, P.: Educação para os media nas sociedades multimidiáticas. In *CIES E-Working Paper*, 2011, Vol. 108, p. 1-30. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://core.ac.uk/reader/54050680>>; SILVEIRA, P.: A Educação para os Media: uma abordagem teórica acerca do conceito e da sua aplicação no contexto educativo. In PEREIRA, S. (ed.): *Congresso Nacional “Literacia, Media e Cidadania”*. Braga : Universidade do Minho: Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, 2011, p. 797-809.

<sup>67</sup> D'OLIVEIRA MARTINS, G. et al.: *Perfil dos Alunos à saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Curriculo/Projeto\\_Autonomia\\_e\\_Flexibilidade/perfil\\_dos\\_alunos.pdf](https://dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Curriculo/Projeto_Autonomia_e_Flexibilidade/perfil_dos_alunos.pdf)>.

<sup>68</sup> GUTIÉRREZ, A., TYNER, K.: Educación para los medios, alfabetización mediática y competencia digital. In *Comunicar*, 2012, Vol. 38, p. 32. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307676102\\_Educacion\\_para\\_los\\_medios\\_alfabetizacion\\_mediatica\\_y\\_competencia\\_digital\\_Media\\_Education\\_Media\\_Literacy\\_and\\_Digital\\_Competence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307676102_Educacion_para_los_medios_alfabetizacion_mediatica_y_competencia_digital_Media_Education_Media_Literacy_and_Digital_Competence)>.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31-39.

<sup>70</sup> PÉREZ TORNERO, J. M.: *Comunicação e Educação na Sociedade da Informação: Novas linguagens e consciência crítica*. Porto : Porto Editora, 2000, p. 39.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*.

context.<sup>72</sup> These authors underline the important contribution of the media both as knowledge tools and as citizenship tools, suggesting that its integration in the educational dynamics is fundamental to promote the emancipation of children and young people facing the challenges that arise from the media environment, and also to encourage their participation, civic attitude and to develop the awareness of their rights and duties.<sup>73</sup>

Media Education actively contributes to the empowerment and capacity building of individuals to be more resilient and enlightened citizens. Hobbs and colleagues<sup>74</sup> point out that through media activities students develop analytical and communication, leadership and problem-solving skills and learn to use different sources and media, something extremely relevant in today's deeply mediated context. According to the authors, as citizens are expected to be both (media) readers and writers and to engage in discussions and debates to promote action and change in their communities, it is crucial that the very role of media in democratic societies is understood - both how knowledge is constructed and how knowledge production is related to social, political and economic specificities. As they state, by fostering digital and media literacy in formal and informal learning contexts - both in terms of media analysis and creation - opportunities are created for children and young people to reflect on their uses of media and technology, to analyse and evaluate media messages, and to create dynamic and collaborative works that support their civic engagement. It is therefore a matter of taking advantage of the school space to promote space for democracy, with and through the media, where young people take on different roles, stimulating plurality of thought and active responsibility.

### 3 Methodology

This research sought answers to “*How can media content production practices – namely digital narratives – be integrated in the classroom, based on the curricula and aiming to contribute to expression and reflection on citizenship issues*”. It particularly aimed to understand how media literacy's creative dimension can be promoted in the classroom, based on curriculum themes and to understand how creation and production activities, specifically of digital narratives, can contribute to young people's participation and to their citizenship practices and perceptions.

To answer the research questions and objectives defined, but also considering the context and target audience under study – school and young people – an action research was designed. As it is a methodology that favours collaboration between researcher and participants, promotes a critical and reflective attitude, and is self-evaluative and interventive,<sup>75</sup> it presented itself as the methodological option most suited to the stipulated objectives. The research was divided into three phases: diagnosis, intervention, and reflection and evaluation. In this article, we focus on the results obtained during the intervention phase, through the exploratory questionnaire presented to the students who participated in the media creation activities and the content analysis of the narratives created. The data was analysed also considering the participatory observation. The fieldwork was conducted in two Portuguese schools – one public and one private school. The data regarding the schools is available in TABLE 1.

<sup>72</sup> GARCÍA-RUIZ, R., PÉREZ ESCODA, A.: Empoderar a la ciudadanía mediante la educación en medios digitales. In *Hamut'* ay, 2019, Vol. 6, No. 2. No pagination. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<http://revistas.uap.edu.pe/ojs/index.php/HAMUT/article/view/1771/1796>>.

<sup>73</sup> See: PÉREZ TORNERO, J. M.: *Comunicação e Educação na Sociedade da Informação: Novas linguagens e consciência crítica*. Porto : Porto Editora, 2000.

<sup>74</sup> HOBBS, R. et al.: Learning to Engage: How Positive Attitudes About the News, Media Literacy, and Video Production Contribute to Adolescent Civic Engagement. In *Educational Media International*, 2013, Vol. 50, No. 4, p. 232.

<sup>75</sup> See: AMADO, J.: *Manual de investigação qualitativa em educação*. Coimbra : Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2014; COHEN, L., MANION, L., MORRISON, K.: *Research Methods in Education*. New York : Routledge, 2011.

School 1
Public school
Activities conducted in 5 classes
10 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> grade students
3 teachers (Portuguese, Spanish and English)
118 students
School 2
Private school
Activities conducted in 3 classes
10 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> grade students
2 teachers (Portuguese and Philosophy/Citizenship)
79 students

**TABLE 1:** Data about the two schools and audiences involved in the project

Source: own processing, 2021.

To get to know the students, an exploratory questionnaire was applied. This method was chosen since, usually, it assures the criteria of safeguarding the anonymity of the respondents (in this case, mostly minors) and the possibility of aggregation and confrontation of data concerning individuals moving in similar contexts.<sup>76</sup> The questionnaire was distributed in the first session with each class. The instrument was divided into three blocks, with a total of 16 questions (13 closed questions and 3 open questions) and sought to provide a general description of the population under study, their habits and experience with the media and citizenship practices. A total of 197 questionnaires were applied in eight secondary school classes.

The data collected through the questionnaires was analysed using SPSS – version 24. The analysis was mainly quantitative and focused on socio-demographic data and others concerning media habits and creation, production and participation routines. Descriptive statistics was conducted to analyse the data distribution and dispersion, since the aim was to obtain a general picture of the students and each of the classes that participated in the project.

The analysis of the digital narratives created in the classroom pursued on the one hand, to extract all relevant information and, on the other hand, to interpret the data to understand their implications and meanings for the research.<sup>77</sup> The objective was to comprehend if young people understood the concept of digital narrative; used diversified multimodal elements to create dynamic, coherent and appealing messages; lived a process of learning and reflecting on citizenship issues through the creation of digital narratives; reflected on the role and impact of media in our lives and in citizenship; were able to create media products as a way to express their views, voices and opinions. As narrative is a semiotic product where the art of telling stories is combined with multimedia elements, such as images, audio and video,<sup>78</sup> a content analysis was carried out. Considering the multiplicity of elements that interact in a digital narrative – image, text, audio and video<sup>79</sup> – and the variety of skills involved in its creation, an analysis

<sup>76</sup> See also: ALMEIDA, J. F., PINTO, J. M.: *A Investigação nas Ciências Sociais*. Lisbon : Editorial Presença, 1995.

<sup>77</sup> LANKSHEAR, C., KNOBEL, M.: *New Literacies Everyday Practices and Classroom Learning*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-287-588-4\\_111](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-287-588-4_111)>.

<sup>78</sup> ROBIN, B. R.: *The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/articles/Educ-Uses-DS.pdf>>.

<sup>79</sup> See: HAMILTON, A. et al.: Digital Storytelling as a Tool for Fostering Reflection. In *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 2019, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 59-73. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341138803\\_Digital\\_Storytelling\\_as\\_a\\_Tool\\_for\\_Fostering\\_Reflection](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341138803_Digital_Storytelling_as_a_Tool_for_Fostering_Reflection)>; LAMBERT, J.: *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*. Berkeley : Center for Digital Storytelling. Digital Diner Press, 2010; LAMBERT, J.: *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*. New York : Routledge, 2012; OHLER, J.: *Digital Storytelling in the Classroom: New Media Pathways to Literacy, Learning and Creativity*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Corwin, 2013.

matrix was developed to guide and support the analysis. To build this instrument, we initially started from the concept of media literacy. The analysis models developed by Moon,<sup>80</sup> Alterio and McDury,<sup>81</sup> Lambert,<sup>82</sup> Ohler<sup>83</sup> and Barrett<sup>84</sup> were also considered, as well as the coding categories for the analysis of digital narratives proposed by Snelson and Sheffield<sup>85</sup> and Robin.<sup>86</sup> In this way, considering the polysemy of the concept, as previously mentioned by Lopes,<sup>87</sup> and the criteria developed by the abovementioned authors, the final matrix included four domains of competencies, as TABLE 2 shows, and 12 operational tasks - descriptors that specify the skills, characteristics and learning that we intended to observe through digital narratives. This instrument thus facilitated an organised and systematised collection of information to describe students' creations, performance, and learning. Ultimately, by adopting such an instrument, the data collected allowed us to ascertain the feasibility of the activities and the students' response to the challenge of creating media content from citizenship topics integrated in the curriculum. With regard to the proposed creative activities, these were co-created together with the teachers of each subject and each class that was involved in this research.

Media Literacy	Critical Thinking	Citizenship	Creativity
Media use	Sense creation	Point of view	Multimodal elements
Search	Meaning creation	Voice	Creativity in the production and/or content production
Software use	Storytelling	Involvement and emotional content	Transformative learning
	Story(re)telling		
	Story expansion		

**TABLE 2:** Operational domains and tasks that make up the content analysis matrix for digital narratives

Source: own processing, 2021.

### 3 Results

In the first school, 118 pupils from 5 different classes were involved in this investigation. 24 10<sup>th</sup> year students and 94 11<sup>th</sup> year students. The students were on average 16 years old and mainly female (n=89). Most of them were studying Languages and Humanities (n=43), followed by Visual Arts (n=36) and Science and Technology (n=26). Social networks are the medium which they reported using most frequently in their daily lives, referring to use them occasionally (n=66) or whenever possible (n=50). In the school context, websites and blogs were the media which students use most, with 42 young people mentioning that they used these platforms occasionally and 70 whenever possible.

<sup>80</sup> See: MOON, J. A.: *Reflection in Learning and Professional Practice*. Oxford : Routledge, 1999.

<sup>81</sup> See also: ALTERIO, M., MCDURRY, J.: *Learning Through Storytelling in Higher Education*. London : Routledge, 2003.

<sup>82</sup> See: LAMBERT, J.: *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*. Berkeley : Center for Digital Storytelling. Digital Diner Press, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> See: OHLER, J.: *Digital Storytelling in the Classroom: New Media Pathways to Literacy, Learning and Creativity*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Corwin, 2013.

<sup>84</sup> BARRETT, H.: *The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/archive/rubrics.html>>.

<sup>85</sup> See: SNELSON, C., SHEFFIELD, A.: Digital Storytelling in a Web 2.0 World. In *TCC*, 2009, p. 3930-3933. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276921955\\_Digital\\_Storytelling\\_in\\_a\\_Web\\_20\\_World](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276921955_Digital_Storytelling_in_a_Web_20_World)>.

<sup>86</sup> See also: ROBIN, B. R.: Digital Storytelling: A Powerful Technology Tool for the 21st Century Classroom. In *Theory into Practice*, 2008, Vol. 47, No. 3, p. 220-228. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://desarrollodocente.uc.cl/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Digital\\_Storytelling\\_A\\_Powerful\\_Technology\\_Tool\\_f.pdf](https://desarrollodocente.uc.cl/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Digital_Storytelling_A_Powerful_Technology_Tool_f.pdf)>.

<sup>87</sup> See: LOPES, P.: *Literacia mediática e cidadania. Práticas e competências de adultos em formação na Grande Lisboa*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Lisbon : ISCTE - IUL (Instituto Universitário de Lisboa), 2013.



Regarding their participation habits, the adolescents referred that they were mostly involved in Associations/Cultural Movements (n=39) and in volunteer actions (n=37). To understand their previous experience with media creation, production and participation activities, the youngsters were asked about a set of activities and their accomplishment in the year prior to the completion of the questionnaire. Making a presentation using Powerpoint, Prezi or other (n=105), producing photographs (n=93) and producing and publishing/sharing photographs on a site or social network (n=91) and responding to a petition for a cause through a social network (n=89) were those which most young people reported having carried out; in contrast, writing an opinion article for a media outlet (n=2), sharing or recommending a brand or products on a social network (n=10), writing a letter to the director of a media outlet (n=11) and writing a comment on a party's website or social network (n=17) were those which fewer young people reported having carried out in the previous year. When asked about their participation in media-related initiatives promoted by the school, only 17 of 118 students reported collaborating or having already collaborated in these activities.

In the second school, 79 students, belonging to 3 classes, participated in the empirical work. The students were mainly male (n=41) and aged between 15 and 18. The average age was 16 years old. All students were studying Science and Technology, 49 were in the 10th grade and 30 in the 12th grade. When questioned about the use of media in their daily lives, the youngsters mentioned that social networks and television were the media they used most frequently – 62 said they used social networks occasionally and 74 used television occasionally. In the school context, websites and blogs are the media they used most, with 42 of the students stating that they used these media whenever possible.

When asked about their participation habits, 16 students reported participating in associations and cultural movements, 20 in voluntary work, and 15 in youth groups and religious movements. Regarding the media creation, production and participation practices carried out in the previous year, the activities mentioned by the highest number of young people were producing photographs (n=76), making a presentation using Powerpoint, Prezi or other (n=76), producing and publishing/sharing photographs on a website or social network (n=67) and responding to a petition through a social network (n=60). On the other hand, writing an opinion article for a media outlet (n=0), sharing or recommending a brand or products to friends through social networks (n=0), writing a letter to the director of a media outlet (n=2) and creating a story through a multimedia platform (n=14) were those which fewer young people reported having carried out in the previous year. Regarding the participation in activities promoted internally by the school related to Media Education, only 25 out of 79 students mentioned being or having been involved.

During the process of co-creation of the media creation activities, three main areas of work were identified – literary education, citizen expression and personal expression and individuality. Following the preparation meetings held with the Spanish teacher from school 1 and the Philosophy/Citizenship teacher from school 2, it became clear that the themes related to citizenship identified in the syllabus provided answers to more than one thematic area. Therefore, a fourth area emerged, crossing citizen expression and personal expression and individuality. As a transversal objective to all activities, it was defined, together with the teachers, that they should result in the creation of digital narratives, through a process of reflection and critical understanding about the media and specific subjects of the curricula related to citizenship.

Nine activities were carried out, as TABLE 3 shows – 3 in the scope of Literary Education, 2 in the domain of Citizen Expression, 1 in the scope of Personal experience and individuality and 3 in the area that crossed Citizen Expression / Personal experience and individuality. The content analysis of the narratives shows that the students, as young citizens, were confronted with their beliefs and opinions on current pressing issues and the role of the media as instruments for teaching and learning, but also as tools to promote and experience citizenship. The analysis was complemented with the participant observation notes.

Media Literacy	Citizen expression	Personal experience and individuality	Citizen expression/ Personal experience and individuality
School 1	School 1	School 1	School 1
1 activity   10 <sup>th</sup> grade   Portuguese	1 activity   11 <sup>th</sup> grade   English	1 activity   11 <sup>th</sup> grade   English	2 activities   11 <sup>th</sup> grade   Spanish
School 2	School 2		School 2
2 activities   12 <sup>th</sup> grade   Portuguese	1 activity   10 <sup>th</sup> grade   Philosophy/Citizenship		1 activity   10 <sup>th</sup> grade   Philosophy/Citizenship

**TABLE 3:** Structures of the activities conducted according to subject area

Source: own processing, 2021.

Most of the students appreciated the opportunity to create digital narratives in the context of various disciplines and to discuss the suggested themes, especially those addressed in the citizen expression and citizen expression/personal experience and individuality areas. The themes addressed in these subject areas aroused particular interest, causing young people to share their opinions and personal experiences and even posing new questions for discussion. For others, however, the proposed media format and the objectives of the activities were not clear; some of the students even questioned the purpose of the activities. In these cases, along with the individual interests of each young person, it is possible that the unfavourable opinions of some parents about the activities also influenced the students' attitudes.

The time factor sometimes proved to be a constraint in reaching the established objectives. Some of the dynamics were even too ambitious for the time available and inappropriate for the groups concerned. In some activities, the groups showed difficulties in organizing and managing the time available. This was the case of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade class of school 1 (public) and activity number 4 – some of the groups were not able to execute the digital narratives within the time set. In other cases, the time for discussion proved to be short. As an example, we ended the three activities carried out within the theme of citizen expression/personal experience and individuality with the feeling that it would have been essential to spend more time than planned discussing the subjects and sharing the students' opinions. Considering the discriminatory perspectives and gender differences identified in activities 7 and 8, it would have been fruitful to explore the themes further. In some situations, it was even necessary to interrupt the discussions to continue with the plan of work. In other cases, like in the activity conducted with 10<sup>th</sup> grade class of school 1 (public) within the Portuguese classroom, the short time available made evident comprehension, critical reading, and construction of contents-related difficulties. It was not possible to explore neither the themes, nor the digital narratives format, nor the proposed tools in greater depth. However, in retrospective analysis, considering the empirical work and the options taken in terms of planning, the time constraints and the need to comply with the syllabus would not allow organising the activities in any other way.

The purpose of using the media in a perspective of creation and expression was not always achieved. We perceived that the process of critical reflection and transformative learning took place from the moments of analysis and discussion promoted prior to the creative activities, but not necessarily through creation. In some cases, the use of the media was simply limited to an instrumental use and not to a use as tools of creation. We also point out that the unfamiliarity of the platforms and the media format caused hindrances to the realization of the activities. The lack of knowledge of the digital narrative format and of some of the platforms contributed to the fact that the objectives set for the activities were not always achieved. In some of the activities, the groups presented other media formats, such as reports or videos. Some young people, such as those involved in activity 4, questioned the proposed platform, mentioning that an alternative could have been used. It should be noted that this comment was only shared at the moment of presentation of the final works.

With regard to the relationship between the origin of the young people (public or private school) and the narratives/messages created, we can state that the differences between the students of the two schools are slight. As an example, we highlight the narratives created by the 11th grade Spanish students of school 1 (public) and 10th grade Citizenship students of school 2 (private), in which we focused on the themes of (cyber)bullying and hate speech. Although students from school 1 (public) showed a greater familiarity with the subject during the discussions, the students from the private school and their creations showed equal interest, concern and sensitivity towards the themes. The students recognised the importance of discussing and reflecting on the issues, demonstrating, in general, a concern with creating strong messages that would sensitise the viewer.

## 4 Discussion

The data collected through the exploratory questionnaire, and the content analysis of the digital narratives created – supported by notes from classroom participant observation –, allow us to underline several aspects regarding the ways media production activities based on the secondary school curricula contribute to exploring and promoting discussions about citizenship and MIL topics within the classroom. Firstly, the results of the exploratory questionnaire reveal that although we have worked in two educational settings with different educational projects and infrastructures, no significant differences were identified in the two contexts in terms of daily use of the media by the students. In general, all students reported using social networks and television more frequently, a trend already pointed out by the works cited in the literature review. Specifically, about the use of media in the school context, most of the adolescents referred to use websites and blogs more frequently to carry out schoolwork. As to their participation habits, it can be noticed that, in general, young people referred to be little involved with the activities listed. In the total of 197 young people who answered the exploratory questionnaire, 55 mentioned being involved in cultural associations/movements, 57 in volunteer actions and 30 in youth groups or religious movements. Less than 16% of young people reported being involved in the remaining activities. The data collected in this preliminary stage also revealed that although both institutions promoted more or less regular activities related to media literacy and Media Education, only 42 of 197 students said they collaborated or had collaborated in these initiatives, which corresponds to a little more than 20% (21.3%) of the total number of young people who participated in this research project.

Secondly, in relation to the digital narratives created and the results of the content analysis (analysed together with the participant observation notes), several aspects stand out. Not all young people aspire to participate, but promoting discussions and reflections on citizenship issues is key to promoting civic awareness. Contrary to the idea of a generalised disinterest of the younger generation towards political engagement and active participation in society,<sup>88</sup> the works analysed in the literature review describe a move away from more traditional forms of participation by young people and a greater interest in engaging in alternative forms of participation, more related to (digital) spaces.<sup>89</sup> The literature also evidences a rising interest in advocating for issues that do not appeal so much to the other generations, as authors, such

<sup>88</sup> See: PONTES, A. I., HENN, M., GRIFFITHS, M. D.: Youth Political (Dis)engagement and the Need for Citizenship Education: Encouraging Young People's Civic and Political Participation through the Curriculum. In *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 2019, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 3-21. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1746197917734542>>.

<sup>89</sup> See: DAHYA, N.: Critical Perspectives on Youth Digital Media Production: 'Voice' and Representation in Educational Contexts. In *Learning, Media and Technology*, 2017, Vol. 42, No. 1, p. 100-111. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294720890\\_Critical\\_perspectives\\_on\\_youth\\_digital\\_media\\_production\\_%27voice%27\\_and\\_representation\\_in\\_educational\\_contexts](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294720890_Critical_perspectives_on_youth_digital_media_production_%27voice%27_and_representation_in_educational_contexts)>; CROWLEY, A., MOXON, D.: *New and Innovative Forms of Youth Participation in Decision-making Processes*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://rm.coe.int/new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-pro/1680759e6a>>.

as Briggs<sup>90</sup> or Garcia et al.<sup>91</sup> suggest. In the empirical work, we perceived that young people participate little and are little involved in participation-related activities – either in traditional or alternative ways -, something that aligns with previously developed research.<sup>92</sup> But the digital narratives created and the discussions that emerged from the digital creation activities suggest that when encouraged or when confronted with topics that are of interest to them, young people get involved. When they do so in spaces and contexts where they feel safe, respected, and heard, the results are even more interesting, resulting in lively and fruitful discussions.

Through the promotion of media creation and production activities (namely digital narratives) to encourage reflection and discussion on citizenship issues and students' expression through media creation and production, we noticed that production works as a lever for young people to talk, discuss and share their views on citizenship issues, especially those related to human rights, ecology and sustainability, as pointed out by other studies, as mentioned above. As Buckingham<sup>93</sup> suggests, only a minority of young people will be using technology to engage in civic or political participation practices, or to convey their views to audiences beyond their core networks, which involve peers and family. The promise of the participatory culture envisioned by Jenkins<sup>94</sup> has yet to be fulfilled.

Finally, understanding young people as social actors is crucial when it comes to reflecting on their lives. Sociology of childhood and studies on adolescence highlight that children and adolescents are social actors with capacities to act and intervene in society and that rather than replicating adult teachings, they reinterpret them.<sup>95</sup> This is evident in the empirical work conducted in this research where, although young people were given a voice in all the creative and production activities undertaken, there was no prior consultation to ascertain their views and interests in exploring particular themes or using particular programmes and applications. The data suggests that this may have influenced the results of some of the work - in those where there was less interest in the subjects, the discussions and the digital narratives created did not explore the adolescents' opinions and perceptions as deeply; in the activities where it was proposed to use applications and platforms that they were unfamiliar with or disliked, the creation of the digital narratives proved more difficult, both in technical terms and in terms of story design. If we cross-reference the results of the empirical work with the literature review, it becomes clear that exploring and valuing the voice of young people in these contexts, and taking advantage of the potential of digital media to the full extent, allows contributing to youth citizenship and young people's expression<sup>96</sup> valuing their views and, as Almeida, Ribeiro, and Rowland<sup>97</sup> state, esteeming their involvement in the processes that concern their present and their future.

<sup>90</sup> See: BRIGGS, J.: *Young People and Political Participation. Teen Players*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<sup>91</sup> See also: GARCIA, A. D., MACEDO, E., QUEIRÓS, J.: Routes of Construction of Knowledge, Expression and Participation: How Do Young People (Re)create Citizenship? In *Praxis Educativa*, 2019, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 1230-1250.

<sup>92</sup> See: PEREIRA, S. et al.: Media Uses and Production Practices: Case Study with Teens from Portugal, Spain and Italy. In *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 2018, Vol. 0, No. 33, p. 89-114. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<http://www.comunicacionsociedad.cucsh.udg.mx/index.php/comsoc/article/view/7091/599>>.

<sup>93</sup> See also: BUCKINGHAM, D.: Introducing Identity. In BUCKINGHAM, D. (ed.): *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 2008, p. 1-24. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10992-021-09605-9.pdf>>.

<sup>94</sup> See: JENKINS, H.: *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York : New York University Press, 2006.

<sup>95</sup> See: CORSARO, W. A.: *A Sociologia da Infância*. Porto Alegre : Artmed, 2011; SARMENTO, M. J.: Visibilidade social e Estudo da Infância. In VASCONCELLOS, V. M. R., SARMENTO, M. J. (eds.): *Infância (In)visível*. Araraquara : Junqueira e Marin, 2007; STEINBERG, L.: *Adolescence*. New York : McGraw-Hill, 2020.

<sup>96</sup> See: BLUM-ROSS, A., LIVINGSTONE, S.: From Youth Voice to Young Entrepreneurs: The Individualization of Digital Media and Learning. In *Journal of Digital and Media Literacy*, 2016, Vol. 4, No. 1-2, p. 1-23. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/67045/1/Blum\\_Ross\\_From%20youth%20voice%20to%20.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/67045/1/Blum_Ross_From%20youth%20voice%20to%20.pdf)>.

<sup>97</sup> ALMEIDA, A., RIBEIRO, A. S., ROWLAND, J.: *Children, Citizenship and Crisis: Towards a Participatory Agenda*. [online]. [2022-04-05]. Available at: <<https://www.ics.ulisboa.pt/books/book2/ch05.pdf>>.

## 5 Conclusion

Although we cannot generalize the results of this research, they are a useful contribution to continue placing the issues related to the promotion of Media Literacy and Media Education in the political and educational agendas, since they point out that the promotion of citizenship is closely related to them. With the empirical work, several aspects became evident. It became clear that students, despite not finding all themes, programs, or applications interesting, appreciate the possibility to discuss and share their opinions about citizenship issues and to use the media in the classroom as a way to work in more creative ways. Furthermore, and despite valuing active learning and lived experience through creation, it is also clear that teenagers do not yet perceive the creation of media content as a way to express themselves and actively participate in society. If we focus on the impact of the activities developed with the several classes, we can say that they contributed to highlighting the classroom as a space to reflect and discuss citizenship themes present in the curricula, to awaking the youngsters' civic senses and to highlighting the potential of promoting Media Education in a fluid way. As for the intention of promoting the students' expression through media creation and production, this proved to be more challenging, and was not always achieved. It became clear that young people would have liked to have had a more active role in the design of the activities, particularly in decisions regarding the subjects explored and the programs/applications/software used.

Furthermore, we would like to stress out that through a process of reflecting on the role of media in society and its impact on citizenship, the creation and production activities allowed to stimulate the understanding of the ways and reasons why media and media content are created<sup>98</sup> and the ways they can contribute to citizens' expression and engagement in citizenship practices. We also point out that the activities fulfilled the purpose of providing a transformative and reflective process focused on young people's experiences and learning, in line with authors, such as Reia-Baptista<sup>99</sup> and Burn and Durran<sup>100</sup> who underline media literacy as transformative and creative and the act of creating or recreating media content as a reflective and analytical process.

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# Epistemic and Ethical Risks Of Media Reporting in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic, as Challenges for the Development Of Journalistic Practice

## **ABSTRACT**

In this article, the authors intend to analyse risks related to media information in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and identify demands in terms of the nature and development of journalistic practice in the post-covid time. The first part focuses on journalists in terms of their fitness for professional performance, revealing particularly their epistemic, or cognitive and ethical insufficiency that may be caused also by (conscious and unethical) inadequate preparation for the profession. Here, the authors notice a general professional crisis in journalism, particularly the long-standing imminent crisis of its (epistemic and ethical) normativity, greatly influenced by digital technology in journalistic practice. The authors take these phenomena as signals for further development of journalism as a socially valuable profession, particularly in the long-neglected science journalism. The second part of this article is dedicated to the outline of journalistic expertise in terms of knowledge-based journalism. They describe some basic prerequisites, namely the journalist's ability to use knowledge in the process of their professional assessment and practice, and balanced journalistic competence that incorporates skills, expertise and ethos. Pursuing a better quality performance of journalism, they emphasize the need to accept the principle of a close link between epistemic and ethical professional excellence of journalists that includes epistemic and moral virtues. In the third part, they describe the development of journalistic expertise and training – epistemic, or cognitive and moral development, as well as the development of journalistic (communication and media) skills, especially digital competence in the context of scientific evidence. Finally, in terms of academic (or professional) training, they emphasise a combination of reflexive practice and applied theory.

## **KEY WORDS**

COVID-19. Media Reporting. Journalistic Practice. Epistemic and Ethical Risks. Professional Development. Education. Knowledge Journalism.

# 1 Introduction

Media have always been and are still understood to be a significant source of important information, news and knowledge, especially during a time of social crisis. We may also state that during the health crisis that is caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the public expects the media to provide information so that people have a chance to make certain arrangements and take measures in their lives. By information, we mean up-to-date, relevant and reliable media information, as this may mean a matter of life or death.

In the context of quality of media information, or media reporting, we see two important conditions – healthy media and the ability of the journalists to fulfil their role in society. These conditions are mutually related and dependent on each other. As P. Czarnecki, following S. Mocek, pointed out, the overall state of media depends on the fitness of journalists and the state of journalism depends on the world of media.<sup>1</sup> We can ask here about the actual condition or state of media and journalism (or journalists) in connection with media reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on research, we can say that in the middle of the pandemic the performance of media organisations and journalists who share important information with the public is not flawless – but quite the contrary. Journalists themselves see the COVID-19 pandemic as a revelation of the very nature of journalism under threat.<sup>2</sup> We believe it is possible to identify the risks and problems, the nature of which varies in the performance of journalists themselves. These negative conditions are reflected in the quality of media reporting during this pandemic crisis.<sup>3</sup>

We think that reflection on these risks and problems in media reporting may be helpful, as it can raise questions about the development of journalism as a quality and socially valuable profession. This can constitute a certain prerequisite for the development of its theory and practice, or definition of specific demands on journalist education. In this article, the authors intend to analyse risks or challenges related to media informing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely in terms of journalists' fitness for professional performance, and identify demands in terms of the nature and development of journalistic practice in the post-covid time.

## 2 Epistemic and Ethical Risks of Media Reporting and Journalism in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The epistemic dimension of media reporting in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is inevitably based on knowledge and opinions about this health and social problem and how to deal with it. In this context, those who find themselves affected are also in the position of (possible) relevant sources of information. It is their knowledge and experience that journalists inevitably rely on. Journalists must build their reports using these people's statements in order to succeed in their roles.<sup>4</sup> We identify the risk of poor quality of information that journalists receive from their sources and also risks that relate to data and information sourcing. We may state, basing also on the conducted research, that journalists are not satisfied and criticise their own reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in its first half, and consider

<sup>1</sup> CZARNECKI, P.: Sloboda médií. In *Humanum*, 2018, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> PERREAULT, F. M., PERREAULT, P. G.: Journalists on COVID-19 Journalism: Communication Ecology of Pandemic Reporting. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2021, Vol. 65, No. 7, p. 979, 983-985.

<sup>3</sup> You can find a more comprehensive analysis of risks and problems in media reporting in the context of COVID-19 pandemic here: GÁLIK, S., GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Media Information and Its Determinants in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *Communication Today*, 2022, Vol. 13, No. 1. (In press)

<sup>4</sup> These are scientists, doctors and other experts in the field of health. Also the government officials, public authorities, civil servants and politicians are irreplaceable sources of information for journalists.

their own reporting sketchy and insufficient.<sup>5</sup> This surely suggests a problem in terms of the public demand for information, as journalists are expected to deliver up-to-date, relevant and reliable information.

Along with the already mentioned risks and challenges related to the quality of information and the very process of acquiring it from other relevant parties, we also identify risks and challenges in media reporting that are caused by journalists' state of fitness for professional tasks. There are still demands that concern journalists there, demands on their professional capability, without which reliability of information and media coverage is unthinkable in any social situation, not just during the pandemic. If journalists are to be able to collect, reflect, analyse and evaluate various data, knowledge and information using either human or technical sources and then verify, interpret and process it to turn it into information to be presented to the public, they need to have the necessary skills and competences. These demands that concern journalists and their professional fitness (which covers several areas and several levels) are of course also valid in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its management within society. Insufficient or inadequate professional performance may be the reason why journalists do not bring relevant and meaningful descriptions and up-to-date analyses of events or precise and truthful information to the public.

Let us talk first about the standard epistemic or cognitive fitness of journalists that guarantees the epistemic accuracy and reliability of media reporting.<sup>6</sup> All of this we consider in terms of both knowledge and sufficient understanding of the source of information, or expert opinions and competent statements made by information sources, but also in terms of the very ability of their epistemically correct interpretation. These are relevant determinants or conditions for the correct construction of information. We can see a prerequisite for this fitness – a certain level of cognitive skill in journalists. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the epistemic or cognitive condition is seen as particularly important, as this enables journalists to perform professional tasks related to scientific information (particularly in the field of medicine and health care) and its communication, i.e. fitness for science journalism. We are speaking about the competence to inform about scientifically-based issues, and also about understanding the scientific process and the process of academic publishing, but also the very ability to interpret scientific studies.

Sadly, we can say that during the public health crisis, there have been various communication problems in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic – problems related to the publishing process, press releases and general media coverage of science and research related to the pandemic. These problems also include issues associated with the interpretation of scientific results.<sup>7</sup> Even though Sh. Dunwoody pointed out that the quality of science journalism had generally increased over the years and that the effort for dealing with a decline in revenue and competition on social media had resulted in an overall increase in the number of analytical articles that focus

<sup>5</sup> See and compare: PANČOCHÁŘOVÁ, N., MACKOVÁ, V.: Metažurnalistický diskurz jako stabilizátor žurnalistiky v době pandemie COVID-19. Covid-19 Infomore.cz (Released on 11th October 2021). [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.infomore.cz/news-detail/cs/60-metazurnalisticky-diskurz-jako-stabilizator-zurnalistiky-v-dobe-pandemie-covid-19/>>; MACLEOD, H.: *COVID-19 and the Media: A Pandemic of Paradoxes*. Copenhagen : International Media Support, 2021; PERREAULT, F. M., PERREAULT, P. G., MAARES, Ph.: Metajournalistic Discourse as a Stabilizer within the Journalistic Field: Journalistic Practice in the Covid-19 Pandemic. In *Journalism Practice*, 2022, Vol. 16, No. 2-3, p. 365-383. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17512786.2021.1949630?scroll=top&needAccess=true>>.

<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to understand the broad meaning of the “cognitive vs. affective.” More on this for example: MURRAY, T.: Toward Collaborative Technologies Supporting Cognitive Skills for Mutual Regard. In *Proceedings of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning*. Rutgers : ISLS, 2007, p. 1-13. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.perspegrity.com/papers/ethicsTech.pdf>>.

<sup>7</sup> These issues are not new in the time of the pandemic, but this one has emphasised the long-existing problem of communication science in the society. See: CAULFIELD, T. et al.: Let's Do Better: Public Representations of COVID-19 Science. In *Facets*, 2021, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 409-410. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <<https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/10.1139/facets-2021-0018>>.

on the context and promote understanding,<sup>8</sup> we can note that (especially at the beginning of the pandemic) the majority of the communicated scientific messages were not ideal. The content of the news coverage was problematic.<sup>9</sup> Besides various technical flaws and errors that were published in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also witnessed politicization of scientific issues.<sup>10</sup> This all points to the weaknesses of science journalism and its current epistemic state. In this context, T. Caulfield et al. note that for the journalistic community it is important for those working in the (popular) media, whether it is television, radio, printed press or online media, to ensure that science and the result of scientific work is not misinterpreted. The news media (and more broadly the popular press media) should strive to represent science in the most accurate and informative way possible, without inappropriate extrapolation of its output beyond scientific studies.<sup>11</sup> As shown by research, journalists themselves also feel that science journalism has some weak points and, in this context, they criticise media companies for decades-long underfunding.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, to fully describe the performance of journalism at the time of the pandemic, we need to say that certain epistemic or cognitive inefficiency in media professionals in the context of media reporting of the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be the result of a weakening of cognitive abilities (for example concentration) caused by large quantities of information or cognitive overload, work stress or fatigue that they face at this time of crisis. It is quite obvious that this all influences everybody's professional performance, including that of journalists. This impairs their media and communication competence, their ability to understand and interpret knowledge, select, verify and assess information sources and consequently process the content for media reports. It turns out that all of this is also influenced by the time factor. Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, journalists are to perform their professional duties quickly - they are under pressure because the public and media themselves request up-to-date and accurate information more than ever. Journalists are indeed trying to fulfil these demands. However, we do need to say that this high speed is only desirable when it does not impede with the communication of correct and reliable information to the public. We can add in this regard that it is exactly at the time of the pandemic when the risk associated with high speed or acceleration of media information is multiplied. Epistemic correctness and reliability are put at stake when we require high speed information and news, as the speed itself means a threat to the correct media messages and information provided to the public.

We further state that necessary and inevitable is not only a good epistemic, but also moral and ethical condition for journalists to perform their professional tasks. The challenges of media reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of ethical demands within the news media refer to the already occurring problems of information ethics of journalists. We are speaking about problems such as neglecting to verify information, concealing facts, covering up mistakes, or denying mistakes and so on. There is another problem – objectivity, balance, truthfulness

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<sup>8</sup> DUNWOODY, S.: Science Journalism and Pandemic Uncertainty. In *Media and Communication*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 473.

<sup>9</sup> CAULFIELD, T. et al.: Let's Do Better: Public Representations of COVID-19 Science. In *Facets*, 2021, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 409-410. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <<https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/10.1139/facets-2021-0018>>.

<sup>10</sup> See more: DUNWOODY, Sh.: Science Journalism and Pandemic Uncertainty. In *Media and Communication*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 473; CAULFIELD, T. et al.: Let's Do Better: Public Representations of COVID-19 Science. In *Facets*, 2021, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 409-410. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <<https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/10.1139/facets-2021-0018>>.

<sup>11</sup> CAULFIELD, T. et al.: Let's Do Better: Public Representations of COVID-19 Science. In *Facets*, 2021, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 412. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <<https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/10.1139/facets-2021-0018>>.

<sup>12</sup> PANČOCHÁŘOVÁ, N., MACKOVÁ, V.: Metažurnalistický diskurz jako stabilizátor žurnalistiky v době pandemie COVID-19. Covid-19 Infomore.cz (Released on 11th October 2021). [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.infomore.cz/news-detail/cs/60-metazurnalisticky-diskurz-jako-stabilizator-zurnalistiky-v-dobe-pandemie-covid-19/>>.

and in this context also conflict of interest, transparency, but also hidden advertisement in reporting.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, it turns out that media reporting is extremely easily penetrable by not only ideology, but also political interests, financial, or ethically non-standard interests of media organisations, institutions, companies, authorities or media professionals themselves – namely journalists. This endangers media informing, undermining noetical and ethical correctness. It is very difficult for the media to maintain a high standard of objectivity and impartiality if they are sponsored by national governments, pharmaceutical companies or other parties.<sup>14</sup> It is worth mentioning that research has shown that even journalists themselves talk negatively about the journalistic community not sufficiently criticising those in power.<sup>15</sup> However, there are also ethical risks seen in the actions and communication of journalists, or problems in media reporting in terms of impact on those who serve as information sources and people who either voluntarily or involuntarily become involved in reporting. These relate to anonymity or sources, invasion of privacy and similar.<sup>16</sup> We are now speaking of the sick, but also medical staff, scientists or politicians and other persons involved. We see a problem related to disregarding their privacy and even a bigger one in showing sick people without respecting their human dignity, and physical or psychological integrity.

We must not forget that the failure of journalists on the epistemic level can be of an ethical nature and vice-versa. The point is that it can be the result of more or less conscious neglect of professional epistemic or cognitive training in journalists. Similarly, this may also be the result of conscious neglect of one's own ethical preparedness, which can be said when we keep in mind the de-facto expected professional obligation of ethical self-reflection in journalists, as media professionals.<sup>17</sup> This conscious neglect of professional training of journalists is seen in ethical failure. We may state here that this kind of journalistic failure – conscious neglect of professional training – means also betrayal in the sense of the professional ethical and social justice in the society, which is not compatible with the public demand for information during social crises at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe in this context that this may be a failure caused (also) by the immanent professional crisis in journalism.

Many authors and many research studies capture the conditions and circumstances, difficult position of journalists and the working class in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which indeed points to more or less persistent problems.<sup>18</sup> As a specific example, we can mention the quite long imminent crisis of normativity that intervenes on the epistemic and ethical level in media reporting in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We see it here as a great crisis of the truth and objectivity in journalism, but also as a crisis of adherence to the traditional

<sup>13</sup> POLÁKOVÁ, E., MASARYKOVÁ, Z.: *Etika mediálnej komunikácie v on-line prostredí*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2011, p. 88.

<sup>14</sup> If the government pays the mainstream media for advertisement campaigns (COVID-19 tests, vaccination), it is more than obvious that the media will not speak against the vaccination or doubt the safety (e.g. negative side-effects) and so on. If organisations such as WHO and EMA are sponsored by big pharmaceutical companies (such as Pfizer, Moderna) or foundations (such as the Gates Foundation), we may expect to see decisions taken in conformity with these organisations and foundations.

<sup>15</sup> PANČOCHÁŘOVÁ, N., MACKOVÁ, V.: *Metažurnalistický diskurz jako stabilizátor žurnalistiky v době pandemie COVID-19*. Covid-19 Infomore.cz (Released on 11th October 2021). [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.infomore.cz/news-detail/cs/60-metažurnalisticky-diskurz-jako-stabilizator-zurnalistiky-v-dobe-pandemie-covid-19/>>.

<sup>16</sup> POLÁKOVÁ, E., MASARYKOVÁ, Z.: *Etika mediálnej komunikácie v on-line prostredí*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2011, p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> See: REMIŠOVÁ, A.: *Etika médií*. Bratislava : Kaligram, 2010, p. 170-173.

<sup>18</sup> See for example.: PERREAULT, F. M., PERREAULT, P. G.: *Journalists on COVID-19 Journalism: Communication Ecology of Pandemic Reporting*. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2021, Vol. 65, No. 7, p. 976–991.; MACLEOD, H.: *COVID-19 and the Media: A Pandemic of Paradoxes*. Copenhagen : International Media Support, 2021.; POSSETI, J., BELL, E., BROWN, P.: *Journalism and the Pandemic: A Global Snapshot of Impacts*. ICFJ Town Center for Digital Journalism, 2020. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Journalism%20and%20the%20Pandemic%20Project%20Report%201%202020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Journalism%20and%20the%20Pandemic%20Project%20Report%201%202020_FINAL.pdf)>.



ethical codes of professional journalism in its practice or effectiveness of these traditional ethical codes. As also for example S. J. A. Ward pointed out in pre-pandemic times, in the recent journalistic or media practice the term such as “search for the truth”, or even such general notions of journalism as “freedom”, “serving the public” and “democracy” sometimes seem to be “hollowed out.” This author believes that quite often journalists see these notions as simplistic appeals.<sup>19</sup> According to P. Czarneci, it is impossible not to notice that the majority of journalists do not take ethical reflection seriously and understand the codes of journalistic ethics to be empty sentences with no practical meaning.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, we cannot fail to mention the changes that came into journalism with the development of digital technology in media<sup>21</sup> and the associated epistemic and ethical risks and challenges that are currently seen in media reporting at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are talking about the growing number of online media sources and co-existing media practices of various nature that have been developed with the Internet technology. For professional journalists, they bring some changes in terms of ethical standards in news production because this news is distributed via multiple channels, as also J. A. García Avilés points out.<sup>22</sup> In particular, there are new socio-digital technological systems (search tools, recommendation systems, digital archives, social networks) that serve as important technological sources of knowledge or information for journalists. They have also brought some problems with algorithms and processing large volumes of data. They considerably change journalistic practices regarding generation or creation and consumption of information and also inevitably influence the valid (and traditional) norms – for example, they change the existing epistemic practices in the process of fact-finding or fact-checking, etc.<sup>23</sup> It is necessary to say here that at the time of the pandemic, they expose the weak spots in the reporting skill of journalists, especially in the advanced verification practice that could enable them to respond more efficiently to the actual disinformation threat and thus practice higher-quality journalism.<sup>24</sup>

In the previous text, we outlined certain risks or problems in journalism and media reporting, especially from the epistemic and ethical perspectives. These refer to a long crisis of, in our opinion, epistemic and ethical normativity. As noted by M. F. Perreault and G. P. Perreault, this

<sup>19</sup> WARD, A. J. S.: Journalism Ethics. In WAHL-JORGENSEN, K., HANITZSCH, T. (eds.): *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*. London : Taylor&Francis/Routledge, 2009, p. 303-304.

<sup>20</sup> CZARNECKI, P.: Sloboda médií. In *Humanum*, 2018, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> For more information, see: BIELIK, P., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: Explanatory Journalism – A New Way How to Communicate in Digital Era. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 1. p. 24-37.; VRABEC, N., PRONER, J.: Data Journalism in the Context of Important Political Events: The Case of Slovakia. In *Medijske studije*, 2021, Vol. 12, No. 24, p. 40-54.

<sup>22</sup> GARCÍA AVILÉS, J. A.: Online Newsrooms as Communities of Practice: Exploring Digital Journalists' Applied Ethics. In *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality*, 2014, Vol. 29, No. 4, p. 258-260.; See also: SÁMELOVÁ, A.: Vplyv dežurnalizácie na profesionálnu žurnalistiku. In SÁMELOVÁ, A., STANKOVÁ, M., HACEK, J. (eds.): *Fenomé 2019: Súčasná profesionálna žurnalistika a jej reflexie*. Bratislava : UK, 2019, p. 23-36. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://fphil.uniba.sk/fileadmin/fif/katedry\\_pracoviska/kzur/FOTO\\_KZ/foto\\_k\\_clankom/2021/fenomen\\_2019.pdf](https://fphil.uniba.sk/fileadmin/fif/katedry_pracoviska/kzur/FOTO_KZ/foto_k_clankom/2021/fenomen_2019.pdf)>; MORAVČÍKOVÁ, E.: Metamorfózy mediálnej krajiny v ére postfaktuálnej (Kulturologická sondáž). In *Culturologica slovacica*, 2019, No. 4, p. 40-51. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[http://www.culturologicaslovaca.ff.ukf.sk/images/No4/Moravcikova\\_Metamorfozy.pdf](http://www.culturologicaslovaca.ff.ukf.sk/images/No4/Moravcikova_Metamorfozy.pdf)>.

<sup>23</sup> Epistemic and also ethical norms and demands seen in journalism, such as neutrality, objectivity, verification of information and transparency have been changing. More on this for example here: GODLER, Y., REICH, Z., MILLER, B.: Social Epistemology as a New Paradigm for Journalism and Media Studies. In *New Media & Society*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 213-229.; EKSTRÖM, M., WESTLUND, O.: The Dislocation of News Journalism: A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Epistemologies of Digital Journalism. In *Media and Communication*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 259-270.

<sup>24</sup> Journalists themselves declared the need of training: POSSETI, J., BELL, E., BROWN, P.: *Journalism and the Pandemic: A Global Snapshot of Impacts*. ICFJ Town Center for Digital Journalism, 2020, p. 27. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Journalism%20and%20the%20Pandemic%20Project%20Report%201%202020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Journalism%20and%20the%20Pandemic%20Project%20Report%201%202020_FINAL.pdf)>.

crisis has been drastically deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>25</sup> We believe that in this crisis it is the reflection of experience with journalism and media reporting that may be seen as a needed presumption for the development of journalism as a high-quality and socially valuable profession that guarantees desirable performance of the media in terms of their social mission. We understand the risks and problems that we have identified here as challenges for journalism that may serve for professional development in a post-COVID society.

### 3 Epistemic and Ethical Risks of Media Reporting in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Crisis in Journalism as Challenges for Journalistic Expertise and Its Professional Development

Already in pre-pandemic times, there were calls for journalists to expand their basic social function – validating and sharing of reality. The desired (expanded) role can generally be described as a knowledge-based profession.<sup>26</sup> M. Ekström, O. Westlund note on this that professional journalism is one of the most influential knowledge-inciting institutions, with high demands for a daily provision of relevant, exact and verified information about current events. In terms of providing exclusive forms of information, i.e., valuable and relatively unique knowledge, journalism holds a special position of authority within society.<sup>27</sup> It is possible to agree with Y. Godler, Z. Reich and B. Miller that also today, in the digital era and right at the time of a pandemic, professional journalism remains as the most common and most used platform to create and merge knowledge from all walks of life.<sup>28</sup>

Let us not forget that, as in the case of any broad field of expertise, there are sub-domains also in journalism. One of them is science journalism.<sup>29</sup> If we look at how the COVID-19 pandemic is covered, it is obvious that during this time the role of journalists as providers of scientific information has been emphasized. This is of course not a new role, but it has become the central point of discussion.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that it is scientific journalists that have accepted the desired role of mediators and distributors of information or information curators and it is exactly this role that differentiates them from other producers of information (for example bloggers, scientists and public relations professionals).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> PERREAULT, F. M., PERREAULT, P. G.: Journalists on COVID-19 Journalism: Communication Ecology of Pandemic Reporting. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2021, Vol. 65, No. 7, p. 985.

<sup>26</sup> DONSBACH, W.: Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education. In *Journalism*, 2014, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 666.

<sup>27</sup> Epistemology includes reporting and journalism as unique forms of knowledge. However, more recent (sociological) approaches have been developed exploring them. EKSTROÖM, M., WESTLUND, O.: Epistemology and Journalism. In *Oxford Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2019. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <[https://oda.oslomet.no/odaxmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12199/2870/Ekstr%C3%B6m\\_Westlund%20\(2019\)%20-%20OUP%20-%20Epistemology%20and%20Journalism%20\(OA%20Author%20copy\).pdf?sequence=4](https://oda.oslomet.no/odaxmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12199/2870/Ekstr%C3%B6m_Westlund%20(2019)%20-%20OUP%20-%20Epistemology%20and%20Journalism%20(OA%20Author%20copy).pdf?sequence=4)>; See also: GODLER, Y., REICH, Z., MILLER, B.: Social Epistemology as a New Paradigm for Journalism and Media Studies. In *New Media & Society*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 214-225.

<sup>28</sup> GODLER, Y., REICH, Z., MILLER, B.: Social Epistemology as a New Paradigm for Journalism and Media Studies. In *New Media & Society*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 214.

<sup>29</sup> WAI, J., PERINA, K.: Expertise in Journalism: Factors Shaping a Cognitive and Culturally Elite Profession. In *Journal of Expertise*, 2018, Vol. 10, No. 10, p. 16. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE\\_2018\\_1\\_1\\_Wai\\_Perina\\_Mar3.pdf](https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE_2018_1_1_Wai_Perina_Mar3.pdf)>.

<sup>30</sup> PERREAULT, F. M., PERREAULT, P. G.: Journalists on COVID-19 Journalism: Communication Ecology of Pandemic Reporting. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2021, Vol. 65, No. 7, p. 985.

<sup>31</sup> TAKAHASHI, B., PARKS, P.: Journalists and Communicators' Perceptions of Their Graduate Training in Environmental Reporting: An Application of Knowledge-Based Journalism Principles. In *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 2018, Vol. 5, Art. 94, p. 2. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full>>.

Sh. Dunwoody notes that a large part of consumers of information regarding COVID-19 indeed rely on information that journalists gather and evaluate before it is sent to the public. This gives specialised journalists opportunities to stay in control of the COVID-19 narratives,<sup>32</sup> even though there is a threat introduced by the currently ongoing (dis)infodemic.<sup>33</sup> It seems that the popular media have become a channel for important information, especially medical information for the public.<sup>34</sup> It is however necessary to note here that as long as we speak of the quality of journalistic information or verification of concrete fields of knowledge, it is sometimes epistemically questionable and unstable<sup>35</sup>, which is also clearly seen in the context of media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Critical reflection on media reporting, or journalism during the time of a pandemic has revealed a fundamental problem – the problematic and relatively neglected quality of science journalism. We may note here that this field is very demanding, science reporting is a challenging discipline since it requires remarkable scientific endeavour. It seems that when some problems and negative experience with specialised journalists and reporters, or professional misconduct lead to publishing misinformation, it is the result of their inadequate epistemic, or cognitive preparation and education. This means a lack of knowledge, for example of scientifically-based problems, but also the inability to interpret the published scientific studies or scientific research. This all relates to a general misunderstanding of both the scientific process and the process of academic publishing. We believe in this context that better professional journalistic training is also important in the field of science journalism. As pointed also by B. Takahashi, P. Parks, but also Sh. Dunwoody, as long as we speak of better performance, it is necessary that science reporting applies the principles of evidence-based journalism. Scientists Nisbet and Fahy agree and add that evidence-based journalism could prevent such politicisation of scientific issues<sup>36</sup> as we see in the media reporting in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

If we accept knowledge-based journalism, or if we understand the concept of science journalism, then we can see that journalists should present themselves less as general experts and more as highly-qualified experts.<sup>37</sup> Professional journalists are expected to have wide intellectual insight that can steer their professional procedures and decision-making. This includes, for example, also understanding of politics and historical context when reporting on (scientific) issues. This requires something more than just general knowledge and this is

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<sup>32</sup> DUNWOODY, S.: Science Journalism and Pandemic Uncertainty. In *Media and Communication*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 473.

<sup>33</sup> In his statement on the nature of digital era, N. Newman states that journalists no more control access to information. It seems that greater addiction to social media and other platforms give people access to a wide range of resources and “alternative facts.” See: MACLEOD, H.: *COVID-19 and the Media: A Pandemic of Paradoxes*. Copenhagen : International Media Support, 2021, p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> CAULFIELD, T. et al.: Let’s Do Better: Public Representations of COVID-19 Science. In *Facets*, 2021, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 410. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <<https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/10.1139/facets-2021-0018>>.

<sup>35</sup> More on this: EKSTRÖM, M., WESTLUND, O.: Epistemology and Journalism. In *Oxford Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2019. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <[https://oda.oslomet.no/odaxmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12199/2870/Ekstr%C3%B6m\\_Westlund%20\(2019\)%20-%20OUP%20-%20Epistemology%20and%20Journalism%20\(OA%20Author%20copy\).pdf?sequence=4](https://oda.oslomet.no/odaxmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12199/2870/Ekstr%C3%B6m_Westlund%20(2019)%20-%20OUP%20-%20Epistemology%20and%20Journalism%20(OA%20Author%20copy).pdf?sequence=4)>.

<sup>36</sup> See and compare: TAKAHASHI, B., PARKS, P.: Journalists and Communicators’ Perceptions of Their Graduate Training in Environmental Reporting: An Application of Knowledge-Based Journalism Principles. In *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 2018, Vol. 5, Art. 94, p. 4. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full>>; DUNWOODY, Sh.: Science Journalism and Pandemic Uncertainty. In *Media and Communication*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 473.

<sup>37</sup> TAKAHASHI, B., PARKS, P.: Journalists and Communicators’ Perceptions of Their Graduate Training in Environmental Reporting: An Application of Knowledge-Based Journalism Principles. In *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 2018, Vol. 5, Art. 94, p. 2. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full>>.

specialist professional knowledge.<sup>38</sup> The development of journalistic expertise should involve the development of a general, domain-specific knowledge base.<sup>39</sup> According to W. Donsbach, the need for higher quality performance requires following several basic and in fact not completely new areas of competence: A journalist should have a good awareness of the relevant history and current events in the field they are referring to. Furthermore, he or she should have a scientifically granted knowledge of the communication process and master journalistic practice. Last but not least, they should accept the norms of professional ethics.<sup>40</sup> More specifically, this development should include this: 1/ knowledge of the history and intellectual context in which events are taking place, 2/ educated understanding of the concrete topics, concrete subject of the involved, 3/Procedural knowledge of mass communication, social and psychological factors that steer decision-making about the news and communication process, 4/ professional skills in writing, interviewing and gathering of facts and 5/ commitment to professional values and roles. The key requirement for knowledge-based journalism is the balance between all five competences that include the already mentioned skills, expertise and values (i.e. shortly - journalistic skills, general knowledge, content-specific knowledge, understanding the theory of communication and journalistic values).<sup>41</sup>

It is obvious that epistemology is the central concern of journalism<sup>42</sup> and that the epistemic, or cognitive fitness of journalists is indisputable and indeed important, especially in the field of science communication or science journalism, as has been proven by the reflection of experience with journalism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted also by J. Wai and K. Perina, the expertise models generally suggest that cognitive skill plays an important role here. What they found in the field of journalism points to the fact that journalistic expertise and its development depends on general cognitive skills, education and networks. These are important expertise factors of elite journalism in particular.<sup>43</sup> We can generally state that, more than anything else, journalists need to develop various epistemic, or cognitive skills such as the ability to distinguish between opinion and knowledge, correctly assess the information value of events, apply journalistic scepticism (question the correctness), but also apply thought processes correctly (analytical thinking, logics), they need to be able to think critically when evaluating information sources and people's intentions, but also check their own conviction and prejudice.

<sup>38</sup> See and compare: DONSBACH, W.: Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education. In *Journalism*, 2014, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 667-670; TAKAHASHI, B., PARKS, P.: Journalists and Communicators' Perceptions of Their Graduate Training in Environmental Reporting: An Application of Knowledge-Based Journalism Principles. In *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 2018, Vol. 5, Art. 94, p. 3. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full>>.

<sup>39</sup> WAI, J., PERINA, K.: Expertise in Journalism: Factors Shaping a Cognitive and Culturally Elite Profession. In *Journal of Expertise*, 2018, Vol. 10, No. 10, p. 17. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE\\_2018\\_1\\_1\\_Wai\\_Perina\\_Mar3.pdf](https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE_2018_1_1_Wai_Perina_Mar3.pdf)>.

<sup>40</sup> DONSBACH, W.: Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education. In *Journalism*, 2014, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 667.

<sup>41</sup> TAKAHASHI, B., PARKS, P.: Journalists and Communicators' Perceptions of Their Graduate Training in Environmental Reporting: An Application of Knowledge-Based Journalism Principles. In *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 2018, Vol. 5, Art. 94, p. 2, 3, 5. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full>>.

<sup>42</sup> EKSTRÖM, M., WESTLUND, O.: Epistemology and Journalism. In *Oxford Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2019. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <[https://oda.oslomet.no/odaxmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12199/2870/Ekstr%C3%B6m\\_Westlund%20\(2019\)%20-%20OUP%20-%20Epistemology%20and%20Journalism%20\(OA%20Author%20copy\).pdf?sequence=4](https://oda.oslomet.no/odaxmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12199/2870/Ekstr%C3%B6m_Westlund%20(2019)%20-%20OUP%20-%20Epistemology%20and%20Journalism%20(OA%20Author%20copy).pdf?sequence=4)>.

<sup>43</sup> We may wonder in this context whether journalism at its top is the profession of the cultural elite only, or also the profession of the cognitive elite: WAI, J., PERINA, K.: Expertise in Journalism: Factors Shaping a Cognitive and Culturally Elite Profession. In *Journal of Expertise*, 2018, Vol. 10, No. 10, p. 2,19. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE\\_2018\\_1\\_1\\_Wai\\_Perina\\_Mar3.pdf](https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE_2018_1_1_Wai_Perina_Mar3.pdf)>.

We can, from our perspective and in the context of demand for cognitive excellence in journalists, speak about the importance of the so-called epistemic virtues for the development of the desired epistemic competence in journalists. J. A. Greene and S. B. Yu speak of them as certain important dispositions which influence, either positively or negatively, other aspects of epistemic cognition.<sup>44</sup> V. Popescu, for example – noticing bloggers' criticism – points out that professional intelligence should, in modern journalists, include intellectualistic ethics, i.e. journalists-professionals should in fact stand as models for responsibility, accuracy and truthfulness. These virtues guarantee professional excellence in journalists. They contribute to their central intellectual virtue, i.e. epistemic responsibility. According to Popescu, this excellence is defined by the virtues of the printed press (good writing, thorough investigation, concern for the public interest) that combine the old and new dimensions of intellectual or epistemic virtues (accuracy, curiosity, perseverance, digital literacy or digital sufficiency, reliability, honesty, transparency, authenticity and trustworthiness). This all contributes to journalistic reliability and endeavour to research thorough investigation, focus on precision and reliability, brisk but still open mind for observation – the ability to accept that one's own hypothesis might be wrong, effort to check the data in detail, continually refreshing knowledge, but also tirelessly updating what is new, courage and loyalty to the public...<sup>45</sup>

Also J. Wai and K. Perina speak similarly of important components of professional excellence in journalists – we can see them as virtues – they mention for example strong curiosity, open mind to accept experience, ability to think clearly, in the context of a deeper knowledge base and more general capacity – the ability to quickly understand a wide range of topics and the ability to convey information to the wider public (the ability to write well). They also remind us that cognitive fitness is not the only important component of the journalistic profession and that there are also a number of other factors.<sup>46</sup> We believe that it is important to notice the interaction of the cognitive factor and the moral factor. As T. Murray points out, our very cognitive dispositions and moral dispositions already interact with each other. The moral constructs are rooted deeply in our knowledge construction. And moral ways of being, behaving and acting, as well as communication and understanding, improve the quality of our cognition. It is obvious, on the other hand, that these moral ways include (though not exclusively) a set of cognitive skills – the ability to understand the position of other people (cognitive empathy), the ability to accept various perspectives, the ability to reflect our own prejudice and emotions (a type of metacognition), tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity and change (a type of epistemological understanding) and the ability to reflect the quality of communication in which a person engages (metadialogue).<sup>47</sup> From this perspective, the morality and cognitive skills of journalists are interlinked.

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<sup>44</sup> For instance, disposition to openness and willingness to think deeply predict epistemic cognitive skills and positive academic results. Similarly, tendency towards dogmatism and the need for closeness as the opposite of openness, i.e. the desire for the definite answers and the unwillingness to accept ambiguity relate to maladaptive epistemic cognitive skills and poor academic performance. In this case the authors speak about the so-called epistemic bad habits. GREENE, A. J., YU, B. S.: *Educating Critical Thinkers: The Role of Epistemic Cognition*, In *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 2016, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> POPESCU, V.: *Bloggers, Journalists and Epistemic Responsibility. A Particular Type of Self-Regulation in the Romanian Online Media*. In *School of Communication*. Seville : University of Seville, 3rd-5th April 2013. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://idus.us.es/bitstream/handle/11441/42036/Pages%20from%20conference\\_proceeding\\_international\\_conference\\_on\\_media\\_ethics-6.pdf;jsessionid=3353F7097B3FF29407CC9DA501D3A94B?sequence=1](https://idus.us.es/bitstream/handle/11441/42036/Pages%20from%20conference_proceeding_international_conference_on_media_ethics-6.pdf;jsessionid=3353F7097B3FF29407CC9DA501D3A94B?sequence=1)>.

<sup>46</sup> WAI, J., PERINA, K.: *Expertise in Journalism: Factors Shaping a Cognitive and Culturally Elite Profession*. In *Journal of Expertise*, 2018, Vol. 10, No. 10, p. 16, 17, 19. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE\\_2018\\_1\\_1\\_Wai\\_Perina\\_Mar3.pdf](https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE_2018_1_1_Wai_Perina_Mar3.pdf)>.

<sup>47</sup> MURRAY, T.: *Toward Collaborative Technologies Supporting Cognitive Skills for Mutual Regard*. In *Proceedings of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning*. Rutgers : ISLS, 2007, p. 1-3. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.perspegrity.com/papers/ethicsTech.pdf>>.

In professional activity, the decision-making of media creators, or journalists, is a cognitive process that is related to morality.<sup>48</sup> As also M. Land points out, to overtrump moral values or principles actually means a risk<sup>49</sup> because these fundamentally help constitute the journalistic ethos that sets moral standards in the professional performance of journalists in terms of adhering to certain rules, or norms and duties (critical demands of the public, determination to provide free information and refutation, norms for truthful media coverage and so on.<sup>50</sup> As it turns out, these are frequently accepted voluntarily (or perhaps not)<sup>51</sup>, which depends on their own moral standards. Journalists, as professionals, are moral subjects acting in accordance with their moral characters. They are steered by their own moral beliefs, ideas, intentions, choices or decisions.<sup>52</sup> As R. Kapuściński points out, the personal and moral attitude of a journalist is a basic indicator of journalistic professionalism. According to him, a journalist must firstly be a good person, only then he or she can become a good journalist. Bad people will not make good journalists, as only good people try to understand others, their intentions, beliefs, interests, problems and tragedies.<sup>53</sup> From this perspective, if the journalistic profession necessarily includes the aspect of ethos, then we can say that the moral character, or moral virtue, has an irreplaceable place here.<sup>54</sup> Journalistic expertise, or excellence, is determined by applying also other moral virtues, not just epistemic ones. For example, J. A. García-Avilés also directly states that professional journalistic practice, such as truthful transcription and verification of information, brought by sources, including image origins, has always had a moral dimension and must be accompanied by not only intellectual but also moral virtues.<sup>55</sup>

It is obvious, in the context of the previous, that media informing during the COVID-19 pandemic, with associated risks, problems and starting crisis in journalism, poses challenges for journalistic theory and practice. We can state, following M. F. Perreault and G. P. Perreault, that they have opened a space for discussion in the changing journalistic paradigm. They have contributed to discussions on what is and what is not considered correct journalistic practice. This problem has become a primary concern for journalists, who are discussing what is - according to the consistent norms - actually future-proof.<sup>56</sup> They have also revealed the need for the very journalistic expertise and professionalism. We believe that when reflecting these phenomena, we actually also find the potential of knowledge journalism. The development of the journalistic profession and the actual professional training of journalists should be based on knowledge and science.

<sup>48</sup> See: REMIŠOVÁ, A.: *Etika médií*. Bratislava : Kaligram, 2010, p. 181-185.

<sup>49</sup> LAND, M.: Mass Media Ethics and the Point of Decision Pyramid. In LAND, M., HORNADAY, W. B. (eds.): *Contemporary Media Ethics. A Practical Guide for Students, Scholars and Professionals*. Washington : Marquette Books, 2006, p. 26.

<sup>50</sup> DONEV, D.: Determining Media Ethics in Traditional Media: Terminological Issues. In *Synthesis Philosophica*, 2017, Vol. 63, No. 1, p. 159. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <<https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/280650>>.

<sup>51</sup> LASKOWSKA, M.: Ethics of Journalism as an Academic Discipline. Problems and Challenges Defined on the Basis of Research Conducted among Polish Students. In RANKOV, P. (ed.): *Staré a nové médiá – starí a mladí používatelia..* Bratislava : Stimul, 2013, p. 64.

<sup>52</sup> DONEV, D.: Determining Media Ethics in Traditional Media: Terminological Issues. In *Synthesis Philosophica*, 2017, Vol. 63, No. 1, p. 159. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <<https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/280650>>.

<sup>53</sup> LASKOWSKA, M.: Ethics of Journalism as an Academic Discipline. Problems and Challenges Defined on the Basis of Research Conducted among Polish Students. In RANKOV, P. (ed.): *Staré a nové médiá – starí a mladí používatelia..* Bratislava : Stimul, 2013, p. 65.

<sup>54</sup> See: REMIŠOVÁ, A.: *Etika médií*. Bratislava : Kaligram, 2010, p. 164-170.

<sup>55</sup> GARCÍA AVILÉS, J. A.: Online Newsrooms as Communities of Practice: Exploring Digital Journalists' Applied Ethics. In *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality*, 2014, Vol. 29, No. 4, p. 269-270.

<sup>56</sup> M. F. Perreault and G. P. Perreault point out that the essence of the crisis in journalism practice is in abolition of norms. PERREULT, F. M., PERREULT, P. G.: Journalists on COVID-19 Journalism: Communication Ecology of Pandemic Reporting. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2021, Vol. 65, No. 7, p. 979-980.

## 4 On Professional Development of Journalists in Education from the Perspective of Knowledge Journalism

Expertise development of journalists in education in terms of the knowledge journalism framework could result in better prepared and more focused experts, professionals who will produce journalistic products of higher quality. It should be focused on general, but also professional, specific knowledge that is one of the tools of journalistic ability applicable in their professional thinking and acting. W. Donsbach emphasises the importance of integrated teaching e.g. through interdisciplinary courses. He believes this way journalists-students will be able to integrate disciplines or expertise into the entire curriculum. The future journalist's training should lead to the state when they become seekers of the truth in the scientific sense of the word.<sup>57</sup> Today's students need to know more than just "what," they also need to learn the "why" and "how." It should teach them to think critically, analyse, assess and interpret. J. A. Greene and S. B. Yu point out that researchers have developed several successful epistemic or cognitive interventions that help them acquire efficient epistemic knowledge and the ability to think critically.<sup>58</sup> It seems that knowledge building and organisational learning should be, and is, more critical.<sup>59</sup> Logics should become a more important part of the curriculum for journalists. Even though the pure sense of logics cannot guarantee good thinking, its insight can push us toward it.

At the same time, learning to take a constructive and critical view of oneself, or self-reflection that leads to self-knowledge should be one of the essential components of journalistic training. This is basically a moral prerequisite of the desired ability to self-control one's own beliefs and prejudices,<sup>60</sup> which refers to the need for moral development. From this perspective we agree with T. Murray and his idea that humans and most groups or situations would benefit from more moral ways of being, communicating and acting.<sup>61</sup> We think that this challenge is also relevant in the field of development in journalism and improving the professional performance of journalists. It is therefore important in education to support the close link between epistemic and ethical excellence in journalists. In this context, we can see the importance and role of ethics in journalist education.

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<sup>57</sup> As also W. Donsbach states, according to Ph. Meyera, for example, journalists must utilise logics of scientific method in their actions: DONSBACH, W.: Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education. In *Journalism*, 2014, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 666-667. P. M. Lings speaks similarly. In SEILEROVÁ, B., SEILER, V.: *Človek, masmédiá, realita. K filozofickému media turn*. Bratislava : Iris, 2008, p. 24. However, M. Ekström and O. Westlund note that although journalism is a form of knowledge associated with justification standards, it is different from how knowledge is constructed and reasoned in the scientific discourse. Also V. Semir warns that despite certain analogies with the world of science, "the world of reporting constructs its own norms, language and truth." See: SEMIR, V.: Scientific Journalism: Problems and Perspectives. In *International Microbiology*, 2000, Vol. 3, p. 125.; EKSTRÖM, M., WESTLUND, O.: Epistemology and Journalism. In *Oxford Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2019. [online]. [2022-1-01]. Available at: <[https://oda.oslomet.no/odaxmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12199/2870/Ekstr%C3%B6m\\_Westlund%20\(2019\)%20-%20OUP%20-%20Epistemology%20and%20Journalism%20\(OA%20Author%20copy\).pdf?sequence=4](https://oda.oslomet.no/odaxmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12199/2870/Ekstr%C3%B6m_Westlund%20(2019)%20-%20OUP%20-%20Epistemology%20and%20Journalism%20(OA%20Author%20copy).pdf?sequence=4)>.

<sup>58</sup> GREENE, A. J., YU, B. S.: Educating Critical Thinkers: The Role of Epistemic Cognition, In *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 2016, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 46, 49.

<sup>59</sup> MURRAY, T.: Toward Collaborative Technologies Supporting Cognitive Skills for Mutual Regard. In *Proceedings of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning*. Rutgers : ISLS, 2007, p. 3. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.perspegrity.com/papers/ethicsTech.pdf>>.

<sup>60</sup> See more: REMIŠOVÁ, A.: *Etika médií*. Bratislava : Kaligram, 2010, p. 170-173.

<sup>61</sup> MURRAY, T.: Toward Collaborative Technologies Supporting Cognitive Skills for Mutual Regard. In *Proceedings of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning*. Rutgers : ISLS, 2007, p. 2. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.perspegrity.com/papers/ethicsTech.pdf>>.

In the majority of the cases, journalists, as professionals, study journalism, so ethics can be taught as a separate subject.<sup>62</sup> As pointed out by A. Remišová, studying ethics, or journalistic ethics obviously does not guarantee more ethical behaviour in journalists. Ethical awareness does not turn one into an ethically sensitive professional. However, it does help the individual to avoid ethical failure. Remišová believes that it is important not to see knowledge of ethics as an end in itself, but as the foundations for ethical skills in journalists. In the case of acquiring knowledge of morality – the nature of moral sanctions or ethical principles such as the principle of responsibility, we are talking about a condition for the development of moral qualities in journalists, their ethical competences, improving the ability of ethical self-reflection, analysis of the consequence of one's professional actions. This cannot be developed without ethical theoretical knowledge, including the knowledge of one's own professional code of ethics. A journalist cannot rely purely on ethical intuition or routine in their professional conduct. Knowledge is one of the factors for their ability to apply in their thinking and acting or improvement of their moral character.<sup>63</sup>

In our perspective development and professional training of journalists may be and is promoted by professional and scientific research both at the level of theoretical effort and at the empirical level. It is necessary to say first of all that the development of epistemic and ethical dimensions of journalistic expertise requires assessment of the actual quality of the epistemic, or cognitive and ethical capacity of journalists. Equally important is the evaluation of the educational training of journalists. This seems to be one of the important steps toward maintaining the role of journalism in society and its development.<sup>64</sup> As stated also by J. Wai and K. Perina, the role of education and cognitive skills in expertise development in various professions has been reviewed. However, when it comes to journalism, they believe that this still remains more or less untouched. To be more specific, little or no research has been conducted regarding various factors that may be significant for the development of journalistic expertise.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, when it comes to the morality of journalists, or its assessment, the experience shows that it is not approached too seriously. We believe this relates to the fact that T. Murray was speaking about: academic institutions, as well as the fields of business, politics and culture, have been quite willingly avoiding the topic of ethics or morality, although the situation with this “taboo subject” has been improving in the recent years. It seems that ethics has been pushed aside and kept in a remote and dark corner of the sociocultural domain.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Regarding media ethics, though implementing of its elements into experts training in various fields (journalists, as well as film directors, actors and similar) is possible, it is not possible to develop a unified system which could influence all the people. CZARNECKI, P.: Sloboda médií. In *Humanum*, 2018, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 18.

<sup>63</sup> See: REMIŠOVÁ, A.: *Etika médií*. Bratislava : Kaligram, 2010, p. 158-161.

<sup>64</sup> For instance, basing on his own assessment, W. Donsbach points out that the emphasis on all (of those that he desired) competences is hardly ever (if at all) found in a single curriculum: DONSBACH, W.: Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education. In *Journalism*, 2014, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 667. J. Wai and K. Perina note the importance of assessment of cognitive skills in journalists. See: WAI, J., PERINA, K.: Expertise in Journalism: Factors Shaping a Cognitive and Culturally Elite Profession. In *Journal of Expertise*, 2018, Vol. 10, No. 10, p. 2. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE\\_2018\\_1\\_1\\_Wai\\_Perina\\_Mar3.pdf](https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE_2018_1_1_Wai_Perina_Mar3.pdf)>.

<sup>65</sup> There has been quite a long discussion about whether it is the general or specific skills that can help predict the performance in those who have finished their professional training. The extent to which the general cognitive skills may vary in individual expertise areas is, in their opinion, studied less. WAI, J., PERINA, K.: Expertise in Journalism: Factors Shaping a Cognitive and Culturally Elite Profession. In *Journal of Expertise*, 2018, Vol. 10, No. 10, p. 2, 19. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE\\_2018\\_1\\_1\\_Wai\\_Perina\\_Mar3.pdf](https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE_2018_1_1_Wai_Perina_Mar3.pdf)>.

<sup>66</sup> MURRAY, T.: Toward Collaborative Technologies Supporting Cognitive Skills for Mutual Regard. In *Proceedings of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning*. Rutgers : ISLS, 2007, p. 2. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.perspegrity.com/papers/ethicsTech.pdf>>.



Finally, it is particularly important to notice also the fast technological changes brought by digitalisation. These changes need to be reflected in journalistic education. We agree with the view that succeeding in journalistic training or acquiring technology-related skills does not guarantee that one becomes a good journalist.<sup>67</sup> As also pointed out by N. Nahida Begum, following G. Rodman, it is more related to the nature of human existence<sup>68</sup>, which is of a moral dimension. However, when we are interested in performing quality journalism, digital literacy is an obvious requirement for actual journalistic expertise. It is natural that journalists need to learn how to work with the various media platforms to convey their messages to the public. The goal of journalist training should not be mere skill training in the latest technology. Such training may fail in the end because media technologies constantly change. It should be more about strengthening the student's own ability to adapt. In other words, this training should help journalists respond to changes in technology, platforms and perspective, as was noted by W. Donsbach before the pandemic struck.<sup>69</sup>

We should not overlook the fact that journalists are often not acquainted with the details of how technologies are designed and what mechanisms they use when practising their profession. However, they are epistemically responsible for a general understanding of assumptions that must be met in order for technology to produce reliable outputs. Even with the lack of detailed technical information, thus being technical laypersons, they can evaluate the reliability of epistemic technologies to a certain degree, and more importantly, they can still try to better understand how the technology works. Therefore, they should raise questions about the technologies that they rely on.<sup>70</sup> As was suggested in an interview with N. Mazotte for example in the context of the ecosystem of disinformation that is growing and becoming more sophisticated, in the future it should not be satisfying for journalists to only develop, learn and master the advanced technology and procedures that reveal misinformation. They should also understand how this can actually be used to create such information.<sup>71</sup>

Journalists are very interested in training in new reporting skills and advanced verification techniques.<sup>72</sup> In this respect, we can state that journalistic production, especially in the context of technologies that include advanced verification techniques that make it possible to respond more efficiently to the actual threat of disinformation, requires basic knowledge of scientific evidence. Journalists today need better basic theoretical knowledge as this could positively influence their production, or their digital-media (technological) skills for revealing facts, for fact-checking. Even though journalists themselves can try to understand how technologies work in their own production, as is already noted by Y. Godler, Z. Reich and B. Miller<sup>73</sup>, we believe that it is organised training that would be beneficial for them. We believe that the educational proposal of knowledge-based journalism would be suitable, which would emphasize the necessary

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<sup>67</sup> LASKOWSKA, M.: Ethics of Journalism as an Academic Discipline. Problems and Challenges Defined on the Basis of Research Conducted among Polish Students. In RANKOV, P. (ed.): *Staré a nové médiá – starí a mladí používatelia*. Bratislava : Stimul, 2013, p. 64.

<sup>68</sup> NAHIDA BEGUM, N.: Media Ethics: Different Perspectives. In *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 9. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<http://www.isca.in/IJSS/Archive/v3/i1/2.ISCA-IRJSS-2013-197.pdf>>.

<sup>69</sup> DONSBACH, W.: Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education. In *Journalism*, 2014, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 669.

<sup>70</sup> GODLER, Y., REICH, Z., MILLER, B.: Social Epistemology as a New Paradigm for Journalism and Media Studies. In *New Media & Society*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 222.

<sup>71</sup> POSSETI, J., BONTCHEVA, K.: Infodemic: Disinformation and Media Literacy in the Context of COVID-19. In *Internet Sectoral Overview*, 2021, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> POSSETI, J., BELL, E., BROWN, P.: *Journalism and the Pandemic: A Global Snapshot of Impacts*. ICFJ Town Center for Digital Journalism, 2020, p. 27. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Journalism%20and%20the%20Pandemic%20Project%20Report%201%202020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Journalism%20and%20the%20Pandemic%20Project%20Report%201%202020_FINAL.pdf)>.

<sup>73</sup> GODLER, Y., REICH, Z., MILLER, B.: Social Epistemology as a New Paradigm for Journalism and Media Studies. In *New Media & Society*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 222.

intellectual training. This could also help maintain the journalistic standards to propose real knowledge or information, opposing thus the overload of non-professional information available online.<sup>74</sup> This could also include epistemology, as it represents a new knowledge paradigm that is effective also in the journalistic fact-revealing process.<sup>75</sup> However, as B. Takahashi and P. Parks note, we have been facing unwillingness in practically-thinking students to accept theory and academically-oriented classes, or demands to emphasise skill practice and experiential training.<sup>76</sup> It is therefore questionable whether this method of emphasised intellectual preparation of journalists is applicable in our post-covid society.

We believe that the current coherent academic training programs are definitely good and functional for the professional preparation of journalists. As noted also by J. Wai and K. Perina, the model that deliberately promotes practice does show that practice can largely account for performance in a certain domain of expertise. However, there are also other factors that may be more important than deliberate practice. Deliberate practice does not seem to be the only explanation for the performance of journalism.<sup>77</sup> In this perspective, Y. Godler, Z. Reich and B. Miller point out that both practical and educational approaches are important for the current demands in journalism.<sup>78</sup> In journalistic education in the sense of knowledge-based journalism it seems there is also a place for experiential learning. With this kind of learning, students acquire their journalistic skills.<sup>79</sup> However, as W. Donsbach points out, it is necessary to combine training in (communications) competences with the training of practical (media) skills, definitely in line with and based on scientific evidence.<sup>80</sup> This can help improve the quality of journalism.

As N. Joseph and P. Boczkowski state, bridging the unfortunate gap between experts who work in the field and academics could help to combine theoretical reflection and practical insight and thus come up with suggestions that are conceptionally sound and usable in the real world. The above-mentioned authors believe that it is necessary – particularly in the field of ethics – to balance the practice-dominating theory against reality.<sup>81</sup> However, the path could also lead in the opposite direction. From such a perspective, we see the actual challenge for the rather popular and preferred educational models of experiential journalism in balancing real-world learning

<sup>74</sup> TAKAHASHI, B., PARKS, P.: Journalists and Communicators' Perceptions of Their Graduate Training in Environmental Reporting: An Application of Knowledge-Based Journalism Principles. In *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 2018, Vol. 5, Art. 94, p. 3. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full>>.

<sup>75</sup> We as speaking of a philosophical and normative agenda that both scientists and journalists seem to agree on. See: GODLER, Y., REICH, Z., MILLER, B.: Social Epistemology as a New Paradigm for Journalism and Media Studies. In *New Media & Society*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 224.

<sup>76</sup> TAKAHASHI, B., PARKS, P.: Journalists and Communicators' Perceptions of Their Graduate Training in Environmental Reporting: An Application of Knowledge-Based Journalism Principles. In *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 2018, Vol. 5, Art. 94, p. 6, 8. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full>>.

<sup>77</sup> WAI, J., PERINA, K.: Expertise in Journalism: Factors Shaping a Cognitive and Culturally Elite Profession. In *Journal of Expertise*, 2018, Vol. 10, No. 10, p. 2. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <[https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE\\_2018\\_1\\_1\\_Wai\\_Perina\\_Mar3.pdf](https://www.journalofexpertise.org/articles/JoE_2018_1_1_Wai_Perina_Mar3.pdf)>.

<sup>78</sup> GODLER, Y., REICH, Z., MILLER, B.: Social Epistemology as a New Paradigm for Journalism and Media Studies. In *New Media & Society*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 215-216.

<sup>79</sup> TAKAHASHI, B., PARKS, P.: Journalists and Communicators' Perceptions of Their Graduate Training in Environmental Reporting: An Application of Knowledge-Based Journalism Principles. In *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 2018, Vol. 5, Art. 94, p. 3, 9. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full>>.

<sup>80</sup> DONSBACH, W.: Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education. In *Journalism*, 2014, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 669.

<sup>81</sup> As "from the opposite point of view" the authors speak also about the need to bring the world of academia and practice close together. In the media ethics they are interested in the practically based perspective of complementary approach to, as they see it, the dominating principle-oriented schooling. JOSEPH, N., BOCKOWSKI, P.: From Principle to Practice. Expanding the Scope of Scholarship on Media Ethics. In *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*, 2012, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 22-24. [online]. [2022-01-01]. Available at: <[http://www.communicationethics.net/journal/v9n4/v9n4\\_feat1.pdf](http://www.communicationethics.net/journal/v9n4/v9n4_feat1.pdf)>.

against the theoretical and academic background.<sup>82</sup> As De Burgh points out encouragingly, journalism has – at least potentially – a great advantage over many other humanities and social science subjects due to the fact that it can provide unparalleled opportunities for learning practical skills that are very close to the theory. It is the combination of reflexive practice and applied theory that makes journalism an academic discipline of great potential.<sup>83</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

Even at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are certain demands for the professional performance of journalists. Respecting these demands, we have identified some risks or challenges for journalism in the context of news media coverage of the pandemic. These are primarily epistemic, or cognitive and ethical challenges that reflect the weakness and inadequacy in the cognitive and ethical condition of journalists for their professional performance, primarily in the field of science journalism. As we have pointed out, this inadequacy may be the result of journalists neglecting their professional training, which can be either conscious or unconscious. This means their abdication of professional ethical and social responsibility and possible immanent professional crisis in journalism, especially with the more or less lingering crisis of (epistemic and ethical) normativity. This crisis has also been greatly contributed to by the changes associated with the use of digital technology in journalism. We believe that is the reflection of experience with journalism and media reporting, especially at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, that can mean the required prerequisite for development of journalism as a quality and socially valuable profession at the time of the post-Covid society. In our opinion, the risk phenomena or challenges show imperfections and raise questions about journalistic expertise. From this perspective, we see it as a call for development of expertise and training of journalists for their professional duties. We believe that there are several factors, but regarding the identified phenomena, it requires strengthening that is based on knowledge and science – the application of so-called knowledge journalism. From the perspective of the knowledge-based journalism concept, journalistic expertise requires balanced competences that include skills, expertise and values. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the journalistic education system follows this principle and that all the currently and in the future required general competences and expertise, specific (communication and media) skills, and most importantly digital (technical) skills, are promoted and balanced. Journalists should not only know the what, but also the why, basing on scientific evidence. Even training journalistic skills, required by the newest technology, needs a scientific basis, theory knowledge. It is particularly important, from our perspective, to maintain and develop the closely linked epistemic and ethical excellence in journalists, in which epistemic and moral values play an important role. If we want to ensure better journalistic performance, it is important to promote not only the productive epistemic knowledge, but also moral values.

Finally, we point out that despite the fact that the importance of either theoretical or practical training in the professional preparation of journalists may be questioned, coherent academic programmes do have their place in this educational system, and that these programmes expect the application of combined reflexive practice and applied theory.

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<sup>82</sup> TAKAHASHI, B., PARKS, P.: Journalists and Communicators’ Perceptions of Their Graduate Training in Environmental Reporting: An Application of Knowledge-Based Journalism Principles. In *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 2018, Vol. 5, Art. 94, p. 3. [online]. [2022-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full>>.

<sup>83</sup> Ibidem.

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# Profiles of News Consumption in a High-Choice Media Environment: Evidence from Romania

## ABSTRACT

During the last two decades, media and information environments have changed in a fundamental way. Generalized low levels of trust in media sources, incidental news exposure, and higher probability to be exposed only to views similar to their own and echo chambers are just some of the most important challenges within the current, high-choice media landscape. All of them have major ramifications for the information environment as a whole and, particularly, for the way in which they could influence people in becoming informed citizens. In this paper, we explore how news consumption patterns of mainstream and social media are associated with trust in media sources and other news consumption related phenomena, such as incidental news exposure and echo chambers. Theoretically, this study starts from the idea that today, within the current media environment, people tend to consume cross-media information<sup>1</sup>. In other terms, people's news media diet consists of different media sources and media content<sup>2</sup>. Some recent research studies investigating people's media diets put forward "profiles" showing how people consume media content, in an attempt to find out patterns of news consumption and how they might affect various democracy related aspects.<sup>3</sup> Drawing on a news repertoires approach, the presented study aims at investigating news media consumption patterns among Romanian people. By means of a national survey (N=1,000), this study explores the main characteristics of news media consumers in Romania, in an attempt to shed more light on people's media diets (what they actually consume) within the current, high-choice media landscape. The main findings from our study reveal that minimalist news users are the most prevalent category among the investigated sample. Compared with all the other types of news users, minimalist news users have the lowest levels of trust in both mainstream and social media sources. At the same time, they are less prone to be accidentally exposed to news stories, but more prone to be stuck in echo chambers, in environments where they encounter information that reflects or reinforces their own views. From a socio-demographic point of view, all types of consumers share more or less the same characteristics, with an age-related significant difference. These results offer important insights into the way in which news consumption patterns are associated with certain perceptions and attitudes that might result in letting citizens be less informed or even uninformed. Implications for democracy are further discussed.

## KEY WORDS

High-choice Media Environment. News Consumption Patterns. News Profiles.

<sup>1</sup> See: ANDERSEN, K. et al.: Maintenance and Reformation of News Repertoires: A Latent Transition Analysis. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2022, Vol. 99, No. 1, p. 237-261.; DVIR-GVIRSMAN, S.: Understanding News Engagement on Social Media: A Media Repertoire Approach. In *New Media & Society*, 2020, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 1-22. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820961349>>.

<sup>2</sup> DIEHL, T., BARNIDGE, M., GIL DE ZUNIGA, H.: Multi-platform News Use and Political Participation Across Age Groups: Toward a Valid Metric of Platform Diversity and Its Effects. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2019, Vol. 96, No. 2, p. 429.

<sup>3</sup> See: CASTRO, L. et al.: Navigating High-choice European Political Information Environments: A Comparative Analysis of News User Profiles and Political Knowledge. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2021, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 1-33. ISSN 1940-1612. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/19401612211012572>>.

# 1 Introduction

Today's media environments, characterised by the access to myriad sources of information and increasingly diversified media contents, provide both opportunities and challenges for information consumers and the societies they live in. In this paper, the media environment is conceptualized based on the high-choices media consumers are confronted with, the level of trust in media sources and more recent phenomena, such as the incidental exposure to information and the probability to be exposed only to similar opinions and worldviews.

Over the past decennium, the media landscape has gone through dramatic changes with consistent implications for media usage. The rapid technological advances, mainly the proliferation of smartphones and social media, have changed people's news habits and diets, offering an unprecedented amount of information and media choices. This saturation with information has proved, however, detrimental to media trust<sup>4</sup>, with people's trust in mainstream media declining in many countries.<sup>5</sup> Less discerning information consumers, with increasingly personalised news diets, and the tendency to be exposed only to certain interpretations of reality are unsurprisingly correlated with malfunctioning democracies and low levels of citizens' civic and political engagement.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, it is important to understand the nature of people's news habits. Therefore, this study aims to: a) examine how people's news habits influence their level of information (i.e., whether the availability of a high diversity of media content and sources truly makes them open to this abundance of information); b) assess the level of trust in media sources and how this impacts people's media habits; c) explore the patterns of news exposure, whether this is accidental or incidental, and d) analyse whether the multiple choices people can make in terms of media consumption encourage them to be exposed to a plurality of opinions and worldviews or, on the contrary, trap them in informational echo chambers.

To examine people's news habits in today's complex media environment, we take a news repertoires approach and examine people's patterns of news consumption across media, traditional mainstream news media, as well as social media. Recent studies have indicated that a consistent proportion of news consumers have a surprisingly low-source, low-frequency news media diet.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, consuming news from a broader range of news sources does not necessarily lead to more informed citizens, on the contrary, it may have the opposite effect.<sup>8</sup> Thus, we also examine the key covariates related to news repertoires, focusing on media consumers' profiles and the roles played by news exposure, probability to consume diverse information and trust in news media in addition to socio-demographic factors. Examining the specificities of news repertoires requires more fine-grained data. Therefore, this study advances a typology of user profiles, or news diets, constructing four news users' repertoires: *mainstream media consumers* (scoring high on mainstream media news consumption and low on social media news consumption), *social media consumers* (scoring low on mainstream media news consumption and high on social media news consumption), *all-media consumers* (scoring high on both types of news consumption), and *minimalists* (scoring low on both types of news consumption).

<sup>4</sup> See: YUAN, E.: News Consumption Across Multiple Media Platforms: A Repertoire Approach. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2011, Vol. 14, No. 7, p. 998-1016.

<sup>5</sup> See: VAN AELST, P. et al.: Political Communication in a High-choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy?. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 3-27.

<sup>6</sup> See: STRÖMBÄCK, J., FALASCA, K., KRUIKEMEIER, S.: The Mix of Media Use Matters: Investigating the Effects of Individual News Repertoires on Offline and Online Political Participation. In *Political Communication*, 2018, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 413-432.

<sup>7</sup> ANDERSEN, K. et al.: Maintenance and Reformation of News Repertoires: A Latent Transition Analysis. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2022, Vol. 99, No. 1, p. 255.

<sup>8</sup> See: CASTRO, L. et al.: Navigating High-choice European Political Information Environments: A Comparative Analysis of News User Profiles and Political Knowledge. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2021, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 1-33. ISSN 1940-1612. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/19401612211012572>>



By applying an audience-oriented perspective to the study of media environments, the purpose of this paper is to map the prevalent media repertoires and the factors that influence them. Implications of our findings for comparative research and the impact media diets have on society and democracy are discussed in the conclusion.

## 2 Literature Review

Various models of democracy share the idea that media do play an active role in influencing politics, in informing citizens, and, thus, in making democracy work.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, this active role has been highly debated within the contemporary, high-choice media environment.<sup>10</sup> The debates centred around the main changes and trends within the contemporary information environments. Information overload, homogeneity of information, selective exposure to ideologically-driven news, news avoidance, decreasing trust in the media as an institution and in media sources, incidental news exposure or higher probability of encountering similar viewpoints in the media and get stuck in echo chambers (i.e., lower diversity of media diet) are just some of the changes brought about by the technological advancement and high use of social networking sites. All these media-related phenomena have significant implications for people's news consumption habits.<sup>11</sup>

One possible way of investigating people's news consumption habits within the current media environment is to adopt a news repertoires approach<sup>12</sup> and explore people's news consumption patterns across media. The repertoires approach suggests that nowadays people's news consumption patterns are, most probably, cross-media, mainly because people "consume" information from multiple media sources at the same time.<sup>13</sup> This approach (i.e., the channel repertoire) was first introduced with reference to television news use<sup>14</sup> and further used to examine news consumption patterns in other different contexts.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See: STRÖMBÄCK, J.: Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2008, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 228-246.; STRÖMBÄCK, J.: In Search of a Standard: Four Models of Democracy and Their Normative Implications for Journalism. In *Journalism Studies*, 2005, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 331-345; VAN AELST, P. et al.: Political Communication in a High-choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy?. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 3-27.

<sup>10</sup> ANDERSEN, K. et al.: Maintenance and Reformation of News Repertoires: A Latent Transition Analysis. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2022, Vol. 99, No. 1, p. 242.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> See: EDGERLY, S.: Red Media, Blue Media, and Purple Media: News Repertoires in the Colorful Media Landscape. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2015, Vol. 59, No. 1, p. 1-21.; MANGOLD, F., BACHL, M.: New News Media, New Opinion Leaders? How Political Opinion Leaders Navigate the Modern High-choice Media Environment. In *Journal of Communication*, 2018, Vol. 68, No. 5, p. 896-919.; STRÖMBÄCK, J., FALASCA, K., KRUIKEMEIER, S.: The Mix of Media Use Matters: Investigating the Effects of Individual News Repertoires on Offline and Online Political Participation. In *Political Communication*, 2018, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 413-432.; ANDERSEN, K. et al.: Maintenance and Reformation of News Repertoires: A Latent Transition Analysis. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2022, Vol. 99, No. 1, p. 237-261.

<sup>13</sup> See: STRÖMBÄCK, J., FALASCA, K., KRUIKEMEIER, S.: The Mix of Media Use Matters: Investigating the Effects of Individual News Repertoires on Offline and Online Political Participation. In *Political Communication*, 2018, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 413-432.

<sup>14</sup> See: HEETER, C.: Program Selection with Abundance of Choice: A Process Model. In *Human Communication Research*, 1985, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 126-152.

<sup>15</sup> See: BOS, L., KRUIKEMEIER, S., DE VREESE, C.: Nation Binding: How Public Service Broadcasting Mitigates Political Selective Exposure. In *PLoS One*, 2016, Vol. 11, No. 5, p. 1-11. [online]. [2022-03-3]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0155112>>; EDGERLY, S.: Red Media, Blue Media, and Purple Media: News Repertoires in the Colorful Media Landscape. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2015, Vol. 59, No. 1, p. 1-21.; HASEBRINK, U., POPP, J.: Media Repertoires as a Result of Selective Media Use. A Conceptual Approach to the Analysis of Patterns of Exposure. In *Communications. The European Journal of Communication Research*, 2006, Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 369-387.; YUAN, E.: News Consumption Across Multiple Media Platforms: A Repertoire Approach. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2011, Vol. 14, No. 7, p. 998-1016.

Research adopting a news repertoire approach was widely used in several contexts. For example, in a German sample, Hasebrink and Popp<sup>16</sup> found out six different medium-oriented news repertoires: low overall use, high overall use, radio and newspapers, newspapers and TV, TV only, and newspapers only. In 2014, Lee and Yang<sup>17</sup> identified three news repertoires, namely low use of all media, use of new media only, and high use of all media. Later on, Edgerly<sup>18</sup> identified six news repertoires, including several repertoires that were based on usage of a specific medium (e.g., online news only) and others that were more attribute-focused (e.g., conservative news use across TV, radio, online). Wolfsfeld et al.<sup>19</sup> found four types of political information repertoires in Israel, which they labelled news avoiders, traditionalists, social, and eclectics. In studies belonging to Bos et al.<sup>20</sup> and Strömbäck et al.,<sup>21</sup> latent class analysis was performed to identify individual news profiles in the Netherlands and Sweden, finding four and five news user repertoires, respectively. Specifically, with reference to the Netherlands sample, Bos et al.<sup>22</sup> found a group of news minimalists, popular news consumers, users of public media, and omnivores (i.e., people who watch and read all sorts of news and current affairs media). On the other hand, with reference to the Swedish sample, Strömbäck et al.<sup>23</sup> identified a rather similar typology of users, namely minimalists, public and popular news users, as well as local news consumers and users of social media news. Both studies found the largest group to be news minimalists (i.e., people consuming little news compared to the other user profiles). More recently, in a comparative study in 17 European countries (N=28,317), Castro et al.<sup>24</sup> identified five news user profiles: “news minimalists”, “social media news users”, “traditionalists”, “online news seekers”, and “hyper news consumers”. Although these studies of news repertoires are based on data from different contexts and countries, they show striking similarities. Specifically, all of them make the distinction between “how often and how many” and “what” people actually “consume”. These consistent patterns illustrate how news consumption habits seem to cut across different media systems.<sup>25</sup> Among the most consistent findings of the above-mentioned studies is the identification of a news avoiders or minimalist repertoire (i.e., users who have a low overall news use) and a news omnivore or hyper news consumers repertoire (i.e., users who have high overall news use).

<sup>16</sup> See: HASEBRINK, U., POPP, J.: Media Repertoires as a Result of Selective Media Use. A Conceptual Approach to the Analysis of Patterns of Exposure. In *Communications. The European Journal of Communication Research*, 2006, Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 369-387.

<sup>17</sup> See: LEE, H., YANG, J.: Political Knowledge Gaps among News Consumers with Different News Media Repertoires across Multiple Platforms. In *International Journal of Communication*, 2014, Vol. 8, No. 21, p. 597-614.

<sup>18</sup> See: EDGERLY, S.: Red Media, Blue Media, and Purple Media: News Repertoires in the Colorful Media Landscape. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2015, Vol. 59, No. 1, p. 1-21.

<sup>19</sup> See: WOLFSFELD, G., YARCHI, M., SAMUEL-AZRAN, T.: Political Information Repertoires and Political Participation. In *New Media & Society*, 2016, Vol. 18, No. 9, p. 2096-2115.

<sup>20</sup> See: BOS, L., KRUIKEMEIER, S., DE VREESE, C.: Nation Binding: How Public Service Broadcasting Mitigates Political Selective Exposure. In *PLoS One*, 2016, Vol. 11, No. 5, p. 1-11. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0155112>>.

<sup>21</sup> See: STRÖMBÄCK, J., FALASCA, K., KRUIKEMEIER, S.: The Mix of Media Use Matters: Investigating the Effects of Individual News Repertoires on Offline and Online Political Participation. In *Political Communication*, 2018, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 413-432.

<sup>22</sup> See: BOS, L., KRUIKEMEIER, S., DE VREESE, C.: Nation Binding: How Public Service Broadcasting Mitigates Political Selective Exposure. In *PLoS One*, 2016, Vol. 11, No. 5, p. 1-11. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0155112>>.

<sup>23</sup> See: STRÖMBÄCK, J., FALASCA, K., KRUIKEMEIER, S.: The Mix of Media Use Matters: Investigating the Effects of Individual News Repertoires on Offline and Online Political Participation. In *Political Communication*, 2018, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 413-432.

<sup>24</sup> CASTRO, L. et al.: Navigating High-Choice European Political Information Environments: A Comparative Analysis of News User Profiles and Political Knowledge. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2021, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 2. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/19401612211012572>>.

<sup>25</sup> See: ANDERSEN, K. et al.: Maintenance and Reformation of News Repertoires: A Latent Transition Analysis. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2022, Vol. 99, No. 1, p. 237-261.

In this context, our challenge is to adopt a news repertoires approach and explore news media consumption patterns among a Romanian sample, by investigating both media-related phenomena and socio-demographic variables that might be associated with or even influence these consumption patterns. Thus, the following sections will focus on three media-related phenomena that have the potential to correlate with news consumption patterns within the current media environment, namely trust in media sources, incidental news exposure, and diversity of media diet. At the same time, we will explore the theoretical assumptions regarding the role the socio-demographic variables could have on news media consumption patterns.

## 2.1 Trust in Media Sources

In contemporary, high-choice media environments, trust in news media sources, especially the traditional ones, is facing a continuous decline.<sup>26</sup> This explains why the issue of media trust and how it influences patterns of news use have received consistent attention. Scholars point to the fact that, from a democratic perspective, one of the most important functions of the news media is to inform citizens.<sup>27</sup> In other terms, to fulfil this function, it is important that the media offer people the kind of information they really need to be free and self-governing.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, it is important that people trust the news media they use.<sup>29</sup>

On a theoretical level, Tsifti and Cappella<sup>30</sup> suggest that trust in news media is linked to actual news use, in the sense that people tend to turn to news in order to get accurate information about the world and, thus, obtain a proper picture about what is going on at some point. At the same time, they suggest that the audience is rational and wants to achieve the highest levels of utility from the news media they use. However, the audience cannot attend all the available news on a certain topic. Thus, given these assumptions, and the definition of trust as “*the expectation that the interaction with the trustee would lead to gains rather than losses*,”<sup>31</sup> it is highly probable that people follow the news media they trust. In other terms, “*a correlation between news media trust and exposure can be expected*.”<sup>32</sup>

The above-mentioned definition of trust implies that trust leads to an increased likelihood of engagement, whereas mistrust reduces the likelihood of such cooperation. Those people with lower levels of trust in something are less willing to interact with that specific issue/person they do not trust. For example, the lower the trust in one’s teammates, the lower the teamwork; the lower the trust in democratic institutions, the lower the civic participation. Therefore, when applying these principles of general trust to the news media context, one can expect people who are sceptical towards a specific news source to consume less news from that source as part of their media diet. As an example, people with lower levels of trust in mainstream media

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<sup>26</sup> See: STRÖMBÄCK, J. et al.: News Media Trust and Its Impact on Media Use: Toward a Framework For Future Research. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2020, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 139-156.

<sup>27</sup> See: HOLBERT, R. L.: Back to Basics: Revisiting, Resolving, and Expanding Some of the Fundamental Issues of Political Communication Research. In *Political Communication*, 2005, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 511-514.

<sup>28</sup> See: STRÖMBÄCK, J.: In Search of a Standard: Four Models of Democracy and Their Normative Implications for Journalism. In *Journalism Studies*, 2005, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 331-345.

<sup>29</sup> See: STRÖMBÄCK, J. et al.: News Media Trust and Its Impact on Media Use: Toward a Framework For Future Research. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2020, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 139-156.

<sup>30</sup> See: TSFATI, Y., CAPPELLA, J. N.: Do People Watch What They Do Not Trust? Exploring the Association between News Media Skepticism and Exposure. In *Communication Research*, 2003, Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 504-529.

<sup>31</sup> TSFATI, Y., CAPPELLA, J. N.: Do People Watch What They Do Not Trust? Exploring the Association between News Media Skepticism and Exposure. In *Communication Research*, 2003, Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 505.

<sup>32</sup> STRÖMBÄCK, J. et al.: News Media Trust and Its Impact on Media Use: Toward a Framework For Future Research. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2020, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 145.

are more prone to seek alternative news sources compared with their trusting counterparts.<sup>33</sup> The same conclusion can be found in more recent research, pointing to the fact that trust in news media influences news choices; lower trust in mainstream sources drives people to choose alternative, non-mainstream news sources.<sup>34</sup>

Given the context, we assume that audiences are rational and that they seek accurate information when turning their attention to a specific source of news. At the same time, we believe that people do not have the ability to attend all the available information. In such a context, we posit that:

*H1. People tend to trust more the types of media sources they consume more.*

## 2.2 Incidental News Exposure

Generally speaking, incidental news consumption is a phenomenon described as getting exposed to news when not looking consciously for it.<sup>35</sup> Studies refer to incidental news consumption as a particular type of consumption that “long predates social media,”<sup>36</sup> giving the examples of people reading the headlines of a publication while waiting to pay at the supermarket, or watching a short story being displayed at an electronics store while wondering across the streets.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the prevalence of the Internet and the emergence of digital platforms have provided new opportunities for incidental news exposure.<sup>38</sup> In the current media landscape, consuming news incidentally has “moved from the periphery to the centre”<sup>39</sup> or, in other terms, this rather limited practice of the past has become very common among current social media users.

Tewksbury et al. were among the first scholars who discussed the Internet’s “ability to provide a typical user with an array of information choices that extend far beyond what he or she intentionally seeks”.<sup>40</sup> Their main discovery was that Internet users accidentally come across news while being engaged with other news-related and non-news-related online activities. More recent research suggests that interactive and media-rich websites, applications that facilitate social interaction, content creation and sharing, and production of collective intelligence<sup>41</sup> have

<sup>33</sup> See: TSFATI, Y., CAPPELLA, J. N.: Do People Watch What They Do Not Trust? Exploring the Association between News Media Skepticism and Exposure. In *Communication Research*, 2003, Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 504-529.

<sup>34</sup> See: FLETCHER, R., PARK, S.: The Impact of Trust in the News Media on Online News Consumption and Participation. In *Digital Journalism*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 10, p. 1281-1299.; KALOGEROPOULOS, A., et al.: News Media Trust and News Consumption: Factors Related to Trust in News in 35 Countries. In *International Journal of Communication*, 2019, Vol. 13, p. 3672-3693.; VOZAB, D. et al.: Generational Patterns of Digital News Consumption: From Traditionalists to Millennial Minimalists. In *Medijske studije*, 2019, Vol. 10, No. 20, p. 107-126.

<sup>35</sup> See: AHMADI, M., WOHN, D. Y.: The Antecedents of Incidental News Exposure on Social Media. In *Social Media + Society*, 2018, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 1-8.; MATTHES, J., et al.: Processing News on Social Media. The Political Incidental News Exposure Model (PINE). In *Journalism*, 2020, Vol. 21, No. 8, p. 1031-1048.

<sup>36</sup> BOCZKOWSKI, P. J., MITCHELSTEIN, E., MATASSI, M.: “News Comes across When I’m in a Moment of Leisure”: Understanding the Practices of Incidental News Consumption on Social Media. In *New Media & Society*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 10, p. 3524.

<sup>37</sup> See: TEWKSBURY, D., WEAVER, A. J., MADDEX, B. D.: Accidentally Informed: Incidental News Exposure on the World Wide Web. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2001, Vol. 78, No. 3, p. 533-554.

<sup>38</sup> See: YADAMSUREN, B., ERDELEZ, S.: Incidental Exposure to Online News. In *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 2010, Vol. 47, No. 1, p. 1-8.

<sup>39</sup> BOCZKOWSKI, P. J., MITCHELSTEIN, E., MATASSI, M.: “News Comes across When I’m in a Moment of Leisure”: Understanding the Practices of Incidental News Consumption on Social Media. In *New Media & Society*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 10, p. 3524.

<sup>40</sup> TEWKSBURY, D., WEAVER, A. J., MADDEX, B. D.: Accidentally Informed: Incidental News Exposure on the World Wide Web. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2001, Vol. 78, No. 3, p. 534.

<sup>41</sup> See: YAMAMOTO, M., MOREY, A. C.: Incidental News Exposure on Social Media: A Campaign Communication Mediation Approach. In *Social Media + Society*, 2019, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 1-12.

opened new opportunities for such exposure.<sup>42</sup> Specifically, as social media have become more and more ingrained in people's everyday life, they now serve as important sources of information.

There are some important reasons why incidental news exposure occurs more on social media platforms compared with other news media channels. One is related to the "scalability of content,"<sup>43</sup> in the sense that social media platforms make news items more readily visible and bring them to people's attention. Even if people do not actively seek certain pieces of news, when other people from their online social groups post, like, and share news and comments, there is a high probability for those people to be exposed to that news as well (i.e., via their newsfeeds and other types of notifications). The other one is related to the role of algorithms, especially recommendation algorithms, which are used to "curate" the content that social media users see within their networks.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, research indicates that social recommendations, such as posts recommended by online connections and indications about users' engagement metrics (i.e., shares, comments, and reactions) serve as heuristics of content importance and popularity.<sup>45</sup> Such social recommendations generate curiosity about news items, influence people's preferences on what content to consume, and facilitate information seeking behaviours.<sup>46</sup> In other terms, these characteristics suggest that social media have the potential to enhance incidental news exposure. Given this background, we posit that:

*H2. All media users and social media users tend to experience incidental news exposure more often than mainstream media users and minimalists.*

## 2.3 Diversity of News Media Diet

Researchers suggest that the current media environment offers almost infinite choices regarding the types of information to consume and the type of people to engage with.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, unlike their offline counterparts, online media environments are largely influenced by the choices of the people inside. The "fluidity" of these environments has attracted a lot of attention.<sup>48</sup> One specific point here is referred to as the "echo chamber" thesis. It suggests that current online conversations are typically divided into a variety of sub-groups, that are oftentimes ideologically-driven (i.e., people are exposed to limited series of viewpoints, most of the time to ideas that are congruent to what people already know or believe, thus reinforcing their existing opinions). One relevant reason why this thesis attracted so much attention so far is because living in echo chambers limit the diversity of opinions people are exposed to, thus having a severe impact

<sup>42</sup> See: BARNIDGE, M., XENOS, M. A.: Social Media News Deserts: Digital Inequalities and Incidental News Exposure on Social Media Platforms. In *New Media & Society*, 2021. [online]. [2022-03-30]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211059529>>.

<sup>43</sup> YAMAMOTO, M., MOREY, A. C.: Incidental News Exposure on Social Media: A Campaign Communication Mediation Approach. In *Social Media + Society*, 2019, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> See: AHMADI, M., WOHN, D. Y.: The Antecedents of Incidental News Exposure on Social Media. In *Social Media + Society*, 2018, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 1-8.; SCHEFFAUER, R., GOYANES, M., DE ZÚNIGA, H. G.: Beyond Social Media News Use Algorithms: How Political Discussion and Network Heterogeneity Clarify Incidental News Exposure. In *Online Information Review*, 2021, Vol. 45, No. 3, p. 633-650.

<sup>45</sup> See: YAMAMOTO, M., MOREY, A. C.: Incidental News Exposure on Social Media: A Campaign Communication Mediation Approach. In *Social Media + Society*, 2019, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 1-12.

<sup>46</sup> See: TURCOTTE, J. et al.: News Recommendations from Social Media Opinion Leaders: Effects on Media Trust and Information Seeking. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2015, Vol. 20, p. 520-535.

<sup>47</sup> BRIGHT, J.: Explaining the Emergence of Echo Chambers on Social Media: The Role of Ideology and Extremism. In *SSRN*, 2017, p. 1. [online]. [2022-03-30]. Available at: <[10.2139/ssrn.2839728](https://ssrn.com/abstract=3083972)>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

on the democratic debate, open-mindedness, and a healthy public sphere.<sup>49</sup> Possible effects attributed to echo chambers are group polarisation, audience fragmentation, and the circulation of fake news and misinformation.<sup>50</sup> Other scholars suggest that this segregation by interest or opinion has the potential to exacerbate the gap between those who are informed about politics and those who are not, and, consequently, threaten democracies by limiting political information and discussions.<sup>51</sup>

Social media activity is oftentimes characterised by attitude-based “homophily,”<sup>52</sup> taking place within small communities of like-minded individuals. Specifically, especially with regards to controversial topics, when people are exposed to conflicting information, there is a high probability that social media users gather into homogenous echo chambers.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, social media users tend to selectively expose themselves to and engage only with content and sources that are in line with their ideological orientation, while letting apart possible content and sources that contradict their pre-existing thoughts. As a result, the potential for cross-cutting exposure and interactions is severely limited.<sup>54</sup>

Other research studies<sup>55</sup> with specific reference to the current, high-choice media environment suggest that what people actually consume (i.e., their media diet) plays an important role when assessing the threats associated with echo chambers. The authors found out that the number of media sources an individual chooses to incorporate into their media diet is related to the likelihood of becoming stuck in an echo chamber. In other terms, the more diverse the media diet of a person, the lower the chances to get caught in an echo chamber. Thus, their research found evidence that media diversity predicts acts that might help individuals to avoid being stuck in an echo chamber.

In this context, we assume that social media users and people having low levels of news consumption (i.e., low media diversity) are more prone to be stuck in echo chambers than people consuming information from mainstream media sources (which could be more diverse) and people consuming information from all media sources. Thus, we posit that:

*H3. Social media users and minimalist users are more likely to be exposed to similar content than mainstream media users and all media users.*

<sup>49</sup> See: CARDENAL, A. S., et al.: Echo-chambers in Online News Consumption: Evidence from Survey and Navigation Data in Spain. In *European Journal of Communication*, 2019, Vol. 34, No. 4, 360-376.

<sup>50</sup> See: ALLCOTT, H., GENTZKOW, M.: Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election. In *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2017, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 211-236.; DEL VICARIO, M., et al.: The Spreading of Misinformation Online. In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 2016, Vol. 113, No. 3, p. 554-559; BENNETT, W. L., IYENGAR, S.: A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication. In *Journal of Communication*, 2008, Vol. 58, No. 4, p. 707-731.

<sup>51</sup> See: KSIAZEK, T. B., MALTHOUSE, E. C., WEBSTER, J. G.: News-seekers and Avoiders: Exploring Patterns of Total News Consumption across Media and the Relationship to Civic Participation. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2010, Vol. 54, No. 4, p. 551-568.; PRIOR, M.: *Post-broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarizes Elections*. New York : Cambridge UP, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> TERREN, L., BORGE-BRAVO, R.: Echo chambers on social media: a systematic review of the literature. In *Review of Communication Research*, 2021, Vol. 9, p. 101.

<sup>53</sup> See: JUSTWAN, F. et al.: Social media echo chambers and satisfaction with democracy among Democrats and Republicans in the aftermath of the 2016 US elections. In *Journal of elections, public opinion and parties*, 2018, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 424-442.; SCHMIDT, A. L., et al.: Polarization of the vaccination debate on Facebook. In *Vaccine*, 2018, Vol. 36, No. 25, p. 3606-3612.

<sup>54</sup> See: JACOBSON, S., MYUNG, E., JOHNSON, S. L.: Open media or echo chamber: The use of links in audience discussions on the Facebook pages of partisan news organizations. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2016, Vol. 19, No. 7, p. 875-891.

<sup>55</sup> See: DUBOIS, E., BLANK, G.: The Echo Chamber Is Overstated: The Moderating Effect of Political Interest and Diverse Media. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 5, p. 729-745.

## 2.4 Socio-demographics

In terms of socio-demographic variables that have the potential to influence news consumption patterns, previous studies suggest that gender, age, and education matter.<sup>56</sup> In this respect, Cohen<sup>57</sup> found out gender gaps in news use for television, print, and online. Specifically, women in Germany, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United States are less likely to watch TV news than are their male counterparts. The same conclusion, that women tend to consume less news than men, was reached by Benesch<sup>58</sup> and McCombs et al.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, age has also been found to have a notable influence on news consumption across country borders. According to Cohen,<sup>60</sup> older people tend to consume more traditional mass media (television and newspapers), whereas younger people prefer online news. More recent research<sup>61</sup> suggest that younger people tend to consume less news than their older counterparts.

As far as education is concerned, studies show it is a relevant yet complex predictor of news consumption.<sup>62</sup> While it appears that education has a negative effect on TV-watching time (i.e., people with high education watch TV less than people with lower levels of education) and a positive effect on newspaper-reading time (offline and online) (i.e., people with high education read more newspapers than people with lower levels of education),<sup>63</sup> there seems to be agreement among researchers that people with less education consume less news than more educated people.<sup>64</sup> These studies refer to the way in which socio-demographic variables are related or predict general news consumption patterns. Nevertheless, we could not find specific evidence about how such variables are related to news users' profiles (i.e., which are the main socio-demographic characteristics of each news profile). At the same time, apart from few exceptions regarding age,<sup>65</sup>

<sup>56</sup> See: ESSER, F., STEPPAT, D.: *News Media Use: International Comparative Research*. In *The International Encyclopaedia of Media Effects*. Hoboken, New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons, 2017, p. 1-17. [online]. [2022-03-30]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313895437\\_News\\_Media\\_Use\\_International\\_Comparative\\_Research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313895437_News_Media_Use_International_Comparative_Research)>; KARLSEN, R., BEYER, A., STEEN-JOHNSON, K.: Do High-choice Media Environments Facilitate News Avoidance? A Longitudinal Study 1997–2016. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2020, Vol. 64, No. 5, p. 794-814.

<sup>57</sup> See: COHEN, A. A. (ed.): *Foreign News on Television: Where in the world is the global village?* New York : Peter Lang, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> BENESCH, C.: An Empirical Analysis of the Gender Gap in News Consumption. In *Journal of Media Economics*, 2012, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 147-167.

<sup>59</sup> See: MCCOMBS, M., et al.: *The News and Public Opinion: Media Effects on Civic Life*. Boston : Polity Press, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> See: COHEN, A. A. (ed.): *Foreign News on Television: Where in the World Is the Global Village?* New York : Peter Lang, 2013.

<sup>61</sup> See: BAKKER, T., et al.: The Context of Content: The Impact of Source and Setting on the Credibility of News. In *Recherches en communication*, 2013, Vol. 40, p. 151-168; CHYI, H. I., LEE, A. M.: Online News Consumption: A Structural Model Linking Preference, Use, and Paying Intent. In *Digital Journalism*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 194-211.; MCCOMBS, M., et al.: *The News and Public Opinion: Media Effects on Civic Life*. Boston : Polity Press, 2011.

<sup>62</sup> See: ESSER, F., STEPPAT, D.: *News Media Use: International Comparative Research*. In *The International Encyclopaedia of Media Effects*. Hoboken, New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons, 2017 p. 1-17. [online]. [2022-03-30]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313895437\\_News\\_Media\\_Use\\_International\\_Comparative\\_Research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313895437_News_Media_Use_International_Comparative_Research)>.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>64</sup> See: BERGSTRÖM, A., STRÖMBÄCK, J., ARKHEDE, S.: Towards Rising Inequalities in Newspaper and Television News Consumption? A Longitudinal Analysis, 2000-2016. In *European Journal of Communication*, 2019, Vol. 34, No. 2, p. 175-189.; MCCOMBS, M., et al.: *The News and Public Opinion: Media Effects on Civic Life*. Boston : Polity Press, 2011.

<sup>65</sup> See: ANDERSEN, K., et al.: *Generational Gaps in Political Media Use and Civic Engagement: From Baby Boomers to Generation Z*. London : Routledge, 2020. [online]. [2022-03-30]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111498>>; DIEHL, T., BARNIDGE, M., GIL DE ZUNIGA, H.: Multi-platform News Use and Political Participation across Age Groups: Toward a Valid Metric of Platform Diversity and Its Effects. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2019, Vol. 96, No. 2, p. 428-451.; LOADER, B. D., VROMEN, A., XENOS, M. A.: The Networked Young Citizen: Social Media, Political Participation and Civic Engagement. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2014, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 143-150.

we could not find solid academic literature that could help us to advance hypotheses regarding the relationship between these three main socio-demographic variables and patterns of news consumption within the current media environment. In such a context, we are interested in exploring the main socio-demographic characteristics of each news users' profile. Thus, we formulate the following research question:

*RQ. Are there any socio-demographic characteristics that would make people prefer a certain pattern of news consumption?*

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Method

In order to explore the profiles of news consumption among the Romanian population, we conducted a national survey using an online panel (N=1,000), representative of the population of Romania that has access to the Internet and is aged 18 or higher, using quotas for gender, age, and geographical region. The main characteristics of the sample are the following: the mean age is 42,89 years (SD=14,53); the sample consists of 50% women and 50% men; the sample consists of 2% people with low education, 61% people with medium education, and 37% people with high education; people living in urban areas account for 79,3% of the sample. The national survey was conducted by Daedalus New Media Research and the data were collected during October 6-18, 2021.

### 3.2 Measurements

The *four types of profiles* were constructed in two steps, by combining people's scores of mainstream media consumption and social media consumption. First, mainstream media consumption was measured using a 4-item scale, each measuring the number of days in a week that people follow the news on four specific types of media outlets, namely TV, radio, online and printed newspapers, and Internet websites, social media excluded. The items grouped in one factor, with loadings ranging from .647 to .750 ( $\alpha=.656$ ,  $M=3.60$ ,  $SD=1.74$ ). Social media consumption was measured using a similar wording, for 5 most widely used social media and instant messaging platforms in Romania (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook messenger), which grouped in one factor, with loadings from .734 to .852 ( $\alpha=.852$ ,  $M=2.39$ ,  $SD=2.03$ ). Second, people were categorized into light/ heavy mainstream media users and social media users, respectively, using the mean score of each variable to define the group ( $M=3.60$ , and  $M=2.39$  respectively). We then cross-tabulated these groups and obtained four basic profiles: *mainstream media consumers* (scoring high on mainstream media news consumption and low on social media news consumption), *social media consumers* (scoring low on mainstream media news consumption and high on social media news consumption), *all-media consumers* (scoring high on both types of news consumption), and *minimalists* (scoring low on both types of news consumption).

*Trust in media sources* was measured for both mainstream and social media sources, using the same types of media outlets as for news consumptions (see above). The four items that measured trust in mainstream media sources loaded on one factor (loadings from .752 to .838;  $\alpha=.821$ ,  $M=3.98$ ,  $SD=1.43$ ). The five items in the social media trust scale loaded also on one factor (loadings from .855 to .905;  $\alpha=.922$ ,  $M=3.26$ ,  $SD=1.64$ ).



*Incidental news exposure* was measured using an 8-item scale adapted from Kim, Chen and de Zuniga.<sup>66</sup> We asked people how often they stumbled upon news and information about current events, public problems or politics, when they navigated the following channels, for other purposes than news seeking: search engines (such as Google), online portals (such as Yahoo), personal emails, forums, blogs, social networks (such as Facebook or Instagram), online advertising, instant messaging platforms (such as WhatsApp or Facebook messenger). Items loaded on one factor (loadings from .720 to .791;  $\alpha=.888$ ,  $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=1.47$ ).

For *diversity of news media diet (echo chambers)* we used a 4-item scale adapted from Dubois and Blank,<sup>67</sup> asking people how often (from 1 “never” to 7 “very often”) they do four different actions, when looking for political or public affairs related information: “Read/see things you do not agree with.”; “Check other sources than the one you usually use.”; “Try to confirm the information, searching for a different source.”; “Try to confirm the information, searching for an important offline source (TV, printed press, radio)”. Items loaded on one factor, with loadings ranging from .749 to .908 ( $\alpha=.882$ ,  $M=4.41$ ,  $SD=1.61$ ).

We investigated three *socio-demographic* variables. Sex was measured binary (50% males, 50% females of the sample). Age was measured continuously (years of age:  $M=42.89$ ;  $SD=14.53$ ). Education was measured on an 8-item scale (following the International Standard Classification of Education<sup>68</sup> scale).

## 4 Results

Results offer support for H1, in the sense that people who consume mainstream news media more (all media and mainstream media profiles) tend to trust more mainstream media than people who consume less news coming from mainstream media sources. Specifically, One-Way ANOVA showed significant differences ( $F(3,992)=69.34$ ,  $p<.01$ ); post-hoc Bonferonni test showed the differences are significant between any two pairs of profiles (see Descriptives in TABLE 1).

At the same time, results show that people who consume social media more (all media and social media profiles) tend to trust more social media as a source for news ( $F(3,967)=122.59$ ,  $p<.01$ ); post-hoc Bonferonni test showed significant differences between each profile of heavy social media news users and each profile of light social media news users (see Descriptives in TABLE 1).

		Trust in mainstream media	Trust in social media
All media news user	Mean	<b>5.12</b>	<b>4.89</b>
	N	132	132
	SD	1.19	1.48
Mainstream media user	Mean	<b>4.56</b>	<b>2.89</b>
	N	167	165
	SD	1.25	1.36
SNS news user	Mean	<b>4.00</b>	<b>4.20</b>
	N	171	171
	SD	1.33	1.53

<sup>66</sup> KIM, Y., CHEN, H. T., DE ZÚÑIGA, H. G.: Stumbling upon News on the Internet: Effects of Incidental News Exposure and Relative Entertainment Use on Political Engagement. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2013, Vol. 29, No. 6, p. 2610.

<sup>67</sup> DUBOIS, E., BLANK, G.: The Echo Chamber Is Overstated: The Moderating Effect of Political Interest and Diverse Media. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 5, p. 736.

<sup>68</sup> ISCED. 2011. [online]. [2022-03-30]. Available at: < [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International\\_Standard\\_Classification\\_of\\_Education\\_%28ISCED%29#Implementation\\_of\\_ISCED\\_2011\\_-\\_28levels\\_of\\_education.29%3E](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_%28ISCED%29#Implementation_of_ISCED_2011_-_28levels_of_education.29%3E)>.

<b>Minimalist user</b>	Mean	<b>3.49</b>	<b>2.63</b>
	N	526	503
	SD	1.34	1.34
<b>Total</b>	Mean	<b>3.98</b>	<b>3.26</b>
	N	996	971
	SD	1.43	1.64

**TABLE 1:** Descriptives of trust in media sources for each profile

Source: own processing, 2022.

As far as incidental news exposure is concerned, results offer support for H2, in the sense that all media news users and social media news users are more prone to be accidentally exposed to news, compared with the other news profiles. Specifically, One-Way ANOVA showed significant differences ( $F(3,996)=77.68, p<.01$ ). Post hoc Bonferonni test showed significant differences between all media and mainstream media news users; between all media and minimalists news users, between SNS and mainstream news users, and between SNS news users and minimalists (see Descriptives in TABLE 2).

		<b>Incidental news exposure</b>	
<b>All media news user</b>	Mean	<b>4.80</b>	
	N	133	
	SD	1.36	
<b>Mainstream media user</b>	Mean	<b>3.26</b>	
	N	167	
	SD	1.31	
<b>SNS news user</b>	Mean	<b>3.92</b>	
	N	171	
	SD	1.31	
<b>Minimalist user</b>	Mean	<b>2.97</b>	
	N	529	
	SD	1.32	
<b>Total</b>	Mean	<b>3.43</b>	
	N	1000	
	SD	1.47	

**TABLE 2:** Descriptives of incidental news exposure for each profile

Source: own processing, 2022.

H3 was partially validated in the sense that minimalist news users and social media users are more likely to be exposed to similar content than users of mainstream media and all media sources. One-Way ANOVA showed significant differences ( $F(3,996)=27.31, p<.01$ ). However, post-hoc Games-Howell test showed significant differences between all media news users and minimalists, between all media news users and social media users (at  $p<.05$ ), and between mainstream media users and minimalists (see Descriptives in TABLE 3). There was no significant difference between mainstream media users and social media users.

		Diversity of news media diet (high scores – more diverse media diet)
All media news user	Mean	<b>5.10</b>
	N	133
	SD	1.41
Mainstream media user	Mean	<b>4.93</b>
	N	167
	SD	1.48
SNS news user	Mean	<b>4.61</b>
	N	171
	SD	1.43
Minimalist user	Mean	<b>4.01</b>
	N	529
	SD	1.64
Total	Mean	<b>4.41</b>
	N	1000
	SD	1.61

**TABLE 3:** Descriptives of diversity of news media for each profile

Source: own processing, 2022.

Additionally, there is a significant difference between social media users and minimalists, in the sense that the more news one consumes the more diverse their media diet.

Summing up, we could conclude that echo chambers tend to occur only for minimalists, i.e., for people who have a general low consumption of media content, irrespective of its source – mainstream or social media. Furthermore, results prove that this effect is not related to political ideology; we tested possible ideological differences between profiles and they did not prove significant.

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics that would make people prefer a certain pattern of news consumption, results showed statistically significant differences between profiles in regard to age, small differences in terms of gender, while education did not significantly differ across news profiles (see Descriptives in TABLE 4).

		gender (males)	age	education
All media news user	Mean	<b>51.9%</b>	<b>43.25</b>	<b>5.70</b>
	N	133	133	133
	SD		14.68	1.19
Mainstream media user	Mean	<b>58.7%</b>	<b>49.01</b>	<b>6.01</b>
	N	167	167	167
	SD		12.09	1.28
SNS news user	Mean	<b>41.5%</b>	<b>38.64</b>	<b>5.71</b>
	N	171	171	171
	SD		16.21	1.18
Minimalist user	Mean	<b>49.5%</b>	<b>42.24</b>	<b>5.88</b>
	N	529	529	529
	SD		14.02	1.29

Total	Mean	50.0%	42.89	5.85
	N	1000	1000	1000
	SD		14.53	1.26

**TABLE 4:** Descriptives of socio-demographics for each profile

Source: own processing, 2022.

Specifically, main results show that female users tend to be dominant among SNS users, while males tend to use more mainstream media sources. Chi square test showed significant differences between groups ( $\chi^2=10.19$ ,  $df.=3$ ,  $N=1000$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Furthermore, as far as age is concerned, results show that younger people prefer SNS, whereas older people prefer mainstream news sources. One-Way ANOVA showed significant differences ( $F(3,996)=15.81$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Post hoc Bonferonni test showed significant differences between all media news users and mainstream media users, between all media news users and SNS news users (at  $p<.05$ ), between mainstream media users and SNS users, between mainstream media users and minimalist users, and between SNS users and minimalist users (at  $p<.05$ ). However, there was no significant difference between all media users and minimalists (see Descriptives in TABLE 4).

## 5 Discussion

The four news repertoires that we have depicted (*mainstream media consumers*, *social media consumers*, *all-media consumers*, and *minimalists*) align with previous research<sup>69</sup> but also provide new insights in terms of the underlying drivers of the identified news repertoires. Our research showed that access to information, news exposure patterns and trust in news media are key correlates for the identified news repertoires.

Our findings are in line with recent studies,<sup>70</sup> which argue that news use is more ritual than instrumental. People cope with the abundance of choice offered by the current media environment by relying upon relatively small “repertoires” of their preferred media. Furthermore, people have habitual patterns of media consumption and, instead of constantly selecting information sources, they are attached to their preferred media. While previous research on news repertoires has provided valuable insights into the general characteristics of people’s news habits, little is still known about how the dynamics of news repertoires impact the level of media trust or the formation of echo chambers that prevent citizens from being exposed to different opinions than their own. Our study shows that media diets are not only a form of habit, but they influence also the way people evaluate the trustworthiness of the sources that provide information. The more people consume mainstream news media, the more they trust them and, respectively, the more people are exposed to social media, the more they find them trustworthy.

Another insightful finding of our study was that minimalist news users and social media users were more likely to be exposed to similar content than users of mainstream media, which implies that the formation of echo chambers depends also on the type of media one consumes. However, our study has isolated a significant difference in terms of media diets and the type of information included in these diets. Specifically, echo chambers (i.e., exposure only to similar opinions and worldviews) had a tendency to occur only for minimalists (a low diet of both

<sup>69</sup> See: VAN AELST, P. et al.: Political Communication in a High-choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy?. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 3-27.

<sup>70</sup> See: ANDERSEN, K. et al.: Maintenance and Reformation of News Repertoires: A Latent Transition Analysis. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2022, Vol. 99, No. 1, p. 237-261.

mainstream and social media), while for people more exposed to social media this consequence was reduced. Additionally, this effect seems to be mainly related to the information environment people are engaged in and not to their political ideologies, which did not prove significant for differentiating the audience profiles we have employed.

As far as incidental news exposure is concerned, our research indicates that all-media news users and social media news users are more likely to be accidentally exposed to news, compared with mainstream media users and minimalists. This is possibly due to the fact that all-media and social media users have a social media-centric diet (i.e., the largest proportion of their information comes from social media), which makes them more prone to incidental news exposure due to social networks algorithms and news feeds. Social media platforms not only customise their users' news feeds, but they also actively expose them to the most engaging and visible information within their networks. This implies a certain pattern of consumption, which might also be a coping mechanism in regards to the abundance of information disseminated by social media. People who consume more social media do not seek information actively, on the contrary, information is curated for them. Furthermore, social networks news feeds make them more likely to be accidentally exposed to information shared by their groups of friends.

In this context, it is also important to note that recent data<sup>71</sup> indicate certain country characteristics for news repertoires. The share of news minimalists is, for instance, larger in high-income countries, such as Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. These countries are characterised by stronger democratic structures, economic openness and a higher social mobility, which might explain the large proportion of news minimalists, who select their media diets more attentively. Limiting the exposure to information and actively selecting its content seems, therefore, to indicate a pattern of more sophisticated media users, who consciously curate their information diets. On the other hand, online news seekers and social media consumers are best represented in four European countries: Italy, Spain, Poland, and Romania.<sup>72</sup> These media usage patterns seem to be explained by three main factors: a) the accessibility of online/social media-based sources; b) their low price, and c) because traditional media is generally less trusted due to a history of political partisanship and instrumentalization.<sup>73</sup>

Our study presents a different image of the Romanians' news diets, with a high proportion of news minimalists (52.9%) and similar percentages of SNS news users (17.1%) and mainstream media users (16.7%). These variations in results might be due to the different granulation of the media type consumption, and to the moment of the study. Castro et al.<sup>74</sup> gathered data at the beginning of the pandemic, a time of crisis when people's need for orientation becomes unusually high,<sup>75</sup> and media consumption in general increased significantly in Romania. In terms of users' profiles, we have identified four main profiles (*mainstream media consumers*, *social media consumers*, *all-media consumers*, and *minimalists*), while other similar studies have

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<sup>71</sup> See: CASTRO, L. et al.: Navigating High-choice European Political Information Environments: A Comparative Analysis of News User Profiles and Political Knowledge. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2021, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 1-33. ISSN 1940-1612. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/19401612211012572>>

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>73</sup> See: STRÖMBÄCK, J.: In Search of a Standard: Four Models of Democracy and Their Normative Implications for Journalism. In *Journalism Studies*, 2005, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 331-345.

<sup>74</sup> See: CASTRO, L. et al.: Navigating High-choice European Political Information Environments: A Comparative Analysis of News User Profiles and Political Knowledge. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2021, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 1-33. ISSN 1940-1612. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/19401612211012572>>.

<sup>75</sup> LOWERY, W.: Media Dependency During a Large-Scale Social Disruption: The Case of September 11. In *Mass Communication and Society*, 2004, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 339.

employed different labels for depicting media diets. Castro et al.<sup>76</sup> have differentiated between five categories of news users in order to measure political knowledge and participation: news minimalists, social media news users, traditionalists, online news seekers, and hyper news consumers. For the purpose of our study, this fragmentation of media users' profiles was not necessary. The categories do not measure, therefore, exactly the same thing.

Our data have also pointed out some differences in terms of socio-demographics. While education does not seem to play a role in the choice of media diets, age and gender do seem to matter to some extent. Our results show that female users tend to be dominant among SNS users, while males tend to use more mainstream media sources. As expected, when it comes to age, our data indicate that younger people prefer SNS, whereas older people prefer mainstream news sources.

In brief, our study contributes to the field of media studies by highlighting the prevalence of people who are news minimalists, meaning that they seldom use the media to get news. Such news consumption pattern raises a concern for democracy and for the role of informed citizens in actively getting involved in civic matters. Apart from political apathy, the today high-choice media environments can more easily create knowledge gaps and disinterest towards societal issues in general. The digital and social media foster inequalities not only in media use, but also in vital information about public interest issues, which amplifies the current media malaise. If citizens lack the relevant information to engage with politics and societal issues, they cannot monitor the well-functioning of the societies they live in.

As recent studies indicate,<sup>77</sup> media environments are becoming more fragmented and polarized, and people tend to prefer attitude-consistent information. While there might be a cross-channel proliferation of partisan biased and fake information, our study shows that social media seem to facilitate the phenomenon of polarising opinions to a larger extent than mainstream media. News minimalists are another trend in high-choice media environments confirmed by our study. Based on our data, 53% of the population consume news to a low degree, which makes them not only disengaged with political and social issues, but also possibly misinformed and more prone to polarisation. On a societal level, these media habits pose a serious threat to democracy.

In terms of limitations, the survey approach comes with the risk that the identified news repertoires are based on relatively simple measures. Thus, future research on news repertoires should consider both cross-platform consumption patterns and the increasingly individualized and fragmented media environment. Secondly, adding specific brands of news sources used by respondents in our sample would have offered a more nuanced image of media repertoires, by providing a better understanding of the messages people are exposed to and the actual impact of information habits. Additionally, the sample is only representative for gender, age, and geographic region.

The combination of survey and unobtrusively collected observational data enables researchers to understand better whether, for instance, high levels of incidental news exposure among minimalists are indeed due to their tendency to opt-out of news consumption, or are instead motivated by patterns of underreporting news consumption. Similarly, the study of social media-centric repertoires should analyse their resonance with other sources of information or interpersonal communication and the possibility that respondents might be prone to cognitive biases, such as the third person effect, etc.

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<sup>76</sup> See: CASTRO, L. et al.: Navigating High-choice European Political Information Environments: A Comparative Analysis of News User Profiles and Political Knowledge. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2021, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 1-33. ISSN 1940-1612. [online]. [2022-03-03]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/19401612211012572>>.

<sup>77</sup> See: VAN AELST, P. et al.: Political Communication in a High-choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy?. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 3-27.

## 6 Conclusion

Our examination of news repertoires provides a useful contribution to audience research within journalism and mass communication. The study also contributes to a better understanding of media diets by highlighting the important role played by trust and information exposure in some news repertoires. It is important to detect these new patterns of media consumption (mainstream or social media) in order to shed more light on current issues, such as echo chambers and misinformation.<sup>78</sup> Our study supports the hypothesis that news repertoires foster the creation of echo chambers for some people more than for others. News minimalists and social media users are exposed to a more homogenous information environment in terms of opinions, compared to mainstream or all-media users. This suggests that, if people consume news mainly from social media or opt-out of consuming news altogether, they are deprived of the plurality of views necessary for developing informed opinions.

The topic of media repertoires has recently drawn more academic interest and valuable attempts have been made to measure the stability of media repertoires.<sup>79</sup> In this context, our study has provided valuable insights by showing how people navigate the today high-choice media environment by constructing their own media diets, which reflect their attitudes towards news and their trust in information sources. As social media become an increasingly important source of information, exploring the impact of social-media based information diets is crucial for communication sciences. Future studies should also use longitudinal designs in order to explore how changes in media environments influence knowledge acquisition and inequalities and if there is a difference in terms of political knowledge among people who predominantly use social media, compared to the use of traditional media.

To conclude, our study illustrates how news repertoires impact trust in media sources and other media-related phenomena, such as incidental news exposure and echo chambers. Results from this study could be further used to inform evidence-based policies aimed at raising awareness about the important role the media sources and content play in democratic societies.

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<sup>78</sup> See: VAN AELST, P. et al.: Political Communication in a High-choice Media Environment: A Challenge for Democracy?. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 3-27.

<sup>79</sup> ANDERSEN, K. et al.: Maintenance and Reformation of News Repertoires: A Latent Transition Analysis. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2022, Vol. 99, No. 1, p. 238.

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# The Present and the Prospect of Increasing Literacy in the Field of Cultural Heritage

## **ABSTRACT**

Through culture, social learning is passed on from generation to generation, and knowledge (and use) of this experience allows the group to move forward. Culture is an important part of social relations in society and has the same status in society as the economic, political, or legal system. The protection and appropriate presentation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage objects is a natural part of every cultural society. An inseparable part of these efforts should be the education of selected groups of society leading to an increase in cultural literacy, in a narrower context to an increase in the so-called cultural heritage literacy. The current education system in Slovakia is still looking for trajectories to lead students at all levels of education to the ability to find the necessary information, orient themselves in it in the context of broader contexts, analyse, synthesize and as a result apply it in practical life. The essence of education in the field of preservation and presentation of cultural heritage is the connection of current knowledge with historical experience and the potential of modern times, the aim is to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies leading to the creation of innovative concepts in the presentation of cultural heritage. The presented study provides a partial topic about the possibilities of symbiotic development of cultural, media and information competencies necessary for successful operation in the local and global environment, while we consider the combination of these literacies to be a particularly important goal of education. In the article, we perceive cultural (heritage) literacy in higher education as an important concept in teaching and we present a case study that shows the successful integration of this strategy into the area of higher education. The present study represents a specific initiative aimed at increasing cultural (heritage) literacy in the university environment. On the example of the selected study program, we point out the so far little developed possibilities of implementing cultural (heritage) literature in education and show a possible approach to developing similar considerations. The study is designed as a theoretical-practical output providing analytical and critical reflection on related concepts, including a synthesizing view of them. The theoretical part is followed by research and a search for facts that provide an empirical picture of the implementation of cultural (heritage) literature in the process of the selected strategy of higher education. The symbiosis of certain theoretical reflections and concrete / real practical experiences forms a knowledge base of new quality, which can be further subjected to comparisons in different contexts of perception.

## **KEY WORDS**

Cultural Heritage. Literacy. Cultural Literacy. Heritage Literacy. Mediamatics.

# 1 Introduction

The precise, universally valid, and unchanging definition of literacy is very difficult to grasp for several reasons – literacy is developed in accordance with the cultural, educational, and technological development of society. We perceive it as a complex competence that is being formed and constantly supplemented with new dimensions, with the development of culture, society and, more recently, mainly because of the development of technology. In a culturally developed society with a well-developed education system and technologies, we consider literacy (in its basic sense – functional literacy for the purpose of integration in society) to be generally accessible to every person and “*in this sense it could be stated that every person from cultural landscape with the obligation to attend school is literate.*”<sup>1</sup> From the available theory we know several types of literacy, we list those that are important in the context of the presented topic, are interconnected and lead to the “complex competence” of a person enabling his/her integration into society. The framework for the relevant types of literacy is functional literacy – it indicates abilities applicable in everyday life, closely linked to self-education. From the point of view of the presented topic, several types of literacy are relevant:

- Informative – the ability to search, summarize, process, use and store information. It is also closely related to computer (digital) literacy - the ability to use hardware and software computer equipment and other available communication and information technologies.
- Media – the ability to use the media correctly - to obtain, critically evaluate, create, and present media information.
- Cultural – the ability to actively participate in the production and interpretation of cultural values, to perceive and create cultural values. It is related to literacy in the field of cultural heritage.

We can look at the general category of literacy from different points of view – cognitive, developmental, educational, sociocultural... From a socio-cultural point of view, Zápotočná<sup>2</sup> always understands literacy as cultural literacy and inserts it into the mutual relationship of lifelong literacy building as a way of active self-education and acquisition of one’s own cultural identity. Important is the fact that the process of acquiring cultural literacy is carried out in an irreplaceable chain of authentic social and communication conditions as well as individual situations. At the same time, the author points out that with the advancing computerization of society and culture, many more have increased and are currently being used, whether e.g., technological literacy, internet, or multimedia literacy (“media”/ “multimedia-literacy”). Alternatively, there is talk of civilization literacy, electronic literacy (E-literacy; “electracy”), “online literacy”, “new” or “second” literacy, or even “post-literacy”.<sup>3</sup>

Cultural literacy, as an element that favours the knowledge context needed to identify the essential aspects of any topic, comes to the fore with partial elements of “complex competence”, paradoxically, such a perception of literacy is less talked about compared to other types of literacy. The term “cultural literacy” has become a subject of interest to academics since E. D. Hirsch’s publication entitled *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987). It represents an interesting concept of literacy, which he considers “*more than just the actual mechanics of reading. Literacy means understanding what you read and to understand what you read you need to have the appropriate background knowledge.*”<sup>4</sup> He criticizes the formalistic

<sup>1</sup> HRDINÁKOVÁ, Ľ.: *Mediálna a informačná gramotnosť – úvod do problematiky*. Bratislava : UK Bratislava, 2013, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See: ZÁPOTOČNÁ, O.: *Kultúrna gramotnosť v sociálno-psychologických súvislostiach*. Bratislava : Album, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> Core Knowledge Foundation (producer) (1993). ABC News Solutions (1996) and WVEC-TV The Uncommon Classroom. According to: SHAMSHAYOADEH, G.: Cultural Literacy in the New Millennium: Revisiting E. D. Hirsch. In *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 1, No. 8, p. 1.

theories of literacy that focus almost entirely on formal reading skills without paying much attention to the background knowledge or schema (plural: schemata) that students need to know before they can comprehend a given text. Hirsch's main objective in the book is to define cultural literacy and to expound the core cultural knowledge that American students need to attain to function productively in the society, which he terms "core knowledge." As such, this shared knowledge that is referred to as cultural schema, is in Hirsch's view, indispensable to academic and professional success. (...) Hirsch does not solely focus on substantive (i.e., content) knowledge; indeed, he advances the argument that both "procedural" and "substantive" knowledge is needed to comprehend a given text with some level of complexity. The procedural knowledge would be the overall reading skills that readers bring to the reading of a given text, whereas substantive knowledge is comprised of the content-based schemata, that is, the background information (cultural, historical, political, etc.) that would facilitate the reading process."<sup>5</sup> The work was received with embarrassment, provoked controversy in both educational and academic circles, but continues to resonate as key literature on the subject and as key literature for various attempts to put into practice.

The starting point for the specification of cultural literacy is culture as a complex of all specific values, ideas, customs, objects, arts, human activities, but also institutions, traditions, beliefs, and lifestyles typical of a certain social group. Through culture, social learning is passed on from generation to generation, and knowledge (and use) of this experience allows the group to move forward. Culture is an important part of social relations in society and has the same status in society as the economic, political, or legal system. At the same time, it is a cognitive, symbolic, operational, and institutional system that fulfills several functions in society:

- a) Through culture, one understands the world and expresses the content of one's consciousness (expressive function)
- b) By passing on the cultural tradition, the social group is preserved for the future (collective consciousness function)
- c) Through culture, the social group integrates as a whole (integration function)
- d) Through culture, a social group differs from others (differentiation function)<sup>6</sup>

Mistrík states that *"man is thus a product, a creation of a certain culture and at the same time its co-creator, the one who changes this culture. By transforming one's own culture, one creates one's own activity"*.<sup>7</sup> We have the "self-creation" and "self-improvement" of man based on cultural tradition and based on its transformation. In fact, there is no "natural" environment for a person that is not influenced by cultural tradition and that a man does not change in any way. Everything around it is determined by a specific temporal and spatial situation. The "natural" environment of man is the historical and human environment. Behind this human self-formation is culture." Culture can be understood and studied from different perspectives. In our understanding, it is a combination of historical, social, economic factors and values that influence people's behaviour and communication. At the same time, we believe that education today must lead to the acquisition of cultural (heritage) literacy as the cultural core of the cultural and creative industries, which is talked about less often than other types of literacy.

The current "natural" human environment is associated with building a modern digital society. Digital literacy is intensively mentioned (also in connection with the material and technological background), but also with the abilities and skills of individuals to work with information sources and information, to evaluate information sources in the context of their experience, previous

<sup>5</sup> SHAMSHAYOOADEH, G.: Cultural Literacy in the New Millennium: Revisiting E. D. Hirsch. In *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 1, No. 8, p. 273.

<sup>6</sup> MISTRÍK, E.: *Ciele a obsah multikultúrnej výchovy a vzdelávania pre Štátny vzdelávací program ISCED 0 a ISCED 1*. Bratislava, 2011, p. 36. [online]. [2022-02-25] Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/statny-vzdelavaci-program/mkv\\_isced\\_0\\_1.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/statny-vzdelavaci-program/mkv_isced_0_1.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> MISTRÍK, E.: *Kultúra a multikultúrna výchova*. Bratislava : IRIS, 1999, p. 12.

knowledge ... During the information season, we have access to a huge amount of information, but some recipients of information do not know how to adequately understand, process, and use it to solve problem situations. The concept described by Hirsch remains relevant in this context as well. An aspect denying the mechanical reception of information resulting from a lack of knowledge of related aspects, including cultural, historical, social, and political contexts can be considered particularly important. The importance of media literacy as one of the most basic skills of the 21st century is intensively spoken of as a strong resonant topic (following on from digital literacy). It is characterized as *“the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in various forms”*.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, media literacy can be described as a sum of abilities and skills that allows us to critically assess and use the media responsibly. This set can be summarized in three basic areas – access to the media, their evaluation, and analysis and extended by the aspect of autonomous creative activity. *“Nowadays initiatives in the fields of media literacy such as youth participation, teacher training and curricular resources, parental support, policy initiatives, and evidence base construction - are very successful in growing the level of the critical thinking of the participants. However, there are still a few areas which need to be guided.”*<sup>9</sup>

While various concepts of media literacy are relatively richly developed, discussed and gradually implemented with the education system, the concept of cultural literacy is less resonant (for example, in the Slovak area this topic is mentioned in the Objectives and content of multicultural education for the State Education Program ISCED 0 and ISCED 1),<sup>10</sup> despite the fact that the presentation of cultural patterns resonating in a given society and presenting a given culture in a modern media society takes place significantly through the media, not only through various cultural institutions (theatres, museums, galleries, cinemas ...), but also through different types of traditional and new media. *“We often find that people (pupils, students, and youth) make their first contact with the traditions of their own region and nation through the media. It is associated with economic opportunities, workload, distances, and other causes. Part of media competence is the ability to know how to find the necessary information, evaluate it critically and use it in your life. The need to create your own media products is also being talked about more and more often. These media products may also relate to the transmission of cultural tradition: information about the cultural event; interesting facts from the cultural life of the selected community; information on how traditional holidays are celebrated in a certain region, etc. Some historical monuments that are under the auspices of conservationists or that have been closed for some time in connection with the reconstruction are also made available through the media. Modern media can create a simulated image of a monument that is incomplete or destroyed by the environment and time. These are just some of the opportunities the media offer us to spread the cultural tradition.”*<sup>11</sup>

The media provide information about values, attitudes and opinions that seem to be shared with others through media communication. As for the presentation of cultural heritage in the media, we can rely on the analysis of Hamar, who wrote on the subject of this topic that if he should talk about the current reflection of traditional folk culture in the media in Slovakia,

<sup>8</sup> VRABEC, N.: *Úroveň mediálnej gramotnosti mladých ľudí na Slovensku*. Bratislava : IUVENTA, 2007, p. 1. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.iuventa.sk/files/documents/7\\_vyskummladeze/spravy/davm018/zver\\_spravadavm018.pdf](https://www.iuventa.sk/files/documents/7_vyskummladeze/spravy/davm018/zver_spravadavm018.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup> See: KAŇUKOVÁ, N.: The Promises, Challenges, and Futures of Media Literacy. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 1-2. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MLAR\\_2018\\_2\\_NEWS\\_4\\_The-Promises-Challenges-and-Futures-of-Media-Literacy.pdf](https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MLAR_2018_2_NEWS_4_The-Promises-Challenges-and-Futures-of-Media-Literacy.pdf)>.

<sup>10</sup> See: MISTRÍK, E.: *Ciele a obsah multikultúrnej výchovy a vzdelávania pre Štátny vzdelávací program ISCED 0 a ISCED 1*. Bratislava, 2011. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/statny-vzdelavaci-program/mkv\\_isced\\_0\\_1.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/statny-vzdelavaci-program/mkv_isced_0_1.pdf)>.

<sup>11</sup> JALAL, A.: Media Literacy – Prerequisite for the Spread of Cultural Traditions. In *Constantine's Letters*, 2013, Vol. 6, No. 6, p. 7.

critically evaluate the media space that traditional folk culture receives, as well as the quality of the filling of this space, he would have to state very quickly that the media, for example, do not reflect or directly ignore traditional folk culture and folklore. In the field of print media, these are mostly agency reports, interviews with ethnographers, articles on rural tourism and traditional gastronomy.<sup>12</sup> In connection with this issue, it should be recalled that this phenomenon is not at all atypical for the media and the present. "Media Darwinism" has been observed in all spheres of life in the media space for a long time, so it is no wonder that reports of traditional culture are reduced to emotionally tuned contributions with low informational value.<sup>13</sup> In this context, we add another statement reflecting the words about the current state of the mainstream media in relation to other facts of social reality, specifically the current topic of the pandemic crisis: "We also need to think about the media and their role in this crisis, which has also unmasked the low level of one-color journalism. There is a noticeable increase in the popularity of so-called alternative media and a decrease in the level of credibility of the mainstream."<sup>14</sup>

"Media literacy is a critical skill, a subset of information literacy, that at this point in history is more important than ever. Students entering higher education generally receive information literacy instruction at the lower division level. However, the skills taught at this level are rudimentary and geared toward introducing students to scholarly and peer-reviewed sources. Conversely, students have relied upon more popular resources in K-12 education and may not have the evaluative skills to more responsibly consume, and ethically use, popular, news, and social media content. Current instruction methods silo instruction between scholarly and peer-review sources for academic use separately from media consumption in everyday life."<sup>15</sup>

Cultural literacy as the ability to understand the signs, meanings and means of communication used by one's own social group culture and cultural literacy as the ability to use the signs and forms of one's own social group culture for self-expression and communication thus becomes a necessary part of training for university graduates who train professionals especially in areas of media and communication studies. (Of course, "in the combination of understanding the signs and forms of one's own culture with the ability to use them, cultural literacy is a means of involving one's own socio-cultural group. Without cultural literacy, one fails in basic communication with members of one's immediate environment to understand the culture of other social groups."<sup>16</sup> For these reasons, this literacy is relevant to everyone.

„Cultural literacy is as crucial for people's survival in the global and multicultural world as the ability to read, write or count. Fostering the culture of sharing knowledge across perceived boundaries will be a major challenge to the education system and professional life in the years to come.“<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See: HAMAR, J.: *Súčasná reflexia tradičnej ľudovej kultúry v médiách. In Problematika prezentácie a medializácie tradičnej ľudovej kultúry: zborník príspevků z 21. strážnického symposia konaného ve dnech 15. - 16. března 2006.* Strážnice : Národní ústav lidové kultury, 2006, p. 108-116.

<sup>13</sup> According to: PITOŇÁKOVÁ, S.: *Tematika kultúrneho dedičstva v mediálnom prostredí. In Mediamatika a kultúrne dedičstvo: revue o nových médiách a kultúrnom dedičstve*, 2016, Vol. 3, No. 1. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://fhv.uniza.sk/mkd\\_revue/01\\_2016/01\\_2016\\_pitonakova.pdf](https://fhv.uniza.sk/mkd_revue/01_2016/01_2016_pitonakova.pdf)>.

<sup>14</sup> ŠVEC, J.: *What Can Social Sciences and Humanities Offer in the Situation of Global Pandemic? Short Reflection on the Book The Human Rights Controversies and the Covid-19 Pandemic.* In *Filozofia*, 2022, Vol. 77, No. 2, p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> See: GROMBLY, A., ANDERSON, A.: *Information and Media Literacy: Integrating Literacies Into Library Instruction.* In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 1-12. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/1\\_Amanda-Grombly.pdf](https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/1_Amanda-Grombly.pdf)>.

<sup>16</sup> See: MISTRÍK, E.: *Ciele a obsah multikultúrnej výchovy a vzdelávania pre Štátny vzdelávací program ISCED 0 a ISCED 1.* Bratislava, 2011. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/statny-vzdelavaci-program/mkv\\_iscsed\\_0\\_1.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/statny-vzdelavaci-program/mkv_iscsed_0_1.pdf)>.

<sup>17</sup> SALO-LEE, L.: *Cultural Literacy – An Aim of Global Education.* In KAIVOLA, T., MELÉN-PAASO, M. (eds.): *Education for Global Responsibility – Finnish Perspectives.* Helsinki : Helsinki University Press, 2007, p. 75. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <<https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/79403/opm31.pdf?sequence=1#page=75>>.



The current education system in Slovakia is still looking for trajectories to lead students at all levels of education to the ability to find the necessary information, orient themselves in it in the context of broader contexts, analyze, synthesize and as a result apply it in practical life. In teaching and assessment, memorization is preferred to the actual use of information - the ability to draw conclusions, discuss because of arguments, look for an alternative solution..., which is possible only when understanding the relevant context. Hirsch's mentioned concept of cultural literacy also emphasizes reading culturally relevant books, watching culturally relevant films, shows... so that a culturally literate person can know the typical features and symbols of a given culture (not only at the word and script level) and understand them. In this context, it is important to emphasize respect for culture, cultural heritage, as well as the creator - the person who must *"return and build on the values that have contributed to the great development of man in the past ..."*<sup>18</sup> and look for ways to fulfill this in everyday society and in education, as heritage literacy has its roots in the understanding of cultural heritage as the collective wealth of the community. *"In the 21st century, some factors, such as the awareness of multiculturalism, the preservation of local culture and the recognition of national cultural heritage, have led to the need for a new literacy skill called cultural heritage literacy."*<sup>19</sup>

## 2 Methods

This encourages debates on improving the quality of education focused on the historical and cultural context of information, which should be reflected in the development of competencies (skills, abilities, knowledge and attitudes) that can be used in the chosen profession, jobs and functions so that they can anticipate and solve problems, cope with changes in work, appropriately solve a wide range of unpredictable problems and enable them to successfully cope with rapid changes in professional and personal life, to see a world of complex and global interconnectedness. We consider it important to develop selected competencies in mutual symbiosis, to link specific scientific research with real practice. The goal of the university student's training (not only in the humanities and social sciences) should be a culturally competent person who uses speech and culture as a cultural tool of a competent user, is able to understand culture in broader contexts, can express himself/herself by means of a given culture, but elements of culture can also (re) produce at a high-quality level. In connection with the study program, we mention in this article, an important specification is that the graduate is significantly aware of the importance of cultural communication, respects folk traditions, as well as the whole complex of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. He/she knows topics focused on the cultural tradition and cultural heritage of the locality, region, country ..., and thus develops his /her awareness of cultural identity and develops his/her (inter) cultural competencies. He/she orients himself/herself in the latest information and communication technologies, in the media system and at the same time understands culture and can express himself/herself in terms of cultural literacy through appropriate means of communication.

The content framework of cultural literacy goes beyond the dimension of information and media literacy and is a connecting platform for specific interdisciplinary educational content. Such a view of the mentioned issue has resulted in the ambition to present at least a brief reflection on the possibilities of training professionals in the promotion of cultural heritage, for whom cultural literacy is an important skill, a prerequisite for the performance of their

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<sup>18</sup> HULAN, B., DZURIAKOVÁ, J.: *Vybrané kapitoly zo systematickej etiky*. Žilina : EDIS – vydavateľstvo ŽU v Žiline, 2017, p. 104.

<sup>19</sup> ÖZTEMİZ, S. Cultural Heritage Literacy: A Survey of Academics from Humanities and Social Sciences. In *Journal of Librarianship an Information Science*, 2020, Vol. 52, No. 3, p. 818. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0961000619872529>>.

profession. (Interviews with students show that the topic of cultural literacy needs to be given more attention – the very concept of cultural literacy is encountered by many for the first time in college – the oral survey was conducted frontally on a sample of 50 university students, provided useful information, which indicated the level of knowledge of the concept itself, but partly also the experience and expectations of the next generation of professionals, who are aware of, for example, the extent of globalization trends in the media space, but also the need to strengthen the regional / local principle.

In the study we work with the method of qualitative research, which is focused on a detailed description and analysis of a specific case. Selected aspects of related theory with a focus on empirical experience are presented through a case study – it is a study of a selected institution (university – a specific study program), while we focus on specific approaches in the education of future information professionals. The aim of the study is to present an original model of education combining three basic trajectories of education focused on media, information and cultural (heritage) literacy. Through a case study, we provide a more comprehensive view of a selected phenomenon of cultural (heritage) literacy in higher education. The thesis deals with the elaboration of a specific case – a description of the key contents of education in the Central European area of a unique (based on benchmarking) study program in connection with relevant areas of research activities – it is a case study – a description and analysis of the selected case in context. We present information in the context of relevant theory and supplement it with practical experience and findings. We deal with the researched phenomenon of cultural (heritage) literacy on a theoretical and practical level. The theoretical part is a reflection of analytical and critical reflection on related concepts, including a synthesizing view of them. Theoretical knowledge guided us in the exploration and search for facts that provide an empirical picture of the implementation of cultural (heritage) literature in the process of the selected strategy of higher education. The symbiosis of theoretical reflections and practical experiences form a knowledge base of new quality, which can be further subjected to comparisons in different contexts of perception.

We present experiences and the findings through a case study focused on the content of the unique study program *Mediamatics and cultural heritage* implemented at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Žilina in Žilina for more than 15 years. We focused on a case that is exceptional in higher education (the result of comparing the contents of education through the benchmarking method), we describe the specific contents and processes of education. As part of the case study, we present findings from observation and experience over a longer period as a research method, and this basic information is intended to stimulate and precede more extensive research aimed at monitoring the strengthening of cultural literacy in selected groups of university students. The mentioned study program as a research entity would be selected based on the attribute of its uniqueness and originality, an important selection criterion was also practical experience with education of students in the given field. *Mediamatics and cultural heritage* have content and research anchored in the space of media and communication studies. In the results of education, it combines the relevant literacy mentioned in the introduction – information (computer, digital) literacy, media literacy and cultural literacy. We focused on the survey of education aimed at the acquisition of competencies in the field of information and communication technologies, media, and cultural heritage, i.e., symbiosis of information, media, and cultural literacy.

### 3 Results

Based on the information survey and benchmarking of study programs at home and abroad, which was carried out in the period 12/2021 to 1/2022 at the Department of Mediamatics and Cultural Heritage, Faculty of Humanities in University of Žilina in Žilina, it was found that the mentioned study program has no direct competition in Slovakia (where it is provided). Abroad, there are partially similar but not identical study programs (University of Venice) – “Digital

and Public Humanities” study program (the program includes cultural heritage, digitization, media, management, information and technical aspects in the field of websites; King’s College London – study program “Culture, Media & Creative Industries” (the program focuses on media communication, cultural studies, creative / media industries and institutions, but in comparison with our study program it does not comprehensively cover the field of cultural heritage; University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA) – “Media and Cultural Studies” study program (emphasis is placed on the study of the media in their historical, economic, social and political context), examines the cultural forms created and disseminated by the media industry, focuses on the ways that resonate in everyday life at the individual, national and global levels, focuses on sound and image media – television, new media, film, popular music, radio, video games – supports interdisciplinary and transmedia research. Compared to the study program we have analyzed; it does not offer the opportunity to study cultural heritage and does not address issues of digital interpretation of cultural heritage).<sup>20</sup> Based on the findings, it can be stated that the uniquely constituted study program presented by us is unique in the region of Central Europe due to its interdisciplinary reach and focus - connecting media, digital humanities and cultural heritage as an interdisciplinary platform aimed at gaining information, media, and cultural literacy. The impetus for the creation of the mentioned study program was the changing demands on the preparation of media content creators and the growing need to protect cultural heritage. Cultural heritage literacy skills are very important, especially for information professionals focused on providing services in the field of presentation and promotion of cultural heritage. Such professionals must have appropriate qualifications which they can acquire through specific training in a study program drawn from subjects providing these skills. Today, information and media content creators are required to accumulate skills, and at the same time, it is still common ground that a good media content creator “must know something about everything, and everything about something”. *“It is considered beneficial especially for information professionals who have functions of protecting and transferring cultural heritage to the next generations, to add courses or course contents directly related to cultural heritage literacy to undergraduate programs... .”*<sup>21</sup> Graduates of the study program *Mediamatics and cultural heritage* are systematically guided to the interdisciplinary connection of media, information technology and cultural heritage, which creates a good basis not only for content creation but also for the use of information and communication technologies, database work (data journalism), computer graphics and orientation in the online environment. The very focus of the study program is that it is not possible to focus “only” on current media issues, but the graduate’s key knowledge must include knowledge of cultural history and contexts, as knowledge of cultural heritage *“is increasingly in demand due to increasing levels of education and the influence of the mass media.”*<sup>22</sup> The important aspect is the emphasis on respect for culture, cultural heritage, as well as its creator - man who must *“return and build on the values that have contributed to the great development of man in the past... .”*<sup>23</sup> In the context of the presented topic, we consider it crucial to mention the connection between education and research, which we consider to be a basic part of the training of future information professionals. An important part of graduate training is the connection of education with the research activities of teachers and researchers who, through their projects, contribute to the research of the history of Slovak book culture.

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<sup>20</sup> Note of the authors: Benchmarking was conducted by the team of Department of Mediamatics and Cultural Heritage under the supervision of Ing. Henrieta Šuteková, PhD.

<sup>21</sup> ÖZTEMİZ, S.: Bilgi ve Belge Yönetimi öğrencilerinin kültürel mirasokuryazarlığı: Hacettepe Üniversitesi örneği. In *Bilgi Dünyası*, 2020, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 67. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341744102\\_Cultural\\_Heritage\\_Literacy\\_of\\_The\\_Students\\_of\\_Information\\_Management\\_The\\_Case\\_of\\_Hacettepe\\_University](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341744102_Cultural_Heritage_Literacy_of_The_Students_of_Information_Management_The_Case_of_Hacettepe_University)>.

<sup>22</sup> BENČIČ, S., KHARITONOVA, L.: Literary Tourism and Its Role in the Study of Culture (Based on the Material of the Life and Work of Dusan Makovitsky). In *Bulletin of the Karaganda University*, 2021, No. 3, p. 112.

<sup>23</sup> HULAN, B., DZURIAKOVÁ, J.: *Vybrané kapitoly zo systematickej etiky*. Žilina : Žilinská univerzita, 2017, p. 104.

Students are part of these activities and are “co-solvers” of partial outputs of works, in the form of assignments, seminar and final theses. These are the projects *Memory of Slovakia*, *Research of Catalogs of Historical Libraries as a Phenomenon of the Cultural Heritage of Slovakia and Slovaks*, *Chronology of Library History in Slovakia from the Beginning to 2020* and *Graphic Decoration and Typography of Old Prints published in Slovakia in the context of evolving printing technology*. Partial parts of the outputs from these projects (associated with the cultural-historical aspects of selected topics) significantly strengthen the cultural competencies of the students involved in terms of their work in the field of cultural and creative industries, i.e., in their future professions, the basic requirement of which is a high level of acquired knowledge and skills in this field. In symbiosis with other media, digital and information competencies / skills, we consider as key, for example:

**Research in the field of restoration, conservation, and protection of cultural heritage objects** - the aim was to create an educational program for practical identification, archival processing, conservation, and restoration of photographs in the Slovak Republic. The concrete outputs of the activity at present are the creation of a model library of the 20th century after the screening evaluation of book documents, based on which the methodology of non-destructive evaluation in the SurveNIR system was created. As part of the research task **Protection of Colour Photography**, attention was focused on the evaluation of lighting conditions in the main depository of the Slovak National Library (SNL), a survey of the occurrence of colour photography in the deposit Literature and Art Archive of the Slovak National Library was prepared and a model for evaluating the aging of a colour photograph after long-term storage in the absence of light and in conditions where the colour photograph is exposed to light (exposure, etc.) was prepared. The results of the research were incorporated into the updated and expanded textbook *Document Protection*. A special topic was also the research of illuminated and drawn decoration in the SNL incunabula collection and the research of historical maps in the SNL collections, from which databases and monographic representative works were prepared, as well as biographical and genealogical research of Slovak personalities and its presentation. Extensive research covered the history of book printing, publishing, bookbinding (the history of publishing the most published Slovak book *Cithary sanctorum*, a rare book of cultural heritage, was mapped in the form of a bibliography); research of patriotics (it is one of the latest research topics in the history of book culture in Slovakia – basic research was performed on the database of Slovak authors publishing their works outside Slovakia, the database of non-regional dictionaries, but also for the model personal bibliography of important personalities with Slovak roots, Samuel Tešedík Jr. and Sr, who worked in the Slovak-inhabited territory in the Lower Land and had a great influence on national, church and economic life in Slovakia).<sup>24</sup> The topics set in this way are directly linked to the acquisition of cultural literacy in a broader and interdisciplinary context and directly increase students’ practical skills, in particular by their personal involvement in research and have a direct impact on raising the cultural awareness of the generation.

**Research of catalogs of historical libraries as a phenomenon of cultural heritage of Slovakia and Slovaks** – the project was focused on primary heuristics and basic research in obtaining information and source documents of catalogs of historical libraries in Slovakia from the 13th century to 1918 and based on this research the beginnings of library history were postponed in this sense to the beginning of the 12th century. Within the project, a bibliography of professional and scientific works on the topic was prepared, which is available on the page presenting the database of catalogs of historical libraries.<sup>25</sup> A treasurable manuscript was discovered during the research, we assume that it is the manuscript of the historian of book culture history,

<sup>24</sup> *Publications, which Were Written in Terms of the Following Project*. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://fhv.uniza.sk/web/\\_dokumenty/ceps/ceps\\_publikacna\\_cinnost.pdf](https://fhv.uniza.sk/web/_dokumenty/ceps/ceps_publikacna_cinnost.pdf)>.

<sup>25</sup> *Project Research Results*. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[http://historickekniznice.uniza.sk:8080/Sekundarna\\_literatura\\_KHK.pdf](http://historickekniznice.uniza.sk:8080/Sekundarna_literatura_KHK.pdf)>.

Boris Báľent, a catalog of historical libraries in Slovakia, which contains information on almost 1000 catalogs of historical libraries. The facts presented in the scientific collective monograph of the Historical Library in Slovakia until 1918 can be considered extraordinary results, as part of the systematization of information about them, their typology was created, which would enable their clarity and the possibility of sorting information according to their owners. Among the important moments is the research of the library of the Slovak Women's Association Živena, which was highly praised by the President of the Živena Association, a former member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the current chairwoman of the NGO Via cultura, Mrs. Magda Vášáryová. Also, because of this research, the reconstruction and modification of the premises of this rare library began. The research aroused interest among students who, through their final theses, dealt with partial research topics and their presentation.

Based on the source research, 4574 libraries (or information about their catalogs), which operated in Slovakia from the beginning of the 12th century until 1918, were documented, of which 2,376 confirmed the existence of a historical library catalog with a description of the document. The most important scientific result of the project is the publicly available information database Catalogs of Historical Libraries.<sup>26</sup> The knowledge of the funds will have a general cultural and social benefit and their interdisciplinary character will have a benefit not only in terms of history, but also in terms of other scientific disciplines. Practical use is expected in general history, but also in cultural history and regional history. Historical libraries are closely linked to their place of origin and are directly linked to cultural identity.<sup>27</sup> It was regional research that was focused on the involvement of students in practical outputs, and often this regional patriotism, or regional approach linked with the use of acquired knowledge and information, digital and cultural competencies brought concrete and usable outputs in practice, namely of cultural and creative industries.

**Chronology of the history of libraries from the beginning to 2020** (Chronologia historiarum bibliothecarum ab initio usque ad annum 2020). The originality of the project lies in the acquisition of unique knowledge and documents about the historical changes in the origin and building of book collections and later also the institutionalized network of libraries from the Middle Ages to the present regarding the national context. The research is focused on documenting specific manifestations of collection activities and curriculum aspects of library institutionalization. Emphasis is also placed on the popularization of results through scientific, professional, and popular publications, scientific and professional events, as well as software solutions, especially in the digital information space. A modern element and at the same time a specific research problem in the presentation of the obtained data is their visualization using new technologies. The innovativeness of the project is also in the form of access to the analyzed documents and acquired knowledge in the digital information space.<sup>28</sup> Students become actors (as organizers and visitors) of events and are directly confronted with issues of promotion and interpretation of cultural heritage.

**Graphic decoration and typography of old prints published in Slovakia in the context of evolving printing technology** – the last of a series of presented projects to research the history of book culture with active student participation in the proposed context presents a new, qualitatively different perspective on the issue of old prints. Part of the new perspective of viewing the issue is research in the field of clarification of processes of acquisition and creation of graphic and typographic materials for printers, their equipment, research and documentation of their creation techniques and anonymous works – in terms of their publication / printing – creating

<sup>26</sup> *Project Research Results*. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <<http://historickekniznice.uniza.sk:8080/xmlui/>>.

<sup>27</sup> See: AUGUSTÍNOVÁ, E.: Výsledky výskumného projektu. Výskum katalógov historických knižníc ako fenoménu kultúrneho dedičstva Slovenska a Slovákov. In *Mediamatika a kultúrne dedičstvo: revue o nových médiách a kultúrnom dedičstve*, 2017, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 1-5. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://fhv.uniza.sk/mkd\\_revue/01\\_2017/01\\_2017\\_augustinova.pdf](https://fhv.uniza.sk/mkd_revue/01_2017/01_2017_augustinova.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup> See: PITOŇÁKOVÁ, S.: Chronológia dejín knižníc od počiatkov do roku 2020. In *Knižnica*, 2021, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 94-95.

a database to verify the origin and their identification in individual printing offices in Slovakia. The main scientific goal is to identify key determinants influencing the character of the means of expression and graphic decoration of historical prints. Old and rare presses, as a source of historical material, are needed for study and research in a wide range of social sciences and are an important source of knowledge of our history. Historical documents are closely linked to their place of origin and the contribution of regional character is followed by cultural identity and historical documents are its proof at the national, regional, family, or subcultural level. Direct contact of the user of historical documents in the physical or digital form creates historical capital from historical books, which (if it is sufficiently mapped and accessible) can be used in an interesting way even in the current world of modern technologies. The pedagogical-educational moment will also be a benefit, as its results will enable them to provide students with a picture of research and a space for research into Slovak cultural heritage at home and abroad. Students will have the opportunity to participate directly in the various stages of the project, in which they can practically verify the knowledge gained in subjects taught in the study program *Mediamatics and cultural heritage*, which by its interdisciplinary nature meets the ambitions and requirements of applying digital humanities in practice. Research into the possibilities of information visualization is a contribution to the creation of an interactive display of the researched project issues (interactive maps, development timelines, selection of individual authors, creation of online shows, possibilities of displaying digitized content), creating your own generator of graphic decoration (determining structure, metadata), with the unambiguous contribution of the student who acquired the given information, digital and cultural competencies within the study.

The interconnection of educational and research activities focused on the field of cultural heritage leads to a deeper understanding of key topics related to the protection and promotion of cultural heritage and also supports the development of key competences in cultural heritage (intentionally, in the context of the topic we mention only projects focused on cultural heritage). „Protection of cultural heritage products in a sustainable manner requires the information concerning those products to be accessible, usable and shareable. Even the skills of cultural heritage literacy, which form the basis of this process, are important for everyone, these skills are much more necessary for information professionals who have the responsibility to provide service in cultural heritage. Evaluating cultural heritage literacy skills of information professional candidates, carries a great importance to understand whether they have adequate qualifications while serving as a professional and to determine necessary training subjects they need.”<sup>29</sup>

## 4 Discussion

The presented program combines humanities and technical aspects of communication in a digital society in an original way. Abroad, similar programs are referred to as “Information studies” or “New media studies” and are very popular among students. *Mediamatics and Cultural Heritage* profiles an interdisciplinary-oriented study program focused on three key areas: media, digital humanities, and cultural heritage. Related to this is the content of education, which is characterized by three specific trajectories (pathways) of education adapted to the dynamically changing expectations and needs of a modern digital society:

- **Media-managerial trajectory** – leads to media literacy
- **Digital humanities trajectory** – moving towards information literacy
- **Cultural heritage trajectory** – leads to cultural literacy.

<sup>29</sup> ÖZTEMİZ, S.: Bilgi ve Belge Yönetimi öğrencilerinin kültürel mirasokuryazarlığı: Hacettepe Üniversitesi örneği. In *Bilgi Dünyası*, 2020, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 67. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341744102\\_Cultural\\_Heritage\\_Literacy\\_of\\_The\\_Students\\_of\\_Information\\_Management\\_The\\_Case\\_of\\_Hacettepe\\_University](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341744102_Cultural_Heritage_Literacy_of_The_Students_of_Information_Management_The_Case_of_Hacettepe_University)>.

An innovative element in the field of study is the content line of cultural heritage, through which professionals in the field of popularization and protection of national cultural heritage are prepared. From the point of view of our topic, the desired and expected result of the educational process is cultural literacy, the basis of which lies in the understanding of literacy as a base of knowledge and competencies associated with the field of cultural heritage as collective capital of (any) community.

The determining factor is also the fact that information and media literacy is perceived as an integral part of this process – through the media management trajectory and the trajectory of the digital humanities. The offer of subjects is extensive, and students choose their own path of education through compulsory elective subjects. They complete courses focused on media, marketing, management, library and information science, information and communication technologies, history of culture and art, literature and several specialized subjects related to a specific trajectory. In their preparation, emphasis is placed on an analytical and critical view of current mass media issues in various thematic and semantic contexts, on media factors and forms, as well as on the commercial nature of contemporary media. It is therefore a comprehensive system of knowledge, skills (ideally also experience), which is to help the effective use of media production in favor of the promotion of widely established, valued and beneficial values respected by society and individuals. Part of the teaching is the acquisition of skills in the field of media production (expressive media production as a prelude to professional media production) and media competencies in the field of productive activities in accordance with the available theory through practical exercises. Students work with various forms and forms of information and are guided to be able to present information and media content in an adequate way and form through various types of traditional and new media. They are led to critically evaluate information and media content, learn to create media content and through them to strengthen positive human values and the relationship to traditions, culture in general and cultural heritage. The acquired knowledge is used in practice with an appropriate presentation of cultural heritage.

All presented projects in the scientific research area significantly contribute to the preservation, interpretation of written cultural heritage collected in memory institutions in Slovakia and in connection with the pedagogical process contribute to increasing the cultural literacy of interested students who are engaged in scientific research, motivated to further research and issues. Capable to present selected elements of tangible and intangible cultural heritage to selected target groups. These activities in combination with the specifically set content of education are a prerequisite for increasing information, media, and cultural literacy.

## **5 Conclusions**

We live lives (both private and professional) that are linked to different types of media and a wealth of information. Our coexistence with the media does not mean that we know the media, the way they work or the impact on the lives of individuals and society, nor that we can make full use of their potential. In the process of the continuous technological development of society, there are justified efforts to massively promote information and media literacy, less is said about cultural literacy, which is a direct reference to the cultural-historical and political development of society. The dynamics of the information space and the massive growth of information have directed us to a situation unparalleled in human history – we have a constant and massive supply of information, which we are not always able to process (or even search) to support the quality and scope of our information in relevant contexts. The role of universities is to respond adequately to current developments in society, and to place the above topics in the context of wider discussions on cultural literacy. It plays an important role in finding innovative approaches that lead to a continuous connection between history and the present.

The presented case study focused on the description of the original study *Mediamatics and Cultural Heritage* represents education aimed at supporting innovative models, the ambition of which is to combine interdisciplinary content and interdisciplinary creativity. Graduates of the presented study program work in various job positions corresponding to the chosen trajectory of education. Responses from practice (graduates themselves, employers) are an impetus for cyclical reconstructions of educational content to meet the requirements of modern (digital) society, but also to maintain a range of content that strengthens cultural tradition, cultural identity, and knowledge of cultural heritage. Another important aspect is their ability to successfully present cultural heritage in a modern way through traditional and new media, because the media is a very viable organism that adapts very quickly (both in terms of technology and content) and likes to absorb interesting elements, topics – it can also be “old” themes presented in a modern way. In practice, they prove that the symbiosis of information, media and cultural literacy is currently an invaluable competence of a person working in the field of culture, cultural and memory institutions, but also an invaluable competence of a person working in the media and information space. The presented article offers a view of the educational platform beyond the scope of education in the field of media and communication studies and, through a case study, presents a common and proven model of education with the contextual connection of digital, media and cultural literacy. We are on the threshold of the changes started by the coronavirus pandemic and the changes we are considering in the context of the war in Ukraine. It turns out that a world marked by globalization can be easily vulnerable and even in such moments it is extremely important to emphasize the need for information, media and cultural (heritage) literature as competencies to work with information resources, technologies and not forget the (inter) cultural dimension of our functioning and development. In connection with the preparation of graduates for their further work, the current events create an extremely specific set of challenges for higher education institutions. The world is exposed to new situations and higher education institutions must be prepared to navigate future professionals so that they can use their skills and knowledge in an unknown (we do not mean geographically) environment. The purpose of education is essentially unchanged – to provide skills that can be used flexibly in changing situations (and cultural contexts), emphasis must be placed on interdisciplinary and contextual overview of information to increase the quality and understanding of communication in its various situations and variations. In the present case study, we discussed the symbiosis of three literacies, which are part of the three trajectories of education in the study program *Media and cultural heritage*. It turns out that such a connection in the context of interdisciplinary education can be considered a new professional standard (we mean especially the context of anticipated future) professions, as such a view emphasizes the important possibilities of the modern world, without forgetting the cultural heritage acquired through previous generations.

The presented study brings a symbiosis of selected theoretical reflections and practical experiences, which create a knowledge base of new quality, and these can be further subjected to detailed comparisons in different contexts of viewing.

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# Media Literacy in Digital Games

## **ABSTRACT**

The article focuses on aspects of media literacy in digital games and seeks to answer the question whether digital games can develop players' media competences and, if so, in which areas. The article points out the positive aspects of the player's immersion in digital games as a way to develop competencies without the player realizing it. Through a qualitative content analysis with a focus on media competences, it offers an extensive list of games and the competences found in them. The research included 32 digital games from 1997 to 2022. The decisive criterion was the presence of any media in the game (print, radio, television, internet, advertising, music, etc.) with which the player can interact – i.e. use them (read, listen, watch) or create other media products through them. At the same time it distinguishes between the use of media as a supplementary or entertainment element in games and media work as a direct determinant of the further development of the story or gameplay. The article concludes that digital games can indeed teach media competence without the player realizing it, but that this has its limits.

## **KEY WORDS**

Critical Thinking. Digital Games. Game Literacy. Media Literacy.

# 1 Introduction

The current situation in the entertainment industry favours innovation and forces the audience to consume more and more media content. Due to globalisation and interconnected markets, any media or entertainment industry product becomes instantly accessible to a wide range of audiences that seem to have no boundaries. The constant oversaturation of information and options is bringing us into an age where information is no longer powerful and is transformed into a need to be able to choose from a plethora of information, media products and entertainment products. Media education is one of the fundamental branches of education that addresses and teaches such selection to younger and older generations. Media competence has become an integral part of life in today's society.

The current state of media literacy and media education in Slovakia and abroad is not very positive<sup>1</sup>. Many studies show that, despite the implementation of media education in education in Slovakia and in other countries, media literacy is increasing only slowly and audiences are more susceptible to manipulation than ever before<sup>2</sup>, especially in times of pandemic and post-pandemic situations, which are characterised by uncertainty, psychological pressure on audiences, overload of misinformation, etc. The generation that we are able to teach media competences to may be immune to, or may ignore, classical methods of education.<sup>3</sup> The current state of education in Slovakia has also shown that distance learning during the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the level of education of today's young people.<sup>4</sup> However, this is where the aforementioned media content, products of the entertainment industry, come in, which can in some ways take on the role of a mentor and guide their audience to a better understanding of the importance of certain competences.<sup>5</sup> The games industry and digital games are among the fastest growing entertainment industries.<sup>6</sup> They are no longer just for passionate individuals and small audiences, but are steadily growing in popularity. It is not groundbreaking news that digital games primarily designed for education exist and are constantly evolving. Whether they are games that teach players a foreign language and vocabulary (e.g. *Alphabear*<sup>7</sup>), expand their knowledge of a specific area (e.g. *Europa Universalis IV*.<sup>8</sup>), deal with social issues and human emotions (e.g. *GRIS*<sup>9</sup>, *Stillness of the wind*<sup>10</sup>), or use gamification as one of their mainstays.

However, alongside these, we may overlook the educational potential of those games that are primarily designed for entertainment. Yet it is these games for the general public that often combine elements of media education and can teach their audience media competences without the audience (or players) realising it. And it is this potential, and how digital games teach media literacy to players, that is the focus of this article.

<sup>1</sup> See: PETRANOVÁ, D., VRABEC, N.: *Mediálna gramotnosť dospelých populácie v SR – Výskumná správa*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnave, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> *Media Literacy Index 2021*. [online]. [2022-02-21]. Available at: <[https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MediaLiteracyIndex2021\\_ENG.pdf](https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MediaLiteracyIndex2021_ENG.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> See: JÁNOŠOVÁ, D., SÁDECKÁ, R.: Aspects of Communication in the Digital Literacy of Generation Y in the Region. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 205-218.

<sup>4</sup> *Správa z reprezentatívneho prieskumu o priebehu a dopade dištančnej výučby v školskom roku 2020/2021*. [online]. [2022-02-21]. Available at: <[https://www.vzdelavacieanalyzy.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Prieskum-distancne-vzdelavanie\\_final.pdf](https://www.vzdelavacieanalyzy.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Prieskum-distancne-vzdelavanie_final.pdf)>.

<sup>5</sup> See: GENNARO, S., MILLER, B.: Critical Media Literacy in the Googleburg Galaxy. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 6-22.

<sup>6</sup> *Gaming Market – Growth, Trends, Covid-19 Impact and Forecast 2022-2027*. [online]. [2022-02-23]. Available at: <<https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/global-gaming-market>>.

<sup>7</sup> SPRY FOX: *Alphabear*. [digital game]. 2015.

<sup>8</sup> PARADOX DEVELOPMENT STUDIO: *Europa Universalis IV*. [digital game]. Stockholm : Paradox Interactive, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> NOMADA STUDIO, BLITWORKS: *GRIS*. [digital game]. Austin : Devolver Digital, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> LAMBIC STUDIOS: *Stillness of the Wind*. [digital game]. Melbourne : Fellow Traveller, 2019.

The educational potential of digital games is enormous. Unlike other products of the entertainment industry, it draws the audience directly into the action through participation, and the decisions made by the individual, in this case the player, have a serious impact on the course of the overall gaming experience. The attention that an individual has to pay to the gameplay can be found in almost no other media product. This immersion<sup>11</sup> also ensures that the content on offer (in this case, the game content) will not be overlooked, as can happen with other media. The core competencies that gaming can teach can be called game literacy. "Game literacy is a multidimensional combination of varied practices (e.g., reading, writing, and calculating; textual, visual, and spatial cognition; interactive design, programming, and engineering; multitasking and systems understanding; meaning making, storytelling, role playing, perspective taking, and exercising judgment; etc.)."<sup>12</sup> Many of these are applied in different ways in different digital games<sup>13</sup> - mostly in dependence on the game genre. At the same time, some games are more or less open to participation - some directly invite the individual to modify the game and learn game design or creativity through it, others use participation and modification only as a way to have fun or enhance the enjoyment of the game. These could be found in a number of digital games, the most prevalent examples being *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*<sup>14</sup>, *Grand Theft Auto V*<sup>15</sup> and *Minecraft*<sup>16</sup>, which are characterised by an extreme amount of modification.

Against this background, however, media literacy and critical thinking competences, so-called media competences, are also formed and shaped, which may or may not necessarily be part of the original game design and are also transferable to an individual's everyday life. By media competences, following the example of M. Prostináková Hossová and M. Hekelj, we understand knowledge, skills and abilities that help an individual to critically receive, analyse, select and create media.<sup>17</sup> Their occurrence in digital games depends on the specific game genre and also on the motive of the game.<sup>18</sup> However, we can assess that media competences are found in almost every game and every genre. In strategy, simulation and logic games we can observe an increased need for analysis and evaluation of the player, and in RPGs, adventure and action games the need to receive information, analyse it and also create it (although this is of course not the rule). In addition, A. Delwiche says that a media literate player can:

1. "understand that video game messages are constructed and that these messages construct their own immersive realities;
2. realize that different players negotiate the meaning of game content in different ways;
3. understand the commercial dimensions of video games;
4. identify ideological and political implications of video game content;
5. recognize the ways that unique characteristics of the medium shape video game content."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See: HO, J. C. F.: Relevance and Immersion in Digital Games: Content and Personal Factors. In SARI, E., TEDJASAPUTRA, A. B. (eds.): *Proceedings of CHLuXiD 2017 - The 3rd International Conference in HCI and UX in Indonesia*. New York : Association for Computing Machinery, 2017, p. 24-27.

<sup>12</sup> CAPERTON, I. H.: Toward a Theory of Game-media Literacy: Playing and Building as Reading and Writing. In *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-mediated Simulations*, Vol. 2, No. 1. p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> See: DUPONT, B., MALLIET, S.: Contextualizing Dark Patterns with the Ludeme Theory: A New Path for Digital Game Literacy? In *Acta Ludologica*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 4-22.

<sup>14</sup> BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS: *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. [digital game]. Rockville : Bethesda Softworks, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> ROCKSTAR NORTH: *Grand Theft Auto V*. [digital game]. New York : Rockstar Games, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> MOJANG STUDIOS: *Minecraft*. [digital game]. Stockholm : Mojang Studios, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> HOSSOVÁ, M., HEKELJ, M.: *Mediálna výchova a mediálna gramotnosť v kontexte televíznej tvorby pre deti a mládež*. Trnava : UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> See: BUČKOVÁ, Z., RUSNÁKOVÁ, L.: The Issue of Game Genre Typology in the Slovak Online Game-Magazine Sector. In PETRANOVÁ, D., MATÚŠ, J., MENDELOVÁ, D. (eds.): *Marketing Identity – Brands We Love, Part I*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2016, p. 280.

<sup>19</sup> DELWICHE, A.: Media Literacy 2.0: Unique Characteristics of Video Games. In: TYNER, K. (ed.): *Media Literacy: New Agendas in Communication*. New York London : Routledge, 2010, p. 179.

These could be described as additional levels of media competences that are inherent only in games and are not found in the mainstream media that have so far been the focus of media education. At the same time, they are not identical to the competences from game literacy, which are more concerned with the technical aspect, not with a more formal understanding of the context of games and their narrative. In this article we will focus only on the basic media competences as defined by the National institute for education in Slovak republic, i.e.: understanding how media work, active use of media, communication through media and effective use of media.<sup>20</sup>

## 2 Methods

As this article is an introduction to the topic, the research and research methods can be considered as a framework in nature. The objectives of the research study are to point out media competencies in digital games that are not primarily intended for education in this area. I.e. we do not take into account digital games whose primary purpose is to improve players' competences, but we will work with games that aim to bring players fun and relaxation. The premise of this research is that in some games, media learning dominates, and thus can improve the media competencies of players without the players themselves realizing it, while this was probably not the intention of the creators of the game themselves.

The selection of the research sample, i.e. specific digital games, is deliberate. The games were selected from the last 25 years (1997 - 2022) to cover several stages of development of the digital-gaming industry. The selection was not conditioned by the game genre, publisher or other factors. The decisive criterion was the presence of any media in the game (print, radio, television, internet, advertising, music, etc.) with which the player can interact - ie use them (read, listen, watch) or create other media products through them. In these media, we distinguish three functions, depending on their impact on the game, respectively what role they play in the game. It can be either an additional function (the media have a cosmetic character, they have no impact on the game), an additional function (they provide clues, help to create a story, but the absence of interaction with them may or may not have a radical impact on the gameplay itself) or an event-creating function (the player must interact with them in order to, for example, be able to move in the story or provide other possibilities for the development of the story, etc.).

Within the research strategy, qualitative content analysis was used, focusing on the occurrence and form of media, the functions of these media in the game and the media competencies that are found in selected games. By media competencies in this case we mean 10 competencies of media literacy, as described by the National Institute for Education in the Slovak Republic: *"understanding how the media are growing in society, understanding how the media are constructed, understanding how the media portray reality, controlling and using equipment, software and applications, controlling and using orientation in the media environment, communication as information retrieval and processing, communication as content creation, communication as participation in social networks, strategy with the intention of awareness / reflection on one's own use of the media and strategy with the intention of achieving one's goals through the media"*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> STATPEDU: *10 kompetencií mediálnej gramotnosti*. [online]. [2022-02-23]. Available at: <<https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/ucebnice-metodiky-publikacie/10-kompetencii-mediálnej-gramotnosti.pdf>>.

<sup>21</sup> STATPEDU: *10 kompetencií mediálnej gramotnosti*. [online]. [2022-03-30]. Available at: <<https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/dokumenty/ucebnice-metodiky-publikacie/10-kompetencii-mediálnej-gramotnosti.pdf>>.

At the same time, we can distinguish two levels of digital gaming:

1. the gameplay itself, i.e. the one whose final form is decided by the game studio during the game development process,
2. social interaction between players, especially in digital games that have an online mode and allow for communication between players in any form - direct (players communicate with each other through verbal or written communication) or indirect (players communicate through an intermediary medium), real-time or non-real-time.

The fundamental research question is therefore: What media competencies can digital games, whose primary intention is not to teach, teach players? As secondary research question we can determine: What functions do the media play in digital games? We take into account that through different mechanics, genres and narratives, digital games can teach a myriad of different competences - from communication, social interaction, foreign language, moral role models, authority figures, to developing imagination, creative thinking, motor skills, drawing attention to climate and environmental issues, to specific knowledge of a defined domain and learning specific skills such as programming and coding languages. However, we will only focus on those that directly touch on or build on media competences.

### 3 Results

In the first level of digital gaming, i.e., the gameplay itself as it has been designed and created by the game studio without additional modifications and other adjustments by the players, we can observe a large amount of media competence. There are countless digital games in which the character/avatar that the player controls interacts with the media. From interacting with traditional forms of media such as newspapers, radio or the internet to interacting with virtual realities, meta-universes, etc. In some games, the interactions are more of a “cosmetic” nature - the player can choose what music, what songs or radio station to listen to from a predefined playlist, but they have no impact on the game’s progression and are only an enhancement to the gameplay experience. This form can be found in games from franchises such as *Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater*<sup>22</sup>, *Mafia*<sup>23</sup>, *Need for Speed*<sup>24</sup>, *Dirt*<sup>25</sup>, *Eurotruck Simulator 2*<sup>26</sup>, *Final Fantasy XV*<sup>27</sup> or all the installments of the *Grand Theft Auto* series<sup>28</sup>. In games, media is also often found as a messenger of additional information that contributes, for example, to the game’s gameplay. These media, while contributing to the narrative, do not necessarily interact with the player, do not advance the plot, and do not offer any benefits other than a deeper understanding of the narrative, building tension or setting, or an entertainment function (except perhaps supplemental achievements to unlock any objectives or collectibles). To use a few examples to demonstrate - in *Mafia II*.<sup>29</sup>, one of the achievements is to find all the Playboy magazines and find all the posters. It doesn’t advance the gameplay or the story in any way, it is explicitly an achievement. In *Horizon Zero Dawn*<sup>30</sup>, on the other hand, the player can use the main character to interact

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<sup>22</sup> NEVERSOFT, VICARIOUS VISIONS, ACTIVISION: *Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater*. [digital game]. Santa Monica : Activision, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> ILLUSION SOFTWARES: *Mafia*. [digital game]. New York : Gathering of developers, 2002-2020.

<sup>24</sup> ELECTRONIC ARTS: *Need for Speed*. [digital game]. Redwood City : Electronic Arts, 1994-2020.

<sup>25</sup> CODEMASTERS: *Dirt*. [digital game]. Southam : Codemasters, 1998-2020.

<sup>26</sup> SCS SOFTWARE: *Eurotruck Simulator 2*. [digital game]. Prague : SCS Software, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> SQUARE ENIX BUSINESS DIVISION 2: *Final Fantasy XV*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Square Enix, 2016

<sup>28</sup> ROCKSTAR NORTH, DIGITAL ECLIPSE, ROCKSTAR: *Grand Theft Auto*. [digital game]. New York : Rockstar Games, 1997-2021.

<sup>29</sup> 2K CZECH: *Mafia II*. [digital game]. London : Feral Interactive, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> GUERRILLA GAMES: *Horizon Zero Dawn*. [digital game]. San Mateo : Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2017.

with Datapoints, which are various forms of media (audio, textual information, holograms), but they only contribute to shaping the narrative and fleshing out the plot. In *Alan Wake*<sup>31</sup>, on the other hand, it is possible to interact with the television in various locations, which broadcasts a spooky series (interestingly, these are actual camera recordings, not graphics or animation). The series is intended to heighten the tension and spookiness of the environment in which the story takes place, but it is also an additional function or cosmetic feature of the medium.

### 3.1 Media Competences in Digital Games

However, we would primarily like to pay attention to those games in which interaction with the media has an impact on the game, and thus can signify media competence, as discussed in the previous section. We can find many examples. The first one is *Fallout 3*<sup>32</sup>, a digital action role-playing game set in a post-apocalyptic future, in which the player can tune into several radio stations through the main character. While some of these are cosmetic in nature as in the cases of previous games, others have an impact on the game itself - after randomly tuning in to a particular radio frequency, they trigger side quests, allow you to join joinable factions, reflect the player's choices in previous parts of the game, etc. Another radio (Enclave Radio) is propaganda-oriented, broadcasting debates, presidential speeches, inspirational quotes, and patriotic music. We can notice that the radio in this context no longer only has an entertainment function, as in previous games, but also contains spoken word, which can influence the player's decision making, and an informational function is added. The player themselves needs not only to work with the medium, but to take a stance towards it, to critically evaluate the situation and decide on how to proceed. The same or similar media competences can be found in *Dishonored*<sup>33</sup>, where the player can decide whether to turn off the propaganda broadcast on global radio or replace it with another broadcast, which will influence the further development of the game. Information-seeking competence is also found in this case in the use of a book, in which the player can find information that will help them to make better decisions and unlock further options in the game. At the same time, in this game the media reflects the player's behaviour - the player's decisions and actions are displayed on posters. A similar implementation of media can be found in the game *Hitman*<sup>34</sup>, in which newspapers can be found. These write about how the player completed the mission, i.e. how the player killed their target in the previous mission. Another example can be found in some games of the *Assassin's Creed* series<sup>35</sup>, in which, based on the player's choices and their media coverage in newspapers and posters, non-playable characters (soldiers) can attack or not attack the player's avatar because they recognize it. Conversely, if the player actively tears down posters or decides to bribe newspaper printers or town criers, the player's recognizability to hostile characters is diminished. In *Detroit: Become human*<sup>36</sup>, a game that straddles the line between action games and adventure games, and whose narrative and gameplay are based on player decisions (each decision influences the development of the plot), it is possible to interact with newspapers in electronic form on freely deployed tablets. The game has three storylines that run concurrently and do not even collide until a certain point, but each has a differently significant societal impact. In the most serious of these, the robot rebellion against humans, the player can use the newspapers to gather information about the development of the rebellion, how it was handled, and thus be able to

<sup>31</sup> REMEDY ENTERTAINMENT: *Alan Wake*. [digital game]. Espoo : Remedy Entertainment, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS: *Fallout 3*. [digital game]. Rockville : Bethesda Softworks, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> ARKANE STUDIOS: *Dishonored*. [digital game]. Rockville : Bethesda Softworks, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> IO INTERACTIVE: *Hitman*. [digital game]. Copenhagen : IO Interactive, 2000-2021.

<sup>35</sup> UBISOFT, GAMELOFT: *Assassin's Creed*. [digital game]. Montreuil : Ubisoft, 2007-2020.

<sup>36</sup> QUANTIC DREAM: *Detroit: Become Human*. [digital game]. Paris : Quantic Dream, Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2018.



analyze social opinion, which will allow him to better assess the situation and adjust his future decisions in this storyline accordingly. Of course, in this particular case, the media is more of a complementary function, as the player can get through the game without them, but they serve as a basis for better decision-making, i.e. they defacto develop the competence of information seeking. An interesting example that straddles the line between media literacy and game literacy is the game *Doki Doki Literature Club!*<sup>37</sup>, which, despite its childish design, is a horror game and visual novel. During gameplay, it refers the player to game files that they must navigate, which serve as a form of narrative construction outside of the gameplay itself, as the game rewrites or erases them according to the player's choices in the story. It thus forces the player to seek out information that they would not otherwise find their way to and to take a position on it, based on which they will make their next decisions in the game. The potential dangers of mindless media consumption can be found directly in the narrative of *Little Nightmares 2*<sup>38</sup>, in which the player witnesses a dystopian society fanaticalised by broadcasting. In some parts, they also becomes an observer of the suicides of characters who choose to do so because of the influence of broadcasting, and the player is unable to prevent them from doing so.

### 3.2 Social Interaction

At the second level of digital gaming, i.e. the social interaction between players in the game environment, communication skills and abilities are most often, logically, developed. These do not necessarily always have a direct link to media competences and are mostly directly dependent on the player's willingness to communicate on the scale of active - passive participant in communication. Suitable examples could be found in MOBA<sup>39</sup> games such as *League of Legends*<sup>40</sup> or *Dota 2*<sup>41</sup>, in FPS<sup>42</sup> games such as *CS:GO*<sup>43</sup>, *Apex Legends*<sup>44</sup> or *Valorant*<sup>45</sup>, in MMORPGs<sup>46</sup> such as *World of Warcraft*<sup>47</sup> or *Lost Ark*<sup>48</sup>, and in many other sub-genres. Although a player's willingness to communicate can have a direct impact on the success of cooperation and coordination between players in a team, influence the development of communication skills and foreign languages, and influence future social interactions outside the game world, they are not necessarily required of the player.

On the contrary, however, we can encounter digital games in which the player is able to enter at least partially into the creation of the environment in a certain vocabulary and to interact indirectly with other players by leaving, for example, messages. What is interesting about this way of communication, however, is the necessity of analysis, deduction and critical thinking of the player themself. The player may encounter messages that can help him to decipher a task, direct him to the right path, but also confuse them or even prevent them from successfully completing a particular part of the game. When interacting with such communication, the player

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<sup>37</sup> TEAM SALVATO: *Doki Doki Literature Club!*. [digital game]. Boulder : Team Salvato, Serenity Forge, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> TARSIER STUDIOS, SUPERMASSIVE GAMES: *Little Nightmares 2*. [digital game]. Tokyo : Bandai Namco, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Multiplayer online battle arena.

<sup>40</sup> RIOT GAMES: *League of Legends*. [digital game]. Santa Monica : Riot Games, 2009-2022.

<sup>41</sup> VALVE CORPORATION: *Dota 2*. [digital game]. Bellevue : Valve Corporation, 2013-2022.

<sup>42</sup> First person shooter.

<sup>43</sup> VALVE CORPORATION, HIDDEN PATH ENTERTAINMENT: *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*. [digital game]. Bellevue : Valve corporation, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> RESPAWN ENTERTAINMENT, PANIC BUTTON GAMES: *Apex Legends*. [digital game]. Redwood City : Electronic Arts, 2019-2022.

<sup>45</sup> RIOT GAMES: *Valorant*. [digital game]. Santa Monica : Riot Games, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Massively multiplayer online role-playing game.

<sup>47</sup> BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT: *World of Warcraft*. [digital game]. Irvine : Blizzard Entertainment, 2004-2022.

<sup>48</sup> SMILEGATE, TRIPOD STUDIO: *Lost Ark*. [digital game]. Seoul : Smilegate, 2019-2022.

is forced to consider all options, analyse the situation and consciously decide whether to accept or reject the information provided, i.e. it is a direct form of media competence. This could be found in the games *Dark Souls*<sup>49</sup>, in which players in online versions leave messages for each other (outside of real time), or in *Death Stranding*<sup>50</sup>, where players communicate through Signs that they leave at specific locations. It is important to note that in these games, players do not encounter each other, nor do they have a direct impact on anyone else's gameplay (with the exception of Phantoms in *Dark Souls*).

## 4 Conclusions and Discussion

Digital games are a great tool for developing media competences. Among many other competences, they can develop critical thinking, teach players to work with media, to search for information in the game world and take a stance on it, as well as to adapt their further actions in the game based on newly acquired information. Games do so without the player being aware of this learning, through immersion in the game world that literally immerses the player. Another potential dimension for the development of media competences in digital games could be the search, selection and processing of information directly related to the game, i.e. player discussions, hints, tips, walkthroughs, etc., or the creation of media by-products by the players themselves, such as various images (fanart), videos, articles, etc., which could be used as a tool for the development of media competences in digital games. Here, however, we come to the border of fan studies and audience participation, which, although not entirely unknown in this context and can certainly provide many inputs for further research, were not the focus of this paper, which dealt with the games themselves.

Of course, it is unlikely that without otherwise developing media competencies at other levels, this gaming would be sufficient - it is just another level to media education in school or to actively developing media literacy oneself. Ultimately, digital gaming doesn't have as much time and space in an individual's life (for the most part). The time commitment to play through a game can be in the tens of hours, and in-game media or the direct development of media competence through gaming is only a fraction of that time. More space and player attention are devoted to the narrative, characters, or mechanics of the games. The choice of specific games is also important in this context. While some work with the media only as an embellishment of the space, others can directly develop media competences and teach the player to analyse media content, take a stance on it and develop critical thinking. The transferability to the real life of the individual is supported by working directly with the media. Of course, we could assume and argue that the necessity of analysing situations or evaluating danger in the game itself even without the presence of the media has its own meaning and can find application, but we have only focused on the media itself and such transferability would require further and deeper research. Therefore, this article serves more as a primer on the possibilities that digital games bring and the positive aspects they entail for the development of players' media competencies.

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<sup>49</sup> FROM SOFTWARE: *Dark Souls*. [digital game]. Tokyo : FromSoftware, Bandai Namco, 2011-2018.

<sup>50</sup> KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS: *Death Stranding*. [digital game]. San Mateo : Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2019.

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A woman with long hair, wearing a white lace dress with a black belt, stands in a cornfield. She is looking towards the horizon where the sun is setting, creating a warm, golden glow. The corn stalks are tall and dry, with some leaves showing signs of being eaten. The sky is filled with dark, dramatic clouds, suggesting a storm or late evening light.

Erika Moravčiková

# The Contexts of Hyperconsumerist Culture and Social Media Platforms

## ABSTRACT

The advent of social media and their platforms has accelerated the processes of diversion to experience and hyperconsumerism. The hyperconsumerist culture has penetrated all areas of our lives in a natural, sophisticated and inconspicuous way. This study focuses on select links between hyperconsumerism and social media, as well as on the rituals of consumption, their specific manifestations, forms and functions. We use OnlyFans, a social network with erotic and pornographic content, as a *pars pro toto* example of the above principles of consumption rituals. Its immense popularity testifies to the relativization of values, norms and taboos, detabooization – or an outright non-tabooization – of intimacy and consolidation of the cult of pleasure. Furthermore, we will conceptualize the invasion of digital media and the Internet, which accelerated both the expansion of pornography and its secularization and deprofessionalization, and an even greater ubiquity and accessibility to all age categories. We reflect on the effects of these changes on the digital natives, the so-called generation Z, and the nascent generation Alpha.

## KEY WORDS

Hyperconsumerist Culture. Social Media Platforms. Pornography. Detabooization of Intimacy. Onlyfans.

# 1 Introduction

*“It’s a story about us, the people they talked into spending money they don’t have on the things they don’t need and make an impression that won’t last on the people we don’t care about.”*

Jim Jackson, University of Surrey

Consumption currently plays one of the most important roles in the life of an individual and society as a whole. It satisfies our needs; it is instrumental in creating our identity and it shapes our entire culture. The lifestyle most of us pursue has been labelled with the term “consumerism” and our culture has the attribute “consumer”. French philosopher and sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky came up with his own periodization of the consumer society. He distinguishes three stages of development of consumer society, which he terms the three epochs of consumer capitalism. According to Lipovetsky, the first epoch began in the 19th century and ended with the Second World War. In this time period, the basic elements of capitalism were formed and established. The second stage of consumer society can be dated to the three decades after World War II, i.e., during the period of peak Fordism. Finally, the third stage of the consumer society, for which a new term “hyperconsumerism” was introduced, has started in the 1980s and continues to this day.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental difference between the period of hyperconsumerism and the previous stages is that the status motivation for buying consumer products no longer plays a significant role as it did in the previous stage. Fordism is characterized primarily by an ostentatious form of consumption<sup>2</sup>, i.e. consumption motivated by the pursuit of social status. A significant part of the lower social strata, which successfully established themselves in the middle class in the golden decades of the economic boom after World War II, has been confirming its newly acquired social status by escalating consumption.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, consumption in the period of hyperconsumerism is primarily determined by factors such as age, personal hobbies and the cultural or personal identity of the players. In this context, the French thinker speaks about the so-called “emotional consumption”, which evokes affective, imaginative and sensory experiences in the consumer: *“The third developmental phase is characterized by a new emotional bond between individuals and the procured goods: the primacy of experience is established and the social and individual significance of the consumer sphere changes in a way that goes hand in hand with today’s escalation of individualism.”*<sup>4</sup> This bond is built primarily on the “marketing of senses and experiences” and advertising, which places a greater emphasis on spectacularity, emotionality and metaphoricality than on the product itself. Our short excursion into the history of consumer culture was not an end in itself. By following the development, we concur with Lipovetsky that *“we are witnessing the advent of a hyperconsumerist culture based on the post-Fordist economy, with a constant increase in the choice and supply, hypersegmentation of markets, acceleration of the emergence of new products, a growing diversity and unstoppable growth in marketing”*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Paradoxní štěstí: Esej o hyperkonzumní společnosti*. Prague : Prostor, 2006, p. 30-42.

<sup>2</sup> Thorstein Veblen, American economist and sociologist of Norwegian origin, introduced the concept of ostentatious (or also demonstrative) consumption into the social sciences. Compare: BAGWELL, L. S., BERNHEIM, B. G.: Veblen Effects in a Theory of Conspicuous Consumption. In *The American Economic Review*, 1996, Vol. 86, No. 3. [online]. [2021-11-15]. Available at: <<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~lebelp/BagwellVeblenEffAER1996.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> See: LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Paradoxní štěstí: Esej o hyperkonzumní společnosti*. Prague : Prostor, 2006, p. 30-42.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 51-52.

<sup>5</sup> LIPOVETSKY, G., JUVIN, H.: *Globalizovaný Západ. Polemika o planetární kultuře*. Prague : Prostor, 2012, p. 36.

## 2 Methodology

Following the above-mentioned Lipovetsky's concept who uses the term "hyperconsumerism" for the third stage of consumer capitalism, we will work with the term "hyperconsumerist society"/"hyperconsumerist culture" throughout our study. The advent of social media and their platforms has accelerated the processes of consumption. The hyperconsumerist culture has penetrated all areas of our lives in a natural, sophisticated and inconspicuous way. It is so ubiquitous and pervasive that has become inconspicuous and invisible. The contemporary *homo hyperconsumericus* does not lag behind the "classics" of the above-mentioned era of ostentatious consumption. This era has been transformed into a spectacular lifestyle, presented mainly on social networks in unprecedented quantities and volumes. The aim of our theoretical study is to present the coordinates of hyperconsumerist society in an analytical and descriptive way (through the optics of simulacra, hyperreality and trends), as well as the rituals of consumption, and their specific manifestations, forms and functions on social media. These are manifested both in the proclivity towards addictive behaviour, which the social media algorithms multiplied through effective tools and functions such as *infinite scrolling and refreshing*. We use the social network OnlyFans as a *pars pro toto* example of the above principles of consumption rituals. It symbolizes an unhinged desire for material things, a luxurious lifestyle and financial security. This platform, delivering sexually explicit content (with an apt attribute of "personalized pornography") is, on the one hand, an example of the transition from the existing "observe and be observed" model (on social networks) to the "be paid and pay" model. On the other hand, its immense popularity testifies to the relativization of values, norms and taboos, detabooization – or an outright non-tabooization – of intimacy and consolidation of the cult of pleasure.

The second part of the text will be focused on the analysis of reflection of the phenomenon of pornography from the point of view of social sciences, with primary regard to its links to the ways of life in today's society under the influence of hyperconsumerism, sexual revolution, commodification and individualization of sexuality and sexual relations in late modernity. Furthermore, we will conceptualize the invasion of digital media and the Internet, which accelerated both the expansion of pornography and its secularization and deprofessionalization, and an even greater ubiquity and accessibility to all age categories. Last but not least, we will deal with the changing sexuality and the norms designed to regulate it from the perspective of the broader socio-economic context of life in today's hyper-consumer society. These trends are linked to paradigmatically significant cultural changes and the socio-cultural reality of contemporary man living in Bauman's<sup>6</sup> fluid modernity. Within the intentions of his thinking, this refers to a late modern society, also called by the adjective post-modern. However, Z. Bauman rejects this term. The Czech sociologist Miloslav Petrušek takes a similar position when he writes: "*Certainly, there is no such thing as a postmodern society, the postmodernists themselves avoid this phrase and, at most, limit themselves to the statement that it is necessary to distinguish between postmodernism as a set of artistic practices and a revolution in the aesthetic perception of the world and the postmodern<sup>7</sup> (or postmodernity) as a new, specific state of being, as a personal sensibility which overturns and changes lifestyles, customs and value systems, and which therefore radically intervenes in social life, especially at its daily level, and which pays particular attention to what practices establish (or destabilize) "order", which is gradually being replaced by an imperceptible, but certainly impressive, chaos.*"<sup>8</sup> At the same

<sup>6</sup> See: BAUMAN, Z.: *Tekuté časy. Život ve věku nejistoty*. Prague : Academia, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Today's man therefore suffers from frustrations stemming from the feeling of losing his own identity, which is often attributed to postmodernity. Zygmunt Bauman claims that it is not entirely clear on whether we can speak of today's society as a postmodern one. However, according to him, we can certainly talk about the postmodern mentality of the people who live in it.

<sup>8</sup> PETRUSEK, M.: *Společnosti pozdní doby*. Prague : SLON, 2007, p. 289-290.

time, we reflect on the effects of these changes on digital natives, the so-called generation Z, and the nascent generation Alpha. The preferences and value orientation of the observed generational cohort perhaps most significantly reflect the preferences of contemporary late modern culture – with a proclivity to hedonism, consumerism, individualization and narcissism. Miloslav Petrušek, Christopher Lash and Richard Sennet (cult theorists of the theory of the narcissistic individual and the theory of the narcissistic society) agree that narcissism is actually a state where the individual feels an incompleteness in the way they experience the living world and their life, which naturally manifests itself most prominently and emphatically in their intimate relationships, in eroticism and sexuality: *“Narcissus is chronically bored in his restless search for quick and momentary intimacy - emotional arousal without commitment and coercion, so he is promiscuous and often pansexual.”*<sup>9</sup>

We grasp the issue of the expansion of pornography in the context of the hyperconsumption culture not only from an axiological point of view (by discovering their values and influences), but also from the perspective of multi-layered “levels” (segments). We use the psychological-scientific, sociologizing and especially culturological approaches. We do not consider the multiplication of discourses on this issue to be vague, but rather experiential.

### 3 Hyperconsumers Captivated by Trends

Human society is characterized by special features that make up the culture with its typical forms of socio-cultural regulations. These include norms, values, rules and patterns shared by members of society. Through its mechanisms, it influences the ontogenetic development. It determines what is necessary, suitable and/or inappropriate and prohibited for an individual. People’s priorities have long been attuned to the group. Be it the family, immediate surroundings, urban or rural society, the state or nation. The processes that formed the specific needs in humans take place in this environment. We will term this phenomenon “fascination with trends” in this part of our work. Traversing through individual social classes and groups, we can identify different equivalents and names for trendiness: to be “in” (or “out”), “chic”, “trendy”, “cool”, “hot”, “fresh”, etc.

The use of these terms covers a large part of society (but mainly the young generation) and expresses an entire system of meanings and associations. The term “trend” stands for material objects of everyday and occasional use, as well as abstract manifestations in the form of ideas, opinions and attitudes. It has to do with specific beliefs of a group of people about specific objects, phenomena and activities they respect and profess, and which are more preferred than others in a certain period of time. Such preferences are primarily formed by mass-media and digital media and although not strictly defined, they are often considered to be the norm and a manifestation of a particular social status. In today’s hyperconsumerist culture, they happen to be at a high place on the list of priorities of the young who use them to navigate in their own specific world of symbols and values.

The mixture of rivalry, narcissistic self-love, mimeticism and freedom of speech is the driving force behind the current fascination with trends. Today’s social assumptions are mainly focused on the process of personalization. Individuals have acquired an unprecedented position in society. Fashion is no longer a dominant element in the regulation of social relations as was the case in the past. However, it maintained its power to differentiate between individuals. People no longer use it to declare their affiliation to a certain social group and it is primarily a manifestation of individual uniqueness and the hypertrophy of one’s own self. The media and popular culture have created a modern system of social regulation and coercion. They force individuals to

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<sup>9</sup> PETRUSEK, M.: *Společnosti pozdní doby*. Prague : SLON, 2007, p. 208.



constantly demonstrate their personal prestige through trends. Because only those individuals who follow such principles are worthy of other people's attention.<sup>10</sup> Philosopher Jozef Palitefka notes another interesting fact in this context: people are ruled by the "dictatorship of 'is'": "We don't know of this dictatorship, yet we unknowingly succumb to it. We read, we write, and we think what "is" read, written and thought... We pull away from the crowds as others do. We consider rude what "is" considered rude, we praise what "is" praised. The characteristic feature of "is" is mediocrity. In the "is", this mediocrity is even desired. Although we try to differentiate ourselves from others, we are really talking about this mediocrity. The mystery loses its power, and what is valuable and deep becomes shallow and mundane. The "is" levels everything out".<sup>11</sup>

With the help of the media, new cultural patterns have been ingrafted into everyday life, providing individuals with freedom of choice, but only to a limited extent. The task of the individual is then to find the middle ground between imitating the patterns and establishing his/her own uniqueness and differentiating from others. Today's superficial society has convinced the individual that one does not become a personality naturally, but only after creating one's own "cool" and "trendy" style. The Society of Individuals<sup>12</sup>, as Norbert Elias aptly calls it in his eponymous book and Gilles Lipovetsky in his *The Era of Emptiness*, describes the superficial values of a personalized society. He describes "an immense wave that has gradually deprived all institutions, values and goals of their content and essence...".<sup>13</sup>

We trivialize our values, motivated by the agonal principle and interpersonal rivalry. Trends benefit from this tension. Culturologist Z. Slušná aptly described it as follows: "The undisguised and non-tabooed hedonism linked to the experienced, the aestheticized narcissism, adoration of youth and exclusion of the "old", the effort to be "cool" or "sexy", the need to be "in" and engaging – these are just some of the expressive principles of the hyperconsumerist society and its culture".<sup>14</sup> The trends show us how this can be done without much effort, and of course, for an adequate amount of money. The trends help us to look for our superficial, selfish, narcissistic "self" in this perverse way.

In the following chapters, we will take a closer look at the most fundamental areas of social media that define/distort the trends. The consumer society, which this part of our work is dedicated to, is subject to complex mechanisms of the cultural industry. However, the surface-plane dictatorship of digital media, advertising business, and the show business world of celebrities (influencers) and the related aesthetic (dis)taste will not be our primary focus. We will try to debunk the particular and specific mechanisms and means that create the trends on social media. The following chapters of our study represent a unified whole, which portrays our views on the essence of the hyperconsumerist rituals on social media, and the image of its bearers. Its individual parts are interconnected and co-operate at different levels. However, their common denominator is the ability of opinion-forming and the strength to promote new phenomena in our daily lives.

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<sup>10</sup> V. Jakubovská examines these problems in greater detail in her paper *Return to Body and Corporeality through Phenomenology of Perception*, when she draws attention to the body and its manifestations in the hyperconsumer society, the obsession with the body of modern man, and the concept of man as a collector of experiences. See more: JAKUBOVSKÁ, V.: *Return to Body and Corporeality through Phenomenology of Perception*. In *SGEM 2016 : Proceedings from 3rd International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences and Arts. Anthropology, Archeology, History & Philosophy. Vol. 2 History, Philosophy*. Albena : STEF92 Technology, 2016, p. 917-924.

<sup>11</sup> PALITEFKA, J.: Čas, dejiny a smrť v diele Martina Heideggera. In GABAŠOVÁ, K. et al. (eds.): *(De)tabuizácia smrti vo filozoficko-antropologickom diskurze*. Nitra : Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, 2016, p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> See: ELIAS, N.: *Spoločnosť individuí*. Bratislava : Kaligram, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Éra prázdnoty*. Prague : Prostor, 2003, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> SLUŠNÁ, Z.: Simulakrá v kontexte hyperkonzumu: zvädzanie k zážitku a konzumu ako inovovaná funkcia nových médií a fotografie. In *European Journal of Media, Art & Photography*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 69.

## 4 Digital Influencers in the Context of the Hyper-consumerist Culture

In recent years, especially so-called microcelebrities, which marketing and communication practice terms “influencers”<sup>15</sup> (often narrowed to “social media influencers”), have played a key role in the process of hyperconsumerism.<sup>16</sup> As stated by media theoretist P. Mikuláš, they “carry out their activities in several ways, mainly through blogs, photoblogs, videoblogs, Instagram or Facebook posts, or by creating videos on YouTube. They are referred to as bloggers, vloggers or youtubers.”<sup>17</sup> They undoubtedly set certain standards, ideals and patterns of behaviour, which their followers compare with. The users of social networks increasingly perceive their personal value instruments taken over by likes and comments – or in comparison and confrontation with influencers. The creation of own-self-esteem through compulsive comparisons with our friends or influencers can make us question ourselves. In particular, Generation “Z”<sup>18</sup> and the nascent Generation “Alpha”, is under the constant dictatorship of trends spreading across the entire virtual environment. According to psychologist and media theorist K. Fichnová, the period of puberty is a period of “*formation and consolidation of values and value orientation. These processes are largely a reflection of the social environment in which the pubescent grows up, including the family, but the exogenous influences on the formation of one’s self-concept can also include the media.*”<sup>19</sup> She continues: “*It is most obvious that the media have an effect on the perception of self and formation of the self-concept, as well as the formation of one’s identity.*”<sup>20</sup> According to Slovak culturologist Kristína Jakubovská, these tendencies question and downgrade our true understanding of -self and -selves and contribute to further fragmentation of our cultural identities and the sense of social integrity.<sup>21</sup>

The stimulation for an ever-increasing performance and a constant comparison with others on social networks often results in mental imbalance, disharmony, depression, anxiety or loneliness. This is evidenced by Justin Rosenstein, a former Google and Facebook developer and the father of the “thumbs up” button: “*The I like it button was intended to spread positivity and love in the world. The idea that one day the lack of likes will cause depression in teenagers, and can lead to political polarization, did not occur to us at all.*”<sup>22</sup> C. Newport, the author of the bestseller “Digital Minimalism”, says that unlimited online activity underscores the ability of social networks to influence our moods: “*The constant exposure to the most elaborate display of our friends may induce feelings of inadequacy – mainly when we feel down – and it is one of the very effective ways for the teenagers to be excluded from the society of peers.*”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>15</sup> MIKULÁŠ, P.: *Celebrity v mediálnej a marketingovej komunikácii*. Nitra : Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, 2020, p. 67., See also: SPÁLOVÁ, L., HODINKOVÁ, D.: Influencers and Civic Participation in Migration – The Reflection in/congruence of the Social Media and Identity of Influencer in a Social Networking Sites Environment. In *DotComm*, 2020, Vol. 8, No.1, p. 17-34. [online]. [2022-04-11]. Available at: <[https://www.eammm.eu/dot-comm-pdf/2020\\_01.pdf](https://www.eammm.eu/dot-comm-pdf/2020_01.pdf)>.

<sup>16</sup> MIKULÁŠ, P.: *Celebrity v mediálnej a marketingovej komunikácii*. Nitra : Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, 2020, p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> For more informations about Generation “Z”, see: SPÁLOVÁ, L., MIKULÁŠ, P., PÚCHOVSKÁ, O.: Attitudes towards Different Influencer Categories – Exploration of Generation Z. In *Communication Today*, 2021, Vol. 12, No.1, p. 44-60.

<sup>19</sup> FICHNOVÁ, K.: *Masmédiá - ich apercpcia pubescentmi a črty tvorivej osobnosti*. Bratislava : Európska akadémia Manažmentu, Marketingu a Médii, o. z., 2015, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> JAKUBOVSKÁ, K.: Physicality as a Determiner of the Quality of Communication among Cultures (Interpersonal and Intercultural Perspective). In *SGEM 2016 : Proceedings from 3rd International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences and Arts. Anthropology, Archeology, History & Philosophy. Vol. 2 History, Philosophy*. Albená : STEF92 Technology, 2016, p. 776.

<sup>22</sup> NEWPORT, C.: *Digitálny minimalizmus*. Bratislava : Lindeni, 2019, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 11.

Another negative phenomenon accompanying the consumption of content created by influencers is the need to surround ourselves with branded items. The so-called “hypebeast” subculture is another evidence of this phenomenon<sup>24</sup>: it is characterized by expensive branded clothing with a distinctive image of the logo through which the wearer reveals to his/her surroundings that he/she can afford this piece of clothing or accessories. Following this type of profiles leads young people to materialism because materialism is one of the tools that influencers present themselves through on social networks. This concept does not only apply to branded clothing and accessories, but also expensive cars, apartments, vacations etc. However, not every influencer can afford such a luxury, which has given rise to various ways to gain access to luxury items. One of the most popular trends is online shopping for branded clothing and accessories, which the influencer orders for the purpose of creating photos or videos. These things are then returned undamaged to the e-shop and the influencer receives his/her money back or exchanges them for other goods, which creates a certain circulation of money and luxury items. The influencers who buy and return products this way come from all social classes and their followers might never figure out what social class these influencers actually belong to. This extreme way of presenting an above-standard luxury life – even if the influencer can’t afford it – is all the more controversial. Back in 2020, Chinese blogger Lizhonger revealed a rather controversial way used by many Chinese influencers to get into the most expensive hotels and restaurants in China and publish their photos. These influencers use the group on China’s WeChat called the “Shanghai Female Socialite” to get into these places, which are extremely expensive by Chinese standards. It is a group of young women from Shanghai who paid an entrance fee to the group and submitted an account statement stating that there is at least 100,000 yuan (approximately EUR 13,000) in their savings account.<sup>25</sup> The group presents itself with information about the most expensive fashion brands through various events, afternoon tea parties, knowing influential people on social networks and sharing updates on rich and influential educated men. In reality, however, the group has primarily served to share various ways and information on how to look rich. Membership in this group also included the sharing of experiences and costs required for these experiences. It was a way in which a group of several girls shared the cost of renting one hotel room or having afternoon tea in an expensive hotel, and they created a series of photographs independently of each other. This is one of the multiple ways the influencers use to get into places they can’t afford, but they are willing to do anything to create the illusion of an above-standard way of life. These extreme ways of achieving the desired status is inextricably linked to envy. Watching the influencers self-present themselves on social networks makes young people feel jealous and envious. This unpleasant feeling can force young people to engage in similar practices to approximate to their role models. However, this cultivates materialism in pubescents and adolescents, which can later have an adverse effect on financial management. If they admire the digital influencers who take pride in their success, perfect looks and money, envy will continue to grow. And all this despite the fact that it is only an illusion – a simulacrum. The envy of followers will be constantly fueled by the pride of false happiness of successful influencers.

Seconding Z. Slušná, we concur that *“the body is no longer just a means of reception, but increasingly so a means of expression; it is a capital and an investment. A narcissistic and omnivorous hedonist judges others on the basis of how much they are able and willing to invest*

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<sup>24</sup> The so-called “hypebeast” subculture associated with streetwear has been developing alongside the use of leading clothing brands and logos since the mid-nineties. The “hypebeast” concept can be defined as clothes and accessories to simply impress others. This trend is inspired by branded clothes and logos. The “hypebeasts” usually wear different labels at the same time to show off their wealth and popular trends.

<sup>25</sup> KOETSE, M.: *The ‘Fake Rich’ of Shanghai: Peking inside a wannabe socialite WeChat group*. [online]. [2022-04-11]. Available at: <<https://www.whatsonweibo.com/the-fake-rich-of-shanghai-peeking-inside-a-wannabe-socialite-wechat-group/>>.

to achieve their own perfection.”<sup>26</sup> An individual is searching for his/her identity in various ways, but above all in interaction with the social group and the media environment. As claims Gilles Lipovetsky, we live in an *age of seduction*, and there is a hard struggle for the autonomy of the individual.<sup>27</sup> The dangers are lurking everywhere. They capture the human senses and lure us at every step of the way. It is not difficult to be seduced in an era, which “*rejects and discards the hierarchy of universal traditional norms, values and meanings... forces man to create his own hierarchy of values... it just so happens that people gradually change into a herd where one cannot to develop his personality...*”<sup>28</sup> Postmodernists speak of the right of the individual to seek their own values and priorities, and of the futility of seeking universal and intersubjective values.<sup>29</sup>

## 5 Transformation of Sexuality and Intimacy – The Socio-cultural Outlooks of “Porn Culture”

Achieving success among influencers is challenging because competition is high and the chances of success in a market full of competitors are low. With the coming failures due to strong competition, youth and adolescents may come into contact with certain recommendations on how to succeed and make money online as quickly as possible. After a short survey on social networks such as YouTube, this age cohort is very quickly pointed to the lesser-known but increasingly popular social network OnlyFans, which has very aptly managed to connect the services of social networks, pornographic channels and Internet services. The users who use and promote this social network through other social networks (Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, etc.) talk about very fast money and monthly earnings, which in some cases exceed several hundred thousand dollars per month. The vision of such earnings is therefore massively attractive, especially for teenagers and adolescents from “Z” generation, who don’t have a regular financial income or are financially dependent on their parents. Among other things, we can consider the lack of discretion (non-separation of the private from the public sphere of life) and a benevolent relationship to the disclosure of everything, including sexual experiences, to be a significant characteristic of the “Z” generation.

The current porn industry is in crisis mainly due to the expansion of the Internet and various streaming sites, thanks to which the actors don’t have to share their fees with the crew. Due to the above, the classic pornographic industry goes to extremes and users have the opportunity to choose from pornographic videos of various genres and categories, covering the most diverse fetishes and experiments. For this reason, pornography is becoming “boring” and “unsatisfactory”, and users are looking for entertainment beyond the legal boundaries, especially in the field of social networks and e.g. personalized pornographic platforms such as OnlyFans. The rise of digital and social media has caused amateur video to dominate over the last decade. The rapid rise of the Internet has only confirmed the hegemony of pornography, and the current trends suggest a steady boom. Filming porn films on home digital devices (cameras, smartphones, etc.) has become less costly and much more flexible, opening up a world of possibilities even for untrained amateurs. Additionally, camcorders made it possible to get in close proximity, which further enhanced the authenticity and documentary style of the footage, and sometimes even erased the distance between the observer and the observed, making the depicted sex much more intimate and “real”. The secularization and deprofessionalization of

<sup>26</sup> SLUŠNÁ, Z.: Simulakrá v kontexte hyperkonzumu: zväzanie k zážitku a konzumu ako inovovaná funkcia nových médií a fotografie. In *European Journal of Media, Art & Photography*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Říše pomijivosti*. Prague : Prostor, 2002, p. 243.

<sup>28</sup> JURINA, J.: *Postmodernizmus a jeho civilizačno – kultúrne konzekvencie*. Trnava : Dobrá kniha, 2004, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 31.

pornography – a state in which virtually anyone can become a porn director or producer – has significantly differentiated the entire segment.<sup>30</sup>

The first attempts to define pornography can be traced to as early as the 19th century, but the experts haven't unanimously arrived at the exact definition of this term. There is a general consensus that pornography is sexual imaging or acts that can be represented by words, images, photographs or film<sup>31</sup> In general, we are talking about a variety of content types, which are all covered by the term. Despite this broad conceptual definition of this term, most experts studying the pornography phenomenon agree on “a clear ban on the presentation of sex with children in any form, as well as sex with feces, animals and sex with unacceptable violence. These sexual practices are clearly labelled as inappropriate and have nothing to do with pornographic production. They need to be combated and banned because they degrade human dignity.”<sup>32</sup> To some extent, this rule is also followed in standard pornographic film studios, with child pornography being directly classed as a criminal offense, while the seriousness of sexual abuse of animals depends on the legislation each given country.

Following the research of sociologist J. Kalenda, we have summarized the conditions for the spread of pornography in the following three complementary and successive processes: 1. sexual revolution at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s (and the growth of individualization in the intimate sphere) 2. transformation of (media) technologies mediating pornography in a completely different quality and especially quantity, and 3. diffusion of the pornographic genre into mass consumer culture, in which the two previous trends partially overlap.<sup>33</sup> J. Kalenda sees several reasons behind the massive spread of pornography in the last decade of the 20th century: he identifies them not only in the changes in sexuality or the norms intended for its regulation, but also in the technological transformations and socio-economic contexts of the time.<sup>34</sup> British sociologist Anthony Giddens describes some of the most important consequences of the change in the intimate sphere and sexuality that started off in the 1970s: “The transformation of love is a manifestation of modernity as well as the discovery of sexuality; and both are directly linked to the phenomena of reflexivity and self-identity.”<sup>35</sup> Sexuality has thus become reflexively construable for humans, i.e. to some extent shapeable according to the individual preferences, and at the same time it has become a means of building and living different lifestyles and sub-styles. Sex has become more accessible; it is not tied to married life or reproduction, and possibilities of greater competition in the choice of partners are emerging. Science and technological progress have made significant contributions to the liberation of sexuality through the discovery and subsequent massive spread of hormonal contraception. Likewise, artificial insemination has separated reproduction from sexual behaviour, not to mention profound transformational changes in the socio-economic sphere, which have subsequently determined the personal lives of individuals. Thus, “sexuality has become something modifiable, it has opened up to the possibility of being shaped in different ways, it has become a potential ‘property’ of man”.<sup>36</sup> The above-mentioned aspects have helped to significantly shift and modify sexual scenarios not only at the micro-level (individual) but also at the macro-level (de-tabooing of the sexual area in general). “Erotic pleasure becomes ‘sexuality’ as an investigation into it produces texts, manuals, and research that distinguish ‘normal sexuality’ from its pathological forms.”<sup>37</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See: KALENDA, J.: Pornography as Part of the Socio-cultural Changes in Lifestyle in Late Modernity. In KUBÁTOVÁ, H. (ed.): *Ways of Life in the Late Modernity*. Olomouc : Palacký University, 2013, p. 83-103.

<sup>31</sup> HAMACKOVÁ, O.: Analýza fenoménu pornografie. In *Prohuman*, 2018. [2021-10-04]. Available at: <https://www.prohuman.sk/psychologia/analyza-fenomenu-pornografie>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>33</sup> KALENDA, J.: Pornography as Part of the Socio-cultural Changes in Lifestyle in Late Modernity. In KUBÁTOVÁ, H. (ed.): *Ways of Life in the Late Modernity*. Olomouc : Palacký University, 2013, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 87.

<sup>35</sup> GIDDENS, A.: *Proměna intimity. Sexualita, láska a erotika v moderních společnostech*. Prague : Portál, 2012, p. 45.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 30.

The development and transformation of scenarios does not only provide the plurality of options in bringing pleasure and promoting intimacy. The changes in social relations, mass culture, media presentation, the deepening inequalities, globalization, postmodern thinking, narcissism, almost limitless freedom of the individual, rapid consumption of entertainment, pleasures and many other aspects have negative effects on the area of sexuality in individuals. French philosopher and sociologist G. Lipovetsky writes that: *“postmodern society has no idols nor taboos, it does not see itself in a celebratory way, it has no historical project... emptiness takes hold of us... we consume our own existence.”*<sup>38</sup> According to him, we have witnessed the onset of a new order of love in recent decades, in which an increasingly individualized individual lacks social grounding and morality that would regulate their actions in any way. According to him, the reflexively oriented individual sexuality is subject to the free choice of man in which no one from outside can interfere because that would result in questioning the autonomy of the individual.<sup>39</sup> The right to pleasure and sexual expression definitely triumphed over the puritan moral imperatives from the beginning of the previous century, and society entered a phase of mass voyeurism.<sup>40</sup> J. Kavenda also aptly comments on this situation, noting that *“the rejection of traditions and conventions, the onset of individualism and youth culture, as well as other (explosive) ingredients of the socio-cultural revolution of the 1970s did not go unanswered in the sexual sphere. (...) the field of eroticism and consumerism is as clearly interconnected, and only ruins remained of the former high culture: advertising jingles, soap operas or obscene porn films. The search for one’s own liberation from the bondage and the enjoyment of life without a sense of responsibility and pressure of the strict norms have become the agenda.”*<sup>41</sup>

The modern civilization does not hide sex; on the contrary, it is constantly the subject of debate. It is in a state of constant verbalization, definition, redefining, delimitation, setting boundaries. In this way, we create space for the emergence, naming and construction of new sexual activities, identities and projects of individual sexual ideas. Subsequent analysis and description extends to the public sphere, where the moral distress associated with intrapsychic scenarios and the experience of one’s own sexuality is neutralized.<sup>42</sup> Last but not least, intimacy has become one of the most important objects of pop culture: *“Through it, what we perceive as personal is objectified, in terms of worldview, sexuality or taste. This form of personal intimacy becomes a matter for the public that may be embarrassing towards its recipients as it still is a taboo in everyday communication. On the other hand, the recipient receives the assurance that it is a natural part of life for each of us.”*<sup>43</sup> In the words of the sociologist Z. Bauman: *“The postmodern body is above all a consumer of experience. It consumes and digests and experiences. It is an instrument of pleasure because it uses the natural ability to respond to stimuli.”*<sup>44</sup> Such a body must be efficient in terms of perception and ability to respond, absorb pleasure, sexual, gastronomic, visual and more.<sup>45</sup>

The explicit depiction of the human body, sexual pleasure, intercourse, as well as the discourse on sexuality, became paradoxical. On the one hand, they show a supremely intimate act between partners, on the other hand, they are publicly portrayed through words and images

<sup>38</sup> LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Éra prázdnoty. Úvahy o současném individualismu*. Prague : Prostor, 2003, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Soumrak povinnosti. Bezbolestná etika nových demokratických časů*. Prague : Prostor, 2011, p. 67.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> KALENDA, J.: Pornography as Part of the Socio-cultural Changes in Lifestyle in Late Modernity. In KUBÁTOVÁ, H. (ed.): *Ways of Life in the Late Modernity*. Olomouc : Palacký University, 2013, p. 89.

<sup>42</sup> VALKOVÁ, L.: Technológia vo sfére intimity = koniec romantickéj lásky? In *Culturologica slovacica*, 2020, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 128. [online]. [2022-01-02]. Available at: <[http://www.culturologicaslovaca.ff.ukf.sk/images/No5/Valkova\\_Technologie%20intimity.pdf](http://www.culturologicaslovaca.ff.ukf.sk/images/No5/Valkova_Technologie%20intimity.pdf)>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem,

<sup>44</sup> BAUMAN, Z.: *Úvahy o postmoderní době*. Prague : SLON, 2006, p. 78-79.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 78-79.

in the pornographic industry. As a result, sex, sexuality, and intimacy become an affair for the public and, in Foucault's sense, power structures that can portray them by themselves.<sup>46</sup> Porn has begun to fulfill some social functions and it became part of normal mass consumption, i.e. a commodity that can meet a variety of needs. The free availability of pornographic material on the Internet is a major problem today especially for young people who have access to pornographic content without any restrictions. We consider the possible negative consequences of OnlyFans-type platforms on children and adolescents to be significantly problematic.<sup>47</sup> When a child or an adolescent teenager comes into contact with these kinds of "instructions", it is easy for them to bypass the age limit of 18+ and start creating the same kind of content, because they are literally encouraged and instructed to do so in a social networking environment. In addition to sexual deviations, the phenomenon of "porn culture" is largely manifested, which has to do with unrealistic ideas and disturbed social interactions supported by the mass media culture. *"Porn culture teaches girls that their value comes from the attention men and boys give them. In order to receive that attention, they have to morph themselves into an object for male pleasure. Boys have learned from pornography that they have a right to use and abuse women and girls. Some boys and men have been so convinced of this that when told "no" by women, they become enraged and filled with hatred."*<sup>48</sup> The awakening of sexuality in young people is a natural part of adolescence, however, excessive consumption of pornographic content can have significantly negative effects. As O. Hamacková states in her study titled Analysis of the Pornography Phenomenon: *"Pornography portrays the primal desires and physical satisfaction, while courtesy, commitment, and long-term relationships are absent. It is a fantasy world in which women are permanently aroused, long for sex with unknown men and always reach orgasm."*<sup>49</sup> Pornography does not depict a real intimate relationship between two people. It's just a fantasy – a staged sexual act. Excessive consumption of this content among young people creates an unrealistic idea of sexual life, disrupts relationships and causes sexual dissatisfaction. For a pubescent or adolescent individual without previous experience, the consumption of pornographic content can seriously affect his or her sexual life and his/her idea of a life with a partner can assume unrealistic and idealized contours.

With reference to sociological theories (Bauman, Lipovetsky, Giddens, Bourdieu, Kavenda), a social actor who comes into contact with pornography is thus primarily a romantic and hedonistic consumer, striving to find the satisfaction of their sexual fantasies and desires. Indeed, once moral standards were sufficiently relaxed and new ethical and aesthetic attitudes were partially de-regulated, and a parallel technological advancement allowed for pornography not only to be mass-produced but also mass-disseminated, pornography was free to become one of the most profitable commodities of consumer capitalism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, as summarized by J. Kavenda.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> VALKOVÁ, L.: Technológia vo sfére intimity = koniec romantickej lásky? In *Culturologica slovacca*, 2020, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 127. [online]. [2022-01-02]. Available at: <[http://www.culturologicaslovaca.ff.ukf.sk/images/No5/Valkova\\_Technologie%20intimity.pdf](http://www.culturologicaslovaca.ff.ukf.sk/images/No5/Valkova_Technologie%20intimity.pdf)>.

<sup>47</sup> According to research by Barna Group, conducted among 18- to 24-year-old adults, up to 96% of respondents do not think that pornography is something negative. Nine out of ten teenagers agree. And although the overwhelming majority of pornography consumption is a male problem, nearly one in five women admits to also watching it. Compare: DREHER, R.: *Benedictova voľba*. Bratislava : Postoj media, 2017, p. 275.

<sup>48</sup> WALKER, M.: *Sex Dolls Show Us What Men Want from Real Women – We Should Pay Attention*. [online]. [2021-10-12]. Available at: <<https://www.feministcurrent.com/2018/09/08/sex-dolls-extension-men-want-real-women/>>.

<sup>49</sup> HAMACKOVÁ, O.: Analýza fenoménu pornografia. In *Prohuman*, 2018. [2021-10-04]. Available at: <<https://www.prohuman.sk/psychologia/analiza-fenomenu-pornografia>>.

<sup>50</sup> See: KALENDA, J.: Pornography as Part of the Socio-cultural Changes in Lifestyle in Late Modernity. In KUBÁTOVÁ, H. (ed.): *Ways of Life in the Late Modernity*. Olomouc : Palacký University, 2013, p. 83-103.

## 5.1 OnlyFans as an Example of Spiritual and Material Hyperconsumerism

OnlyFans is a London-based prepaid online service that has been in operation since 2016 and is becoming more and more popular every year. The site provides content creators with the opportunity to earn money from subscribers – or fans – who subscribe to their content.<sup>51</sup> It therefore works on a pay-per-view basis. This content is diverse and includes everything from fitness trainers, musicians, hostesses – to sexual content creators who regularly publish online posts for the paying fans. This site allows content creators, i.e. contributors, to earn money from the fans who pay for access to their content. The content creators are paid monthly, but there is also a possibility of one-time earnings and various other ways of monetizing.

The OnlyFans search term directs us to many online instructions on how to use this platform and recommendations on what content works best on this platform. The site itself is not available to users under the age of 18, however, there are various guidelines on how to circumvent this rule. The rapid increase in popularity of this platform came with the COVID-19 pandemic when the influencers themselves started to contribute with paid content and the site subsequently became known to young people. According to the “The Evening Standard”, OnlyFans has essentially become a paid platform and a replacement for Instagram with NSFW<sup>52</sup> content.<sup>53</sup> According to the site’s Vice President, the number of new OnlyFans users increased by more than seventy-five percent in April 2020<sup>54</sup> alone, with approximately 150,000 new users every day.<sup>55</sup> OnlyFans is not only popularized by influencers, but also by other popular websites, such as refresher.sk, which is primarily aimed at the young generation. These sites write about some of the most bizarre cases of how money can be earned on this platform<sup>56</sup>. Their attention and interest in this platform was given a boost in the second half of 2020. The celebrities who opened a personal profile on this platform with various intentions also played a huge role in its popularization. These celebrities include Beyoncé, Cardi B, Tyler Posey, Michael B. Jordan and many others. It was the Covid 19 pandemic which attracted large numbers of celebrities and microcelebrities to the OnlyFans platform, bringing sexual work to the fore of people’s consciousness and making it increasingly “mainstream”. Despite these changes, not all content creators are satisfied. Micro-celebrities who are active and successful on other social networks often try to change the policy of the platform itself by sharing content that is exclusive, but still not explicit and sexual. Sex workers, although dissatisfied with the increase, are calling on these micro-celebrities to fight the stigmas of sex work in addition to working

<sup>51</sup> ARCENEUX, M.: *I Don't Want to Die Poor: Essays*. New York : Atria Books, 2020, p. 151.

<sup>52</sup> NSFW - *Not Safe For Work* - Internet slang used to indicate an online post that may contain explicit content.

<sup>53</sup> HEATHMAN, A.: What is OnlyFans? The NSFW social network shouted out by Beyoncé. In *Evening Standard*. Released on 6. May 2020. [online]. Available at: <<https://www.standard.co.uk/tech/what-is-onlyfans-social-network-beyonce-a4433486.html>>.

<sup>54</sup> This phenomenon was caused by the oncoming wave of the SARS Cov-19 pandemic and especially by the recurring lockdowns. The pandemic has significantly determined the entire media (digital) culture: HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., PRAVDOVÁ, H., BLAHÚT, D.: Post-Lockdown Metamorphoses of Television Culture. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 88-99.; GÁLIK, S., OPRALA, B.: Temporal Changes under the Influence of Digital Media. In *Communication Today*, 2021, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 4-12.

<sup>55</sup> KLEIN, Y.: (2020). Parents: Do You Know the Dangers of OnlyFans? In *Evolve treatment centres*. [online]. [2021-08-13]. Available at: <<https://evolvvetreatment.com/blog/dangers-onlyfans/>>.

<sup>56</sup> Link to posts under the “OnlyFans” tag on refresher.sk: <https://refresher.sk/tag/onlyfans>. Here’s a few examples of the posts for the readers to better understand their nature: “A 21-year-old girl earns a hundred thousand a month by posing like a dog on OnlyFans. She obeys and men pay her for it.”; “The Czech Xholakys at OnlyFans: A fan wanted to buy a photo of a used tampon from me. I sold it for 100 euro”; “A navy officer filmed porn at a nuclear submarine base. Her OnlyFans account has been revealed”; “A believer-model from a Christian family earns \$200,000 a month at OnlyFans with her photos. Her faith does not limit her.”; “A seminar was held at an American university on how to start a career at OnlyFans”; “Prisoners in Mexico earn money with OnlyFans videos. They film oral sex and gangbangs.”



on the OnlyFans platform.<sup>57</sup> They present the view that (sexual) influencers should not only use OnlyFans as a kind of income, but that they should raise awareness of the industry. With the arrival of micro-celebrities on this platform, user expectations also began to rise in direct proportion. Predominantly male fans have begun to complain on social networks (e.g. Reddit, Twitter) that many of their favorite influencers, who have become part of OnlyFans, reject nudity. Many of these micro-celebrities ask for four times more payment for exclusive content than the average monthly subscription, but their content is much less explicit than the vast majority of users is used to.<sup>58</sup> In his study<sup>59</sup>, Paul Rayn notes the changes in the sex industry that have made it possible for amateur content to air on platforms such as OnlyFans. However, according to him, it is premature to predict the long-term impact of OnlyFans on digital sex work. However, it concludes that *“the platform is successfully filling a vacuum in hosting the explosion of micro-celebrities that has amassed huge followers on Instagram and Twitter by offering them and their subscribers easy payment solutions to view content.”*<sup>60</sup> And he sums up: *“Crucially, it is allowing for the broadcast of sexually explicit material at a time when the community guidelines of sites like Instagram have become more restrictive. (...) The marketing of OnlyFans to a broad church of Instagram influencers, bloggers, athletes and models provides a new digital space for sex workers whose successful self-branding facilitates the conversion of not just their bodies but also their everyday sexual lives into monetized content.”*<sup>61</sup>

The site offers a variety of paid content, including sexual content of all kinds that users can purchase. The content creators usually have OnlyFans linked to another social network where they post photos or videos to attract new fans. This content is therefore partially available to all users of social networks. Twitter does not block explicit content, which makes the promoted content of these contributors available to the general public.<sup>62</sup> OnlyFans users also include those who like to brag about their success, the money they earn on this platform per month, the content they add and the content that earns them most money.<sup>63</sup> Some users have also admitted that OnlyFans is their sole source of income thanks to which they make a living and have a higher standard of living compared to their previous jobs. There are a number of videos on YouTube explaining how to monetize the photos of your feet, tongue and other concepts that may seem innocent at first glance. When a teenager comes into contact with these “instructions”, it is easy for him/her to start creating the same content because he/she is literally encouraged to do so. Yael Klein<sup>64</sup>, editor-in-chief of Evolve treatment, which offers treatment and outpatient centres for teens struggling with mental health, has alerted the parents to the OnlyFans threat.

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<sup>57</sup> Researchers from the University of Ghent M. Vlerick and J. van Hove in their study titled *Revolutionising digital sex work: an analysis of the impact of OnlyFans on sex workers* titled analyze other aspects of digital sex work on social networks, in particular the impact of OnlyFans on sex workers. See more: VLERICK, M., Van HOVE, J.: *Revolutionising Digital Sex Work: An Analysis of the Impact of OnlyFans on Sex Workers*. Ghent : Ghent University, 2021, p. 1-14. [online]. [2022-01-12]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353236967\\_Revolutionising\\_digital\\_sex\\_work\\_an\\_analysis\\_of\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_OnlyFans\\_on\\_sex\\_workers](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353236967_Revolutionising_digital_sex_work_an_analysis_of_the_impact_of_OnlyFans_on_sex_workers)>.

<sup>58</sup> There is a ranking on OnlyFans where the best creators are placed, based on the income they have received in the past period for example. Many original creators complain that the influx of micro-celebrities known from other social networks is significantly changing the order of this ranking, because it is these that are gaining prominence. As a result, they lose their subscribers and their followers.

<sup>59</sup> See: RAYN, P.: *Netporn and the Amateur Turn on OnlyFans*. In *Male Sex Work in the Digital Age*, p. 119-136. [online]. [2021-12-12]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331900947\\_Netporn\\_and\\_the\\_Amateur\\_Turn\\_on\\_OnlyFans](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331900947_Netporn_and_the_Amateur_Turn_on_OnlyFans)>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 133.

<sup>62</sup> Content offered by Twitter after entering the OnlyFans search term: Available at: <[https://twitter.com/search?q=onlyfans&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=onlyfans&src=typed_query)>.

<sup>63</sup> Tutorials on how to make money at OnlyFans: Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=how+to+earn+money+on+onlyfans](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=how+to+earn+money+on+onlyfans)>.

<sup>64</sup> KLEIN, Y.: *Parents: Do You Know the Dangers of OnlyFans?* In *Evolve Treatment Centres*. [online]. [2021-08-13]. Available at: <<https://evolvreatment.com/blog/dangers-onlyfans/>>.

She draws attention not only to the fact that adolescents can consume explicit content by these contributors, but also that teenagers may think that by supporting these contributors they form a real intimate relationship with them. They don't realize that the intention of these contributors – even this if they make direct contact with their fans – is primarily focused on income. This can pose a great threat to young people with mental health problems who may understand the opportunity to join the exclusive fan clubs at OnlyFans as a prospect of an intimate relationship between them and the contributor.<sup>65</sup>

Although OnlyFans presents itself as a platform with prepaid content or a social network, it is essentially a paid platform supporting the creation of sexual content and home-made or amateur pornography. The site basically works on a similar principle as Instagram where private sexual or explicit content of users is not blocked, with the difference being that the followers of selected profiles pay for being able to subscribe to the content. At the same time, OnlyFans prohibits registration to users under the age of 18, which means the site doesn't violate any laws and is therefore not legally punishable. Nevertheless, the site often shows juvenile-looking youngsters who are legal adults, however, their appearance on the site is juvenile – sometimes even child-like, or the activity they are involved in is deliberately childish and infantile. The creation of such content is risky in this case as it may be classed as pedophile pornography, which is in high demand on this site. The site also includes content for paraphilics, which sometimes borders on other types of sexual disorders that go to the extremes.

From October 1, 2021, OnlyFans planned to ban pornographic content on its site. According to the article in the British daily *The Independent* dated August 20, 2021,<sup>66</sup> the site wanted to get rid of its erotic and pornographic reputation and at the same time ensure its long-term sustainability in the future. The company's management claimed that this is how they wanted to meet the requirements of their banking partners. Some have linked this case to MindGeek, which owns a number of large pornographic sites (such as PornHub<sup>67</sup>). This company changed the rules and deleted part of its content after revelations were made that it had published videos with minors or rape. Banking and payment companies, such as Mastercard, put a great pressure on this company at that time. The company also had to deal with a massive data leak.

The New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof addressed the topic in more detail, resulting in a comprehensive article<sup>68</sup>, mapping the Pornhub platform. N. Kristof points to the averted side of pornographic industry. According to Kristof, there are many videos on Pornhub alone depicting rape of children or adults, videos that spy on people in their private moments or in public, or videos of women who are suffocated by plastic bags. The site makes money through

<sup>65</sup> This is also confirmed by the findings of M. Vlerick and J. Van Hove, who make the claim in their research "that OnlyFans established a new type of platform for fans or clients who not only seek erotic content but desire authentic and intimate relationships with sex workers. For them, a relationship of trust can be established in this environment where intimacy and love can flourish (or be simulated)." Compare: VLERICK, M., Van HOVE, J.: *Revolutionising Digital Sex Work: An Analysis of the Impact of OnlyFans on Sex Workers*. Ghent : Ghent University, 2021, p. 1-14. [online]. [2022-01-12]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353236967\\_Revolutionising\\_digital\\_sex\\_work\\_an\\_analysis\\_of\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_OnlyFans\\_on\\_sex\\_workers](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353236967_Revolutionising_digital_sex_work_an_analysis_of_the_impact_of_OnlyFans_on_sex_workers)>.

<sup>66</sup> GRIFFIN, A.: *OnlyFans Bans Sexually Explicit Videos and Posts*. Released on 20th August 2021. [online]. [2021-11-12]. Available at: <[https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/onlyfans-nsfw-sexually-explicit-videos-b1905564.html?utm\\_content=Echobox&utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR1jsAXWf3MCkecnCjpWKWBWtduQoopPG9AbmGVf5L6uChuKt9Tp8hYJwM4#Echobox=1629397936](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/onlyfans-nsfw-sexually-explicit-videos-b1905564.html?utm_content=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR1jsAXWf3MCkecnCjpWKWBWtduQoopPG9AbmGVf5L6uChuKt9Tp8hYJwM4#Echobox=1629397936)>.

<sup>67</sup> Pornhub is one of the biggest pornographic video sites in the world, which, according to the *Standard* daily "receives up to 3.5 billion hits per month (visitors are a lot fewer, but they return repeatedly), which is more than Amazon, Yahoo or Netflix. According to some sources, Pornhub is on the list of the 10 most visited websites in the world." Compare: OROLÍN, J.: *Najväčšiu pornostránku vyšetrujú za videá znásilnení maloletých*. Released on 8. December. 2020. [online]. [2021-09-06]. Available at: <<https://dennikstandard.sk/10862/najvacsiu-pornostranku-vysetruju-za-vidoa-zobrazujuce-znasilnenia-maloletych/>>.

<sup>68</sup> KRISTOF, N.: *The Children of Pornhub*. Released on 12th April 2020. [online]. [2021-08-13]. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/opinion/sunday/pornhub-rape-trafficking.html>>.

ads displayed to such videos.<sup>69</sup> Data leaks are also a problem for OnlyFans - the photos and videos originally uploaded to this platform here appeared on various other websites – the so-called “revenge porn”, i.e. pornographic content uploaded without the consent of the participants, e.g. after the split of partners.<sup>70</sup>

The examined spiritual-material hyperconsumerism in the field of human sexuality, the manifestations of which not only decimate the moral ethos or the overall condition of modern society, are also a proof of the relativization of values, norms and taboos, detabooization – or an outright non-tabooization – of intimacy and consolidation of the cult of pleasure. Hyperconsumerism is “associated with the liberation of “covetous” fantasies. The desires are connected with hedonistic and narcissistic tendencies of contemporary society.”<sup>71</sup> Erich Fromm’s well-known line that “love is primarily about giving and not receiving”, seems to be the answer to the growing self-love, selfishness, narcissism and hedonism. This is because a hyperconsumer is subjecting everything to his/her own needs and desires. “If love is essentially a tendency to support the object of love (to oneself, to society, to an idea) in their struggle for fulfillment, help them and give them a blessing, then “to love” actually means to leave the self-interest in the interest of this object, and make our own happiness a mere reflection, a mere side effect of the happiness of this other object.”<sup>72</sup>

## 6 Discussion

Our primary intention was not to point out the harmfulness of pornography on children and young people, or to point out the wide range of negative aspects and consequences of such explicit content on social media, although we necessarily aim for some degree of summarization. Sexologist Dana Šedivá<sup>73</sup> sees the shifting boundaries as one of the biggest negatives – deviant and sadistic practices have made it into couple sex, coupled with the possibility of addiction to pornography. Pornography is also often criticized for exploitative relationships, discrimination, racism, violence and various other forms of unethical and illegal behaviour. Pornography is also perceived by D. Šedivá as a textbook of sex education. Through the social learning and imitation system, the displayed sexual behaviour is for a fact, and a norm for future (real) sexual behaviour. However, we would like to draw attention to yet another aspect: in our research we record how little attention experts pay to how pornography is perceived by young people. They automatically anticipate that young people are quite passive and vulnerable when consuming this content, and they are never skeptical or critical.

*“To what extent are we affected by the visual material we voluntarily expose ourselves to? How does pornography affect our idea of intimacy, relationships and sex?”*<sup>74</sup> These questions are asked by Lívia Halmkan, a host of discussions within the informal educational project “Pressure Pot – Quick and Nutritional Debates” with the students of primary and secondary

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<sup>69</sup> “If you search for ‘girls under18 (no space)’ or ‘14yo’ on the site, you get more than 100,000 videos. Although many of these girls are not underage, many are. The columnist in the above American daily points out a number of cases where, for example, videos with girls who have been kidnapped or abducted have appeared on the site.”

<sup>70</sup> OROLÍN, J.: Čo leží, nebeží? Portál OnlyFans si rozmyslel zákaz pornografického obsahu. Released on 26. August 2021. [online]. [2021-09-06]. Available at: <<https://dennikstandard.sk/108714/co-lezi-nebezi-portal-onlyfans-si-rozmyslel-zakaz-pornografickeho-obsahu/>>.

<sup>71</sup> SLUŠNÁ, Z.: Simulakrá v kontexte hyperkonzumu: zvädzanie k zážitku a konzumu ako inovovaná funkcia nových médií a fotografie. In *European Journal of Media, Art & Photography*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 69.

<sup>72</sup> BAUMAN, Z.: *Umění života*. Prague : Academia, 2010, p. 50.

<sup>73</sup> DANIŠKA, J. (moderator): *Do kríža (Porno – skrytá pandémie)*. [Talk show of Radio and Television of Slovakia]. Broadcast on: 3rd March. 2021. Bratislava : Radio and Television of Slovakia, 2021. Available at: <<https://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/15289/262872>>.

<sup>74</sup> *Tlakový hrniec. Rýchle a výživné debaty na školách*. [online]. [2022-01-31]. Available at: <<https://tlakovyhrniec.sk/>>.

schools in Slovakia. Since 2017, she has been visiting classes of ethics and discussing topics such as unplanned pregnancies, relationships and pornography. These debates are aimed at provoking young people to think, evaluate and defend their own attitudes to the issues. In the first part of the discussion, the lecturer asks students questions such as: “*When did you first come into contact with pornography? Does pornography affect a person they watch it? Do we want to be the goal or a means in the context of an intimate relationship? What’s going on behind the scenes of the porn industry?*”

According to L. Halmkan, pornography wins because it communicates about sex with children sooner and more often – in other words: if parents remain silent on the topic of sexuality, children will find the answers elsewhere. Based on the research by the “Pressure Cooker – Quick and Nutritional Debates” platform in primary and secondary schools, children encounter pornography at an average age of 9 years (whether intentionally or accidentally). One of the key issues in this area is the demonization of sex by parents. The upbringing of children in the area of sex is in fierce competition with pornographic sites. “*Porn normalizes the idea that sex is a goal we can and should achieve at the cost of anything. You really won’t find respect for your partner, exclusivity, restraint and respect for yourself (especially women) in porn.*”<sup>75</sup>

The immediate presence of technology and digital media in everyday reality has spread to the intimate sphere, where it is not a complete novelty however. The liberation of sexuality has brought with it many changes that have disrupted the formation of partnerships, or the clarity of the division of tasks in the relationship and increased competition in the selection of partners have brought the emotional side to the forefront. Competition, disappointment, the impossibility of finding the ideal partner have become potential factors in the search for other ways to achieve satisfaction.

## 7 Conclusion

The consumer cycle of today’s society can be considered the result of a long-term control of social life by multinational corporations, digital oligarchs and the cultural industry. The creation of *world culture* with global cultural processes and products increasingly demonstrates a dominant influence on the individual. We are almost at an impasse, which in most cases forces us to succumb to what is imposed on us. We are awash with a stream of stimuli, influences, information and attractions, often unable to distinguish the real from the imaginary. J. Baudrillard calls it a *hyperreality*. The objects and phenomena we consume as if lost their true value and turned into abstract signs and carriers of meanings. Their real form has gradually disappeared, and only their imaginary presence in hyperreality remains. He terms them *simulacra*, and describes them as dependent on continuous simulation. In hyperreality, simulation abounds.<sup>76</sup> According to Baudrillard, man is suddenly in a position where one’s status is dictated by the relationship to these meanings and they determine one’s social status.<sup>77</sup> The cult of the *simulacra* constantly seduces the consumer to consume. We are witnessing a turnaround of ethics and values: the focus is on desires, pleasures and experiences, and all dimensions of social and cultural life acquire formal aspects of adventure, events and happenings, transforming the rhythms of everyday life.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> KOHUTIAROVÁ, M.: *Livia Halmkan: Porno vyhráva, pretože o sexe s deťmi komunikuje skôr a častejšie*. Released on 10th September 2020. [online]. [2022-01-12]. Available at: <<https://blog.postoj.sk/61114/livia-halmkan-porno-vyhrava-pretoze-o-sexe-s-detmi-komunikuje-skor-a-castejsie>>.

<sup>76</sup> See: BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Dokonalý zločin*. Olomouc : Periplum, 2001, p. 162-169.

<sup>77</sup> BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Dokonalý zločin*. Olomouc : Periplum, 2001, p. 158.

<sup>78</sup> SLUŠNÁ, Z.: Simulakrá v kontexte hyperkonzumu: zvädzanie k zážitku a konzumu ako inovovaná funkcia nových médií a fotografie. In *European Journal of Media, Art & Photography*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 70-73.

We offered the reader some basic and practical coordinates of the hyperconsumerist culture with the current dominance of social media. It is clear that it is next to impossible to break free from hyperconsumerism in the current overpressure of the media and its attractions. For this reason, our pragmatic recommendation is to carefully select the media sources we are exposed to and develop critical thinking. A more ascetic approach to social media and the consumption of their content would be another recommendation. However, we would like to add a few important points in the concluding paragraphs of our work. Our overview of the problems identified on the “hyperconsumerist culture – social media” axis is by no means exhaustive because we considered them especially in terms of their practical occurrence and presence in the social science theory. We would like to make an optimistic prediction: with the ever-increasing dysfunction of hyperconsumerist culture, new alternative attitudes to it will abound and there will be a certain renaissance of the philosophical and value platforms of contemporary man. We are aware of the need for a broad analytical-global reassessment of the acute state of the issue from a more comprehensive perspective. And all this especially with regard to the projection of these topics into formal media education and media education. If there are too many threats, not all of them can be predicted, and it is necessary to pay attention to the effective tools and methods that media education offers.<sup>79</sup> However, it does not involve additional mechanization of man, or yet another step to narrow the thinking in an instrumental direction (to know how to control communication and information technologies), but to motivate the recipient to create media communications competently and use the media offer and the media themselves productively. It turns out that it doesn't help if parents and educators are quiet about this. Because the world and the media will certainly not remain quiet. Keeping children and teens safe from dangerous online content (including pornography) does not mean trying to lock this content in a closet and pretend it doesn't exist. The correct response from society, parents and teachers is open communication, investment in sex and media education, supportive social programs to break down the stereotypes and prejudices, creation of space for the enhancement of competencies (especially in the area of media) that allow children and adults to navigate in today's world and its situations.

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<sup>79</sup> An expert in media education and media literacy addresses this issue in more detail in his scientific and professional publications. For more information see e.g.: VRABEC, N.: *Paradigmatické prístupy a súčasné trendy vo výskume mediálnej gramotnosti*. Trnava : UCM in Trnava, 2013; VRABEC, N.: *Stratégie rozvoja mediálnej gramotnosti v európskych krajinách*. Trnava : UCM in Trnava, 2014.

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## Author

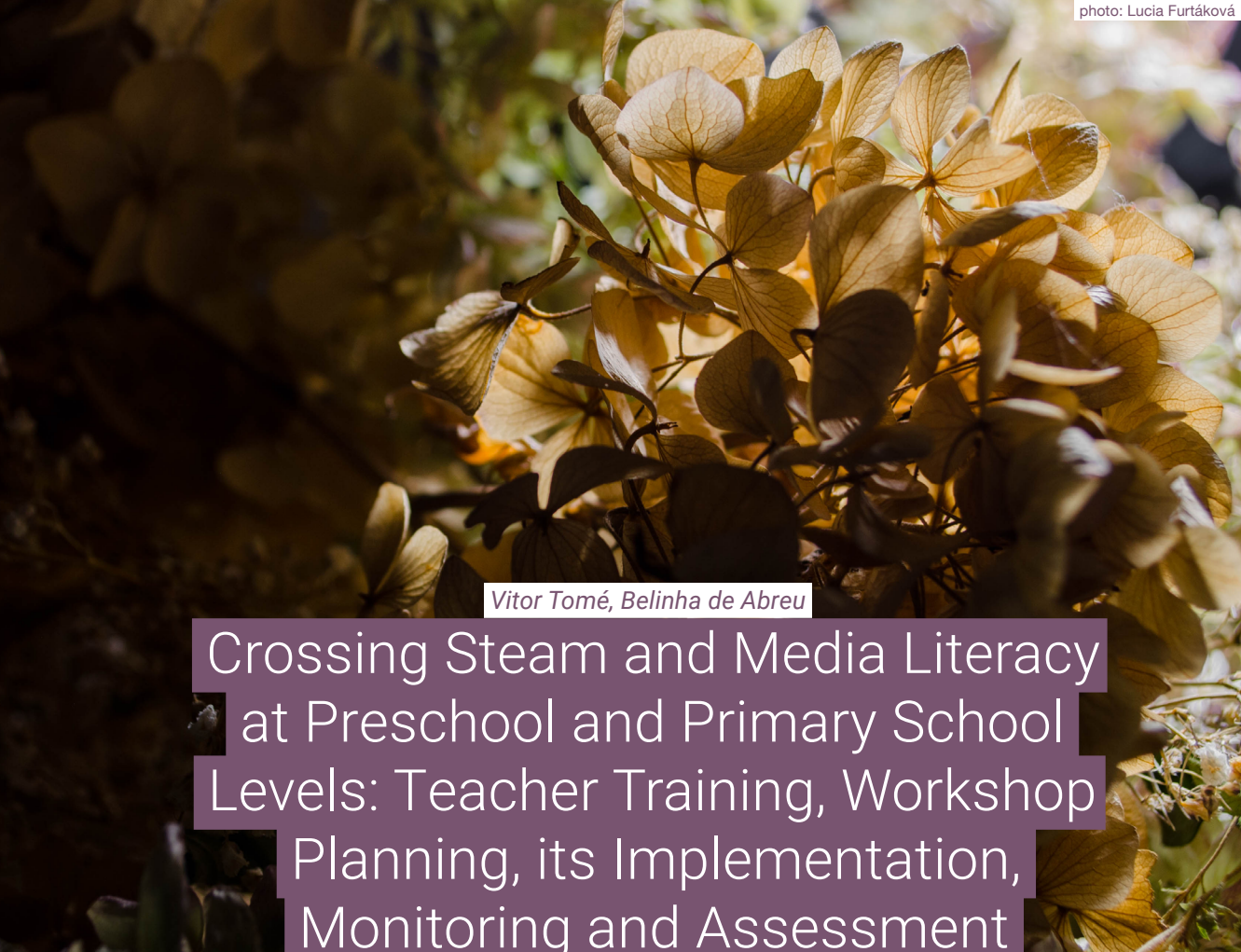


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*Vitor Tomé, Belinha de Abreu*

# Crossing Steam and Media Literacy at Preschool and Primary School Levels: Teacher Training, Workshop Planning, its Implementation, Monitoring and Assessment

## **ABSTRACT**

Seventeen workshops on STEAM and Media Literacy, involving 500 children aged 3-10, their families and other community members, in a pandemic context, was the end result of the third phase of the 'Digital Citizenship Academy'. This community-based action research project began in early 2015, in a Lisbon neighbourhood of Portugal. The workshops were planned, implemented, monitored and assessed by 29 teachers during an online training initially planned to be developed on site. Despite the Covid-19 outbreak, teachers implemented strategies to overcome the lack of resources and autonomy of many students, especially younger ones, and the training focus remained on the production of scientific, artistic, technological, but also media content. The workshops allowed the creation of media and STEAM products primarily focused on the arts, but in which science, technology, engineering and mathematics were present. Results point to the fact that STEAM projects gain in relevance when associated with Media Literacy activities, and vice versa. Although there is a general feeling that the situation resulting from the pandemic prevented the achievement of more significant results, the training course was suitable to pedagogical practices, provided an opportunity for sharing of experiences, practices and ideas, fostered cooperation and interdisciplinary, and resulted in useful resources.

## **KEY WORDS**

Education. Media Literacy. In-Service Teacher Training. Pre-School Children. Primary School Children. STEAM.

# 1 Introduction

In recent years, Media Literacy has been mostly envisioned as a solution against disinformation<sup>1</sup>, the “infodemic”<sup>2</sup>, or the “disinfodemic”<sup>3</sup>. This dialogue raised two problems that needed clarification. First, Media literacy is not the answer to disinformation, but is only one dimension of a needed global response, with new laws and policies created to respond to emerging challenges, with a focus on communication of science to the general public, better mechanisms to detect false information and other strategies to protect the public.<sup>4</sup> Second, pointing Media Literacy mainly as a strategy to combat disinformation is narrowing its scope and disregarding a crucial area that informed, active and responsible digital citizens from cradle to lifelong learning.

Media Literacy consists of a set of knowledge, skills and abilities needed to participate in contemporary society, through access, analysis, critical evaluation and reflective and creative production of media messages in a wide variety of formats and languages.<sup>5</sup> This production is valid only when associated with a structured dissemination, through multiple channels, enhanced participation, social intervention, and social reflection. Media Literacy is a key competence that contributes to access to information, freedom of expression, digital security and privacy protection, as well as to the prevention of extremism and combating hate speech and inequalities.<sup>6</sup>

Although its importance was recognized, the truth is that a decade ago several challenges were identified in relation with Media Literacy development path. Those challenges: specifically the traditional school resistance to change, the integration of formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts, the implementation of a media education activities with a critical and cultural logic and focused only on the practical and technical use of media, apart from bridging several digital divides and the need of strengthening the initial and continuing teacher training in the field.<sup>7</sup> Apart from the lack of teacher training, there was a lack of research in school contexts involving collaboration among researchers, teachers, media representatives and political decision-makers,<sup>8</sup> the lack of educational resources validated by specialists, teachers and students,<sup>9</sup> and an insufficient curricular development as well.<sup>10</sup> These challenges were transversal

<sup>1</sup> WARDLE, C., DERAKHSHAN, H.: *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe, 2017. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-report-november-2017/1680764666>>.

<sup>2</sup> NIELSEN, R. K. et al.: *Navigating the 'Infodemic': How People in Six Countries Access and Rate News and Information about Coronavirus*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism & University of Oxford, 2020. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-04/Navigating%20the%20Coronavirus%20Infodemic%20FINAL.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO: *Seoul Declaration on Media and Information Literacy for Everyone and by Everyone: A Defence against Disinfodemics*. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <[https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/seoul\\_declaration\\_mil\\_disinfodemic\\_en.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/seoul_declaration_mil_disinfodemic_en.pdf)>.

<sup>4</sup> HEATH, C.: *Annotated Bibliography for Online Misinformation. Evidence for Democracy*. 2021. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://evidencefordemocracy.ca/en/research/reports/annotated-bibliography-onlinemisinformation?fbclid=IwAR00hkSOe3lTtcg1n6eCdHlj6f1G2z2MbS8PsqkoOzWEHWkmqVybgvKEYkc>>.

<sup>5</sup> See: HOBBS, R.: Media Literacy. In MASTRO, D., NUSSBAUM, J. (eds.): *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. London : Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO: *Seoul Declaration on Media and Information Literacy for Everyone and by Everyone: A Defence against Disinfodemics*. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <[https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/seoul\\_declaration\\_mil\\_disinfodemic\\_en.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/seoul_declaration_mil_disinfodemic_en.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> See: TOMÉ, V.: Redes sociais online: práticas e percepções de jovens (9-16), seus professores e encarregados de educação. In TOMÉ, V., BÉVORT, E., REIA-BAPTISTA, V. (eds.): *Research on Social Media: A Global View*. Lisbon : RVJ-Editores, 2015, p. 127-335.

<sup>8</sup> See: RIVOLTELLA, P.: Realidad y Desafíos de la Educación en Medios en Italia. In *Comunicar*, 2007, Vol. 15, No. 28, p. 17-24.

<sup>9</sup> See: TOMÉ, V.: CD-Rom “Vamos Fazer Jornais Escolares”: *Um Contributo para o Desenvolvimento da Educação para os Média em Portugal*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> See: FRAU-MEIGS, D., TORRENT, J.: *Mapping Media Education Policies Worldwide: Visions, Programmes and Challenges*. New York : UN Aoc, 2009.

to the educational systems, but more obvious regarding very young children, since their online practices had been largely ignored by policymakers in many countries.<sup>11</sup>

Aiming to answer these challenges at the micro-level, in 2015 we planned a project focused on the Preschool and Primary school levels, in Caneças, north of Lisbon, Portugal. A community-based action-research project seemed to be the best option since education is a mental and sociocultural phenomenon,<sup>12</sup> and learning processes are not internalized individually. Instead, they are socially distributed, with implications for pedagogy and instruction.<sup>13</sup> Being literate as a citizen is not a state that is attained, but is an ongoing, lifelong process. Children learn by watching others, and then mimicking first their parents and siblings, and then extending observation to grandparents, cousins, uncles, and neighbours.<sup>14</sup> Later, they watch and mimic those at school, within the local community, and then within a progressively larger world. Therefore, the preparation of children should follow “a planned, systematic approach to issues relevant to the community of interest, [which] requires community involvement, has a problem-solving focus, is directed at societal change, and makes a lasting contribution to the community”.<sup>15</sup>

The project named ‘Digital Citizenship Education for democratic participation’ aimed to contribute to identify best practices in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts, to influence public policies, to integrate digital citizenship education in the school curricula, and to be replicable elsewhere in Portugal and abroad. The starting query was: “To what extent can a local and replicable project, with teachers and out-of-school contacts, including families, empower preschool and primary school age children to become active and effective citizens in the digital era?”. Following a mixed-method approach,<sup>16</sup> the study has undergone frequent improvements as the authors followed a research model,<sup>17</sup> according to which there are three interrelated areas that form the basis of how the individual produces and receives media messages, whether in formal settings or in an informal context:

1. Operational – capacities and skills needed to read, write, and interpret messages from different media and its various platforms;
2. Critical – interaction with texts and digital products, seeking to answer questions related to power and agency, representation and voice, authenticity and veracity;
3. Cultural – concerns interpretations and actions that develop according to its involvement in digital literacy practices in specific social and cultural contexts.

<sup>11</sup> See: HOLLOWAY, D. et al.: *Zero to Eight: Young Children and their Internet Use*. LSE, London : EU Kids Online, 2013. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/52630/>>.

<sup>12</sup> See: GEE, J. P.: *New Digital Media and Learning as an Emerging Area and “Worked Examples” as One Way Forward*. New York : MIT Press, 2009.; See also: JENKINS, H.: *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. New York : MIT Press, 2009.

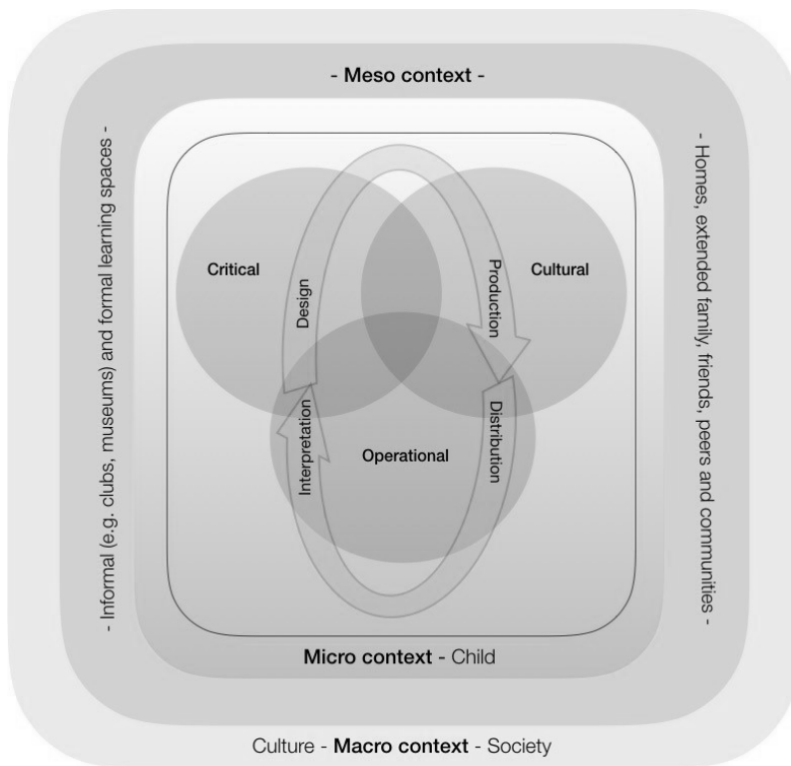
<sup>13</sup> See: UNDERWOOD, C. et al.: Getting it Together: Relational Habitus in the Emergence of Digital Literacies. In *Learning, Media and Technology*, 2013, Vol. 38, No. 4, p. 478-494.

<sup>14</sup> See: CHAUDRON, S.: *Young Children & Digital Technology: A Qualitative Exploratory Study across Seven Countries*. Luxembourg : Publications Office of the European Union, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> HILLS, M. et al.: Community-based Participatory Action Research: Transforming Multidisciplinary Practice in Primary Health Care. In *Rev Panam Salud Publica*, 2007, Vol. 21, No. 2-3, p. 127. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6270848\\_Community-based\\_participatory\\_action\\_research\\_transforming\\_multidisciplinary\\_practice\\_in\\_primary\\_health\\_care](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6270848_Community-based_participatory_action_research_transforming_multidisciplinary_practice_in_primary_health_care)>.

<sup>16</sup> See: CRESWELL, J., CLARK, V.: *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks (CA) : Sage, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> See: SEFTON-GREEN, J. et al.: *Establishing a Research Agenda for the Digital Literacy Practices of Young Children: A White Paper for COST Action. IS1410*. 2016. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/projects/p4df/COST-2016.pdf>>; CARRINGTON, V.: An Argument for Assemblage Theory: Integrated Spaces, Mobility and Polycentricity. In BURKE, A., MARSH, J. (eds.): *Children’s Virtual Play Worlds: Culture, Learning and Participation* New York : Peter Lang, 2013, p. 200-216.; See: COLVERT, A.: *Ludic Authorship: Reframing Literacies through Peer-To-Peer Alternate Reality Game Design in the Primary Classroom*. Unpublished PhD, Institute of Education, University College of London, 2015.; See: GREEN, B.: Subject-Specific Literacy and School Learning: A Focus on Writing. In *Australian Journal of Education*, 1988, Vol. 32, No. 2, p. 156-179.



**PICTURE 1:** *The processes of and contexts for children's digital literacy practices*

Source: SEFTON-GREEN, J. et al.: *Establishing a Research Agenda for the Digital Literacy. Practices of Young Children A White Paper for COST Action IS1410*. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/projects/p4df/COST-2016.pdf>>.

When a citizen wants, for example, to communicate a message, he/she draws on these three areas and makes decisions within the context of the following four levels: design (whether the message is multimodal or not); production (creation of the text); distribution (choosing the appropriate channels); and implementation (imagining how the receivers will interpret the message). All these processes take place within the frameworks that influence the digital literacy practices of children, including: micro (with the child), meso (formal and informal learning contexts with family, friends, and the local community), and macro (the nation state).

Similarly, to the predicted model, our project design went from the micro to the macro framework, through a mixed method approach (qualitative and quantitative). It aimed to intervene in micro and meso frameworks with children, teachers, families and the local community, focusing on the empowerment of children concerning digital literacy skills. However, as a whole, and given its characteristic replicable nature, our long-term aim is to have an impact on the macro framework.

## 1.1 The Project in Three Phases and Three Trainings

Renamed 'Digital Citizenship Academy' in 2019, the project had three phases so far:

- I. a three-year period (March 2015 to February 2018), supported by individual research grant;
- II. a twenty-months period (March 2018 to October 2019), not funded;
- III. an ongoing three-year period (November 2019 to December 2022), supported by a project grant funded by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

The first phase consisted of four sub-phases:

- I. preparing and certifying a teacher training course, producing data collecting instruments, and inviting school do participate (March-Dec 2015),
- II. implementing the training, collecting data from teachers, inviting teachers to take part in the intervention process in the community (Jan-Apr 2016);
- III. collecting data from pupils and parents and structuring an intervention plan (May-Sep 2016); iv) implementing and monitoring the plan, in partnership with teachers, children and families, the school board, the local government and other community members (Oct 2016 – February 2018). A main output of the intervention plan was a printed school's newspaper whose first edition was published in December 2016.

The 25-hour training course on 'Digital Citizenship Education for Democratic Participation of young people' (sub-phase ii) took place in Jan-Feb 2016 and was attended by 25 teachers (10 from Preschool) who organized themselves in ten groups and developed 10 media literacy activities with 366 of their students (147 preschoolers and 219 primary school students). The activities were embedded in the work that had been previously planned, and consisted of organizing a book, creating a collective text from image exploitation, discussing the role of newspapers, Internet safety and bullying, learning with and through the media, and analyzing media messages (print and online newspapers, YouTube videos, comics) including advertising.

During the second phase (March 2018 to October 2019), which was not funded, the project remained active, the teachers continued working, planning, implementing and developing media literacy activities. Three new editions of the printed school newspaper were edited and published while meetings with the researcher continued on a regular basis. The project results were presented nationally and internationally, and the Caneças School District became a member of the Council of Europe's Democratic School Network, and a new training course took place, addressing in particular the school newspaper production, because a group of preschool and primary school teachers had started a printed school newspaper in December 2016, making the implementation of this course a crucial need.

As we had already proposed in the training course held in 2016, the planned and developed activities would not collide with the general planning that teachers were already implementing and, from its implementation, two products should result: a media product and a report with the planning, the description of the production process and the students involved and the analysis of the results according to the objectives set at the beginning. The 27 teachers (7 from Preschool, 13 from Primary school and 7 from Secondary school<sup>18</sup>) planned and implemented seven Media Education activities (a wall school newspaper, a co-creation of a plot and story board, a school radio programme, a TV News service, the analysis of the pros and cons of the Internet, memes about sexting, a set of four sequential wall frames focused on bullying), which involved 485 children and students (54 from preschool, 245 from primary and 186 from secondary), but also family members and other community members.

In the third phase (November 2019 to present), in which this article is focused, the 'Digital Citizenship Academy' is funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (until December 2022) and focused on STEAM and Media Literacy.

Media Literacy and STEAM have a central aspect in common: using technologies, namely digital technologies,<sup>19</sup> first as toys, but gradually to communicate and learn, and later to work. In other words, there is a transversal use of digital technologies, from birth and throughout life, individually and as part of a community, in formal and informal environments, always preparing individuals for that which the whole society is responsible.

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<sup>18</sup> Note of the authors: The enrolment was opened to Secondary school teachers since it was possible to involve up to 30 teachers in the course.

<sup>19</sup> See: JORGE, A. et al.: Um Dia Na Vida de 3 Meninos Portugueses Com Menos de 3 Anos. In STELLA, C., CAMERON, C. A. (eds.): *Psicologia do Desenvolvimento*. Curitiba : Juruá Editora, 2018, p. 65-74.

This preparation has positive effects at the primary school level, namely at four levels: creativity, critical thinking, design-thinking and digital skills.<sup>20</sup> In formalized education, STEAM should start in preschool education through a focus on transformative pedagogies that prepare children to participate in the digital society. As a STEAM contribution, Makerspaces take into account five central aspects:<sup>21</sup>

- I. **Interest** – technologies evolve very fast, which changes the opportunities they offer to children and the motivations that lead them to use these technologies, so it is essential that children can choose topics or problems based on their interest (“maker agency”).
- II. **Community** – without prejudice to the child’s interest, in a logic centered on the individual, it is important to realize that Makerspaces are not based on individual agendas or personal improvement, but on a participative, democratic vision of common interest, which serves as a basis for the development of socio-cultural practices.
- III. **Prior knowledge** – the child’s prior knowledge, which comes from home, is central, as well as the relationships he establishes with his peers, so it mobilizes the cognitive, affective, creative, and relational areas, which considerably increases learning potential.
- IV. **Play** – Play is fundamental in Makerspaces, as it involves cognitive processes linked to creativity, such as problem solving, metacognition and creative practices. The activities that children develop there (e.g.: movement, expressions, drawing, photography, models, cultural tools or objects) allow them to communicate their meanings and perspectives towards the world.
- V. **Postdigital maker play** – it matters not to separate digital activities from those that are analog, because that boundary no longer makes sense.

Having this in mind, the third phase of the project started with two in-service teacher training courses (40 hours each, attended by a total of 29 teachers from preschool, primary school and middle school). Teachers and pupils planned, implemented and assessed STEAM and Media Literacy workshops related with the community context and aimed, in some cases, to solve local problems.

## 2 Methodology

The training course ‘Media Literacy and Journalism: pedagogical practices with the media and about the media’ focuses on the intersection of Media Literacy and STEAM. Explores the concepts and the relationship between them in international standards of training citizens and national policies, in which the trainees are based to plan and implement workshops, following the methodology of project work, linking them with the educational project of the school and the curriculum plans.

Accredited in 2018 by the Scientific and Pedagogical Continuous Training Council, for teachers of the 3rd cycle of basic education and Secondary, the training course approaches other content related with elements and principles of journalism, ethics and deontology, misinformation, democratization of information and exercise of active and responsible citizenship through the media. In 2019, it was adapted, by the research team, to be given for the first time, to teachers of Preschool and Primary school.

<sup>20</sup> See: BOWER, M. et al.: *Makerspaces in Primary School Settings – Advancing 21st Century and STEM Capabilities Using 3D Design and 3D Printing*. Sydney, Australia : Macquarie University. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://primarymakers.com>>.

<sup>21</sup> See: MARSH, J. et al.: *Makerspaces in Early Childhood Education: Principles of Pedagogy and Practice*. In *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 2019, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 221-233. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10749039.2019.1655651>>.

The course implementation, within the scope of the project, was first scheduled for March 9, 2020, in person, but was canceled due to the measures taken to minimize the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The decision also resulted in the cancellation of the creation of a Makerspace on premises provided by the local government (Parish Council of Ramada e Caneças). This space would have held STEAM and Media Literacy workshops every fortnight, some of them with the presence of the children's relatives and other elements of the community.

The training ended up being delivered at a distance via the Zoom platform, in seven sessions between September and December 2020. The delay in delivery from March to September 2020 was to accommodate the teachers, who were focused on emergency distance learning, with all the resulting adaptations. There was no space to include training. Still, it was necessary to make important adaptations to deliver the training course, with five of the fundamental adaptations, namely:

- **Format** – changed from face-to-face to online, with each session having a maximum of three hours, which increased the number of sessions from five (four hours each) to seven (six of three hours each and one of two hours);
- **Cycles covered** – between January and March, data on socioemotional skills (pre-test) had been collected from children attending the 4th year of Primary school, which were carried over to the 5th year and continued at the same school grouping, so enrollment was open to 2nd cycle teachers, with four enrolled;
- **Number of trainees** – it was only possible to involve 30 applicants (one withdrew later), as the rules of the groups changed, from a minimum of 15 elements to a maximum of 15 participants per class;
- **Contents** – the workshops would have to be planned and implemented according to the space of the classroom and not a Makerspace, which implied the adaptation of the contents of the training course;
- **Data collection** – the limitations resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic prevented members of the research team from observing and evaluating the implemented workshops, so, together with the teachers, workshop observation and evaluation sheets were created for teachers and children;

The two editions of the training course took place between September and December 2020. 29 teachers participated (27 female and two male), with the following distribution in terms of levels of education: seven Preschool teachers, 12 Primary school (one librarian), four teachers from 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle (three of Mathematics/Sciences and one of Visual Education), and six teachers of Special Needs.

### 3 Results

Teachers planned 28 workshops from which 17 were implemented (Table I), totalling 230 hours and involving 410 children (197 females and 213 males). Five workshops focused on preschool education, eight on Primary school, involving children from all the four grades of the cycle, and four focused on the 2nd cycle (5th and 6th grades). Workshop 8 involved two classes, one 2nd Year and another 4th Year, which performed complementary tasks. Workshop 11 was developed with a class that included 3rd and 4th year students.

Nº	Workshop title	Level	Duration	Participants
1	Feeling the music	Preschool	20	45
2	“Umbrella Stick” – percussion musical instrument	Preschool	2	20
3	A Trip to the Solar System	Preschool	40	18
4	“Once upon a time...” – Chinese shadow acting	Preschool	25	20
5	The Giant Turnip - story illustrated and narrated by the children	Preschool	10	21
6	Let's do experiments	Preschool / Primary (year 1)	15	20
7	Geometry at Play	Primary (year 1)	21	47
8	Exhibition about the digestive system	Primary (year 2)	10	22
9	Geometric Solids: electronic quiz	Primary (years 2/4)	8	40
10	Portugal and its flags: the national and regional flags	Primary (year 3)	4	20
11	For a safe school: better streets!	Primary (years 3/4)	12	25
12	Road safety: from Caneças to Islamabad	Primary (year 4)	9	17
13	Number, light and color: making a video with children	Primary (year 4)	12	26
14	Ten fingers, ten secrets: building an articulated hand	2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle (year 5)	4	4
15	4 in a row: mathematical board game	2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle (year 5)	20	7
16	Journalists with a future: news production about Environment	2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle (year 5)	6	29
17	“Knitting...stories”: an interview from wire to wick	2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle (year 6)	12	29
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>410</b>

**TABLE 1:** Workshops developed by level, duration and participants

Source: own processing, 2021.

### 3.1 Workshop Media Products

Similar to what is common in Media Literacy and STEAM projects, one of the goals of the workshops was to create products<sup>22</sup>. Teachers were provided complete freedom of choice in terms of the type of products, support and methodology followed in their preparation, with some being more associated with the production of multimedia content, and others being associated with science (STEM) and the Arts. The multimedia-related products were organized into five categories:

- I. Videos about the final product (W2, W4)
- II. Videos describing the process (W1, W3, W6, W9, W12, W13, W15, W17)
- III. Photo slide show (W8, W10, W14)
- IV. Power Point file as final product (W5)
- V. Power Point file describing the process (W7, W11, W16)

In eight of the 17 workshops, videos were produced that describe the process, such as the exploration of a book (“A Symphony of Animals”, by Dan Brown), using digital technologies, the creation of instruments from simple materials (ex: xylophones, using open-end wrenches and cardboard) and the interpretation of ‘Turkish March’ by Mozart, with the students organized in an orchestra formation (W1). Other examples of process videos are:

- The creation of a model of the solar system in 3D, using simple materials (styrofoam balls...) and electrical circuits (W3);

<sup>22</sup> See: DIEGO-MANTECÓN, J. et al: Proyectos STEAM con Formato KIKS para el Desarrollo de Competencias Clave. In *Comunicar*, 2021, Vol. 29, No. 66, p. 33-43. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://www.revistacomunicar.com/verpdf.php?numero=66&articulo=66-2021-03>>.



- The creation of a kit for bean growth, by students from the 1st year of the 1st cycle, who proceeded to record their progress after germination and produced kits which they offered to students in preschool education at the same school (W6);
- The creation of geometric solids on cardboard (2nd Year of Primary) and the production of a game with questions about the characteristics of these solids, to which an electrical circuit (4th Year) was associated with a green or red light, depending on the student response to card questions being right or wrong (W9);
- Exploration of the work 'Why don't animals drive?', by Pedro Seromenho, and subsequent study of traffic signs, including those around the school, whether in Caneças or Islamabad, Pakistan, where some students of Portuguese Non-Native Language are from (W12);
- Production of objects allusive to the seven days of the week, seven musical notes and seven colours of the Rainbow, using an electrical circuit in one of the cases, followed by choreographed interpretation of the song "7 days, 7 notes, 7 colours", by Maria de Vasconcelos (W13);
- Production of the game '4 in a row', cross-curricular, with Mathematics, Visual Education and Natural Sciences (W15);
- Preparing a script and organizing an interview with a non-teaching staff member of the school and conducting this interview, followed by writing and preparing for publication (W17).

The slideshows were an option in three workshops, namely the preparation of an exhibition on the digestive system, which included a 3D work (W8), the production of the national flag and the flags of the Madeira and Azores archipelagos (W10) and the production of an articulated hand, involving four students in need of accommodations to support learning due to their specific conditions (W14).

PowerPoint files were used in four cases, the first as a final product, in which preschool students produced drawings for each of the slides and told the story 'The Gigantic Turnip' by Aleksey Tolstoy, allowing the user to choose between listening to the story told by children or by an adult, or listening to both and comparing.

The other three files describe processes such as using the computer to build geometric figures (W7), building a model with proposals to improve road safety around the school, and writing a letter to the local government (W11), as well as research on the situation of environmental pollution in the community and production of news on these cases in conjunction with the Sustainable Development Goals (W16).

The products of the workshops were kept in their original versions, without any professional editing, and the teachers produced them without having access to any training or technological equipment other than those they had access to before the beginning of the training course. These authentic products (which only underwent minor changes to protect the data and identity of children) were uploaded to a YouTube channel, created for this purpose.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.2 Other Resources Produced

In addition to the multimedia products the workshops allowed the creation of other products, which we have organized here into seven categories:

- I. Musical instruments created by children to interpret Mozart's Turkish March (W1) and to simulate sound (W2) in Chinese shadow theatre;
- II. Models, namely the solar system (W3), the proposed improvement of road safety around the school (W11), and 3D objects, such as the puppets of the Chinese shadow theatre (W4), materials for the music choreography '7 days, 7 notes, 7 colours', by Maria de Vasconcelos (W13), and the articulated hand (W14);

<sup>23</sup> O Cusco - *Jornal Escolar*. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://bit.ly/3AsnROH>>.

- III. Drawings produced to be included in PowerPoint with the story 'The Gigantic Turnip' (W5);
- IV. Strategies for using software/hardware, either to produce human or other geometric figures (W7) or the use of robots in educational activities associated with road safety (W12);
- V. Exhibition of products, namely posters on the digestive system (W8) or the flag of Portugal, the Madeira Islands and the Azores Islands (W10);
- VI. Games and experiments, such as the creation of the bean maturity kit (W6), the game about geometric solids (W9) and the '4 in a row' game, which stayed at school, in the space of mathematical games (W15);
- VII. Journalistic text, like the one of the maids about cases of environmental pollution in the Caneças' community (W16) or about what life was like at one of the non-teaching staff member's grandma's time (W17).

## 4 Discussion

Each teacher participating in the training courses prepared a final report with five areas: compliance with the planning (dates, hours, constraints and strategies to overcome them); evaluation (strategy and resources used), results (achieved, not achieved); and sustainability of the workshops after the training course and annexes (evidence and resources used). These reports were subject to content analysis, using the software Atlas.ti.

### 4.1 Constraints and Strategies to Overcome Them

In the teachers' opinion, all the plans were fulfilled, although some of them required more time than initially foreseen, and the time dedicated to the workshops was not linear but divided over time. As an example, only two workshops (W2 and W10) were started and concluded in the same month, in November. Almost every workshop underwent adaptations, because of constraints mentioned by the teachers, which we organized into five groups:

- I. **Physical conditions** – “the extreme luminosity of the room” made it difficult to record the Chinese shadow theater video (W4), as well as “the outside noise at the time of recording” (W5).
- II. **Conjuncture** – public health rules to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic meant that “on stipulated days for recordings, some children were absent” and had to be replaced (W5), that some students were prevented from working “at four-seater tables” (W6, W15), or that it was not possible to develop activities for some time (“the classes were in prophylactic isolation from November 19th to December 9th”).
- III. **Resources** – the “absence of Internet access, which made research difficult” (W6, W9), the “network failures” (W7), the lack of a “camcorder and a photo and video editing program” (W8), “the reduced number of computer equipment”, especially tablets, with which the activity “would have been easier to carry out, due to the possibility of ‘dragging’ on the touch screen” (W7).
- IV. **Children** – “the lack of autonomy of some elements of the groups” (W1) which “forced a very individualized support for the children” (W2, W4), with some finding it “very difficult to handle the mouse” (W7) and others quickly forgetting the work instructions, which “made it necessary to recall, at the beginning of each 45-minute session, the work objectives, the work done and what was to be done” (W16).
- V. **Teachers** – research and selection of information and recording activities “would have been more productive if developed with smaller classes” (W8), as it is difficult to use certain equipment when “there is only one teacher to respond to all requests” (W7), and, at least in some cases, such as “in video editing techniques and even filming (...) the main obstacle was the lack of training in the area (...) so everything was done intuitively” (W13).

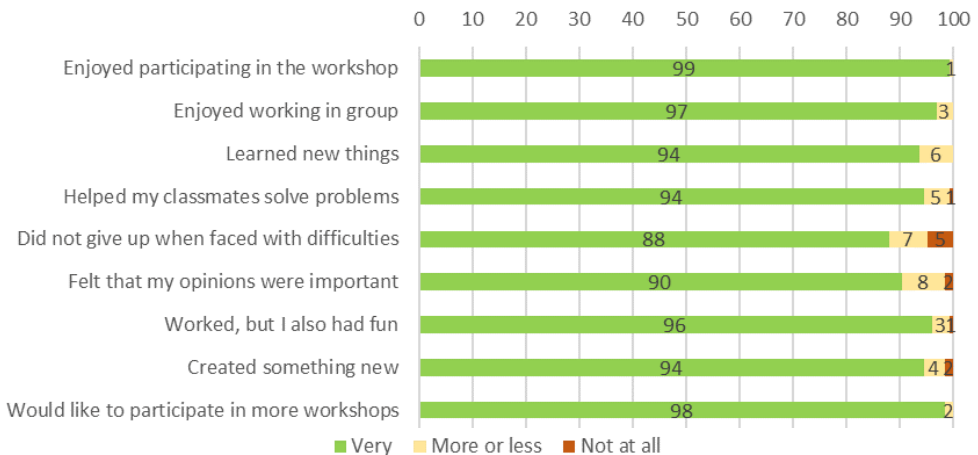
In addition to making more time available for activities, providing individual support and betting on the “positive reinforcement” of behaviours, the teachers adopted several strategies, which we organized into seven areas, namely: reflection and monitoring, chain improvements, interdisciplinary, collaboration between students, use of teacher resources, extended work hours, and families and community support.

## 4.2 Strengths of the Workshops According to the Teachers

The final assessment was carried out using self-assessment forms for children in preschool education, Primary and 2nd cycle of basic education and for teachers. Following the assessment process, teachers identified six types of strengths in the workshops: start from the interest of the children, Focus on practical and real situations, foster interdisciplinary connections, associate learning with playing, involve cooperation and collaboration, encourage participation and social intervention, develop knowledge, and develop skills and attitudes.

## 4.3 Workshops’ Assessment by Children

After having analysed the data made available by the teachers, either in their reports or in the attached documents, and concerning workshops that involved Preschool children, we obtained data of 125 responses individuals, which allowed us to conclude that the children enjoyed participating in the activities (Figure 1):

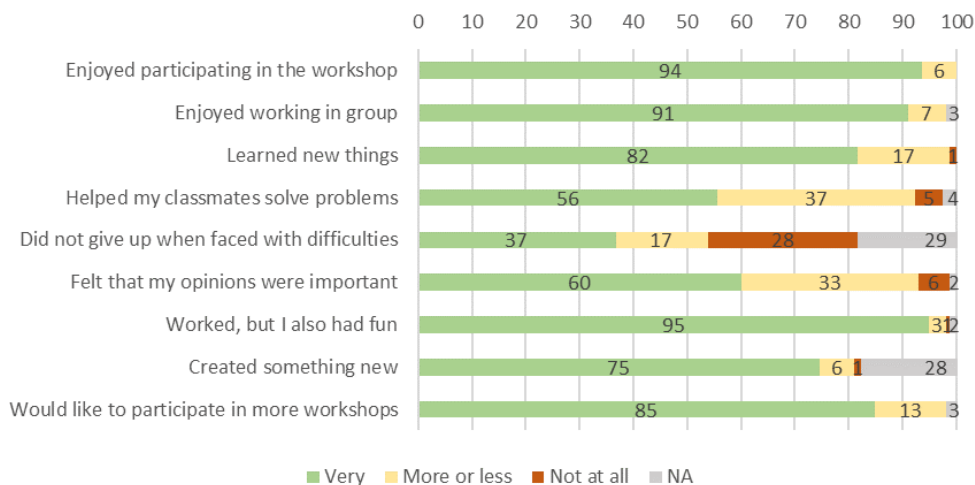


**FIGURE 1:** Evaluation of workshops by children through Annex VI (%) (n=125)

Source: own processing, 2021.

Children enjoyed working in groups (more or less) as they learned new things and are further available to participate in additional workshops. The vast majority felt that they worked, but also had fun (96%), that they helped their peers solve problems (94%) and that they created something (94%). It is also important to understand the reasons for there being a fringe of children who responded differently. From the teachers’ perspective, the children had difficulty in understanding some statements, which can justify these answers, similarly to what happened with the statement “I didn’t give up in the face of difficulties” which, “because I was in the negative, I was not understood” (W3). Finally, 10% of the children felt that their opinions were not important to their peers (2%) or only partially (8%), but the teachers stated that this type of response was more common among children who “are less participatory” (W6).

Regarding the assessment of workshops involving Primary school or 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle children, we focused first on the answers that allowed quantitative analysis, followed by a qualitative analysis (selection of student expressions). We were able to gather responses from 158 children, all of whom enjoyed very much (94%), or more or less (6%), participating in the workshops (Figure 2).



**FIGURE 2:** Evaluation of workshops by children through Annex VII (%) (n=158)

Source: own processing, 2021.

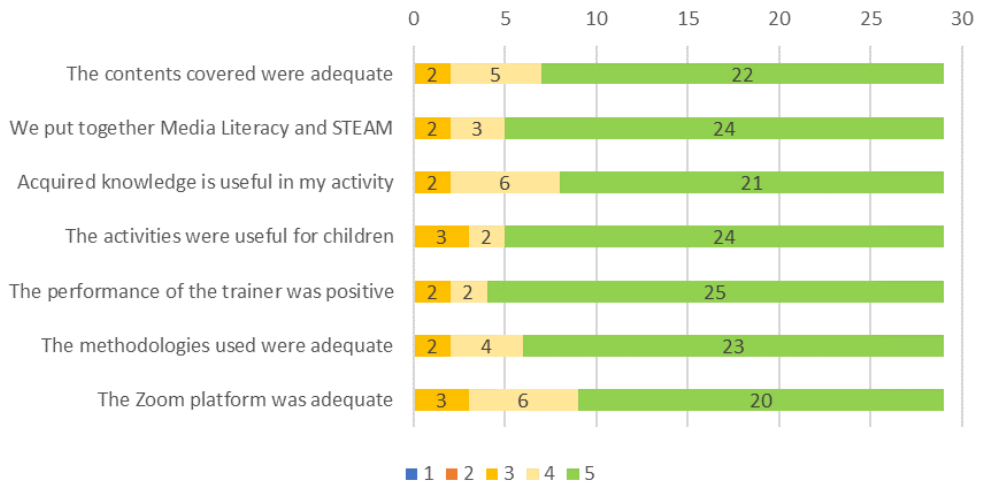
Similarly, older children considered that they worked, but also had fun, and enjoyed working in groups and would like to participate in future workshops like those in which they had already participated. Their responses align with younger children, although with different percentages of total agreement regarding having learned “new things” and having created something. It is important to mention here that the 28 respondents in this item were all involved in the same workshop.

Students were, however, more critical in relation to the assessment of their performance. Only 56% of children consider that they helped their peers to solve problems, teachers did not have an explanation. However, it is difficult to infer what the students mean by “help colleagues to solve problems” because the answers may even be related to the difficulty in identifying the problems themselves or when they were, in fact, part of the solution. The statement “I didn’t give up in the face of difficulties” may not have been understood, as explained above.

With more or less difficulty, the children managed to correctly order the phases of the workshops, having valued various aspects, such as: content, technical skills, social skills and social intervention.

#### 4.4 Training Course Assessment by Teachers

Teachers assessed the training course through an online questionnaire and the final reports they had produced. The questionnaire consisted of three closed and three open questions. All trainees (n=29) responded by class, although the data are presented together. The first closed question requested the evaluation of seven parameters through a scale with values between 1 (totally disagree) and 5 (totally agree), with the results being available in Figure 3:



**FIGURE 3:** Evaluation of the training course by trainees (n=29)

Source: own processing, 2021.

Teachers earned a positive overall assessment regarding the contents, the relationship between the contents and the application of these contents in the teaching activity, although the latter is one of the two in which the total agreement is lower (21). The activities developed in the scope of the workshops were considered useful for the children, although five of the teachers did not fully agree.

In terms of the implementation of the training course, the teachers evaluated the trainer’s overall performance positively, but the level of total agreement is lower when evaluating the methodologies used (six teachers selected the value 3 or 4) and even lower when evaluating the platform used (*Zoom*). In two sessions (1 and 5) there were problems with access, which were, however, solved in good time.

The assessment of the suitability of the platform was influenced by other reasons, as was clear from the open-ended answers regarding the question “aspects for improvement”. Teachers said that it will be “important to have a physical presence in schools”, that is, “in-person training”, which, in their view, should “be open to a greater number of students”. One teacher even stated that this type of training should take place continuously, involving teachers from all education cycles “so as to ensure vertical continuity”.

From the teachers’ perspective, the constraints arising from the pandemic “may be overcome”, so “the dynamics of work in the classroom can improve without these constraints”, including practical examples: “I would like to have developed an activity more related to Experimental Sciences. This did not happen due to the constraints we faced caused by the pandemic”. They also asked for more IT support and available resources in mother language. Despite the needs pointed out, they have mentioned five types of positive aspects: appropriateness of the workshop theme, sharing experiences, ideas and practices, interdisciplinary cooperation, usefulness of learning, and creation of resources.

Finally, all teachers agreed that the duration of the training course was “adequate” (and not insufficient or excessive) and showed their availability to continue involved in the ‘Digital Citizenship Academy’, even though participation in the training did not imply such a decision.

## 5 Conclusions

The two in-service teacher training courses on STEAM and Media Literacy implemented on behalf of the 'Digital Citizenship Academy' had as main result a set of 17 planned, implemented and assessed workshops, which allowed the creation of two types of products, some in reflective production of media content, and others associated with STEAM, with a clear focus on the arts, but in which science, technology, engineering and mathematics were present. These indicators point to the fact that STEAM projects gain in relevance when associated with Media Literacy activities, and vice versa.

In spite of the Covid-19 pandemic, in which physical and technological resources were lacking, the teachers implemented strategies to overcome the lack of autonomy of many students, especially younger ones, while also supporting each other when time or even technical knowledge was an obstacle (ex.: video editing). These strategies consisted of frequent and joint reflection among the teachers and with the students, creating conditions for gradual improvement of the work carried out. That was done by teachers, with their own resources, and through giving up their personal time and involving families and other members of the community.

The implementation of these strategies contributed to the results achieved, which were subject to regular monitoring among teachers, including through the training course sessions. The evaluation carried out throughout the process was also focused on the observation of situations, attitudes and actions of interest, participation and commitment, communication and collaboration, creativity and critical thinking. The oral feedback from students, through conversations in large/small group meetings and individual conversations, the completion of evaluation sheets on the covered content, the presentation of papers, the children's productions and the spirit of observation were other elements of evaluation.

Workshops' assessment took place throughout the process, informally through monitoring and observation, and at the end of the process, through evaluation sheets for teachers and students, which were created during the training courses. In the opinion of the teachers, and in line with the scientific literature, the strengths of the workshops are due to the fact that they are based on the interests of children,<sup>24</sup> and that they are focused on practical and real situations,<sup>25</sup> which refer to problems whose resolution processes are more effective when they assume an interdisciplinary logic.

The practical tasks developed in the STEAM and Media Literacy workshops associate play<sup>26</sup> and creativity to learning not only content, but also cognitive, social and emotional skills and competences. The tasks also encourage cooperation and collaboration between teachers, between students and between teachers and students, fostering resilience and persistence in seeking solutions or improvements to a product.<sup>27</sup> They can also be seen as key initiatives in terms of participation and social intervention.

<sup>24</sup> See: MARSH, J. et al.: Makerspaces in Early Childhood Education: Principles of Pedagogy and Practice. In *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 2019, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 221-233. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10749039.2019.1655651>>.

<sup>25</sup> COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*. Strasbourg : Council of Europe, 2018. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/>>; MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO: *Perfil dos Alunos à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória*. Lisboa : Editorial do Ministério da Educação e Ciência. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <[https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Curriculo/Projeto\\_Autonomia\\_e\\_Flexibilidade/perfil\\_dos\\_alunos.pdf](https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Curriculo/Projeto_Autonomia_e_Flexibilidade/perfil_dos_alunos.pdf)>; UNESCO: *Keystones to Foster Inclusive Knowledge Societies – Access to Information and Knowledge, Freedom of Expression, Privacy, and Ethics on a Global Internet*. Paris : UNESCO, 2015. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232563>>.

<sup>26</sup> See: MARSH, J. et al.: Makerspaces in Early Childhood Education: Principles of Pedagogy and Practice. In *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 2019, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 221-233. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10749039.2019.1655651>>.

<sup>27</sup> See: DIEGO-MANTECÓN, J. et al: Proyectos STEAM con Formato KIKS para el Desarrollo de Competencias Clave. In *Comunicar*, 2021, Vol. 29, No. 66, p. 33-43. [online]. [2022-04-07]. Available at: <<https://www.revistacomunicar.com/verpdf.php?numero=66&articulo=66-2021-03>>.

The forms created by the teachers so that children could evaluate the workshops were adapted to the respondents and were important on two levels: to give children a voice and to improve, both the following workshops and the evaluation sheets themselves. In general, children liked the workshops, wanted to participate in more, liked to work in groups, and liked to have fun and to learn “new things”.

They easily recognized that they learned in these workshops, not only content, but technical skills, social skills and even ways to intervene socially. However, children did have some difficulty in recognizing situations in which the initiative was theirs, as well as whether they helped their colleagues in solving problems, or in realizing whether their opinions are listened to and respected.

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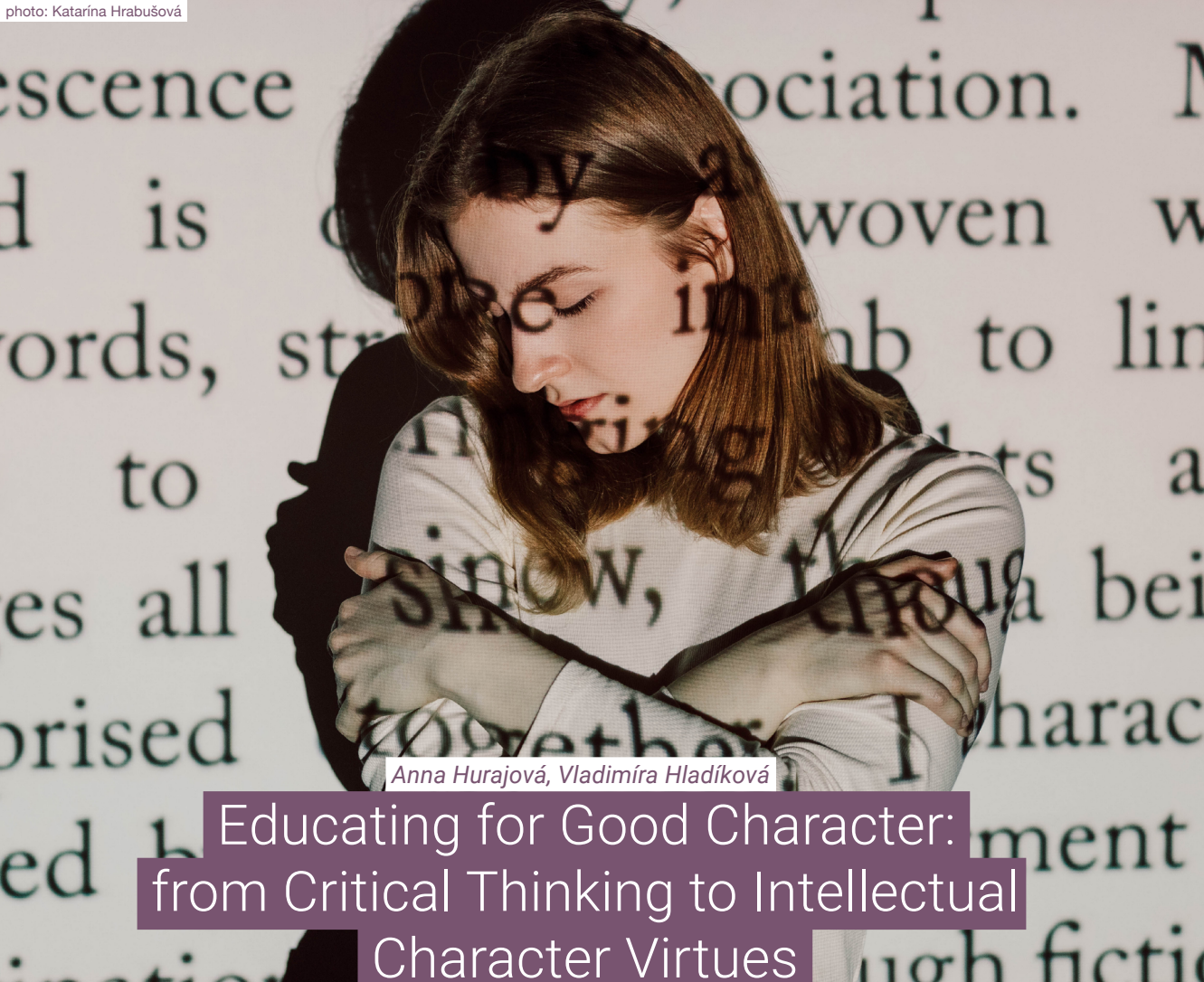
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## Educating for Good Character: from Critical Thinking to Intellectual Character Virtues

### **ABSTRACT**

Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has presented people with unprecedented appeals and ethical challenges which are nowhere more evident than in educational institutions as well as in the online space. A renewed interest in the character as one of the crucial ethical developments is gaining momentum today. Good character is based on the virtues one possesses. We argue that education focused on the cultivation of intellectual virtues such as curiosity, intellectual humility, intellectual autonomy, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, open-mindedness, intellectual courage and intellectual tenacity are needed for individuals to lead fulfilling lives. At least, growing in intellectual virtues seems to be a valuable and desirable educational aim. This theoretical study strives to make a twofold contribution to the area of knowledge: firstly, it aims to contribute to the area of character and moral education through describing its forms and features; and secondly, it aims to contribute to virtue epistemology by identifying its nature and focus and outlining nine intellectual or epistemic virtues. Further to the second contribution, the study ends by arguing that the intellectual virtue approach and the critical thinking approach both help to cultivate intellectually virtuous critical thinkers.

### **KEY WORDS**

Character Education. Moral Education. Virtue Epistemology. Intellectual Virtues. Critical Thinking.

# 1 Introduction to Moral and Character Education

Good character is not formed beyond one's control.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary – it evolves over time through a steady process of teaching, learning, and modelling virtues in real-life situations. Experts on moral education argue that education focused on the cultivation of character and moral virtues will guide us through the pitfalls and risks not only of cyberspace but also of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in general. Although the field of moral or character education is not new, a renewed interest in character and education to character, perseverance, resilience, tolerance, respect, or confidence has been observed in recent years. Actually, a desire to raise and educate moral individuals has existed for generations. At present, there are many approaches to forming and educating a moral and principled individual, among which moral education and character education have become the predominant formal approaches used in schools to offer advice and guidance for positive students' development. The concept of moral education has its roots in Piaget's constructivist theory of the development of children's moral reasoning in school settings.<sup>2</sup> Moral education is focused on values, "correct thinking" and recognizing good. From the educational viewpoint, more pedagogical approaches have been developed to foster youth's moral development. One of the fundamental pedagogical approaches is moral dilemma discussion, which involves peer-group discussions, in which students are exposed to different viewpoints of moral and ethical issues<sup>3</sup> to advance their moral reasoning. The second approach, more complex and community-oriented, is the just community approach which, in addition to promoting students' moral development is aimed at transforming the moral atmosphere of the school into a moral community.<sup>4</sup> However, in search of a critical postmodern perspective on moral education, some authors are in favour of a so-called narrative approach to moral education which helps young people "to tell their own moral stories, to speak in their own voices, and hence to authorize their own moral perspectives and experiences".<sup>5</sup> In contrast to previous conventional approaches, this moral pedagogy is focused on real-life and everyday students' moral dilemmas thus grounding moral education in the experienced moral dilemmas of students.

Character education, in general, is an umbrella term for a wide range of approaches to moral education, outcome goals, and pedagogical strategies. Although there is a significant overlap between character education and moral education mainly in their goals, there are some crucial differences between them, most notably in the broadness of scope and richness of content, with character education having a comprehensive and diversified set of outcomes, content areas and a broad and varied range of pedagogical strategies.<sup>6</sup> From the pedagogical standpoint, they tend to differ more in their grounding in different philosophical traditions as well as empirical strength rather than in practice. In terms of methods, character education is reflected for example in the whole brain teaching method, the most important aim of which

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<sup>1</sup> See: PALA, A.: The Need for Character Education. In *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, 2011, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 23-32.

<sup>2</sup> CUMMINGS, R., HARLOW, S.: The Constructivists Roots of Moral Education. In *The Educational Forum*, 2000, Vol. 64, No. 4, p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> See: BERKOWITZ, M. W.: The Role of Discussion in Moral Education. In BERKOWITZ, M. W., OSER, F.: *Moral Education: Theory and Application*. Hillsdale, NJ : L. Erlbaum, 1986, p. 201; CUMMINGS, R., MADDUX, C. D., CLADIANOS, A.: Moral Reasoning of Education Students: The Effects of Direct Instruction in Moral Development Theory and Participation in Moral Dilemma Discussion. In *Teachers College Record*, 2010, Vol. 112, No. 3, p. 631.

<sup>4</sup> POWER, F. C., HIGGINS-D'ALESSANDRO, A.: The Just Community Approach to Moral Education and the Moral Atmosphere of the School. In LUCCY, N. P., NARVAEZ, D. (eds.): *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*. New York and London : Routledge, 2008, p. 231.

<sup>5</sup> TAPPAN, M. B., BROWN, L. M.: Envisioning a Postmodern Moral Pedagogy. In *Journal of Moral Education*, 2006, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> BERKOWITZ, M. W., BIER, M. C.: *What Works in Character Education: A Research-based Guide for Practitioners*. Washington, D.C. : Character Education Partnership, 2005, p. 7.

is not to master academic skills but to make children and youth become virtuous.<sup>7</sup> The term character education is mostly used in the USA since it is deeply rooted in the U.S. public school system. Over the past decades, schoolteachers and schoolmasters have been increasingly implementing character education programs in their schools and classrooms. In the Slovak environment, there has been an increased need for the creation of character education programs as well as for improvements in the theory of value-posture and character education.<sup>8</sup>

Moral and character education in Slovakia are not taught as autonomous subjects but take the form of activities focused on the development of various virtues within informal education or they take place within the framework of the subjects Ethics Education or Pro-social Education. Furthermore, experimental programs of stimulation of socio-moral development of younger pupils have been implemented in the education of lower primary school pupils. The subject Ethics Education has been implemented in the Slovak educational system since the 1990s in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of primary schools and at secondary schools, and since 2005 in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade of primary schools.

The contemporary character education movement in Slovakia has the exclusive form of informal educational practices focused on teaching values and moral virtues. There has been an increase in implementing various development programs aimed at developing students' skills and character traits for real life at Slovak schools and organizations; let us mention the *DofE Program (The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award)* which is currently running at 180 schools across Slovakia and Great Works Academy aimed at critical thinking and growing in virtues through exploring great works of world writers, painters and music composers which is currently running at 26 schools, *Školy, ktoré menia svet* [Schools That Change the World] program, *Cesta krajinou dobra* [The Road Through the Land of Good] primary-school program, or the *So vzdelaním k charakteru* [With Education to Character] program which is running at the English-Slovak School BESST in Trnava. In addition to emphasizing morality and character, educators have been gradually becoming keen on implementing the ideas of social and emotional intelligence in educational institutions. What is more, learning has been employed at schools that emphasize the skills, emotions, and attitudes necessary for appropriate social settings.

In many countries of the world, character education is reflected in education systems. It has been gaining increasing popularity and schools are convinced that focusing on this area brings significant improvements in pupils' behaviour, the school atmosphere and, last but not least, pupils' performance. In Great Britain, a separate subject Character Education is taught, the same is true for the United States. Great attention to character development is paid in Australia, China, and other countries. Its form and name differ from country to country but the basis is the same – working on a person's personality, developing their good character traits, developing life skills and well-being. When dealing with the topic of character in school, it should always be borne in mind that the subject alone is not enough but the whole idea must be implemented in the school culture. The subject or its systematically created place in the school curriculum has an important role in the fact that students, as well as teachers, must understand the terminology in the same way. There must be interplay and a common language. So when speaking, for example, about modesty, it is necessary to exactly define what it is, what it is not, where the boundaries are, what its forms are, when it can help, and also what place it has in the life of a school or an individual. This is consequently transferred to the daily life of the school and its values.

<sup>7</sup> HOMOLOVÁ, M.: Metóda Whole Brain Teaching v primárnom vzdelávaní. In DUCHOVIČOVÁ, J., HOŠOVÁ, D., KOLEŇÁKOVÁ, R. Š. (eds.): *Inovatívne trendy v odborových didaktikách. Prepojenie teórie a praxe výučbových stratégií kritického tvorivého myslenia*. Nitra : UKF, 2019, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> ŠVEC, Š.: Súčasný pedagogický výskum na Slovensku. In *Pedagogická orientace*, 2010, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 36.

Globally, a number of research studies have been published on this issue, let us mention, e.g. Pane & Patriana, Zopiatis et al.<sup>9</sup> Research into the formation of character in tertiary (university) education in Slovakia is still in its infancy. Numerous studies provide evidence that university students' character formation is linked to the development of intellectual character virtues such as critical thinking. Different researchers have pointed to the interconnection of media literacy and "the formation of the historical, civic, and ethical awareness of the individual",<sup>10</sup> the instillation of the value of critical thinking and research skills among university students,<sup>11</sup> the relation between media education and development of critical thinking competence,<sup>12</sup> or to increase the level of digital literacy to prevent fake news in order to critically approach media and their content.<sup>13</sup> Gluchmanová suggests that teacher ethics should be applied in the training of future teachers at universities, which may offer opportunities for the implementation of appropriate ethical concepts in higher education.<sup>14</sup>

## 2 Virtue Epistemology

### 2.1 Introduction

Virtue epistemology is a fairly new stream and one of the prevalent directions in epistemology today. It represents a set of the latest approaches to the study of knowledge within which intellectual virtues play a central role. First, intellectual virtues are the characteristics and capabilities of a good thinker or knowledgeable person. Hence, a significant trait of virtue epistemology is the fact that it is directly focused on knowing the subject or agent.<sup>15</sup>

Within virtue epistemology, there are two main varieties – virtue reliabilism and virtue responsibilism – each of them offering distinct conceptions of intellectual virtues. The idea of intellectual virtue in modern epistemology was first introduced by Ernest Sosa. However, philosophers are not uniform in defining intellectual virtues. In general, *virtue reliabilism* understands the performance of intellectual virtue as the application of reliable and well-functioning cognitive abilities (faculties) such as vision, reason, memory, or introspection. They are called *faculty-virtues*.<sup>16</sup> In other words, Sosa as an advocate of virtue reliabilism perceives intellectual virtues as being affected by several external factors which can influence the performance of these virtues. As Sosa sees it, "an intellectual virtue is a quality bound to help maximize one's surplus of truth over error".<sup>17</sup> Other philosophers explain intellectual virtues as traits of cognitive character that are

<sup>9</sup> See: PANE, M. M., PATRIANA, R.: The Significance of Environmental Contents in Character Education for Quality of Life. In *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2016, Vol. 222, p. 244-252; ZOPIATIS, A. A., KRAMBIA-KAPARDIS, M.: Ethical Behaviour of Tertiary Education Students in Cyprus. In *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2007, Vol. 81, No. 3, p. 647-663; NAKAYAMA, O.: Actualizing Moral Education in Japan's Tertiary Section. In *Journal of Character Education*, 2015, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 39-50.

<sup>10</sup> KAČINOVÁ, V.: The Topic of Media-Disseminated Mis-Information and Dis-Information as an Integral Part of General Education in Slovakia. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> PAGLINAWAN, W. M. C.: University Students Engagement with and Disengagement from Fake News. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> See: PETRANOVÁ, D.: Rozvíja mediálna výchova v školách kritické kompetencie žiakov? In *Communication Today*, 2011, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 66-83.

<sup>13</sup> See also: HOSSOVÁ, M.: Fake News and Disinformation: Phenomenons of Post-Factual Society. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 27-35.

<sup>14</sup> GLUCHMANOVÁ, M.: Učiteľská etika a mravná výchova. In *Mravná výchova v školách na Slovensku a v zahraničí. Zborník príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie*. Banská Bystrica : PF UMB v Banskej Bystrici, 2009, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> BAEHR, J.: *Virtue Epistemology*. *New Catholic Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. [online]. [08-06-2021]. Available at: <[https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1036&context=phil\\_fac](https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1036&context=phil_fac)>.

<sup>16</sup> KING, N. L.: Erratum to: Perseverance as an Intellectual Virtue. In *Synthese*, 2014, Vol. 191, No. 15, p. 3783.

<sup>17</sup> SOSA, E.: *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected Essays in Epistemology*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 225.

acquired, and these virtues are also called *character virtues*. Lorraine Code supports the theory of *virtue responsibilism* by arguing that a focus on solid intellectual virtues and predispositions like intelligence, wisdom, or prudence is more beneficial and these virtues constitute very important character traits.<sup>18</sup> Zagzebski<sup>19</sup> advanced this view by developing a list of intellectual character traits including humility, autonomy, courage, perseverance, courage, fairness, open-mindedness, and thoroughness. Nonetheless, for virtue epistemology to be fully-fledged and fruitful, both faculty-virtues and character virtues need to be incorporated in it.<sup>20</sup>

Philosophical foundations of contemporary character ethics can be traced back to Ancient Greece including the philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. According to Aristotle, moral virtues are character traits which are evolved during one's lifetime. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gives an account of the development of character, morality, and virtue in a person. In particular, he claims that any moral virtue is inborn and it arises from habit. He promotes the thesis that virtue is acquired through activity or by getting used to some activity. Therefore, virtue is dependent on repeated activity (1103a19-26).<sup>21</sup> This leads us to believe that moral and character education is at least worth talking about and integrating into schools' curricula or implementing into schools' cultures.

Further, the roots of contemporary virtue ethics lie in ancient Greek philosophy. It is therefore obvious that modern scholars have adopted three fundamental concepts derived from it: "*arête (excellence or virtue), phronesis (practical or moral wisdom) and eudaimonia (usually translated as happiness or human flourishing)*".<sup>22</sup> The Aristotelian concept of virtues as states of character rather than passions can be transformed into the online environment as the development of cyber-virtues, above all cyber-wisdom. Eudaimonia (flourishing) can therefore deviate from its primary meaning of hedonistic happiness or short-term pleasure and be replaced by cyber-flourishing. Harrison goes far beyond these basic definitions by extending them to the online environment or cyberspace. Thus, the three fundamental components of a character-based approach in the online environment are cyber-flourishing, cyber-virtues, and cyber-wisdom.<sup>23</sup> Building upon Aristotelian *phronesis, cyber-wisdom* in its most basic form helps us to do the right things at the proper time and in the proper manner.<sup>24</sup> How can the concept of wisdom or practical wisdom be transformed into the cyber-environment? When taking into account that we are daily confronted with moral dilemmas in the online and other digital environments, being cyber-wise means thinking through a battle of virtues, make a decision and consistently carry out the chosen procedure adopted to deal with the dilemma. However, this does not happen overnight – on the contrary, it requires active trying and learning from trying. In view of this assumption, it can be concluded that cyber-wisdom is a cognitive or intellectual virtue as it requires our thinking before taking action. Dennis and Harrison further point out that although cyber-wisdom is an intellectual virtue, it is more than just an intellectual virtue, "*it is the quality of knowing the acceptable course of action in any given online situation*".<sup>25</sup> It is a meta-virtue

<sup>18</sup> CODE, L.: Toward a 'Responsibilist' Epistemology. In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1984, Vol. 45, No. 1, p. 29-50. [online]. [08-06-2021]. Available at: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2107325?origin=crossref>>.

<sup>19</sup> ZAGZEBSKI, L.: Intellectual Motivation and the Good of Truth. In EDWARDS, D. (ed.): *Truth a Contemporary Reader*. London : Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019, p. 345.

<sup>20</sup> KING, N. L.: Erratum to: Perseverance as an intellectual virtue. In *Synthese*, 2014, Vol. 191, No. 15, p. 3783.

<sup>21</sup> RACKHAM, H. (ed.): *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics*. [online]. [08-06-2021]. Available at: <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0054%3Abekker%20page%3D1097b>>.

<sup>22</sup> HURSTHOUSE, R.: *Virtue Ethics*. [online]. [09-09-2021]. Available at: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>>.

<sup>23</sup> HARRISON, T.: Cultivating Cyber-phronesis. In *Journal of Pastoral Care in Education*, 2016, Vol. 34, No. 4, p. 239.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> DENNIS, M., HARRISON, T.: Unique Ethical Challenges for the 21st Century: Online Technology and Virtue Education. In *Journal of Moral Education*, 2021, Vol. 50, No. 3, p. 6.

that harmonizes other intellectual character virtues such as critical reasoning, open-mindedness, or sound and independent judgment, while at the same time requiring their good application in online or digital communication. Moreover, implementing morally correct conduct in online interactions enhances the level of behaviour online in general.

The issue of ethical dilemmas and the process of ethical decision-making in the digital environment, in particular in digital games, is dealt with by Magová.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2 Intellectual Virtues

Intellectual virtues are cognitive character traits leading to honesty and truth as well as the minimization of erroneous decisions.<sup>27</sup> They can also be described as character strengths motivated by an interest to reach good goals such as truth and understanding. Some authors like Zagzebski<sup>28</sup> see Aristotle's classical moral virtues such as kindness, compassion, friendliness, truthfulness, justice, or temperance as the focal point for the shaping of intellectual virtues. Baehr<sup>29</sup> goes on to argue that each intellectual virtue encompasses a tendency to perform a certain cognitive activity which differentiates the specific virtue from other intellectual virtues. In summary, an intellectual virtue may either be an implementation of cognitive abilities like introspection and vision memory, or the implementation of acquired cognitive character traits like open-mindedness, curiosity and honesty. In general, the most fundamental aim of intellectual virtues is to reach the final goal of enhancing human understanding by looking for or understanding truth. And this paramount aim of truth is also what distinguishes intellectual virtues from moral ones.

Thinking of intellectual virtues within a virtue responsibilist framework, we now provide a classification of foundational intellectual virtues as elaborated by Baehr.<sup>30</sup> And with this common model before us, we turn to a concise description of these virtues. Further to the virtues identified by Baehr, some authors add other intellectual virtues and character traits which are also included in the following classification.

1. Curiosity – people who are curious have an intrinsic motivation to ponder and learn new knowledge. In other words, curiosity replaces the motivation to learn. Unlike perceptual curiosity which depends on auditory, visual, or other kinds of stimulation, by intellectual curiosity we mean epistemic curiosity relating to searching for opportunities for intellectual engagement and learning new facts.<sup>31</sup> Watson uses the term *inquisitiveness* as a foundational intellectual virtue to educate students for while characterizing it as the "... *question-asking virtue*".<sup>32</sup> While inquisitiveness motivates people to initiate an intellectual inquiry, asking good questions is an intellectual skill and the result of such inquiry. Therefore, intellectual curiosity or inquisitiveness is, alongside individual differences in cognitive abilities and intelligence, a decisive factor in academic achievement.

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<sup>26</sup> See: MAGOVÁ, L.: The Development of Ethical Education through Digital Games: The Butterfly Effect Implementation. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 32-44.

<sup>27</sup> HEERSMINK, R.: A Virtue Epistemology of the Internet: Search Engines, Intellectual Virtues and Education. In *Social Epistemology. A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy*, 2018, Vol. 32, No.1, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> ZAGZEBSKI, L.: Intellectual Motivation and the Good of Truth. In DePAUL, M., ZAGZEBSKI, L. (eds.): *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 153-154.

<sup>29</sup> BAEHR, J.: *Cultivating Good Minds: A Philosophical and Practical Guide to Educating for Intellectual Virtues*. 2015. [online]. [2021-09-16]. Available at: <<https://www.ivalongbeach.org/academics/master-virtues>>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> VON STUMM S., HELL, B., CHAMORRO-PREMUZIC, T.: The Hungry Mind: Intellectual Curiosity is the Third Pillar of Academic Performance. In *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2011, Vol. 6, No. 6, p. 577.

<sup>32</sup> WATSON, L.: Educating for Inquisitiveness: A Case against Exemplarism for Intellectual Character Education. In *Journal of Moral Education*, 2019, Vol. 48, No. 3, p. 304.

2. Intellectual humility – the virtue of intellectual humility means being aware of one’s intellectual limitations and owning cognitive weaknesses. On the other hand, some authors<sup>33</sup> argue that humility stems from low self-esteem. From this perspective, intellectual humility lies in a sort of underestimating of one’s cognitive strengths and being realistic about the intellectual and cognitive limitations which represent one’s weaknesses while being able to admit not to know everything. The vices, which stand in contrast to the intellectual virtue of humility, include arrogance, pride, snobbery, impertinence, self-ambition, or narcissism. Roberts and Wood conclude that humility as an intellectual virtue not only demands unconcern with one’s desire to appear faultless and without weakness to others, but it is also a mixture of other positive virtues such as self-confidence.<sup>34</sup>
3. Intellectual autonomy – the virtue of intellectual autonomy can be described as an ability to autonomously and independently think and reason for oneself. Being intellectually autonomous, however, does not require stubbornly sticking to one’s beliefs; on the contrary – it involves reliance and outsourcing, e.g., on other individuals or technologies. It is nevertheless important to balance between intellectual autonomy and intellectual humility by admitting that one is not an expert in something and depends on others when necessary. The term *intellectual autonomy* bears similarities with the term *critical thinking*. Critical thinking is a competence essentially meaning ‘thinking out of the box’ and further considering or re-considering something that is widely accepted, and at the same time undertaking personal development, evaluating things from various angles, verifying and checking facts. Baehr elaborates this point further by comparing an intellectual virtues approach and a critical thinking approach in education. The latter combines a concentration on critical thinking skills with a concentration on the critical spirit or intellectual properties which are very close to intellectual character virtues.<sup>35</sup>
4. Attentiveness – being intellectually attentive means being attentive to details while focusing on the cognitive task performed. Attention is drawn to all necessary details and nuances which are then dealt with adequately. An attentive student notices small details in texts, likes to look closely at things, and tends to see details in texts that other students overlook.
5. Intellectual carefulness – means sensitivity to avoiding intellectual faults and mistakes on one hand and, and acquiring true beliefs on the other. Heersmink points out that to be able to avoid mistakes, a basic comprehension of a knowledge area concerned as well as critical thinking skills are essential.<sup>36</sup>
6. Intellectual thoroughness – a person who is intellectually thorough has an ability to take an interest in and seek explanations for problems. They look for a deeper explanation and understanding of phenomena, being unsatisfied with easy and shallow interpretations. The virtues of intellectual thoroughness and carefulness are thus crucial in determining the trustworthiness of sources. Gálik and Gáliková-Tolnaiová warn that the long-term use of digital media may cause digital superficiality that will replace the depth of intellectual work necessary for learning.<sup>37</sup>
7. Open-mindedness – a person who is open-minded is able to consider other opinions and perspectives and, based on this, they will be more willing to change and correct their beliefs and views. Bugeja insists that an individual as an epistemic agent should be aware

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<sup>33</sup> WHITCOMB, D. et al.: Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations. In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2015, Vol. 94, No. 3, p. 518.

<sup>34</sup> ROBERTS, R. C., WOOD, W. J.: Humility and Epistemic Goods. In DePAUL, M., ZAGZEBSKI, L. (eds.) *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 261.

<sup>35</sup> BAEHR, J.: Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice. In *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, 2013, Vol. 47, No. 2, p. 253.

<sup>36</sup> HEERSMINK, R.: A Virtue Epistemology of the Internet: Search Engines, Intellectual Virtues and Education. In *Social Epistemology*, 2018, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> GÁLIK, S., GÁLIKOVÁ-TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Influence of the Internet on the Cognitive Abilities of Man. Phenomenological and Hermeneutical Approach. In *Communication Today*, 2015, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 7.



of their personal biases the consequences of which can be alleviated by exercising the intellectual character traits like intellectual carefulness and open-mindedness.<sup>38</sup>

8. Intellectual courage – means a readiness to face a potential loss or harm, including fear and embarrassment when communicating or presenting one’s view. Baehr notes that there is some overlap in the intellectual traits of curiosity, open-mindedness, and courage by putting forward that an epistemic agent only possesses an intellectual virtue if he or she demonstrates a certain activity that has its root in “love of epistemic goods”.<sup>39</sup> Zagzebski concludes by adding that it is the virtue of intellectual courage that is included in the motives behind searching for truth.<sup>40</sup>
9. Intellectual tenacity – can also be described as intellectual perseverance. This virtue embraces a readiness to take on intellectual challenges and stay persistent. An important presumption is that an intellectually tenacious individual does not give up on solving problems; he or she stays curious until epistemic goals have been achieved.

For each virtue, there is a vice that is associated with it and is the opposite of virtues. A vice is a weakness that has developed during the intellectual life of an epistemic agent. Baehr notes that intellectual vices are deformities of intellectual character such as intellectual apathy, intellectual laziness, narrow-mindedness, arrogance, neglect, carelessness, or indecisiveness.<sup>41</sup> Further, he notes that there is an asymmetry between intellectual virtues and intellectual vices. He concludes that defective judgment and defective epistemic motivation are enough to form an intellectual vice – more precisely, in order to be intellectually vicious, one does not need to be defective in all main features of intellectual virtue. Zagzebski goes on to argue that vices and virtues are a category of one’s qualities to be ascribed to a person after their death, thus defining a person more precisely than any other category of qualities.<sup>42</sup>

### 3 The Intellectual Virtue Approach and the Critical Thinking Approach

Making use of the abundant scholarship on virtue epistemology, see, for example,<sup>43</sup> it can be stated that there is a strong relation between intellectual virtues and satisfactory education, so the development of intellectual virtues seems to be a valuable educational aim. A person or student who is intellectually virtuous has an intrinsic desire for generally recognized goods such as love of learning, truthfulness, and understanding. In this context, a question of the

<sup>38</sup> See: BUGEJA, M. J.: *Living Ethics: Across Media Platforms*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> BAEHR, J.: Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice. In *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, 2013, Vol. 47, No. 2, p. 249.

<sup>40</sup> ZAGZEBSKI, L.: Intellectual Motivation and the Good of Truth. In DePAUL, M., ZAGZEBSKI, L. (eds.): *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 153-154.

<sup>41</sup> See: BAEHR, J.: The Structure of Intellectual Vices. In KIDD, J. I., BATTALY, H., CASSAM, Q. (eds.): *Vice Epistemology*. London : Routledge, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> See also: ZAGZEBSKI, L.: *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>43</sup> See: WATSON, L.: Educating for Inquisitiveness: A Case against Exemplarism for Intellectual Character Education. In *Journal of Moral Education*, 2019, Vol. 48, No. 3, p. 303-315; BAEHR, J.: Is Intellectual Character Growth a Realistic Educational Aim? In *Journal of Moral Education*, 2016, Vol. 45, No. 2, p. 117-131; HEERSMINK, R.: A Virtue Epistemology of the Internet: Search Engines, Intellectual Virtues and Education. In *Social Epistemology*, 2018, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 1-12; DENNIS, M., HARRISON, T.: Unique Ethical Challenges for the 21st Century: Online Technology and Virtue Education. In *Journal of Moral Education*, 2021, Vol. 50, No. 3, p. 251-266; AMBROŽOVÁ, P., KALIBA, M.: Educational Counselling in Czech Educational Settings from the Perspective of Primary School Pupils. In CHOVA, L. G. et al. (eds.): *EDULEARN19: International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies*. Palma, Spain : IATED, 2019, p. 3445.

educational significance of character and virtues in school environments arises. According to Baehr, the essential aim of education is to cultivate intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness, attentiveness, curiosity, courage, carefulness, and intellectual honesty.<sup>44</sup> Watson adds that the fundamental intellectual virtue to educate for is the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness as it acts as a motivating intellectual virtue that initiates the intellectually virtuous inquiry.<sup>45</sup> It is, however, worth mentioning that promoting intellectual virtues is the only valuable aim in education. An intellectually virtuous student in tertiary education should display virtues like fairness, open-mindedness, courage, attention, carefulness, honesty, humility, autonomy, tenacity, patience, and diligence.<sup>46</sup> Kotzee et al. point out that when comparing other educational aims, such as knowledge and critical thinking, with the intellectual virtue aim, the latter should have priority.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, however, they pose a question of whether intellectual virtues can be taught properly. The pedagogical challenge of the intellectual virtue education envisages the successful organization of educational activities around it, effective maximization, and its importance over other teaching methods and activities.<sup>48</sup> Advocates of the intellectual virtue approach in education, such as Baehr,<sup>49</sup> Orona & Pritchard,<sup>50</sup> Croce & Pritchard<sup>51</sup> propose the cultivation of intellectual virtues like curiosity or intellectual courage rather than reliable faculties like memory or eyesight. The value of intellectual values education is reflected in the modern economy by placing emphasis in the job environment on soft skills and competencies that are based on intellectual virtues such as perseverance, curiosity, open-mindedness, autonomy, and carefulness. Gerstein & Friedman point out that in skills-based education, any content subject may be enhanced by delivering not only content but also skills and intellectual virtues.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the coherence between the approaches deployed by educators and divergent skill strategies has also been examined.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the aim of intellectual character development in an educational environment has the capacity to add a refining and intrinsically motivating dimension to the educational process.<sup>54</sup> As a consequence, there is a broad discussion among scholars about the acquisition of intellectual virtues. The contemporary image of the way the intellectual virtues are acquired builds upon Aristotelian habituation. Zagzebski's exemplarist theory of virtue acquisition is grounded in exemplars of moral goodness, i.e. people who are admirable and inspiring as possessing particular moral or non-moral virtues.<sup>55</sup> Based on this belief, the intellectual virtues can thus also be learned through admiration of the exemplar of intellectual goodness (see, e.g., Battaly).<sup>56</sup>

<sup>44</sup> BAEHR, J.: Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice. In *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, 2013, Vol. 47, No. 2, p. 253.

<sup>45</sup> WATSON, L.: Educating for inquisitiveness: A Case against Exemplarism for Intellectual Character Education. In *Journal of Moral Education*, 2019, Vol. 48, No. 3, p. 307.

<sup>46</sup> LeBLANC, S.: *Good Students: Intellectual Virtues in Higher Education*, 2019. [Dissertation Thesis]. Fredericton, NB, Canada : University of New Brunswick, 2019, p. 113.

<sup>47</sup> KOTZEE, B., CARTER, J. A., SIEGEL, H.: Educating for Intellectual Virtue: A Critique from Action Guidance. In *Episteme*, 2021, Vol, 18, No. 2, p. 189.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> BAEHR, J.: Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice. In *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, 2013, Vol. 47, No. 2, p. 256.

<sup>50</sup> ORONA, A. G., PRITCHARD, D.: Inculcating Curiosity: Pilot Results of an Online Module to Enhance Undergraduate Intellectual Virtue. In *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 2021, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> CROCE, M., PRITCHARD, D.: (Forthcoming). Education as the Social Cultivation of Intellectual Virtue. In ALFANO, M., KLEIN, C., de RIDDER, J. (eds.): *Social Virtue Epistemology*. London : Routledge.

<sup>52</sup> GERSTEIN, M., FRIEDMAN, H. H.: Rethinking Higher Education: Focusing on Skills and Competencies. In *Psychosociological Issues in Human Resource Management*, 2016, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 111.

<sup>53</sup> ROŠTEKOVÁ, M., PALOVÁ, M.: Curricular Internationalization in Higher Education in Slovakia through the Integration of Content and Language – Experience with Teaching in French In *XLinguae*, 2020, Vol. 13, Issue 1, p. 215.

<sup>54</sup> BAEHR, J.: Is Intellectual Character Growth a Realistic Educational Aim?. In *Journal of Moral Education*, 2016, Vol. 45, No. 2, p. 124.

<sup>55</sup> ZAGZEBSKI, L.: *Exemplarist Moral Theory*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> BATTALY, H.: Teaching Intellectual Virtues. In *Teaching Philosophy*, 2006, Vol. 29, Issue 3, p. 197.

By contrast, the critical thinking approach teaches students how to think critically, why critical thinking is good and why thinking uncritically is not good. By good is meant good “*from the epistemic point of view*”,<sup>57</sup> i.e. thinking which provides reasons and evidence and thinking that avoids deceptions and other fallacies in reasoning. Siegel argues that critical thinking is not merely an intellectual virtue – on one hand, it embraces dispositions and habits of mind, but on the other, it outranks intellectual virtues in that its component of assessing reasons entails the abilities necessary for assessing reasons in epistemically respectable ways.<sup>58</sup> The critical assessment component includes dispositions such as disposition to seek reasons and evidence or to request reasons and justifications for arguments, or attitudes and character traits such as a refusal of being partial or inconsistent, and an obligation to evaluate relevant evidence objectively as well as to value good reasoning and objectivity of judgment. In terms of ‘good thinking’, thinking in logical terms confers a benefit compared with thinking in virtue terms in that the former is completely exact and explicit. Kotzee et al. conclude that the intellectual virtue approach in education should be supported; however, there are not enough tools to do so in real teaching. In practical terms, if students are to be taught intellectual virtues, these virtues should not be only modelled but an understanding of the reasons and the abilities necessary for reasoning must be taught properly.<sup>59</sup> Byerly<sup>60</sup> discusses a proposal to include teaching and learning activities aimed at fostering intellectual virtues into the logic or critical thinking classes. He reveals a need to create further pedagogical resources in addition to the existing ones. Vrabec and Rigo<sup>61</sup> provide an analysis of different forms of standardized assessment tools focused on critical testing. Elder and Paul<sup>62</sup> discuss critical thinking competence standards which are fundamental to teaching and learning because they go further than the development of skills to the advancement of fundamental intellectual virtues.

## 4 Conclusion

Educators’ focus on the development of character and morality is not new. It has been of interest to philosophers, moral theorists, and educators since classical antiquity. This interest in ‘good character’ was translated into education systems worldwide in the form of moral and character education. It can be concluded that character education is the intentional struggle to cultivate virtues. A central theoretical principle is that of Aristotle’s meaning that virtues are developed by accomplishing virtuous actions. Following this principle, character educators strive to encourage students to carry out nice, polite, and self-controlled acts continually – until it becomes customary and self-evident for them to do so and natural to avoid doing the opposite. A person’s character is built upon several (often overlapping) dimensions, each of them having a distinctive set of virtues and vices – performance, moral, civic, and intellectual. This model of personal character is relevant for the implementation of character education practices in all types of educational institutions. Surprisingly, an approach to character education that is aimed

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<sup>57</sup> KOTZEE, B., CARTER, J. A., SIEGEL, H.: Educating for Intellectual Virtue: A Critique from Action Guidance. In *Episteme*, 2021, Vol. 18, No. 2, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> SIEGEL, H.: Critical Thinking and the Intellectual Virtues. In BAEHR, J. (ed.): *Intellectual Virtues and Education. Essays in Applied Virtue Epistemology*. New York : Routledge, 2015, p. 99.

<sup>59</sup> KOTZEE, B., CARTER, J. A., SIEGEL, H.: Educating for Intellectual Virtue: A Critique from Action Guidance. In *Episteme*, 2021, Vol. 18, No. 2, p. 181.

<sup>60</sup> BYERLY, R. T.: Teaching for Intellectual Virtue in Logic and Critical Thinking Classes: Why and How. In *Teaching Philosophy*, 2019, Vol. 42, No. 1, p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> See: VRABEC, N., RIGO, F.: Possibilities of Evaluating Critical Thinking Through Standardized Tests. In ČÁBYOVÁ, L., BEŽÁKOVÁ, Z., MADLEŇÁK, A. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: New Changes, New Challenges*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2021, p. 730-742.

<sup>62</sup> ELDER, L., PAUL, R.: Critical Thinking: Competency Standards Essential to the Cultivation of Intellectual Skills, Part 4. In *Journal of Developmental Education*, 2012, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 30-31.

at the cultivation of intellectual virtues, particularly in tertiary education, is scarcely investigated in the literature and remains unexplored. We support the responsibilist approach to virtue epistemology that places emphasis on the epistemic significance of intellectual character virtues like intellectual humanity, intellectual autonomy, curiosity, intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual courage, and intellectual tenacity. Assuming that a good learner is a good thinker and thus possesses intellectual virtues, the promotion and fostering of intellectual virtues should undoubtedly be implemented in educational theory and practice. Nevertheless, the intellectual virtues approach does not have powerful and elaborated pedagogic tools for intellectual virtues to be acquired as a crucial aim of education. Contrary to the intellectual virtues approach, which is more model-based, the critical thinking approach thus proves to be more practical in providing tools for thinking critically, analysing arguments, structuring arguments, creating argument schemes, etc. If we conclude that good character should be a primary goal of education, then the mutual overlapping of critical thinking and the fostering of intellectual virtues may be conceived of as educationally ideal.

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Yuliia Sazonova

# Inventions in Media Education with the Use of the Innovative Technologies (with the Example of Teaching the Discipline “History of Journalism”)

## ABSTRACT

The article substantiates the need to modernize media education in higher educational institutions of the post-information society, the factors that determine the methodology of lectures and seminars are identified, the ways of optimization of media education with the example of teaching the professional discipline “History of Ukrainian and foreign journalism” are offered, the formats of lectures and seminars classes in media education with the use of information and communications technologies are proposed, the characteristic features and advantages of each format are determined. The typology of invariants of lectures is developed and the expanded classification of formats of seminars with implementation of innovative technologies through a prism of elements of gamification is modelled, in particular classes in the format of interactive quizzes and brain-rings, interactive crossword puzzles (classical, Japanese, fillwords, sudoku, scanwords), interactive group debates and discussions, interactive polls and interactive fine arts (mindmapping). The results of a survey of students of the specialty “Journalism” of the capital and regional Ukrainian universities regarding the most popular ICT, the most effective, motivational, and creative formats for lectures and seminars classes in the educational process are presented. The effectiveness of seminars with the implementation of gamification is substantiated, since information in the form of an intellectual game activates creative and analytical thinking, allows the integration of all students to creative cognitive activities, contributes to the intensification of the educational process, and makes it more interesting, flexible, and multifaceted.

## KEY WORDS

Media Education. History of Journalism. Information and Communications Technologies. Modernization. Invariants of Classes. Interactive Forms.



# 1 Introduction

In our time one of most pressing issues of social communication is the problem of the optimization of media education. Journalistic education in the time of the post-information society and the latest information technologies requires significant modernization in the use of innovations in the training of qualified specialists for the mass-media.

The soviet methods of journalism studies are losing their effectiveness and efficiency, so for the preparation of competitive specialists in mediacommunications for the labour market it is necessary and considerable to optimize the educational process in higher education, to provide burst performance and efficiency of studies. This is actually due to the transition from the Gutenberg generation, which primarily used textbooks, to the generation of Google, that favours online versions of textbooks and information and communication technologies.

*The relevance of the topic* is due to the lack of research on the problems of optimization of media education and in particular specific professional disciplines. It is known that every discipline has its own subject, its own tasks and aims, so when teaching certain disciplines it follows using not only general innovative technologies but also such technologies and methodologies that will be effective exactly for the certain educational discipline. The modernization of the system of education and the use of European standards in it compels the teacher of journalistic disciplines to constantly transform, to modify, to perfect their methodology of the realization of classes, change the approach to the realization of lectures and seminars in accordance with the new challenges of modern education in the era of the post-information society and the active development of multimedia technologies.

For many centuries the methodology of media education has remained unchanged. But today new challenges and tasks that are predefined by trends in global education stand before teachers. Today in many universities around the world (in particular, in Spain and the Ibero-American countries) students do not have to attend lectures,<sup>1</sup> which forces teachers to look for ways and methods of engaging students in lectures and seminars. Another factor in reducing student motivation is the distraction of students by gadgets and devices that dull the perception and understanding of the lecture material and diminish students' activity in seminar classes. According to V. Vlasyuk, *"gadgets should not be banned, but teachers should become interesting. So much so that students did not have a desire to be distracted."*<sup>2</sup> V. Kaplinsky also emphasizes this, noting that today *"the aim of the lecturer is not so much to inform the students of a certain amount of knowledge, but to ensure their counteracting activity, that is, to create all the necessary conditions for the student to want "to take" what the teacher offers."*<sup>3</sup> The teacher must find ways to motivate students through the use of information and communication technologies, gamification and to promote their immersion in the educational process. According to S. Grofčíková, motivation is a unifying element between teacher and student, and the components "teacher-motivation-student" are triad, which is an important factor in the effectiveness of the learning process.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See more: ¿Debería ser obligatoria la asistencia de los estudiantes a las clases? [online]. [2020-11-09]. Available at: <<http://noticias.universia.es/educacion/noticia/2018/03/01/1158204/deberia-obligatoria-asistencia-estudiantes-clases.html>>; *Motivos para asistir a conferencias en la universidad*. [online]. [2020-11-09]. Available at: <<http://noticias.universia.com.bo/educacion/noticia/2015/11/23/1133953/motivos-asistir-conferencias-universidad.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> VLASYUK, V.: *Studenty proty hadzhetiv: khto koho?* [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<https://blog.liga.net/user/vlvlas%D1%83uk/article/28221>>.

<sup>3</sup> KAPLINSKY, V.: *Metodyka vykladannia u vyshchii shkoli*. Vinnytsia : TOV "Niland LTD", 2015, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> See: GROFČÍKOVÁ, S.: Učiteľ – motivácia – študent. In MATTOVÁ, I., PLESCHOVÁ, G. (eds.): *Ako kvalitne učiť? Skúsenosti začínajúcich VŠ učiteľov*. Bratislava : Alternatíva – Komunikácia – Občania, 2007.

The problems of journalistic education and the importance of the use of information and communication technologies in media education is considered in the works of media researchers from different continents, presented below:

Continent	Country	Scientists	Short summary of scientific works
Europe	Russia	E. Baranova <sup>5</sup>	the process of media convergence and perturbation in journalistic education caused by the development of information technologies is considered
		L. Zemlyanova <sup>6</sup>	the aspects of modernisation of journalistic education are examined by taking into account foreign experience of communication science
		N. Kirilova <sup>7</sup>	the author analyzes changes in media education in the era of social modernization
		L. Svitch, A. Shiryayeva <sup>8</sup>	the sociological study is conducted to analyze the problems of training journalists
		I. Fateeva <sup>9</sup>	the traditions and prospects of practitioner-oriented journalistic education are analyzed
		L. Shesterkina <sup>10</sup>	the possibilities of application of the technological component in modern journalistic education are investigated

<sup>5</sup> BARANOVA, E.: Protsess konvergensii SMI i zhurnalistskoe obrazovanie. In *Electronic Journal Medyaskop*, 2010, No. 1. [online]. [2020-12-08]. Available at: <<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/protsess-konvergensii-smi-i-zhurnalistskoe-obrazovanie/viewer>>.

<sup>6</sup> ZEMLYANOVA, L.: Modernizatsiya sovremennogo zhurnalistskogo obrazovaniya – znachenie nauchnogo opyta zarubezhnoy kommunikativistiki. In *Electronic Journal Medyaskop*, 2007, No. 1. [online]. [2020-12-08]. Available at: <[www.mediascope.ru/node/61](http://www.mediascope.ru/node/61)>.

<sup>7</sup> See: KIRILOVA, N.: Mediaobrazovanie v epohu sotsialnoy modernizatsii. In *Pedagogika*, 2005, No. 5, p. 13-21.

<sup>8</sup> See: SVITICH, L., SHIRYAEVA, A.: Problemyi podgotovki zhurnalistov (Itogi sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniya). In *Vestnyk Moskovskoho unyversyteta. Seryia Zhurnalystyka*, 2003, Vol. 6, p. 16-23.

<sup>9</sup> FATEEVA, I.: Praktiko-orientirovannoe obuchenie zhurnalistike: traditsii i perspektivy. In *Electronic Journal Medyaskop*, 2008, No. 1. [online]. [2020-12-10]. Available at: <<http://www.mediascope.ru/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D0%B6%D1%83%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B5-%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B8-%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D1%8B>>.

<sup>10</sup> SHESTERKINA, L.: Sovremennoe zhurnalistskoe obrazovanie: aktualizatsiya tehnologicheskogo komponenta. In *Electronic Journal Medyaskop*, 2011, No. 3. [online]. [2022-03-22]. Available at: <<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/sovremennoe-zhurnalistskoe-obrazovanie-aktualizatsiya-tehnologicheskogo-komponenta/viewer>>.

Europe	Ukraine	I. Mykhailyn <sup>11</sup>	the trends, aims and tasks of journalistic education in Ukraine, its genesis and development are analyzed
		N. Kalashnyk <sup>12</sup>	the use of innovative technologies for teaching of the professional discipline "Journalistic investigation" is analyzed
		H. Onkovych <sup>13</sup>	technologies that are acceptable for use in media education, and prospects for implementation of the latest technologies in media education are investigated
		I. Zyuzyan <sup>14</sup>	the modern information technologies and innovative teaching methods at higher education are examined
		S. Gáliková Tolnaiová <sup>15</sup>	analyzes the determinants of successful digital education in the context of the introduction of digital ICT in the educational process, outlines an alternative perspective for understanding the pedagogical training of students and their digital competencies from the point of view of phenomenology and hermeneutics is outlined, which reflects the psychagogic approach to education
Europe	Slovakia	F. Rigo, J. Mikuš <sup>16</sup>	analyzes the use of Edmodo (educational social network) and Google Meet as tools and platforms for distance learning in teaching English to students of Faculty of Mass Media Communication of UCM in Trnava, the main features of Edmodo and Google Meet in the process of distance learning of students are presented, the possibilities of asynchronous distance learning (with Edmodo) and synchronous distance learning are considered (combination of Google Meet with Edmodo), the comparison of two methods is carried out and there are conclusions about their efficiency in the distance learning of English by journalists
		H. Hubináková, M. Mikula <sup>17</sup>	motivational factors related to the use of Internet services are explained, services that students consider important and used in the learning process and other activities in the academic environment are identified

<sup>11</sup> See: MYKHAILYN, I.: *Zhurnalistyka yak vsesvit: vybrani mediadoslidzhenia*. Kharkiv : Vydavnychiy Tsentr "Prapor", 2008.; MYKHAILYN, I.: *Zhurnalistska osvita i nauka*. Sumy : Vydavnychiy Tsentr "Universytetska knyha", 2009.

<sup>12</sup> KALASHNYK, N.: *Vykorystannia innovatsiynykh tekhnolohii u vyshchii shkoli (na prykladi vykladannia dystsypliny „Zhurnalistske rozsliduvannia“)*. [online]. [2020-11-12]. Available at: <<http://www-philology.univer.kharkov.ua/nauka/e.../kalashnyk.pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> See also: ONKOVYCH, H.: *Mediaosvita v Ukraini: suchasnyi stan i perspektyvy rozvytku*. In *Novi Tekhnolohii Navchannia*, 2010, Vol. 62, p. 89-92; ONKOVYCH, H.: *Tekhnolohii mediaosvity*. [online]. [2020-12-11]. Available at: <<http://www-podelise.ru/docs/17361/index-14775.html>>.

<sup>14</sup> *Modern Information Technologies and Innovative Teaching Methods in the Training of Specialists: Methodology, Theory, Experience, Problems*. Collection of Scientific Papers. [online]. [2022-03-15]. Available at: <<https://lib.iitta.gov.ua/723174/1/Z-55-druk.pdf>>.

<sup>15</sup> See: GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: *On Perspectives of Teacher Training and Understanding of Their Digital Competencies as Determinants of Digital Education In Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 118-133. [online]. [2021-09-11]. Available at: <[https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/8\\_Galikova-Tolnaiova.pdf](https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/8_Galikova-Tolnaiova.pdf)>.

<sup>16</sup> See also: RIGO, F., MIKUŠ, J.: *Asynchronous and Synchronous Distance Learning of English as a Foreign Language*. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 89-106. [online]. [2021-09-11]. Available at: <[https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/6\\_Rigo\\_Mikus.pdf](https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/6_Rigo_Mikus.pdf)>.

<sup>17</sup> HUBINÁKOVÁ, H., MIKULA, M.: *The Importance of the Internet the Life of Students of Media Studies*. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 31-42. [online]. [2021-09-10]. Available at: <[https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/MLAR\\_3\\_The-Importance-of-the-Internet-in-the-Life-of-Students-of-Media-Studies.pdf](https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/MLAR_3_The-Importance-of-the-Internet-in-the-Life-of-Students-of-Media-Studies.pdf)>.

Europe	Spain	P. Colás-Bravo, J. Conde-Jiménez, S. Reyes-de-Cózar <sup>18</sup>	the model for developing digital competence in teaching based on a sociocultural approach is proposed
		G. Parodi, T. Moreno-de-León, G. Burdiles <sup>19</sup>	the modern generation of students, that is positioned as a transitional generation of "Gutenberg-Google", that gives advantage to symbiosis of paper forms and digital technologies in studies, is analysed
		J. Gómez Galán <sup>20</sup>	contains an analysis of the practical and theoretical paradigm of mediaeducation as a fundamental pedagogical model for the development of modern methods of digital literacy
		J. Dela Cruz <sup>21</sup>	considers the generation of communications technologies from the middle of the twentieth century, in particular with the use of media, audiocassettes, videocassettes, fax) to the present day, high-bandwidth computer technologies are outlined, in particular: desktop video conferencing, two-way interactive audio and real-time video, web media, etc.
		A. Gutiérrez, K. Tyner <sup>22</sup>	the relationship between education and the media in modern society is analyzed, the role that formal education should play in the integration of the media into the curriculum and in digital literacy skills is explored, such types of digital literacy as multimodal, critical and functional
		J. E. Pescador <sup>23</sup>	emphasizes the concept of integrative educational models of mediaeducation, which should take into account the need for analytical / reflective-evaluative study of media and new information and communications technologies, emphasized the importance of critical thinking through the implementation of the technical components and formation of digital citizenship as a prerequisite for the participation of an individual in a global network community
Europe	Italy	F. Cornali, S. Tirocchi <sup>24</sup>	the main features of globalization in education are explored with special emphasis on the role of new information and communications technologies (ICT), which provide new competencies and skills, allow experimenting with new didactic models based on social media and web 2.0 tools, help build a new digital literacy aimed at the critical use of digital media

<sup>18</sup> COLÁS-BRAVO, P., CONDE-JIMÉNEZ, J., REYES-DE-CÓZAR, S.: El desarrollo de la competencia digital docente desde un enfoque sociocultural. In *Comunicar*, 2019, Vol. 61, No. 4, p. 21-32.

<sup>19</sup> PARODI, G., MORENO-DE-LEÓN, T., JULIO, C., BURDILES, G.: Generación Google o Generación Gutenberg: Hábitos y propósitos de lectura en estudiantes universitarios chilenos. In *Comunicar*, 2019, Vol. 58, No. 1, p. 85-94.

<sup>20</sup> GOMÉZ GALÁN, J.: Media Education as Theoretical and Practical Paradigm for Digital Literacy: An Interdisciplinary Analysis. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2015, Vol. 11, No. 3, p. 31-44.

<sup>21</sup> DELA CRUZ, J.: *History of Distance Education*. [online]. [2021-09-05]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/17360954/History\\_of\\_Distance\\_Education](https://www.academia.edu/17360954/History_of_Distance_Education)>.

<sup>22</sup> GUTIÉRREZ, A., TYNER, K.: Media Education, Media Literacy and Digital Competence. In *Comunicar*, 2012, Vol. 19, No. 38, p. 31-39.

<sup>23</sup> PESCADOR, J. E. P. (ed.): Educación mediática y formación del profesorado. In *Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado*, 2018, No. 91. [online]. [2021-09-10]. Available at: <[https://aufop.com/aufop/uploaded\\_files/revistas/15337165305.pdf#page=158](https://aufop.com/aufop/uploaded_files/revistas/15337165305.pdf#page=158)>.

<sup>24</sup> CORNALI, F., TIROCCHI, S.: Globalization, Education, Information and Communication Technologies: What Relationships and Reciprocal Influences? In *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2012, Vol. 47, p. 2060-2069. [online]. [2021-09-09]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275541968\\_Globalization\\_Education\\_Information\\_and\\_Communication\\_Technologies\\_What\\_Relationships\\_and\\_Reciprocal\\_Influences](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275541968_Globalization_Education_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_What_Relationships_and_Reciprocal_Influences)>.

<b>Europe</b>	<b>England</b>	D. Buckingham <sup>25</sup> R. Crick, K. Wilson <sup>26</sup>	the importance of the use of information technology in mediaeducation for its modernization and optimization is considered
<b>North America</b>	<b>USA</b>	G. Morrison, D. Morrison, <sup>27</sup> A. Collins, R. Halverson <sup>28</sup>	offer a vision for the future of American education that goes well beyond the walls of the classroom to include online social networks, distance learning with “anytime, anywhere” access, digital home schooling models, video-game learning environments
<b>Asia</b>	<b>India</b>	K. Bhakta, N. Dutta <sup>29</sup>	the use of information technology in mediaeducation is considered, which helps to strengthen students’ 4C skills (critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration) and provides meaning and relevance for the Net generation
	<b>Pakistan</b>	I. Hussain, M. Safdar <sup>30</sup>	
	<b>China</b>	A. Y. Lee <sup>31</sup>	
<b>Australia</b>	<b>Australia</b>	G. Faloon <sup>32</sup>	analyzes various frameworks and models for building students’ digital capabilities, options for using new technologies, principles for improving students’ skills in using “educational” applications and digital information, options for effective combination of pedagogical, semantic and technological knowledge in classes as well as support for the integration of digital resources into learning to improve the results of the educational process
<b>Africa</b>	<b>Nigeria</b>	K. Mohammed, B. Muhammad Yarinchi <sup>33</sup>	new information technologies are considered as a set of tools that have a significant impact on all areas of education and helps in promoting opportunities of knowledge sharing throughout the world

Source: own processing, 2022.

However in the aforementioned works, the issues of optimization of the educational process in mediaeducation are considered abstractly, without justifying the appropriateness of applying certain methods to specific professional disciplines, which actualizes our research. All of the above actualizes the appeal to this topic, since today it is fundamentally necessary for a teacher to be able to interest students, to immerse themselves in the learning process, in particular using the gadget as an important attribute of the learning process, not only as an obstacle, to deepen the motivation of students, which requires the teacher to transform the types of lectures and seminars, the implementation of innovative technologies and gamification, and the variability of pedagogical tools.

<sup>25</sup> See: BUCKINGHAM, D.: *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge, UK : Polity, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> CRICK, R. D., WILSON, K.: Being a Learner: A Virtue for the 21st Century. In *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 2005, Vol. 53, No. 3, p. 359-374.

<sup>27</sup> See: MORRISON, G. R., LOWTHER, D. L.: *Integrating Computer Technology into the Classroom. Skills for the 21st Century*. Boston, MA : Pearson, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> See: COLLINS, A., HALVERSON, R.: *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology: The Digital Revolution and Schooling in America*. New York : Teachers College Press, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> BHAKTA, K., DUTTA, N.: Impact of Information Technology on Teaching-learning Proces. In *International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies*, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 11, p. 131-138. [online]. [2020-09-03]. Available at: <<http://oaji.net/articles/2017/1707-1483695373.pdf>>.

<sup>30</sup> HUSSAIN, I., SAFDAR, M.: Role of Information Technologies in Teaching Learning Process: Perception of the Faculty. In *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 2008, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 44-56. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/156261>>.

<sup>31</sup> LEE, A. Y. L.: Hong Kong Media Education in the Web 2.0 Era: Engaging with the Net Generation. In *Media Literacy Education in Action*, 2014, Vol. 1, p. 87-93.

<sup>32</sup> FALOOD, G.: From Digital Literacy to Digital Competence: The Teacher Digital Competency (TDC) Framework. In *Education Technology Research Development*, 2020, Vol. 68, No. 5, p. 2449-2472. [online]. [2021-09-12]. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11423-020-09767-4>>.

<sup>33</sup> MOHAMMED, K., MUHAMMAD YARINCHI, B.: Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Media Education: In Historical Perspective. In *European Scientific Journal*, 2013, Vol. 9, No. 20, p. 198-206.

**The purpose of the research** – to offer methods for the optimization of process of training mediaworkers in higher education through the implementation of innovative technologies in the educational process and to develop a detailed classification of invariants of lectures, seminars and classes using gamification, interactivity, information and communication technologies on the example of teaching of the professional discipline “History of Ukrainian and foreign journalism”, to conduct a survey of students majoring in “Journalism” of the capital and regional universities of Ukraine to determine the most effective and interesting formats of lectures and seminars classes.

## 2 Methodology

To achieve the stated aim we used a set of general scientific (*analysis, synthesis, generalization*) and empirical methods (*in particular observation, study and generalization of pedagogical experience*), as well as the following methods:

- *socio-communicative method of working with documents, study of scientific literature – method of “hemerografía registral”* according to the method of F. Núñez-Romero Olmo,<sup>34</sup> *selection and systematization of primary sources* (including description and analysis of angles /topos of scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied works of Eastern and Western European (Ukrainian, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Italian, English), North American (USA), Asian (Indian, China, Pakistani), African (Nigerian) and Australian researchers the use of information and communication technologies in education and mediaeducation, factors of modernization of mediaeducation in accordance with the latest trends in the mediaindustry, convergence of mediaplatforms);
- *hypothetical-deductive method* (to create a system of deductively related hypotheses / proposals for ways to modernize mediaeducation), which is used in the first stage of the study during the nomination and further proof of the hypothesis of modernization of mediaeducation through the purposeful use of gamification, role-playing games and information and communications technologies in the educational process and conducting lectures and seminars in various forms and invariants on the use of new technologies and software on the example of teaching the professional discipline “History of Ukrainian and foreign journalism”);
- *method of modelling and classification* according to the method of M. Harris<sup>35</sup> (which is used to identify and classify our proposed invariants of lectures and seminars classes using innovative technologies and gamification, in particular to develop a typology of invariants of lectures and formats of seminars classes on the example of teaching of professional discipline “History of Ukrainian and foreign journalism” during the implementation of research and writing parts of this article 3.1. Classification of types of lectures and 3.2. Invariance of types of practical classes) and *method of content analysis* according to K. Krippendorff<sup>36</sup> (used during the consideration of each individual invariant of lectures and seminars using gamification and interactivity; used in the second stage of this research during the classification, development of invariants of lectures and seminars classes and detailed study and analysis of software, information and communications technologies acceptable for conducting classes in one of the developed invariants);

<sup>34</sup> See: NÚÑEZ-ROMERO OLMO, F.: *La formación de las secciones de deportes en los diarios de información general españoles antes de 1936. Análisis hemerográfico estructural comparado*. Valencia : Universidad CEU - Cardenal Herrera, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> HARRIS, M.: Modeling: A Process Method of Teaching. In *College English*, 1983, Vol. 45, No. 1, p. 74-84.

<sup>36</sup> See: KRIPPENDORFF, K.: *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage Publications, 2004.

- *pedagogical experiment* (which consisted in the implementation of simulated invariants of seminars in order to test them, verify their validity in classes on the discipline “History of journalism”. The experiment consisted of testing students’ knowledge and acquired competencies before the use of information and communications technologies and gamification during lectures and seminars and after their use in the educational process. To verify (validate) the results of the experiment, the intermediate (current) learning outcomes of 161 students of the Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University (Mykolaiv, Ukraine) and the International Open University of Human Development “Ukraine” (Kyiv, Ukraine) were compared using the classical format of lectures and seminars with learning outcomes using simulated invariants of lectures and seminars classes involving gamification and information and communications technologies. For statistical processing of learning outcomes before and after the experiment, nonparametric criteria of statistical conclusion were used in accordance with Pearson’s criterion  $\chi^2$  relative to independent groups (students majoring in “Journalism” at the capital and regional universities of Ukraine);
- *traditional-pedagogical method* (in particular, the method of observation according to L. M. Given;<sup>37</sup> different types of observation are used during the classes for each modeled invariant of lectures and seminars, in particular structured observation (observation was carried out according to the developed procedure taking into account the factors of motivation, stimulation of interest, increasing attention and increasing the regularity of attending classes in response to certain technologies and invariants of lectures and seminars), field observation (implemented in real conditions of the educational process), systematic included observation (where the researcher is a real participant in the educational process), stimulating observation (the influence of the researcher on the educational process, which a the teacher of the discipline organizes ), study and generalization of pedagogical experience; *pedagogical experiment* and *traditional-pedagogical method* are used in the third phase of this study);
- *survey method* (which allowed us to determine the effectiveness and interest of information and communications technologies and educational platforms used by students majoring in “Journalism” of Ukrainian universities, most interesting and productive for students invariants of lectures and seminars classes, which were introduced during the teaching of the discipline “History of Journalism”. The survey of students was conducted in the form of an annual structured questionnaire during 2018-2020. 161 full-time students of bachelor’s and master’s studies of the specialty “Journalism” of International Open University of Human Development “Ukraine” (capital Ukrainian University) and Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University (regional Ukrainian University) were interviewed, of which 35 are first year students, 39 are second year students, 37 are third year students, 34 are fourth year students and 16 are fifth year students. The sample of respondents was carried out according to the regular attendance of classes by the method of equal quotas for students of the capital and regional universities. A broad sampling strategy (surveying students from different courses and different universities of Ukraine) was used to increase the comprehensiveness and richness of the data for the study. The questionnaire was based on a self-developed design and contained three parts: the first part – “Necessity of application of information and communications technologies for an educational process and their availability” (five questions), the second part – “The most popular ICT in the learning process. The most effective form of lectures” (five questions), the third part – “The most effective format of realization of seminar classes” (one question with seven possible answers). In total, the questionnaire contained 11 questions. By thematic range the questionnaire – a multi-topic survey (omnibus), which is divided

<sup>37</sup> See: GIVEN, L. M.: *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Singapore : Sage Publications, 2008.

into three parts; by the number of respondents – a group questionnaire (161 respondents); by type of research tasks – focused (collected information on a specific situation – on the need of ICT in educational process, on the most popular ICT in the educational process, on the interest, effectiveness of certain formats of lectures and seminars in the educational process) and standardized (aimed at obtaining statistical information among the student community on the need to use ICT in the educational process, on the most popular ICT in the educational process, on the most interest, efficiency form of classes in the educational process); by type of question, it is a mixed, eclectic questionnaire, in particular, the first part of the questionnaire asks scale and closed questions (for example, the question “The use of ICT does studies more interesting” and answer options: “Mainly agree”, “Mostly disagree”, “Fully agree”), the second part of the questionnaire contains closed-ended questions (for example, “What are your favourite programs of ICT in the educational process?”) and open-ended questions (for example, “Which format of lecture do you prefer and why?”), as well as an alternative type (for example, “Which educational platforms do you use in educational process and which one do you prefer: Moodle or Class Room?”), the third part of the questionnaire presents an open-ended question (in particular, “Which type of seminar is the most interesting and effective and why?”). The presence of open-ended questions in the questionnaire allowed us not only to determine the collective opinion of students on the most interesting and effective for them formats of classes, but also to clearly clarify their attitude to each invariant lecture and seminar classes separately, to outline the factors of interest and effectiveness of each lesson, which are represented in the descriptions to the tables of this study (part 2, graph 7 and part 3, graph 8; the survey method is used in the fourth phase of this study);

- *method of quantitative analysis* (used to fix quantitative parameters of students' preferences for certain formats of lectures and seminars, determining the most effective, in the opinion of students, forms of lectures and seminars classes. For statistical data processing, nonparametric statistical inference criteria were used according to Pearson's  $\chi^2$  criterion relative to independent groups (students majoring in “Journalism” from different courses and different universities). External data completeness control was used as a means of data control in the questionnaires. The data obtained from the questionnaire of students of two universities were systematized and grouped into a common table of results.

### 3 Results and Discussion

There are two important factors to consider in the educational process of future media practitioners: the use of innovative technologies and realization of synergy of theory with practice for the sake of the most productivity in the educational process.

It is worth noting that the implementation of innovative technologies in the educational process of training journalists is determined by the form of classes (lectures or seminars) and the tasks facing journalistic education. In particular, I. Mykhailyn says: “*The tasks of journalistic education are not to adapt the student to the changing topography of modern information technologies, but to create a personality from him, to develop in him the skills to continue acquiring knowledge and practical applied skills.*”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the main imperative of mediaeducation is education of the Personality, the creation of the Elit person through the implementation of the model of learning “eternal student”, the education of such personality who is capable of self-education and self-development, is able to think critically and creatively, to generate new ideas, operatively to interpret, to correct, to analyse information, to develop

<sup>38</sup> MYKHAILYN, I.: *Zhurnalistska osvita i nauka*. Sumy : Vydavnychi Tsentr “Universytetska knyha”, 2009, p. 76.



a personal value system. That is, the main imperative of journalistic education should be not the model of adaptation of the journalist to information technologies, but the education of the Intellectual, Erudite Person, that is capable to generate new productive ideas and to own to perfection information and communication technologies. It is extremely important in the process of training media workers to use various innovative technologies that can increase the productivity of the learning process, make it flexible and dynamic, to increase the efficiency of teaching specialized subjects in the specialty “Journalism”, to provide the best perception and understanding of the material by students, to make at first difficult material accessible, versatile and lively.

The choice of teaching methods and the most relevant innovative technologies should be clearly based on the purpose and subject of the course. The purpose of the course “History of journalism” is to give to the students a integral understanding of the general trends in the development of national and world journalism, taking into account the historical past and critical understanding of all processes and phenomena related to the origin, development and functioning of print mass-media from the moment of the appearance of the first editions until the present; to form a holistic view of the genesis, evolution and dynamics of the development of the media, the role of the media in distribution of in national ideas and principles of state independence; to define the basic subjects and range of problems of the Ukrainian and world mass-media at different stages of their development. The subject of study of the discipline are the genesis and features of the development of Ukrainian and world journalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, socio-cultural and political factors of the development of periodicals in different historical eras, the most prominent periodicals and figures (editors, publishers, authors – journalists and correspondents).

It should be noted that an important factor in determining the methodology of lectures and the use of innovative technologies in them are the characteristics of the target audience. In particular variations of innovative technologies for lectures for students in absentia form of studies from taking into account of age peculiarities of target audiences or for students with disabilities, part-time and absentia forms of studies can be definitely modified. So, let’s consider separately the use of the most relevant innovative technologies for the realization of lecture and seminar classes in the discipline “History of journalism”.

### **3.1. Classification of Types of Lectures**

Sufficiently appropriate in teaching the discipline “History of journalism” is the use of lecture-presentation (combination of word and sliding seat on principles of symbiosis with a sinergistical effect and levelling of multitasking as to the type of dispersion of attention by a recipient).

The use of this type of lecture, such as **lecture-presentation**, facilitates visualization and showing theoretical material, makes it possible to use archival photo and video materials or animation fragments. In particular, at a study concerning mass-media in the history of journalism, it is very important to present photocopies of mass-media (in print or in electronic form) for the sake of acquaintance of students with the design of edition, its stylistics, the form of publication, etc., which is due to the synergy of verbal and visual components will influence on emotional perception, will increase the efficiency of students’ assimilation of information. Information and communication technologies will make the lecture more productive and will activate the work of students. The presentation will organize the visual material, show the illustrations in fragments, distinguishing main, enlarging individual parts, to enter animation, colour, accompany the illustration with text, show it against the background of music).

The use of lecture-presentation will give an opportunity for the wider use of interdisciplinary connections in lectures on “History of journalism”, in particular the use of intermedia aspects for demonstrating to students how visual images (film fragments or animated presentations)

and speaking of actor or author to carry out interpretation of non-fiction works, as well as a comparison of a nonfiction work and its adaptation, which will make it possible to trace polysematicity, the ambivalence of interpreting non-fiction works and comparing the semiotic systems of journalism and journalism as the core of journalism and cinematography demonstrates the possibilities of encoding and transcoding a non-fiction work within different semiotic systems. As well as a comparison of a nonfiction work and its adaptation, which will make it possible to trace polysematicity, the ambivalence of interpreting non-fiction works and comparing the semiotic systems of journalism and publicism as the core of journalism and cinematography, will demonstrate the ability to encode and transcode a nonfiction work within different semiotic systems. According to many scientists,<sup>39</sup> intermediation is functioning and eproduction of channels and facilities of communication in publicism, the creation of a integral coherent semi-artistic space in the cultural system, a specific form of dialogue of cultures, which is carried out by the interaction of artistic references (artistic images or stylistic techniques that have a significant character for each certain epoch). The importance of application of the intermedial aspect in teaching the “History of journalism” is due to the fact that intermediation can have three foreshortenings: a) intermediation is related to modelling the material texture of another type of art in publicism as a symbiosis of journalism and literature, b) intermediation implies the projection of the formative principles of a piece of music or film in a nonfiction text (what they refer to as a symbol – transposition); c) intermediation is based on the incorporation of images, motives, plots of works of one medial rank – music, graphics, sculpture – into works of another medial rank – publicism (denotation, referent is an icon, copy is an transfiguration) and creation of a reduced model of the object in the work, which reproduces the transition from objectivity to representation.

In addition to traditional lectures (informative and lecture-commentary), the course “History of journalism” is appropriate for the use of non-traditional lectures, in particular **lectures-excursions (interactive lecture, virtual excursion** to museums of periodicals in different countries or documentary videos about certain historical epochs). This type of lecture will give possibilities for the application of the cultural-historical method at teaching of history of journalism, which involves studying the background of the era (sociopolitical, socio-cultural factors of the functioning of the mass-media), realization of associative parallels. This technology should be focused on immersing of student into the virtual world of the historical epoch, in the past, operating the art of installation, creating the effect of a student’s presence in the epoch (feeling the recipient of his own own real-world observation of events, being on the scene, imitation of reality, illusion of authenticity) that will affect emotional perception, will become a motivational factor, will interest and facilitate the perception of the material. Implementation of lectures-excursions or use in lectures of interactive multimedia posters is possible through the Thinglink program, that allows to upload a picture to the service and apply markers to it with different icons that lead to another service and make comments and tags. As an effective format of lecture can be examined videolecture, that is more effective during realization of the controlled from distance studies on the platform of Moodle for the students of in absentia form of studies, students with individual study schedules and students with disabilities. An important argument, that testifies to the effectiveness of using on the Moodle platform not only lecture-presentation or textual lectures, but also videolecture, is a circumstance that for everybody depending on the structure of his brain, limbic system, on the development of the right or left hemisphere is dominated by one type of memory.

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<sup>39</sup> See: DUBININA, O.: Ekranizatsiia literaturnoho tvoru: semiotychnyi aspekt. In *Inozemna filologiya*, 2014, Vol. 126, p. 89-97; RATUSHNYAK, O.: Vykorystannia kinoekranizatsii v literaturnii osviti. In *Naukovyj visnyk Kirovogradskogo derzhavnogo pedagogichnogo universytetu. Seriya «Filologichni nauky. Literaturoznavstvo*, 2010, Vol. 111, p. 189-197.

According to neuropsychologists, different forms of processes of memory have different cerebral mechanisms. In particular, T. Nikitina notes, *“The types of memory differ on the basis of modality (visual, auditory, etc.); it is important to mark that rarely for a person all these types of memory are developed by an equal degree, usually better – some one of them. Therefore, it is useful to find out which memory – visual, auditory or motor – in a greater degree developed for a particular person, and consciously try to “speak” with memory by a comfortable for her language. Most deeply, this problem is related to the success of studies.”*<sup>40</sup> Thus, students can be divided into visuals (which have a predominant dominance of the visual modality, so they have difficulty perceiving information if it is presented only by hearing) and audios ((in which the auditory modality prevails and will experience difficulties if they are unable to hear information). In order to make the learning process if possible more effective it costs to create for such students the course of videolectures on the platform of Moodle, that will witness informatization of the controlled from distance studies. The course of videolectures is seen as effective, first of all because information that will be given the information in form virtual, interpersonal dialogue of teacher with a student, will be much better understood. By such an approach efficiency of studies of the audio students will be much higher, than if they perceived the material visually by reading the manuals. And the main point here should be the method of reduction, that is, the reduction of the difficult language of textbooks, which are difficult to understand by the terminological vehicle and thesaurus, to a comprehensible, fascinating, artistic presentation of material in the genre of the lecture with the use of elements of dialogue.

### 3.2. Invariance of Types of Practical Classes

An important innovative technology in the training of journalists is the use of different types of games as a form of seminars. Usually, teachers treat the educational process with academic seriousness, ignoring the important factors of the game. This is because games are understood as an immanent property of children, which is irrelevant to the educational process. But in the broad sense, the game is a socio-cultural phenomenon. As noted by J. Huizinga in the philosophical treatise *“Homo Ludens”*,<sup>41</sup> a playing element is contained in all spheres of life of humanity. The concept of game is a certain constitutional feature, the dominant – dominant, through which a philosopher interprets all culture and contains in *“playing space”* jurisprudence, war, wisdom, science and different types of art (literature, music, painting). According to J. Huizinga, a game lies beyond the disjunction of wisdom and stupidity. But in the right direction, it can be the producer of this wisdom. Important here is the opinion of J. Huizinga that the game becomes serious, in addition, the game is able to completely absorb people. A very important factor is its competitive nature. Therefore, it is quite appropriate to place mediaeducation in the same playing space. That is, it involves the use of game techniques or some types of game in practical classes in the teaching of journalistic disciplines. Thus, a game will act as a meaningful form, bearing the ideological and semantic load, will contribute to the implementation of social, pedagogical and educational functions. The importance of using game techniques consistent with the subject being taught, testifies to the famous researcher Guy R. Lefrancois in his work *“Psychology for Teaching”*.<sup>42</sup>

Implementation of gamification for the realization of seminar classes, we consider by rather effective and efficient technology, which will increase the positive motivation and realization of competitive factors between students, and, consequently, will increase the level and quality

<sup>40</sup> NIKITINA, T.: *Samouchitel po razvitiyu pamyati (tehnika skorostnogo zapominaniya)*. Moscow : Mezhdunarodnoe Aghentstvo “A. D. & T.”, 2002, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> See: HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo ludens*. Moscow : Vydavnychi Tsentr “Proghress-Akademyja”, 1992.

<sup>42</sup> LEFRANCOIS, GUY R.: *Prikladnaya pedagogicheskaya psihologiya*. St. Petersburg : Vydavnychi Tsentr “PRAJM-EVRO- ZNAK”, 2005.

of students' knowledge. According to O. Makarevich, "*gamification (the use of game techniques) is aimed at attracting students, increasing their interest... Gamification exploits a known property of the brain: it is very enjoyable to be rewarded for the work done. The main advantage of gamification is its motivational properties: it is competitive, which increases the overall level of quality and speed of work. This is an effective tool, as it learns more while learning the game format and she longer holds out in memory.*"<sup>43</sup>

So, we will consider the invariants of realization of practical classes with the use of gamification.

1. There is realization of seminar classes **in the format of interactive quizzes and brain-rings**. Such forms of training can be used both in full-time and part-time and distance learning on the Moodle platform. For this purpose it is possible to apply mobile addition – the program Kahoot!, which allows for the implementation a game form of studies and to interview students on the topic of the seminar in the form of a quiz, both individually and to divide students into teams for verification teamwork. In this program, the game is played on time (the teacher can set parameters from 5 seconds to 1 minute) and set points for each correct answer (thus, the program will evaluate each student individually or in team (in the format of a brain-ring) and allocate places, determining the top three winners on a virtual podium among the students that scored the most points). In the program Kahoot! it is possible to use not only text to create a quiz, but also photo illustrations, pictures, videos and animations.

It is also possible to use for an interactive quiz in seminar classes the programs Survey Monkey, myQuiz.ru, EasyTestMaker, ProProfs, Quibblo, Learningapps, where it is possible to create quizzes directly on a web-site in the constructor, to start them on a web-site and to play at once. These programs give an opportunity operatively to get the answers of students by topic of study and analyze the results in real time, thus the intermediate results of all students appear after every question. Thus, both the participants of quiz and teacher can see real-time, who's who and where they are. In the interface of most of these programs, it is possible for the teacher to track the percentage of questions that students have mostly provided the correct answers to, and which questions have been difficult for most students, to include motivators as a podium or medals and musical accompaniment. Advantages of the realization of seminars in the form of online-quizzes and breaks are obvious, since the use of these multimedia technologies meets the general criteria of the module-credit system of education and the rating system of evaluation of success of students from discipline, such as: increase of motivation of students towards active studies and responsibility for the results of activity, ensuring competitiveness and healthy competition in learning, absolute objectivity of evaluation of level of preparation of students (as students are estimated by the program), intensification of the educational process. Due to the implementation of these programs in the educational process, students will develop critical thinking, speed of thinking, general intelligence, which ultimately demonstrates the level of their preparation on specific topics. It captures and immerses students, enhances their interest in learning. Another variation of the interactive quiz can be placed on platforms of Google Classroom, Moodle and programs of iSpring Converter Pro and iSpring Cloud of presentations, created in the programs PowerPoint, Prezi, Powtoon, Sway, Google Slides, LibreOffice Impress, Keynote in the form of a quiz of "Most Reasonable", where it is possible to create a playing field, choose the categories of themes of seminar and score from the least difficult category to the most difficult and insert a hyperlink to the next question, it is thus possible to give both text questions and photos and videoquestions.

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<sup>43</sup> MAKAREVICH, O.: Heimifikatsiia yak nevidiemnyi chynnyk pidvyshchennia efektyvosti elementiv dystantsiinoho navchannia. In *Molodyi vcheniy*, 2015, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 282.

To similar quizzes it is possible to add a few tours and finale, as well as triggers and audio triggers with the sounds of defeat and victory.

2. Realization of practical classes **in the format of interactive crossword puzzles (classic, Japanese, filvords, sudoku, scanwords)** on the topic of the seminar on the names of newspapers and magazines and their additions, places of publication, names and surnames of editors, authors of editions, titles of materials, definitions of terms of the discipline through crossword puzzles in programs such as Online Test Pad, Childdevelop, Learningapps, PuzzleCup, Cross, Crosswordus. Crossword can be styled and placed through Google Classroom and Moodle platforms for the students of daily, in absentia and controlled from distance forms of studies through basic reference or through the special html-code. The interface of such programs is quite simple, it is possible to add images to the crossword puzzle, the ability to calculate the result (assessment) for the student, a tabular presentation of the results of the crossword puzzle, additional data and view the solution of the crossword puzzle by each student.
3. Realization of practical classes **in the format of virtual (interactive) group debates and discussions** through the programs of Kahoot (through the Discussion) and Padlet, where it is possible to create an interactive whiteboard with the name and surname of every participant, where everybody should criticize the opinion of a classmate and defend their position on problematic, rhetorical issues of the history of journalism with application of the hermeneutical method (“art of interpretation”) on the design, conception, structure, problematic-thematic range, purpose of newspapers or certain texts of ancient editions. This technology will contribute to the development of students’ polemical skills, mastering and practice of various techniques of rhetoric, sophistry, developing the ability to discuss, to argue, to persuade, form an opinion in written communication, to analyze ancient prints in the context of the era from both the position of that time and modern recipient and author.

Through the interactive program Padlet, it is possible to build the role and situational practice games, that are an original of preventative injection for the journalist, by the important element of the acquisition of work experience. In particular, L. Aleksandrov distinguishes several models of the practical situation: *“Except the role of “journalist”, participants are given the opportunity to serve as a source of information, a hero of the publication, a colleague on the editorial board, troublemaker in an interview, a troubled interlocutor in an interview, an employee of the official press service, the justice’s court and other conditional figures.”*<sup>44</sup> A leading moment in the creation of such models is not so much a result, but the psychological experience, that students receive as a result of improvisation of certain situation, practice of ability to come forward in different social roles and hypostasis. N. Kalashnik testifies about the importance of using modelling in mediaeducation, in particular in teaching the discipline of “Journalistic investigation”: *“Effective are the game strategies sent to development of skills of communication in communication models a “journalist – source of information”, “journalist – anti-hero of investigation”, “journalist – civil servant”, etc. In this way the knowledge of the legal basis of the journalist’s activity, his emotional and psychological firmness, journalistic principle are being perfected.”*<sup>45</sup> Based on the simulation of practical situations, experimentation, there is becoming of personality of a journalist not only as a repeater of information, but first of all as a thinker, analyst, a kind of Sherlock Holmes. Such effect in modelling can be achieved by using the method of brainstorming and the method of mask (travesty, changing the journalist into other social roles).

<sup>44</sup> ALEKSANDROV, L.: *Tvorcheskie „igrovyie“ metodiki kak innovatsii zhurnalistskogo obrazovaniya*. [online]. [2020-09-11]. Available at: <[http://journ.usu.ru/index.php /component/-content/article/401](http://journ.usu.ru/index.php/component/-content/article/401)>.

<sup>45</sup> KALASHNYK, N.: *Vykorystannia innovatsiinykh tekhnolohii u vyshchii shkoli (na prykladi vykladannia dystsypliny “Zhurnalistske rozsliduvannia”)*. [online]. [2020-11-12]. Available at: <<http://www-philology.univer.kharkov.ua/nauka/e.../kalashnyk.pdf>>.

The use of interactive whiteboards from the Padlet program is possible also for collection of seminar topics and realization of collective brainstorming on the topic of a classes to gather material.

4. Realization of seminar classes **in the format of the interactive survey or questioning** to gather the opinions and views of participants on problematic subjects of the seminar on the topic with the use of the open, closed and semi-closed questions and format of press-conferences through the programs of Kahoot! (division of Survey) and Quizizz. The format of survey can be implemented both for the theoretical aspects of the disciplines and for practical concepts that can have different vectors: in particular, "Conference of nicknames", "Newspaper duck", "Editorial bath-house". According to L. Aleksandrov, in journalistic education it is possible to practice different game techniques: *"These can be individual or team competitions, trainings, intellectual and emotional games, "role" plays or "business" games are freely organized with rigidly fixed status of participants.*"<sup>46</sup>
5. Realization of practical classes **in the format of interactive fine arts**, presentation of conceptual terms and key aspects of seminars as intellectual maps, diagrams, charts through the programs of Coggle and Inspiration. Students can implement MindMapping technology individually as well as collectively (in a team) using verbal and visual components. Realization of classes **in the format of interactive fine art** for students-journalists helps visualize their thinking, development of imagination, creative and critical thinking, systematization of material, reflection of own opinions, helps to realize creative potential, and also get critical remarks to the own maps of mind through options "comments" and "chat" in the programs. Mindmaking can be used to generate new ideas for students, to solve complex problems collectively, acceptance of self-weighted and carefully thought out decisions. The Intellectual maps are presented by soba charts that visualize certain information in its processing in the form of a diagram, which shows the words, concepts, ideas, connected by branches that depart from the central concept, which not only use visual images, but also act as visual images. Creation of mind maps as the format of practical classes is sufficiently effective, because it allows for effectively updating information, to generate and capture new ideas, draw conclusions and make connections between them. Also the format of interactive fine art envisages the creation and demonstration of presentations by students from the seminar topics in the programs of PowerPoint, Prezi, Powtoon (for creating animated presentations with the method of scribing), Sway, Google Slides, LibreOffice Impress, Keynote, in particular, as a newsletter, visual report, or essay, which can have three vectors: an analytic-hypothetical discourse (including the topic: "If I were the editor of the newspaper "Zorya Halytska" (1848-1857), I would have done otherwise...", where students have to predict major changes from positions of the then editor and the recipient at the time, transformations that had to be carried out in a particular newspaper to ensure its high efficiency); analytic and generalizing discourse (in particular on the theme: "The image of a Ukrainian from the periodicals of XIX-XX centuries"); creative and experimental character (creation and stylization of materials by students under the manner of letter, ideology of prominent publicists in the history of journalism). The format of interactive fine art for seminar classes "History of journalism" gives the possibility for group work by students in creating a printed publishing project (old-fashioned media product under antiquity, with taking into account the interrelationship and reciprocal concept of "work – eraW – job in programs Adobe PageMaker v.7.0, QuarkXPress Passport v.7.3, Adobe Illustrator CS3, Adobe InDesign CS3, which are the programs required for the layout of the printed periodical, the design in the printing and printing activities, that is, powerful computer publishing systems). Such group tasks will teach students to work

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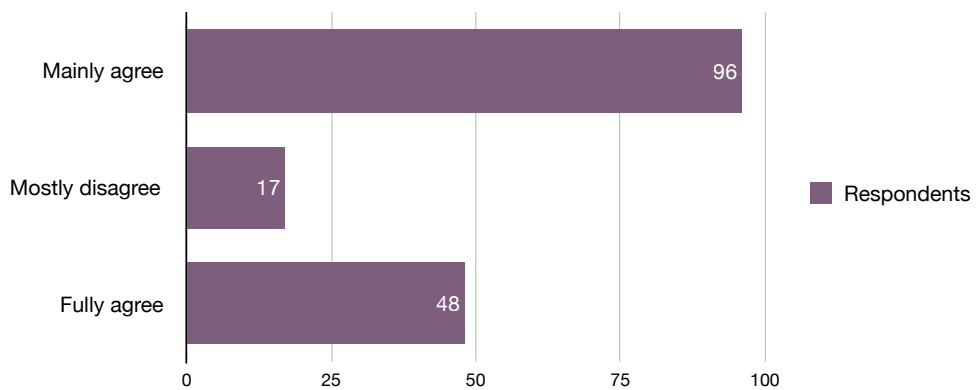
<sup>46</sup> ALEKSANDROV, L.: *Tvorcheskie "igrovyie" metodiki kak innovatsii zhurnalistskogo obrazovaniya*. [online]. [2020-09-11]. Available at: <[http://journ.usu.ru/index.php /component/-content/article/401](http://journ.usu.ru/index.php/component/-content/article/401)>.

in a team, will create an atmosphere of cooperation, interaction, promote the development of communication skills and ability to work in a team for the implementation of a successful mediaproject, will demonstrate collective creativity, will give an opportunity to join the practice by creating laboratory conditions of work in the virtual edition of the ancient newspaper, which is studied in the course “History of journalism”.

For determination of the relationship of students to the application of information and communication technologies (ICT) in mediaeducation and their digital competence, for finding out of the most interesting and effective formats for lectures and seminars for students, we conducted a sociological survey of students I, II, III, IV and V of courses of speciality “Journalism” of the Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University (Mykolaiv, Ukraine) and Open International University of Human Development “Ukraine” (Kyiv, Ukraine) throughout 2018-2020 years. It surveyed 161 students from both universities.

Graphs are with the results of the questioning of students.

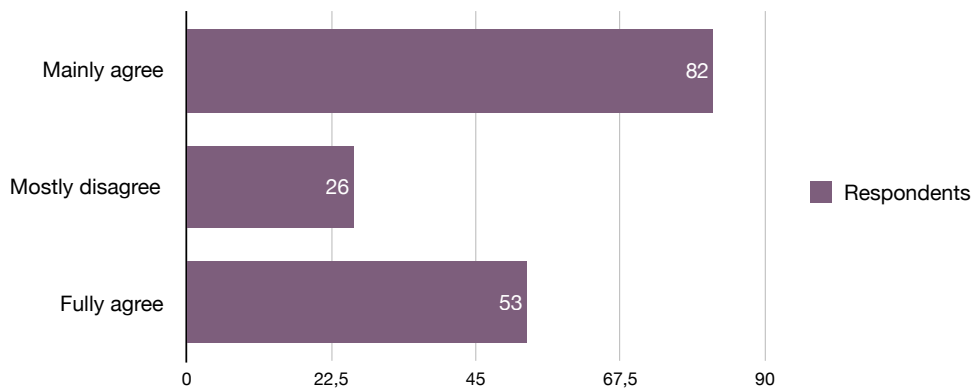
**PART 1: Necessity of application of information and communication technologies for an educational process and their availability.**



**GRAPH 1:** *The use of ICT an educational process helps me to study more effectively*

Source: own processing, 2021.

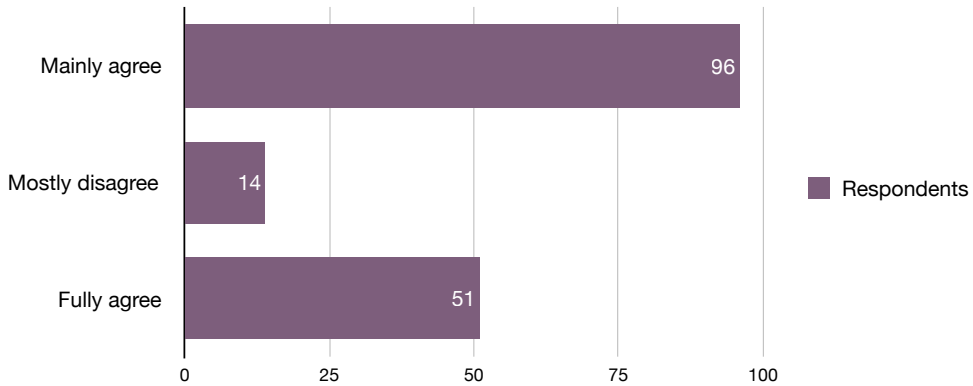
48 respondents consider that, using ICT, it is possible to facilitate the soba implementation of tasks and certain information retrieval for studies.



**GRAPH 2:** *The use of ICT makes studies easier*

Source: own processing, 2021.

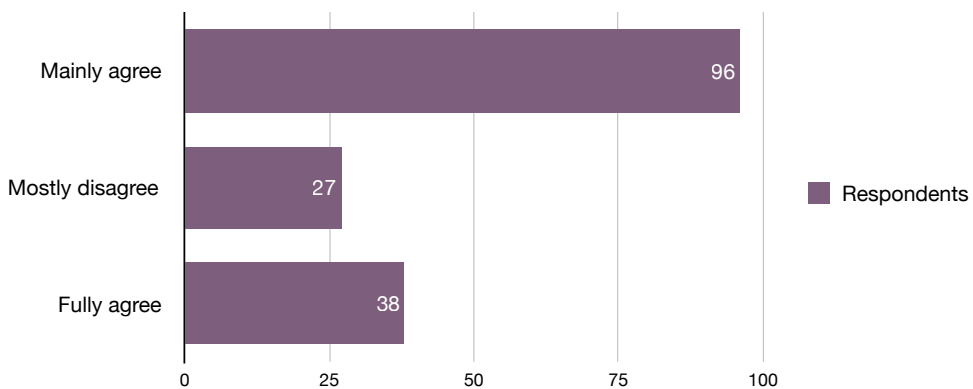
82 respondents believe that this makes learning a lot easier, because instead of writing a manuscript you can type text and send it via mail, or you can find more information to prepare for a for classes.



**GRAPH 3:** *The use of ICT makes studies more interesting*

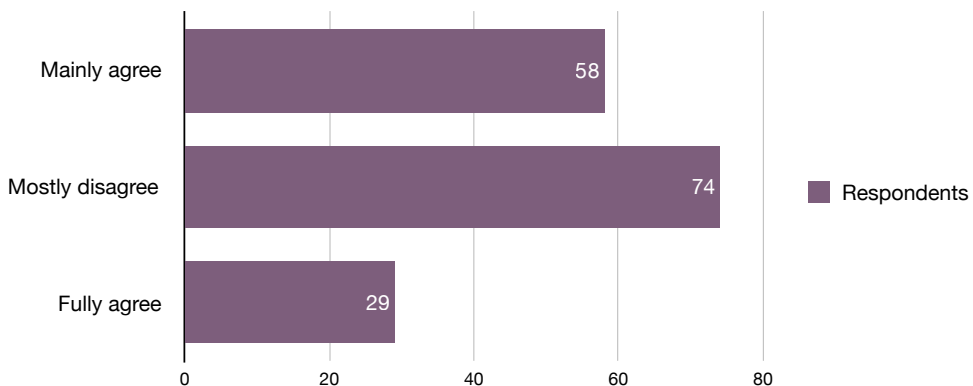
Source: own processing, 2021.

51 respondents believe that ICT can be done original and creative presentations that allow you to be creative, to develop creative skills, not just to brush up on certain material.



**GRAPH 4:** *The process of applying ICT is simple and straightforward*

Source: own processing, 2021.

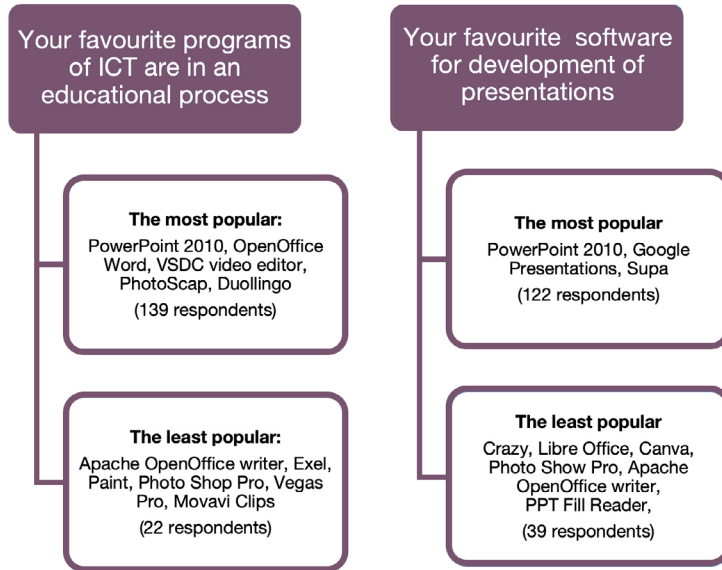


**GRAPH 5:** *I run into technical difficulties when using ICT*

Source: own processing, 2021.

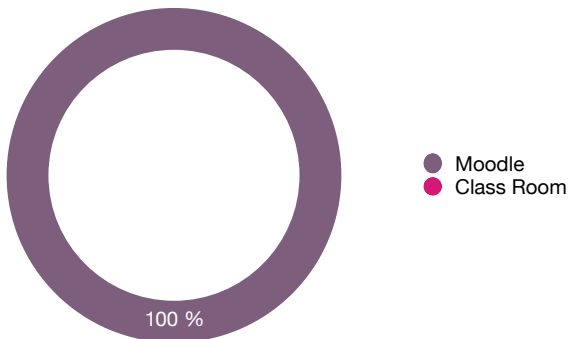


**PART 2: The most popular ICT in the learning process. The most effective form of lectures**



**PICTURE 1:** “Your favourite programs of ICT are in an educational process” and “Your favourite software for development of presentations”

Source: own processing, 2021.



**GRAPH 6:** Which educational platforms do you use in the educational process and which do you prefer?

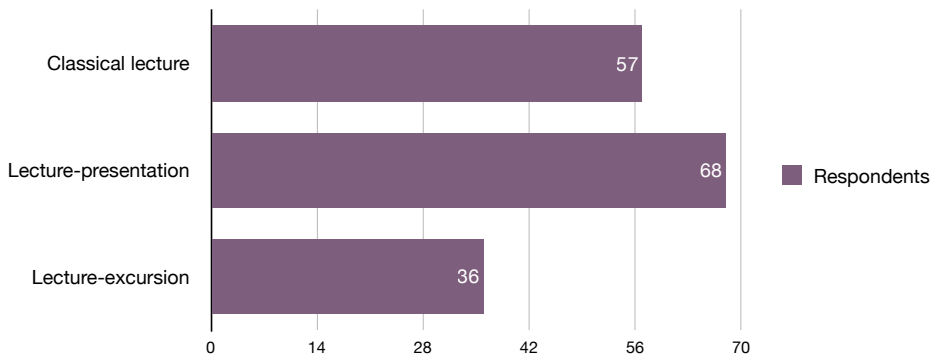
Source: own processing, 2021.

100% of the students surveyed use this platform and consider that it is very comfortable for checking in distance studies, has a comfortable interface, information is quickly passed and there are possibilities for checking in distance studies and dialogue between a teacher and students.

Mostly	At least
Theory and history of Journalism	English
History of Journalism	Ukrainian
Newspaper Journalism	Philosophy
Internet-Journalism	

**TABLE 1:** From which subjects (professional and general) do you use ICT in the learning process

Source: own processing, 2021.



GRAPH 7: Which format of lecture do you prefer and why?

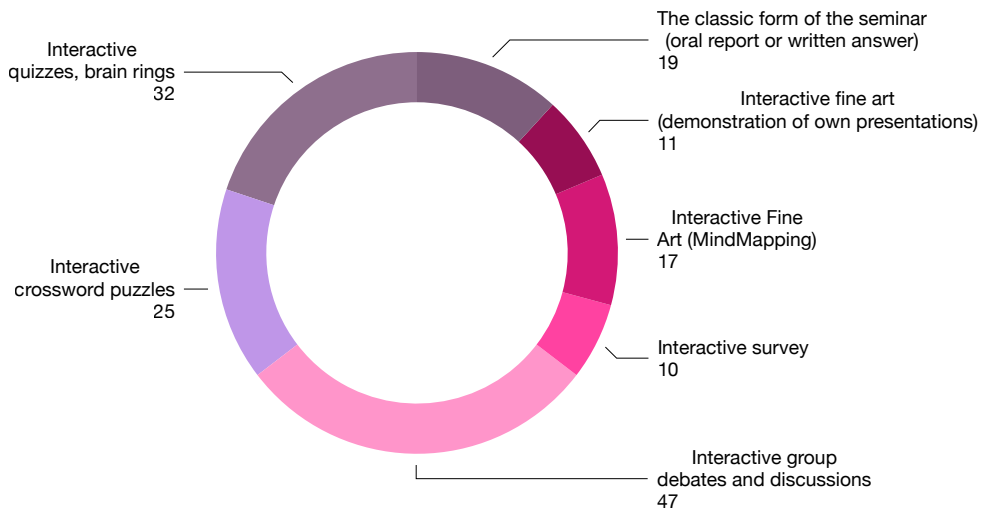
Source: own processing, 2021.

**Classical (traditional) lecture** – 57 respondents (because it is the most common and comprehensible form of presentation of material that develops critical and analytical thinking).

**Lecture-presentation** – 68 respondents consider that lecture-presentation is more interesting, as by means of presentation, it is possible better to explain the material, present a visual presentation of the material, show by example and this will be for students clearer, by means of activation of not only auditory but also visual memory more information is memorized.

**Lecture-excursion (virtual excursion)** – 36 respondents consider that a lecture-excursion is more interesting, because allows anyone to submerge to the educational process, to carry out the installation.

**PART 3: The most effective format of realization of seminar classes**



GRAPH 8: Which type of seminar is the most interesting and effective and why?

Source: own processing, 2021.

**Interactive quizzes, brain rings** – 32 respondents (since this is a cognitive gambling format, allowing you to master the material well, to thoroughly test your knowledge in design situations, also it most objective brain-storm, that motivates, arouses the spirit of competition and rivalry, igniting interest. In addition, rivalry helps to remember the material, the spirit of excitement awakens, so you want to be better prepared to win; this format helps to bring students together and better integrate them into the learning process).

**Interactive crossword puzzles** – 25 respondents consider that this format of the lesson successfully develops logic.

**Interactive group debates and discussions** – 47 respondents consider that this format is more productive, as it develops language resources, explains to all, awakens interest, assists in development of critical thinking; it is more interesting and easier for a student to absorb new knowledge in this format; this format allows students to discover themselves, express their point of view, defend their opinions through the use of a gadget and see each opinion of classmates and analyze it, in addition, this format provides true knowledge, since truth is born in the discussion.

**The classic form of the seminar (oral report or written answer)** – 19 respondents consider that traditional format, is more usual for them and allows to use disputes and communicative attacks.

To test the simulated formats of lectures and seminars, a pedagogical experiment was implemented, which consisted of testing students' knowledge and acquired competencies before the use of information and communication technologies and gamification during lectures and seminars and after their use in the educational process. To verify (validate) the results of the experiment, the intermediate (current) learning outcomes of 161 students of Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University and International Open University of Human Development „Ukraine“ were compared using the classical format of lectures and seminars with learning outcomes using simulated invariants of lectures and seminars classes involving gamification and information and communication technologies. As a result of the experiment, it was found that when using information and communication technologies and gamification for the same student groups, the success rates in these groups increased by an average of 63-65 %. For statistical processing of learning outcomes before and after the experiment, nonparametric criteria of statistical conclusion were used in accordance with Pearson's criterion  $\chi^2$  relative to independent groups (students majoring in „Journalism“ at the capital and regional universities of Ukraine).

## 4 Conclusion

Therefore, as a result of the research, we have identified ways to optimize mediaeducation, which consists in the invariability of lectures and seminars and the implementation of innovative technologies, which is the key to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the educational process and make it more interesting, lively, versatile, multifaceted, facilitates the perception and memorization of material, deepens the motivational factor of mastering the discipline of students. During research we defined the invariants of lectures on “History of journalism”, in particular lecture-presentations (combination of word and slide on the basis of symbiosis with synergistic effect and leveling of multitasking as to the type of dispersion of attention by a recipient), lecture-excursion (virtual excursion to the museums of periodicals of different countries or documentary videos about specific historical eras), a classic lecture, and also modelled the detailed classification of seminar formats with the implementation of innovative technologies through the prism of elements of gamification (games and playing techniques as a sociocultural phenomenon), in particular: lessons in the format of interactive quizzes and brain-rings, lessons in the format of interactive crossword puzzles (classic, japanese, filvords, sudoku, scanwords), classes in the format (interactive) of group debates and discussions, classes is in the format of the interactive questioning, classes in the format of interactive fine art (mind-mapping, presentation of conceptual terms and key aspects of the seminar in the form of intellect maps, diagrams, charts through special programs and presentation of seminars by students in the form of creative presentations with animations).

The specifics of such games will be that they will be of purely historical and journalistic character especially. Realization of seminar classes in the form of a game will be an effective motivational factor for the student, in addition, information in the form of intellectual game is perceived much better, activates the creative and analytical thinking of students, promotes the development of their creativity, allows integrating all students into creative cognitive activity. The interactive methods of studies embrace wide potential of student: the level and extent of his / her competence (intellectual and emotional), autonomy, ability to make decisions, to cooperation, assist intensification of educational process, increase in speed of perception, understanding and depth of mastering of enormous arrays of knowledge.

With the aim of finding out of the digital competence of students of the speciality of “Journalism” and the most productive formats of realization of lecture and seminar a survey of 161 students of the specialty “Journalism” of the Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University (Mykolaiv) and Open International University of Human Development “Ukraine” (Kyiv) throughout 2018-2020 years was carried out. The survey found that 59.62 % and 29.81 (89.43 %) of the surveyed students overwhelmingly and completely agree that information and communication technologies allow them to study more effectively, 50.93 % and 32.91 % (83.84 %) – overwhelmingly and completely agree that information and communication technologies make learning easier and 59.62 % and 31.67 % (91.29 %) overwhelmingly and completely agree that information and communications technologies make learning more interesting, 59.62 % and 23.6 % (83.22 %) consider the process of using ICT predominantly and completely simple and clear, while 54.03% have technical difficulties in using ICT. Also, 42.23 % of the surveyed students consider the most effective and interesting format of lecturing lecture-presentation, and among the most effective and motivating formats of realization of seminar classes 19.87 % students call the classes in the format of interactive quizzes, brain-rings (as it is a playable and cognitive format, that allows well to master material, to perfection to check the knowledge in the constructed situations, also it is the most objective brain-storming that motivates, arouses the spirit of competition, spirit of excitement and rivalry, motivates interest, integrates into learning) and 29.19 % – in the format of interactive debates and discussions (as it is more interesting, it allows students to discover themselves, develop language and rhetorical abilities, express their point of view through the use of gadgets, and motivates them to learn the material better).

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## Children's Rights through the Eye of the Pakistani Press: An Analysis of Print Media

### **ABSTRACT**

News coverage has a major impact on the interpretation of news events and the response towards these events by public and policy makers. The study intended to investigate the extent of children's rights representation in newspapers in Pakistan. The aim was to determine the coverage, type of the News and level of placement in four selected newspapers (Dawn, The Express Tribune, Jang, and Nawa-i-waqt). A content analysis of 316 news editions of selected samples was conducted over the duration of one year (November 2017 to October 2018). The purpose of content analysis is to provide advocates with a comprehensive basis for how children's problems are presented in the news. A systematic sampling technique is used for the collection of data. The Nawa-i-waqt newspaper covered the maximum news stories (792 in number) as compared to the other dailies. Furthermore, most of the stories about children were found on the inside pages of newspapers which shows that children's issues received minimal coverage. This paper argues that the press should take more responsibility by adequately informing children and making them aware, so that the attention of the government and the public can be aimed at tackling child problems in society.

### **KEY WORDS**

Child Rights. Media Responsibility. News Coverage. Newspaper. Social Problems.



# 1 Introduction

The word “rights” is not easy to define, for multiple and contrary meanings attached to the word confuse the whole idea of what should be constituted as “right”. Generally, however, rights are those fundamental rules which are owed to people by some legal system or ethical theory. Freeman characterized rights as “*just cases or privileges that start from moral as well as lawful standards,*”<sup>1</sup> and claimed that children’s rights have essential importance in human life. The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) characterizes a child as an individual who is less than 18 years of age, but in Pakistan, according to article 25A of the constitution, someone under the age of 16 is termed as a child. According to the UNCRC, minimum freedom and entitlement that should be provided to every child without any discrimination is termed as child rights. A child has the right to live individually in a society and should be able to live with peace, self-respect, patience, independence, fairness and unity.<sup>2</sup> Children’s rights can be depicted as “*the rights that apply both to the protection of the individual child and to the creation of the circumstances in which all children can fully develop.*”<sup>3</sup> According to UN, four main categories which cover all the aspects of children rights are Protection, Development, Survival and Participation. Protection means that all children ought to have the privilege to be shielded from mishandling, disregard, abuse or elsewhere. Development is the rights to all types of development (physical, emotional and mental development) which should be provided to children. Physical development highlights the necessary physical growth of a child and thus playing, diet and nutrition play an important role. Survival means that the right to survival is the basic need of children and should be provided to all children without any discrimination. The basic needs of children for survival are food, clothes shelter and a life with pride. And participation means that a child must be able to actively participate in his/her life matters and this right must be provided to him/her in direct or indirect ways. There may be a variation in how different children participate in different matters, based on their age and maturity level.

## 1.1 Emergence of Children’s Rights Convention

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was launched in the 1940s and during the international expansion of human rights, a general document indicated the absolute truth that all people are born equally. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) helped in the development of civil rights, economically, socially, culturally as well as politically.<sup>4</sup> CRC was adopted on 20 October 1988 by the UN General Assembly and was approved in 1990. After their confirmation, the UN Convention paved the road to the restoration of the rights of children in 187 countries.<sup>5</sup> By signing the United Nations Convention on Terrorism, governments agreed to secure the children from unfairness, sexual harassment, commerce and viciousness and to provide special care for orphans and immigrants.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> FREEMAN, M.: *Human Rights*. Oxford : Polity Press, 2002, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN’S FUND (UNICEF): *UNICEF Pakistan*. New York : UNICEF, 2017. [online]. [2022-04-01] Available at: <<http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/pk>>.

<sup>3</sup> YATES, V.: *CRIN Newsletter*. London : Children Rights Information Network, 2005, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> See: BRATVOLD, M. J.: *Human Rights, Children, and The Role of Mass Media: The Case of the Latin American Street Child*. USA : Acadia University, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> CRC: *Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund*, 2009. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[www.unicef.org/crc](http://www.unicef.org/crc)>.

<sup>6</sup> LIIRA, T.: *How Youth and Children’s Issues are Represented in the Media: Content Analysis on Newspaper Articles*. Finland : Humak University of Applied Sciences, 2012. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/48014>>.

## 1.2 Children's Rights in Pakistan

According to the society for the protection of rights of the child (2013) about 48% of the population are children in Pakistan. With a recent census now the population is 200.69 million in 2017 making it 6th largest population. The ratio of children is increased to 1.87%.<sup>7</sup>

On account of social, basic and institutional factors, for example, poverty, unemployment and brief connections, children security issues are usual.<sup>8</sup> Child labour in Pakistan has many facets. It is estimated that more than 10 million children are workers in Pakistan. There are deficiencies in the training framework due to poor foundation, low nature of instructing, absence of qualified educators, non-appearance, corporal sentences, passionate and verbal mishandling, strict circumstances and absence of instructive materials; and all these factors drive children out of school.<sup>9</sup> Pakistan follows the constitution of 1973 which was approved in the regime of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The constitution safeguards the rights of all segments of society regardless of their age, gender and religion. Article 11(3) of the constitution of Pakistan prohibits slavery, forced labour and declares that no child below fourteen years old will be employed for the extractive industry or for any other dangerous work. Article 25(A) highlights that in "accordance with the law, free compulsory education for all children under the age of 16"<sup>10</sup> is to be provided. Some other Articles of constitutions like 25 (3), 26 (3), 35 & Article 37 also state the rights of family and children.

## 1.3 Experience of Children in Pakistan

Pakistan ratified the Child Rights Convention (CRC) in November 1990. In this regard, The National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) has propelled a few exercises in collaboration with Provincial commissions for Child Welfare and Development (PCCWDs) and local NGO boards of trustees. According to a report by the Civil Rights Commission of Pakistan in 2005, in the initial a half year of 2005, 71 children were murdered after sexual mishandling. Child abuse is widespread. Also, due to poor living conditions, children throughout the country suffer from malnutrition, illness and death. Pakistan sanctioned ILO Convention 182 as the most exceedingly extreme type of child labour in 2001; however, they keep on working in hazardous occupations including mining. The number of rapes has increased, including those involving young girls.<sup>11</sup> Statistics from Pakistan on women's and children's health in particular are the worst in the world. The literacy rate was 59% but the infant mortality rate was the highest in South Asian countries.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. *Population Census 2017*. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/brief-census-2017>>.

<sup>8</sup> AZIZ, F.: Child Abuse. In *Journal of Ayyub Medical College*, 2007, Vol. 19, No. 3, p. 1-2. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://ayubmed.edu.pk/JAMC/PAST/19-3/00%20Editorial.pdf>>.

<sup>9</sup> SPARC.: *The State of Pakistan's Children*. Islamabad : Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, 2016, p. 98-104. [online]. [2022-04-01] Available at: <<https://www.sparcpk.org/sopc2017/sopc2016/Combined/The%20State%20of%20Pakistan's%20Children%202016%20Report.pdf>>.

<sup>10</sup> *Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Article 25(A)*. [online]. [2022-06-04]. Available at: <[https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415\\_632.pdf](https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415_632.pdf)>

<sup>11</sup> See: HYAT, K.: *State of Human Rights*. Lahore : Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, HRCP-Pakistan, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> STATISTA: *Pakistan: Literacy Rate from 2006 to 2017, Total and by Gender*. 2017. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/572781/literacy-rate-in-pakistan/>>.

## 1.4 Representation of Children's rights in Print Media News Coverage

The press is considered the “obligatory representative” of the people and known as the “fourth pillar of state”. Press is mandatory for the “collective image” of various groups, which form society. News reports can influence and thus urge the public and the policymakers to talk about street children, early marriages, child labour and other social issues. In order for effective policies to be made, to improve the well-being of children, journalists covering children's issues must be able to make the public resonate with children's lives. Similarly when a journalist is writing about children's issues and cases, he/she should know which part of his/her story can be examined.<sup>13</sup>

## 2 Statement of the Problem

Children are the ultimate future of all societies. Yet the way we are treating our own is offensive and a disgrace to mankind. By dismissing their rights, we are preparing an unpleasant future for the country (Yousafzai, 2107). The low coverage rate of children's problems in Pakistani newspapers is one of the most serious problems in Pakistan. There are a number of reasons that make Pakistani newspapers ignore or provide little coverage to children's issues. Generally, coverage of children's issues is not very important for the Pakistani press.

## 3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study formed to evaluate and analyze the representation of children's rights in the press of Pakistan. The nationwide English and Urdu Newspapers are published in Pakistan and have a great readership. The Objectives were constructed to know how much children's rights were in the news and how the press treated children's rights:

- To explore the children's issues which are frequently published in the selected newspapers.
- To examine the level of prominence given to children issues reported in all four newspapers.
- To determine the quantification of the child-rights news (size and placement of the news).

## 4 Research Questions

The research questions are constructed in the light of objectives of this study. The prime purpose was to know how the press is representing the children's stories. How many stories on children's right are published and on which pages and place the press gives space to these stories. All the research questions were aligned with the objectives of this study.

*What level of prominence/placement is given to child-rights issues reported in the four selected newspapers?*

*What is the extent of the coverage given to children's rights issues/theme by all selected newspapers?*

*How and what kind of visual stories are being used in the selected newspapers?*

*Is there a difference in the coverage between the English newspapers and Urdu newspapers?*

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<sup>13</sup> See: WARTELLA, E.: Electronic Childhood. In DENNIS, E. E., PEASE, E. C. (eds.): *Children and the Media*, New Jersey : Transaction Publishers, 1996, p. 29-40.

## 5 Literature Review

Nwankwo and Okwemba explored how the media report children's affairs and their study focused on whether the media recognizes and upholds children's rights. Content analysis was used to investigate how the media understand and illustrate child-related issues. 420 editions of the Daily State, East Africa Standard and Kenya Times were examined, at random, in selected years – from June 2000 to June 2002. They found that Children's issues are not as prominent when contrasted with other political issues, making them be avoided by the media. Subsequently, the media will in general report youngsters' issues only when they are sensational.<sup>14</sup>

In another study Ikpe investigated press reports on the sexual behaviour of children in Nigeria and found that the newspapers were mainly concerned with negative stories of rape or other similar sexual problems, therefore supporting the inclination for the media to concentrate on negative stories in their reportage of children related issues.<sup>15</sup> This phenomenon is not only for children, but media also give less coverage to womens' issues. It has been observed that during elections male candidates received more media representation as compared to female candidates.<sup>16</sup>

The research by Manzo aimed to explore the media coverage of the link between child trafficking and slavery among West African children in international law and academic research in the context of geography and development.<sup>17</sup> A paper presented by Oyesomi, Oyero and Okorie examined the use of journalism development to promote the protection of Nigeria's child rights issues. In addition, development journalists should play a role in promoting media activation for development and social revolution. Development journalism is the use of journalistic means for the development of society. The most important thing for researchers is to encourage journalists to be at the forefront of the rights-protection companies. It is helpful that the media distributes and communicates the content about child-rights issues in daily papers, magazines, radio stations and TV channels as issues of national intrigue.<sup>18</sup>

As indicated by Ortum the way in which news is secured can impact how social issues are translated and reacted to by general society and policy makers. The study analyzed the scope of children's rights issues in driving Kenyan daily papers were inspected to recognize the degree, sort and level of unmistakable quality of youngsters' issues in two daily papers. He found that issues related to children had low noticeable quality, which made kids imperceptible in the articles of both newspapers and these articles are found in the middle pages of both newspapers.<sup>19</sup>

In another comparison on youngsters' rights stories in two Nigerian Newspapers over a five-year time span from 1999, the year that the Oslo challenge was propelled, to 2003, the year that the National Assembly of Nigeria adopted the law on the rights of the child. The study found that children's-rights issues were generally insufficient. Furthermore, such reports were

<sup>14</sup> NWANKWO, E. H., OKWEMBA, A.: *How the Kenyan Media Covers the Children's Rights Issues: A Content Analysis*. Nairobi, Kenya : Presented to International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). 2002. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/article/how-the-kenyan-media-covers-the-childrens-rights-issues-a-content-analysis.html>>.

<sup>15</sup> See: IKPE, E.: *The Coverage of Sexuality by the Nigerian Print Media*. Lagos : Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> See: NAZAR, A. et al.: Female Politicians and Pakistani Media: A Content Analysis of English and Urdu Newspapers. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 235-251.

<sup>17</sup> See: MANZO, K.: Exploiting West Africa's Children: Trafficking, Slavery and Uneven Development. In *Wiley*, 2005, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 393-401. [online]. [2022-01-23]. Available at: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20004478>>.

<sup>18</sup> See: OYESOMI, K. O. et al.: Media Advocacy, Development Journalism and Child Right Issues in Nigeria. In *Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2014, Vol. 2, No. 2B, p. 261-265. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<http://sasjournals.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/SJAHSS-22B261-265.pdf>>.

<sup>19</sup> See: ORTUM, L. L.: *An Investigation into the Extent of Children Content in Kenyan Media: A Case Study of the Nation and the Standard Newspapers*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Nairobi : University of Nairobi, 2013, 60 p.

typically covered in the middle pages of the papers predominantly. Poor reporting on child rights stories acts as a sign of frail news worthiness of such issues among media professionals. In fact, media and other stakeholders, while setting out their agenda, overlook children's voices. Children are often constructed as being 'reckless' in wider society and in addition to this, decision-making processes on the part of journalists do not appear to challenge these widely held assumptions.<sup>20</sup>

Numerous guardians see daily papers as disregarding child's modifying and training issues. In his study, the greater part of guardians (53.4%) said, the newspaper was either "not exceptionally accommodating" or "not supportive by any means" in helping them to settle on choices about what demonstrations their youngsters should watch. Indeed, parents were significantly more inclined to state that newspapers were "not useful by any means" (28.7%) than to state that they were "extremely useful" (9.6%). Just 31.8 percent said they were "fairly useful".<sup>21</sup> According to Woodruff newspaper coverage of child nutrition issues in California, articles on child nutrition are minimal in California's mainstream newspapers read by state-wide policy makers and opinion leaders. Researchers argued that there are very few stories of children's rights in mainstream media.<sup>22</sup>

The burden of child labour is much featured in Vietnam by the main newspaper reports. The labour newspaper underlines that 30 percent of Vietnamese kids between the ages of six to seventeen join work, with most children remaining near their home to provide help with their privately-run business. The newspaper also contends that the genuine number could be substantially bigger as teenagers utilized as domestic servants, restaurant workers or children chipping away on the streets as beggars, shoes shiners and newspaper and lottery sellers were not canvassed in the report.<sup>23</sup> Another study on the print media coverage of sexually abused children realized that most daily papers in Kenya embrace an approach of sensationalization in detailing the abuse cases and there is no clear sensitivity towards the said topic from either law or journalists. (Kerlinger, 2004) investigated the role of media in the prevention of child abuse and concluded that the media can assume a vital part in revealing the issues and impression of children's abuse in the world either by going up against the whole issue or by sidestepping it out and out.

## 5. 1 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theory of social responsibility of the press. Social Responsibility Theory was presented by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Lang Schramm in 1956. The theory emphasizes the moral and social responsibility of the people and institutions that occupy the media, which means the media are convinced that they are responsible to society. Media should be conscious to design its content and it should play a role to maintain the peace and for the progress of society.<sup>24</sup> The theory of social responsibility is the result

<sup>20</sup> See: OYERO, O.: Children: as 'Invisible' and Voiceless as Ever in the Nigerian News Media. In *Estudos em Comunicação*, 2014, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 25-41. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<http://www.ec.ubi.pt/ec/07/vol2/oyero.pdf>>.

<sup>21</sup> ADAY, S.: *Newspaper Coverage of Children's Television. Report Series No. 7*. Annenberg Public Policy Center: University of Pennsylvania press, 1997. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=googlescholar&id=GALE|A20556104&v=2.1&it=r&sid=googleScholar&asid=7884bbb3>>.

<sup>22</sup> See: WOODRUFF, K. et al.: Coverage of Childhood Nutrition Policies in California Newspapers. In *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 2001, Vol. 24, No. 2, p. 150-158. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3343510>>.

<sup>23</sup> NGUYEN, H.: *Growing Pain of Child Labor in Vietnam*. 2009. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/5181903/CHILD\\_LABOR\\_IN\\_VIETNAM](https://www.academia.edu/5181903/CHILD_LABOR_IN_VIETNAM)>.

<sup>24</sup> See: OKUNNA, C. S.: *Teaching Mass Communication: A Multi-Dimensional Approach*. Enugu : New Generation Books, 2002.

of the Hutchinson Commission on Press Freedom, founded in 1947 in the United States, to promote the concept of the freedom of the press, as stated in the libertarian theory of free freedom.<sup>25</sup> This study is linked with theory to determine how the Pakistani press has managed to fulfill this responsibility. How much space is devoted to and on which pages child related issues are portrayed in daily papers. The results will help to find out if media is fulfilling their social responsibility or not, by representing children's rights in a manner which can help policy makers to solve the issues.

## 6 Methodology

Research relies on content analysis of the four national newspapers including two Urdu and two English named as Daily Jang and Daily Nawa-i-waqt in Urdu and Daily Dawn and The Express Tribune in English, published between November 2017 to October 2018 for the coverage and collection of the news including survival, development, protection as well as awareness news regarding child's rights issues. Systematic random sampling techniques are used in which every fifth newspaper out of a total sample of 1460 newspapers is examined. The Newspapers Jang, Nawa-i-waqt, Dawn and The Express Tribune are chosen because they are among the leading Pakistani newspapers with nationwide circulation and readership and considered as the most read newspapers in Pakistan. This time period is important because the children's rights problems are increasing in Pakistani society.

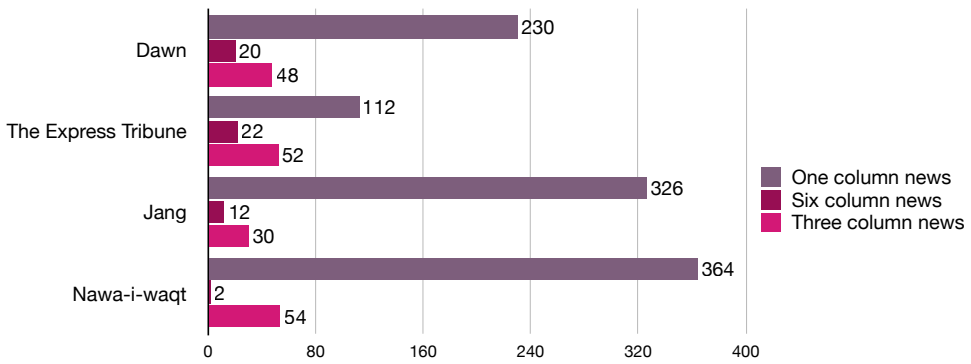
Data are collected using analytical analysis techniques. This involves calculating the occurrence of information on child issues in four newspapers. An analysis of four sample newspapers includes all the news and events including the themes on development, education, health, child labour and child abuse. The themes were chosen in the light of social and children's right issues discussed in UNCRC with the help of news stories. A total of 316 Newspapers were reviewed. The results presented in graphs show the coverage of the newspapers related to children rights including how much of a newspaper covered child related news stories with the theme of the news as crime, education, health, etc., the placement of the news, on which pages the news stories are provided as well as the kinds of visuals portrayed in the newspapers regarding child rights.

## 7 Results

The result sections show the overall data collection and its analysis. The primary focus was on the selected issues regarding children's rights. The selected newspapers have nationwide circulation and readership across the country. Every graph shows a separate result to fulfil the objectives of this study. The major focus of the study was to know how much news exists regarding children's rights and how it is represented by the press. The study measures the total number of stories during this period and checks the placement and size of the news in newspapers, as priming and framing is important in news coverage to play up or play down the news value.

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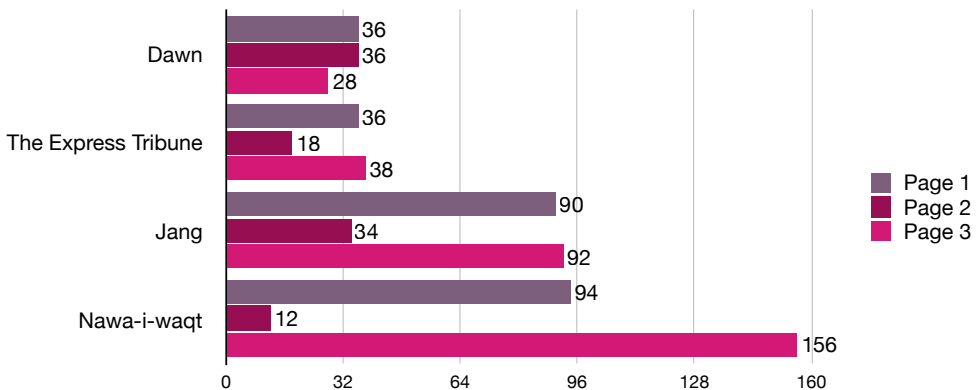
<sup>25</sup> See: FOLARIN, B.: *Theories of Mass Communication: An Introductory Text*. Ogun State, Nigeria : Link Publication, 2002.



**GRAPH 1:** Showing size of the news stories from November 2017 to October 2018

Source: own processing, 2022.

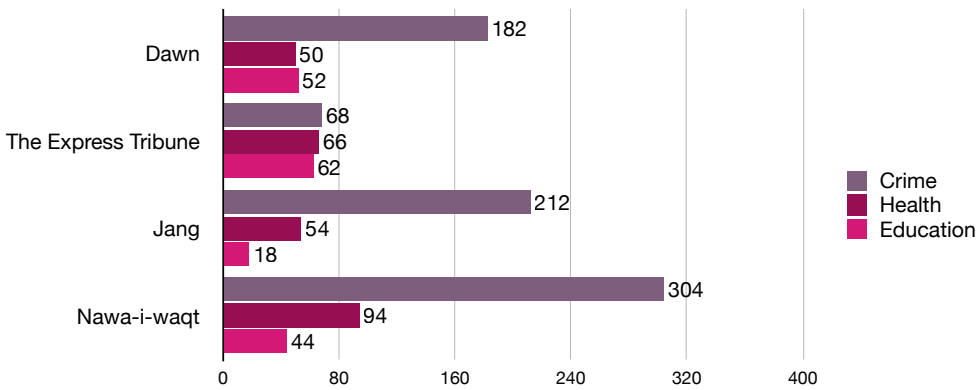
This bar graph illustrates the size of the news stories with three basic types of column with different numbers of news reports. Dawn newspaper published 230 news stories in one column, 48 news stories in three columns while only 20 news stories covered in the six columns of news. Similarly, The Express Tribune printed 112 news stories in one column, 52 news stories in three columns whereas 22 news stories are portrayed in six columns of news from November 2017 to October 2018. By examining the Jang newspaper, it can be seen that there are 326 news stories in one column, 30 news stories in three columns while six column news stories are only 12 in number. Nawa-i-waqt has the top quantity of news, providing 364 news published by the newspaper in one column, 54 news stories in three columns whereas only 2 news are seen published in six columns by the Nawa-i-waqt newspaper.



**GRAPH 2:** Showing placement of news stories from November 2017 to October 2018

Source: own processing, 2022.

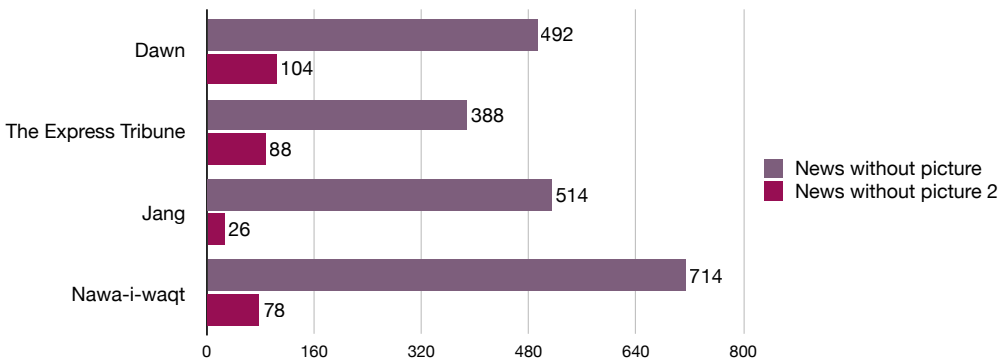
This bar graph depicts the placements of news in selected daily papers highlighting on which pages these newspapers are covering the news stories. There are 36 news stories given on both page one and page two separately while 28 news stories are published on page three by the Dawn Newspaper. The Express Tribune has printed 36 news stories on page one and 18 news stories on page two, while 38 news stories are covered on page three by the newspaper. Examining the Jang newspaper, 90 news stories can be seen on page one but only 34 news stories on page two, whereas 92 news stories are given on page three. Nawa-i-waqt news enumerates the classification of news in such a way that page one covers 94 news stories, only 12 news stories are covered on page two while 156 news stories, which comparatively is the highest number among all news, can be seen on page three.



**GRAPH 3:** Showing themes of stories in newspapers from November 2017 to October 2018.

Source: own processing, 2022.

The given graph demonstrates the theme data of selected newspapers in which the Dawn newspaper published 182 news stories related to crime. The news stories regarding health are 50 in number while education related news stories are 52. The Express Tribune published 68 crime related news stories, 66 news stories regarding health and 62 news stories of education which are highest among the others. Similarly, the Jang newspaper puts forth 212 news stories regarding crime, 54 news stories of health while education related news stories are 18 in number. The Nawa-i-waqt newspaper covered the highest news stories related to crime which are 304 in number, health news stories are 94 in number which is also the highest amongst the others while 44 news stories related to education are published.

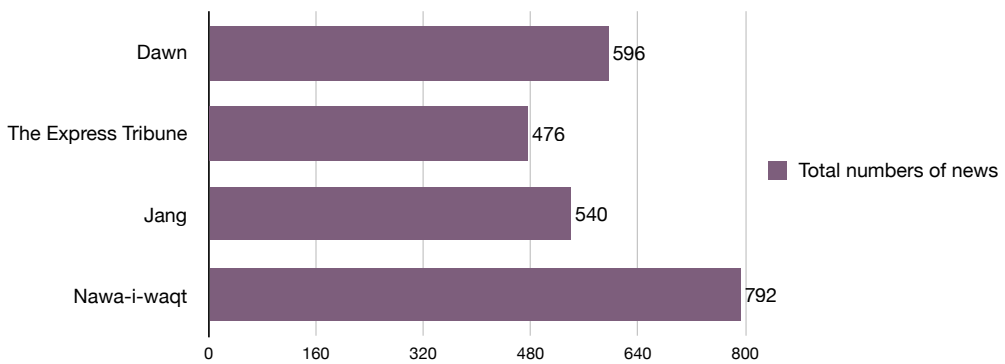


**GRAPH 4:** Number of Visual stories. Showing the visual stories of newspapers from November 2017 to October 2018

Source: own processing, 2022.

This graph illustrates the news stories with visuals as well without visuals in all selected daily papers from November 2017 to October 2018. The Dawn published 596 news stories, from which only 104 news stories are in visuals and the remaining 492 news stories are published without visuals or pictures. Similarly, The Express Tribune printed a total of 476 news stories from which 388 news stories are without visuals while only 88 news stories are covered with the picture alongside captions. Furthermore, from November 2017 to October 2018, Jang printed 540 news stories from which only 26 news stories are published with visuals and the remaining 514 news stories are without visuals. Moreover, the Nawa-i-waqt newspaper published the maximum number of news stories, in the time period from November 2017 to October 2018, which are 792 in number. 714 news stories are published without visuals whereas only 78 news stories are covered with visuals.





**GRAPH 5:** Total Number of News stories. Showing total number of news stories from November 2017 to October 2018

Source: own processing, 2022.

This graph demonstrates the total number of news stories published by all selected newspapers from November 2017 to October 2018. The Dawn daily paper published the second highest news stories which are 596 in number while The Express Tribune printed the minimum number of news stories which are 476 in total. The Jang newspaper covered a total of 540 news stories whereas Nawa-i-waqt published the maximum number of news stories from November 2017 to October 2018 which are 792 in number.

## 8 Discussion

This study has attempted to investigate the part that media play in reporting children's rights. This analysis has led us to look at how child related issues are revealed by each of the four chosen newspapers (Dawn, The Express Tribune, Jang, and Nawa-i-waqt) from November 2017 to October 2018. Evidence assembled from this study shows that there is low coverage of children issues in all chosen daily papers in Pakistan. The same results are found in studies of (Oyero, Ortum & Eman) in other countries.<sup>26</sup> Among all selected newspapers, Nawa-i-waqt gave the highest attention to child-related issues and published 792 news stories related to child rights. Regardless, this seems to be very low coverage and quantity of news when compared to other news, especially to political news. It is a responsibility of the press to maintain the balance in different areas and to cover all events in society. The press is one of the key institutions for the progress of society and it is a social and moral responsibility of the press.

The findings from four selected newspapers for the period of one year from November 2017 to October 2018 underscore that the portion of crime related news stories for children in the Nawa-i-waqt newspaper is the biggest which is 304 news stories in total while The Express Tribune covered the minimum news stories related to crime which are 98 in number. The Dawn newspaper contained 182 news stories while the Jang newspaper published the second highest number of news stories which are 212. Moreover, all selected newspapers gave coverage mostly on the inside pages of newspapers. Both the Dawn and The Express Tribune newspapers published 36 news stories on page 1 while the Jang and Nawa-i-waqt

<sup>26</sup> See: EMAN, M. S.: *Coverage of Children's Issues in Egyptian Newspapers at The American University in Cairo*. [Master's thesis]. Cairo, Egypt : The American University, 2015. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://fount.aucegypt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=etds>>; ORTUM, L. L.: *An Investigation into the Extent of Children Content in Kenyan Media: A Case Study of the Nation and the Standard Newspapers*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Nairobi : University of Nairobi, 2013, 60 p.; OYERO, O.: Children: as 'Invisible' and Voiceless as Ever in the Nigerian News Media. In *Estudos em Comunicação*, 2014, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 25-41. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<http://www.ec.ubi.pt/ec/07/vol2/oyero.pdf>>.

daily papers printed 90 and 94 news stories, respectively, on page 1. It shows the priority of press regarding children's rights in Pakistan.

Dawn news published highest, with 104 news stories with visuals out of 596 total news stories and the remaining 492 news stories were published without visuals. Similarly, The Express Tribune included 88 news stories with visuals and 388 news stories without visuals. On the other hand, the Jang newspaper covered the minimum number of news stories with visuals which are 26 in number, whereas the remaining 514 news stories were published without picture stories. Furthermore, the Nawa-i-waqt newspaper published only 78 news stories with visuals out of a total of 792 news stories while the remaining 714 news stories were covered without any visual.

The findings show that there is low media coverage regarding children as well as their rights. Media give coverage to issues of children only when some problem or incident occurs or when a certain news story gets highlighted on social media. Otherwise, media don't put much effort into covering children issues and their rights. It can be seen that in the month of January 2018, all selected newspapers have the maximum news stories regarding child rights. By viewing the findings of both English and Urdu newspapers, it is clear that the Urdu newspapers (Jang and Nawa-i-waqt) gave more coverage and attention to children's rights and their issues. Both Urdu newspapers covered more news stories which are 1332 in number while English newspapers published a total of 1072 news stories from November 2017 to October 2018. Moreover, English newspapers paid more attention to the visuals containing child rights news stories and printed more of those stories as compared to Urdu newspapers. The quantity of the visual news stories is 192 in number. On the other hand, Urdu newspapers covered 104 news stories with visuals along with captions.

## **9 Conclusion**

The above results point to a number of interesting trends in news stories about children issues. Previously, not much coverage was given to children issues in the four newspapers, but there has been a recent increase in the news coverage about children and crime related stories are being reported excessively, as sexual abuse and child abuse is increasing day by day. In the meantime, different kinds of news were ignored, particularly news related to social issues, like those concerning street children, child labour, health issues, education and early marriage. Development news were ignored as well, the press focus on more negative news (Muita & Khamasi, 2007). The Media is interest in negative news not about positive, productive or progressive news regarding children's rights or in general. The study examined the media coverage of children's rights and the results showed that it is necessary to increase coverage of children's issues in major newspapers to create awareness regarding children's rights.

Pakistan sanctioned the Child Rights Convention (CRC) in 1990 and, the National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) in collaboration with Provincial commissions for Child Welfare and Development (PCCWDs), local NGOs and local press to create the awareness on Children's right and health problems. But it did not produce good results, the CRC discusses the role of media in questioning children's rights and in the collection of data from different regions. Unfortunately, the press in Pakistan has not the same priorities and focuses on the news events and problems of children in newspapers. It is pertinent to state that the media have a greater responsibility in shaping the children's agenda as well as giving them adequate coverage and visibility, so that the attention of governments and the public concerned can be used to solve children's problems in society. The reason for the low prevalence of children's problems in newspapers is that children's problems are considered unpredictable when compared to political or economic issues. Social issues and problems faced by Pakistani children have minuscule coverage which shows that it's not considered the priority by our press.

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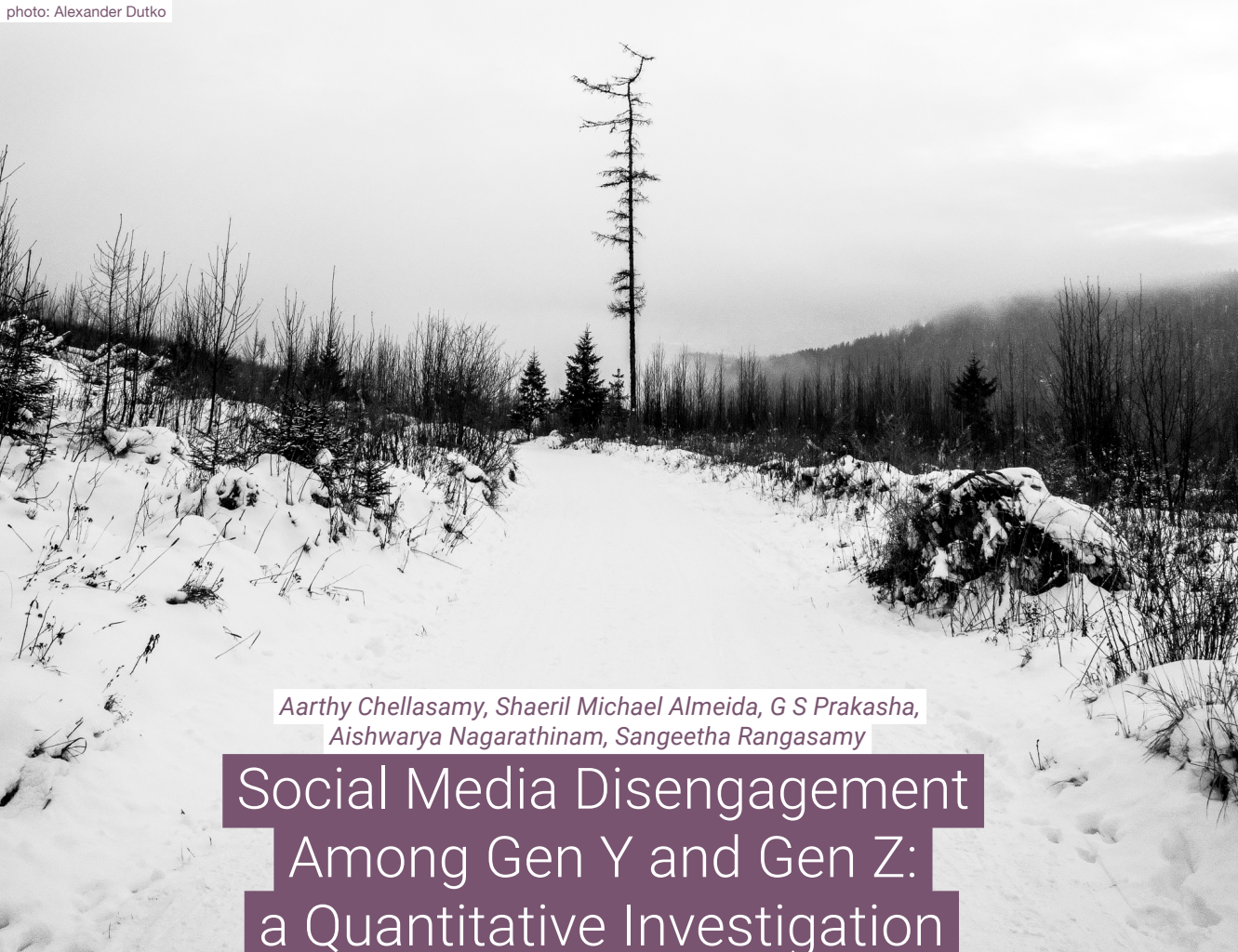
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# Social Media Disengagement Among Gen Y and Gen Z: a Quantitative Investigation

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to identify the relationship between Social media disengagement (SMD) and Social media experience (SME), perceived anonymity (PA), perceived credibility (PC) and subjective norms (SN), individual characteristics (IC) and to identify the most widely used social media network among Gen Y and Gen Z. A quantitative survey of 800 participants of Gen Y and Gen Z of Bangalore city were the respondents. A total of 532 responses were received, and the data were analyzed using SPSS. Results reveal that there is no correlation between SMD and SME, PC, PA and SN. However, the disengagement level varies across different social media networks like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The study suggests that degree of social media activity combined with digital literacy enhances social media usage among millennials, and with improved customer engagement in social media, marketers can harness it positively to improve their product offerings and customer base. Social Media Disengagement was first studied in the Indian context and less explored compared to engagement. During the pandemic GenY and GenZ shared and cared for in the online platform, resulting in a sense of belongingness. Hence, their disengagement from social media, generates opportunities for marketers to have better connectivity.

## **KEY WORDS**

Credibility. Digital Natives. Social Media Disengagement. Social Media Experience. Subjective Norms.

# 1 Introduction

Social media is a new stream media and vast information shared across these platforms have made this a natural fit among advertisers to reach GenY and GenZ (Digital Natives). Social media, also called consumer-generated media, or Web2.0, refers to media that is created and driven by consumers.<sup>1</sup> Social Media has given a lot of space for digital natives to express themselves like #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, Awareness for Climate change, demanding eco-friendly products, and so on has completely revamped business models. A global survey (2019) from marketingcharts.com<sup>2</sup> has revealed that 60% of Gen Z and 72% of GenY agreed that social media is an essential part of their daily routine to get connected to all spheres of life. India has given a red-carpet welcome to internet penetration which reflects the growth in digital population (680 million Internet users) of the country. A survey (2021) from Statista.com<sup>3</sup> stated that 28.4% of GenZ and 52.3% of GenY are the main contributors to social media usage in India. These people can be called social savvy as they spend at least 2.5 hrs per day engaging in social sites like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter and Snapchat.

This traffic provides an easy prediction of how they perceive and interact with products and services.<sup>4</sup> This statistical evidence emphasizes that these generations are the prospective customers of the social media who amplify the purchasing power<sup>5</sup> of this segment; hence, it becomes imperative for researchers and marketing organizations to understand them.

By predicting the phenomenal growth of social media usage by these segments and research by Duffet<sup>6</sup> we focused on methods of engaging and setting co-creative experiences across different social media platforms for GenY and GenZ. At the same time these consumers can be easily disengaged from social media; many complex reasons. The dark side of social media disengagement may be temporary or permanent and can affect academics, business, politics and society.<sup>7</sup> To overcome this, a holistic approach should be followed by the companies to build a strong trusting relationship with this generation. The process of disengagement and engagement with social media goes parallel for a consumer. Companies which focus on the engagement process, cannot afford to overlook the disengagement process, as it can slowly lead to a loss of consumers. Although customer engagement and disengagement are two separate concepts, they both exist within the same customer, product and service settings. This phenomenon of disengagement is considerably significant since it can lead to unreparable repercussions.

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<sup>1</sup> See: KAPLAN, A. M., HAENLEIN, M.: Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media. In *Business Horizons*, 2010, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 59-68. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/1274371/Users\\_of\\_the\\_world\\_unite\\_The\\_challenges\\_and\\_opportunities\\_of\\_social\\_media](https://www.academia.edu/1274371/Users_of_the_world_unite_The_challenges_and_opportunities_of_social_media)>.

<sup>2</sup> LASHBROOK, J.: *Why Do Different Generations Use Social Media?*. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.marketingcharts.com/digital/social-media-110652>>.

<sup>3</sup> KEELERY, S.: *Social Media Usage in India – Statistics & Facts*. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/topics/5113/social-media-usage-in-india/>>.

<sup>4</sup> See: THONG, J. Y. L. et al.: Consumer Acceptance of Personal Information and Communication Technology Services. In *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 2011, Vol. 58, No. 4, p. 613-625. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/1497488/Consumer\\_Acceptance\\_of\\_Personal\\_Information\\_and\\_Communication\\_Technology\\_Services](https://www.academia.edu/1497488/Consumer_Acceptance_of_Personal_Information_and_Communication_Technology_Services)>.

<sup>5</sup> See: AHMED, R. R., HANIF, M., MEENAI, Y. A.: Relationship Between Demographic and Internet Usage. In *Journal of Information Engineering and Applications*, 2015, Vol. 5, No. 10, p. 32-38. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283733993\\_Relationship\\_between\\_Demographic\\_and\\_Internet\\_Usage](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283733993_Relationship_between_Demographic_and_Internet_Usage)>.

<sup>6</sup> See: DUFFET, R. G.: Influence of Social Media Marketing Communications on Young Consumers' Attitudes. In *Young Consumers*, 2017, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 19-39. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1108/yc-07-2016-00622>>.

<sup>7</sup> See: YAMAMOTO, M., KUSHIN, M. J., DALISAY, F.: Social Media and Political Disengagement Among Young Adults: A Moderated Mediation Model of Cynicism, Efficacy, and Social Media Use on Apathy. In *Mass Communication and Society*, 2016, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 149-168. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2016.1224352>>.

Hence a study on disengagement is considered more important and on account of this, an attempt is made to explore the factors Social Media Experience (SME), Perceived Anonymity (PA), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Credibility (PC)<sup>8</sup> and individual characteristics, which is an add-on to the variable list by the researchers that may or may not drive Social Media Disengagement (SMD). The next section discusses these variables followed by analysis, discussion and conclusions.

## 1.1 Literature Review

### Social Media Disengagement

Disengagement is a complex construct found in a multidimensional state with a sum of various human domains<sup>9</sup> associated with complex patterns involving behavioural, emotional and cognitive areas. Disengagement can arise for people in various aspects of life and is associated with terms such as disaffected, detached, indifferent, alienated, resentful, hostile and distrust.<sup>10</sup>

Disengagement is associated with a loss of meaningfulness, safety and non-availability<sup>11</sup> which leads to a reduction in interaction and an increase in interpersonal conflict as well as overt hostility, distrust and emotional distress.<sup>12</sup> Males are found to become disengaged when their association and linkage with Social-Media-Based Brand Communities (SMBBCs) decreases. Females on the other hand become disengaged with a brand when they lack a personal connection or customization. Young population naturally prefer artificial intelligence<sup>13</sup> on social media and if there is a lack of usage of artificial intelligence by the website then this can lead to disengagement in younger generations. For instance, gamification has gained popularity among young customers and research shows that it increases brand engagement.<sup>14</sup>

Social media disengagement in youngsters could be a result of psychological factors such as emotional health, psychological distress, low motivation, inter alia and pressure from parents and peers.<sup>15</sup> Rapid physical and emotional changes in the teenage phase are the same

<sup>8</sup> See: NGUYEN, L. T. V. et al.: Drivers of Social Media Disengagement: A Study of Young Consumers In Vietnam. In *Young Consumers*, 2019, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 155-170. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336357070\\_Drivers\\_of\\_social\\_media\\_disengagement\\_a\\_study\\_of\\_young\\_consumers\\_in\\_Vietnam](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336357070_Drivers_of_social_media_disengagement_a_study_of_young_consumers_in_Vietnam)>.

<sup>9</sup> CHIPCHASE, L. et al.: Conceptualising and Measuring Student Disengagement in Higher Education: A Synthesis of the Literature. In *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2017, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 31. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n2p31>>.

<sup>10</sup> *Student Engagement Literature Review*. [online]. [2022-04-12]. Available at: <[https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/studentengagementliteraturereview\\_1\\_1568037028.pdf](https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/studentengagementliteraturereview_1_1568037028.pdf)>.

<sup>11</sup> See: KAHN, W. A.: Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work. In *Academy of Management Journal*, 2017, Vol. 33, No. 4, p. 692-724. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://journals.aom.org/doi/10.5465/256287>>.

<sup>12</sup> See: FITZPATRICK, M. A.: Between Husbands & Wives: Communication in Marriage. In *Choice Reviews Online*, 1989, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 31-227. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232440676\\_Between\\_Husbands\\_Wives\\_Communication\\_in\\_Marriage\\_Sage\\_series\\_in\\_interpersonal\\_communication\\_Vol\\_7](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232440676_Between_Husbands_Wives_Communication_in_Marriage_Sage_series_in_interpersonal_communication_Vol_7)>.

<sup>13</sup> See: HASSE, A. et al.: Youth and Artificial Intelligence: Where We Stand. In *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2019, p. 1-21. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3385718>>.

<sup>14</sup> See: XI, N., HAMARI, J.: Does Gamification Affect Brand Engagement and Equity? A Study in Online Brand Communities. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, Vol. 109, p. 449-460. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.11.058>>.

<sup>15</sup> BAIK, C., NAYLOR, R., ARKOUUDIS, S.: *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings From Two Decades, 1994-2014*. Australia : Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education. The University of Melbourne, 2015. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/1513123/FYE-2014-FULL-report-FINAL-web.pdf](https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1513123/FYE-2014-FULL-report-FINAL-web.pdf)>.



across the globe. It often starts with an increase in the number of activities in one's life<sup>16</sup> results in spending less time on social media. Social media disengagement associated with a brand is based on few important factors namely affection with the brand and brand-use intention.<sup>17</sup>

When a brand fails to cherish and maintain a relationship with the user, this may lead to disengagement in social media. The user feels that the content shared by the social media is no longer useful, or the user's interest changes and a disconnection with the community leads to disengagement; unpleasant technical environments or hostile community environments also contribute toward disengagement from social media.

Customer engagement can occur when high engagement<sup>18</sup> exists both with brand<sup>19</sup> and advertising<sup>20</sup> and a lack of these factors leads to disengagement which is signified by certain actions, such as removal of the brand page from the feed, overlooking the available information related to the brand and discontinuation in following the page of a particular brand.

### Social Media Experience

The advent of social media has facilitated a new world of virtual engagement through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat to individuals. More than 80% of the day is spent on social media to connect and communicate, which might either solicit social networking or social dysfunction.

However, the positive or negative effects of social media depend solely on the user.<sup>21</sup> In this context<sup>22</sup> we explored individuals motivating factors towards virtual environments such as subjective wellbeing and psychological needs. The authors considered Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) to the social media experience of participants regarding positive, negative and overall affect balance that provides virtual happiness. They stated that virtual experience depends on the generation they belong to. A study conducted by<sup>23</sup> revealed that blogs, Instagram and LinkedIn positively predicted social comparison. Nevertheless, the author mentioned that overall happiness and life satisfaction are not affected by social comparison, it is also vital to understand the features of social media

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<sup>16</sup> HILLMAN, K., MARK, G.: *Becoming an Adult: Leaving Home, Relationships and Home Ownership Among Australian Youth*. Australia : LSAY Research Reports, 2002. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/34533036/Becoming\\_an\\_adult\\_Leaving\\_home\\_relationships\\_and\\_home\\_ownership\\_among\\_Australian\\_youth](https://www.academia.edu/34533036/Becoming_an_adult_Leaving_home_relationships_and_home_ownership_among_Australian_youth)>.

<sup>17</sup> See: DUTOT, V., MOSCONI, E.: Understanding Factors of Disengagement Within a Virtual Community: An Exploratory Study. In *Journal of Decision Systems*, 2016, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 227-243. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304067260\\_Understanding\\_factors\\_of\\_disengagement\\_within\\_a\\_virtual\\_community\\_an\\_exploratory\\_study](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304067260_Understanding_factors_of_disengagement_within_a_virtual_community_an_exploratory_study)>.

<sup>18</sup> See: BRODIE, R. J. et al.: Customer Engagement: Conceptual Domain, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications for Research. In *Journal of Service Research*, 2011, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 252-271. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285726483\\_Customer\\_engagement\\_Conceptual\\_domain\\_fundamental\\_propositions\\_and\\_implications\\_for\\_research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285726483_Customer_engagement_Conceptual_domain_fundamental_propositions_and_implications_for_research)>.

<sup>19</sup> See: HOLLEBEEK, D. L.: Exploring Customer Brand Engagement: Definition and Themes. In *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 2011, Vol. 19, No. 7, p. 1-30. [online]. [2022-04-12]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232906763\\_Exploring\\_customer\\_brand\\_engagement\\_Definition\\_and\\_themes](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232906763_Exploring_customer_brand_engagement_Definition_and_themes)>.

<sup>20</sup> See: PHILLIPS, B. J., MCQUARRIE, E. F.: Narrative and Persuasion in Fashion Advertising. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 37, No. 3, p. 368-392. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1086/653087>>.

<sup>21</sup> See: GRACIYAL, D. G., VISWAM, D.: Social Media and Emotional Well-being: Pursuit of Happiness or Pleasure. In *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 2021, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 99-115. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365x211003737>>.

<sup>22</sup> See: BEREZAN, O. et al.: The Pursuit of Virtual Happiness: Exploring the Social Media Experience Across Generations. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2018, Vol. 89, p. 455-461. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://anjala.faculty.unlv.edu/Berezan\\_JBR\\_2018.pdf](https://anjala.faculty.unlv.edu/Berezan_JBR_2018.pdf)>.

<sup>23</sup> See: CHAE, J.: Re-Examining the Relationship Between Social Media and Happiness: The Effects of Various Social Media Platforms on Reconceptualized Happiness. In *Telematics and Informatics*, 2018, Vol. 35, No. 6, p. 1656-1664. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324689243\\_Reexamining\\_the\\_Relationship\\_between\\_Social\\_Media\\_and\\_Happiness\\_The\\_Effects\\_of\\_Various\\_Social\\_Media\\_Platforms\\_on\\_Reconceptualized\\_Happiness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324689243_Reexamining_the_Relationship_between_Social_Media_and_Happiness_The_Effects_of_Various_Social_Media_Platforms_on_Reconceptualized_Happiness)>.

pages or content that attracts and provides a better experience. Perez-Vega et al.<sup>24</sup> explored the Fan Page Cues (FPCs) using three dimensions' social interactive value, visual appearance and identity attractiveness.

It was suggested that elements representing attractiveness namely large images, images of celebrities, little text and a search feature<sup>25</sup> should be considered when developing a digital interaction tool. Mastrodicasa and Metellus<sup>26</sup> explored the impact of social media on college students and found that social media is not a problem. However, the specific use and focus on social media activities of college students make a lot of difference in the outcome as well as the experience.

Social media experience is based on results that a user gets while exploring the sites or pages. Positive experience during access and usage of various sites makes the user stay connected; the main reason for youngsters to connect with social media is to have an update on the economy, industry and the environment. Social media sites might have better engagement and experience when they are updated<sup>27</sup> with accurate information.<sup>28</sup> Instagram sites consider three dimensions; objectification, sexualisation and misrepresentation of female counterparts who are college students. Most of the posts were by college students, especially female students indicating women empowerment<sup>29</sup> Abedin and Jafarzadeh<sup>30</sup> mentioned that many young people are active on Facebook due to its appealing content, navigation options and the coverage of socializing aspects, yet another feature in social media experience is based on the navigation mechanism adopted in various social networking platforms.<sup>31</sup>

Internet users' experiences of cyber-hate were explored by Celik<sup>32</sup> with respect to ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, and gender-based political perspective and found that gender, income and socio-political aspects significantly contribute to cyber-hate. Twenge<sup>33</sup> investigated online social media leading to social connection or social disconnection among the millennial,

<sup>24</sup> See: PEREZ-VEGA, R. et al.: On Being Attractive, Social And Visually Appealing in Social Media: The Effects Of Anthropomorphic Tourism Brands on Facebook Fan Pages. In *Tourism Management*, 2018, Vol. 66, p. 339-347. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.11.013>>.

<sup>25</sup> See: DJAMASBI, S., SIEGEL, M., TULLIS, T.: "Generation Y, Web Design, and Eye Tracking". In *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 2010, Vol. 68, No. 5, p. 307-323. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220108757\\_Generation\\_Y\\_web\\_design\\_and\\_eye\\_tracking](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220108757_Generation_Y_web_design_and_eye_tracking)>.

<sup>26</sup> See: MASTRODICASA, J., METELLUS, P.: The Impact of social media on College Students. In *Journal of College and Character*, 2013, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 21-30. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270550330\\_The\\_Impact\\_of\\_Social\\_Media\\_on\\_College\\_Students](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270550330_The_Impact_of_Social_Media_on_College_Students)>.

<sup>27</sup> See: VOORVELD, H. A. M. et al.: Engagement With Social Media and Social Media Advertising: The Differentiating Role of Platform Type. In *Journal of Advertising*, 2018, Vol. 47, No. 1, p. 38-54. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2017.1405754>>.

<sup>28</sup> See: KHAN, F.R. et al.: "Impact of Social Media on Customers Satisfaction: Bank Muscat – A Case Study. In *Ahead International Journal of Recent Research Review*, 2017, Vol. 1, No. 11, p. 154-163. [online]. [2022-04-12]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/33076681/IMPACT\\_OF\\_SOCIAL\\_MEDIA\\_ON\\_CUSTOMERS\\_SATISFACTION\\_BANK\\_MUSCAT\\_A\\_CASE\\_STUDY](https://www.academia.edu/33076681/IMPACT_OF_SOCIAL_MEDIA_ON_CUSTOMERS_SATISFACTION_BANK_MUSCAT_A_CASE_STUDY)>.

<sup>29</sup> See: DAVIS, S. E.: Objectification, Sexualization, and Misrepresentation: Social Media and the College Experience. In *Social Media + Society*, 2018, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 1-9. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118786727>>.

<sup>30</sup> See: ABEDIN, B.: Relationship Development with Customers on Facebook: A Critical Success Factors Model. In ABEDIN, B., JAFARZADEH, H. (eds.): *Proceedings of 48th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. Hawaii : IEEE Computer Society, 2015, p. 1889-1898. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/38437025/Relationship\\_Development\\_with\\_Customers\\_on\\_Facebook\\_A\\_Critical\\_Success\\_Factors\\_Model](https://www.academia.edu/38437025/Relationship_Development_with_Customers_on_Facebook_A_Critical_Success_Factors_Model)>.

<sup>31</sup> See: NIZAM, N.: Link Sharing on Twitter During Popular Events: Implications for Social Navigation on Websites. In NIZAM, N., WATTERS, C., GRUZD, A. (eds.): *Proceedings of the Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. Hawaii : IEEE Computer Society, 2014, p. 1745-1754. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: < DOI:10.1109/HICSS.2014.222>.

<sup>32</sup> See: CELIK, S.: Experiences of Internet Users Regarding Cyberhate. In *Information Technology & People*, 2019, Vol. 32, No. 6, p. 1446-1471. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1108/itp-01-2018-0009>>.

<sup>33</sup> See: TWENGE, J. M.: Does Online Social Media Lead to Social Connection or Social Disconnection? In *Journal of College and Character*, 2013, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 11-20. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1515/jcc-2013-0003>>.

and the results showed that because of the popularity of social media, there is a decline in empathy, civic engagement and political involvement. Based on the reviews presented in this section this study explores the relationship between the social media experience of ZenY and ZenZ and their disengagement with social media.

### Perceived Credibility (PC)

Modern technological capabilities and the rise of social media have prompted concerns for the credibility of information on social media pages; as a result, new responsibilities have been placed on social media and its users.<sup>34</sup> There are worldwide instances in which social media is seen as a source of information. For example, social media has been the go-to destination for seeking information on the spread of Covid-19 across countries, vaccination information etc. Mass media has historically been a source of information<sup>35</sup> because consumers always associate them with credibility, worthiness and time sensitivity. However, it is imperative to learn more about how consumers evaluate the information they process from social media websites.<sup>36</sup>

Credibility, often known as believability, is a quality possessed by individuals, who are not always able to recognize genuine information from fakes through their cognitive ability.<sup>37</sup>

Information credibility is the extent to which an individual perceives information to be believable.<sup>38</sup> When consumers perceive information that is of high quality, they may give importance to it if it remains useful for them.<sup>39</sup> Perceived credibility is often considered a strong predictor of consumer's further action based on the information they receive. Perceived credibility in social media websites can be attributed to three factors: medium, message and source credibility.<sup>40</sup> The longer the message length of retweets and replies in social media websites, the higher the perceived credibility.<sup>41</sup> The recency of updating content on social media websites has a positive linear relationship with perceived source credibility which means that faster updates lead to increased source credibility.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See: METZGER, M. J. et al.: Credibility for the 21st Century: Integrating Perspectives on Source, Message, and Media Credibility in the Contemporary Media Environment. In *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 2003, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 293-335. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/850675/Credibility\\_for\\_the\\_21st\\_century\\_Integrating\\_perspectives\\_on\\_source\\_message\\_and\\_media\\_credibility\\_in\\_the\\_contemporary\\_media\\_environment](https://www.academia.edu/850675/Credibility_for_the_21st_century_Integrating_perspectives_on_source_message_and_media_credibility_in_the_contemporary_media_environment)>.

<sup>35</sup> See: MURCH, A. W.: Public Concern for Environmental Pollution. In *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1971, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 100-106. [online]. [2022-04-12]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1086/267870>>.

<sup>36</sup> See: WESTERMAN, D., SPENCE, P. R., VAN DER HEIDE, B.: Social Media as Information Source: Recency of Updates and Credibility of Information. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2014, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. 171-183. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12041>>.

<sup>37</sup> VIVIANI, M., PASI, G.: Credibility in Social Media: Opinions, News, and Health Information-A Survey. In *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery*, 2017, Vol. 7, No. 5, p. 1209. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1002/widm.1209>>.

<sup>38</sup> See: MCKNIGHT, D. H.: Factors and Effects of Information Credibility. In MCKNIGHT, D. H., KACMAR, C. J. (eds.): *ICEC '07: Proceedings of the ninth international conference on Electronic commerce*. Minneapolis MN USA : Association for Computing Machinery, p. 423-432. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221550596\\_Factors\\_and\\_effects\\_of\\_information\\_credibility](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221550596_Factors_and_effects_of_information_credibility)>.

<sup>39</sup> See: AHN, T., RYU, S., HAN, I.: The Impact of Web Quality and Playfulness on User Acceptance of Online Retailing. In *Information & Management*, 2007, Vol. 44, No. 3, p. 263-275. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2006.12.008>>.

<sup>40</sup> See: LI, R., SUH, A.: Factors Influencing Information Credibility on Social Media Platforms: Evidence from Facebook Pages. In *Procedia Computer Science*, 2015, Vol. 72, p. 314-328. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2015.12.146>>.

<sup>41</sup> See: MITRA, T., GRAHAM, W. P., GILBERT, E.: A Parsimonious Language Model of Social Media Credibility Across Disparate Events. In MITRA, T., GRAHAM, W. P., GILBERT, E. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 2017 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing*. Portland : Association for Computing Machinery, 2017, p. 126-145. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1145/2998181.2998351>>.

<sup>42</sup> See: WESTERMAN, D., SPENCE, P. R., VAN DER HEIDE, B.: Social Media as Information Source: Recency of Updates and Credibility of Information. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2014, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. 171-183. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12041>>.

Credibility also depends on the person who is administering the social media page, their regular interactions with the followers and the page activity frequency, and various heuristics of social media websites namely modality, navigability, interactivity, and agency, have a profound influence on the youth's assessment of credibility.<sup>43</sup> Age and gender are the dominant tools in shaping perceived credibility in social media. In the mainstream media, older male newscasters were more credible than their younger counterparts.

In contrast, young male social media influencers are more credible on social media websites. In terms of source credibility, male newscasters were more credible, and in terms of the message, the news read by female newscasters was credible.<sup>44</sup> With respect to social media websites, the attitude of males and females to social media content has different effects on credibility and information quality.<sup>45</sup> The growing trend of social media sites pictures that the credibility of the page is imperative for users' engagement. Accordingly, this study attempts to determine whether perceived credibility has a direct impact on social media disengagement.

### Perceived Anonymity

Social media anonymity allows users to freely express their ideas and thoughts which is not possible in mainstream media. Anonymity also provides users with equitable ground without any judgment to make their contributions.<sup>46</sup> In general, anonymous users on social media are much more supportive and helpful in their suggestions and feedback when sensitive disclosures are made. Forums in different social media platforms act as safe spaces to talk about difficult experiences and connect with people who have undergone the same.<sup>47</sup> However, with the increase in online usage across the world, anonymity has been identified with both positive and negative behaviours in social media discussions. Social media platforms like Reddit, Facebook and Quora can compromise anonymity based on their privacy policies.<sup>48</sup> This has warned the anonymous users to some extent to be careful about cyberbullying, trolling and other inappropriate behaviours. 'Throwaway accounts' are being used by young Reddit users which allows them to engage temporarily without disclosing one's identity.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See: SUNDAR, S. S.: *The MAIN Model: A Heuristic Approach to Understanding Technology Effects on Credibility*. Cambridge, MA : MacArthur Foundation Digital Media and Learning Initiative, 2008, p. 73-100. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323990996\\_The\\_MAIN\\_Model\\_A\\_Heuristic\\_Approach\\_to\\_Understanding\\_Technology\\_Effects\\_on\\_Credibility](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323990996_The_MAIN_Model_A_Heuristic_Approach_to_Understanding_Technology_Effects_on_Credibility)>.

<sup>44</sup> See: WEIBEL, D., WISSMATH, B., GRONER, R.: How Gender and Age Affect Newscasters' Credibility – An Investigation in Switzerland. In *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2018, Vol. 52, No. 3, p. 466-484. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838150802205801>>.

<sup>45</sup> See: DEDEOGLU, B. B.: Are Information Quality and Source Credibility Really Important for Shared Content On Social Media? In *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 2019, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 513-534. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330024207\\_Are\\_information\\_quality\\_and\\_source\\_credibility\\_really\\_important\\_for\\_shared\\_content\\_on\\_social\\_media\\_The\\_moderating\\_role\\_of\\_gender](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330024207_Are_information_quality_and_source_credibility_really_important_for_shared_content_on_social_media_The_moderating_role_of_gender)>.

<sup>46</sup> See: SCHLESINGER, A.: Situated Anonymity: Impacts of Anonymity, Ephemerality, and Hyper-Locality on Social Media. In SCHLESINGER, A. et al. (eds.): *CHI '17: Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. Denver Colorado USA : Association for Computing Machinery, 2017, p. 6912-6924. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://dl.acm.org/doi/pdf/10.1145/3025453.3025682>>.

<sup>47</sup> See: ANDALIBI, N. et al.: Social Support, Reciprocity, and Anonymity in Responses to Sexual Abuse Disclosures on Social Media. In *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 2018, Vol. 25, No. 5, p. 1-35. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328010910\\_Social\\_Support\\_Reciprocity\\_and\\_Anonymity\\_in\\_Responses\\_to\\_Sexual\\_Abuse\\_Disclosures\\_on\\_Social\\_Media](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328010910_Social_Support_Reciprocity_and_Anonymity_in_Responses_to_Sexual_Abuse_Disclosures_on_Social_Media)>.

<sup>48</sup> See: KILGO, D. K. et al.: Reddit's Veil of Anonymity: Predictors of Engagement and Participation in Media Environments with Hostile Reputations. In *Social Media + Society*, 2018, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 1-9. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118810216>>.

<sup>49</sup> See: LAMPINEN, A.: Self-declared Throwaway Accounts on Reddit. In LAMPINEN, A., GERGLE, D., SHAMMA, D. A. (eds.): *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, New York USA : Association for Computing Machinery, 2019, p. 1-30. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1145/3359237>>.

Women are increasingly adopting more temporary identities in social networks than men.<sup>50</sup> Young mothers use anonymity to research alternative perspectives on motherhood. Older adults have negative attitudes towards social media use mainly because of the lack of code for social conduct and anonymity in online forums.<sup>51</sup> Social media users are also worried about the fact that the information they share on these platforms is not safe and could lead to data theft, identity theft, hacking, and other security-related issues. This is one of the reasons for social media users to give very little information about themselves and their interests in these platforms and recent awareness of cybersecurity has also led users to check for security certificates on the social media pages and 'lock' their profile for strangers. The security of social media pages is crucial for its credibility and possible threats and privacy risks in social network sites could lead to less credibility on social media pages. In this context, this study tries to determine whether perceived anonymity has a direct impact on social media disengagement.

### Subjective Norms

Subjective norm is the perceived social pressure to exhibit a particular behaviour. It stems from various beliefs, people's opinions, peer pressure and peer approval. It also refers to rules and regulations set predefined by a society on how to behave in a natural setting in a certain manner and emphasizes one's motivation to comply with society's view. People often change their behaviour to 'fit-in' with their peer groups. This behaviour is common among all age groups where everyone puts on their best performance when they are with their 'like-minded' groups and deliberate on trivial issues. The path from subjective norm to behaviour intention is stronger among older people than younger. Subjective norms affect the purchase intention of youngsters on social media platforms.<sup>52</sup>

Educational background is associated with personal attitudes and can have a positive or negative impact on subjective norms.<sup>53</sup> In a cultural context, individuals from collectivistic cultures experience stronger peer pressure and are more willing to follow other's opinions. In the case of people from individualistic countries, strong attitudes towards certain behaviours are exhibited and they may not adhere to others opinions.<sup>54</sup> Social pressures on a certain social media page may increase or decrease the credibility of a page, leading to social media engagement or disengagement.

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<sup>50</sup> See: LEAVITT, A.: "This is a Throwaway Account." In LEAVITT, A. (ed.): *CSCW '15: Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*. Vancouver BC Canada : Association for Computing Machinery, 2015, p. 315-327. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1145/2675133.2675175>>.

<sup>51</sup> See: LEIST, A. K.: Social Media Use of Older Adults: A Mini-Review. In *Gerontology*, 2013, Vol. 59, No. 4, p. 378-384. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1159/000346818>>.

<sup>52</sup> See: RACHMAWATI, I. K. et al.: Collaboration Technology Acceptance Model, Subjective Norms and Personal Innovations on Buying Interest Online. In *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 2020, Vol. 5, No. 10, p. 1-8. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346096054\\_Collaboration\\_Technology\\_Acceptance\\_Model\\_Subjective\\_Norms\\_and\\_Personal\\_Innovations\\_on\\_Buying\\_Interest\\_Online](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346096054_Collaboration_Technology_Acceptance_Model_Subjective_Norms_and_Personal_Innovations_on_Buying_Interest_Online)>.

<sup>53</sup> See: JEGER, M., IVKOVIC, A. F.: The Role of Subjective Norms in Forming the Intention to Purchase Green Food. In *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 2015, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 738-748. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677x.2015.1083875>>.

<sup>54</sup> See: HAM, M., JEGER, M., IVKOVIC, A. F.: The Role of Subjective Norms in Forming the Intention to Purchase Green Food. In *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 2015, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 738-748. [online]. [2015-10-09]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2015.1083875>>.

## 2 Methodology

### Research Design

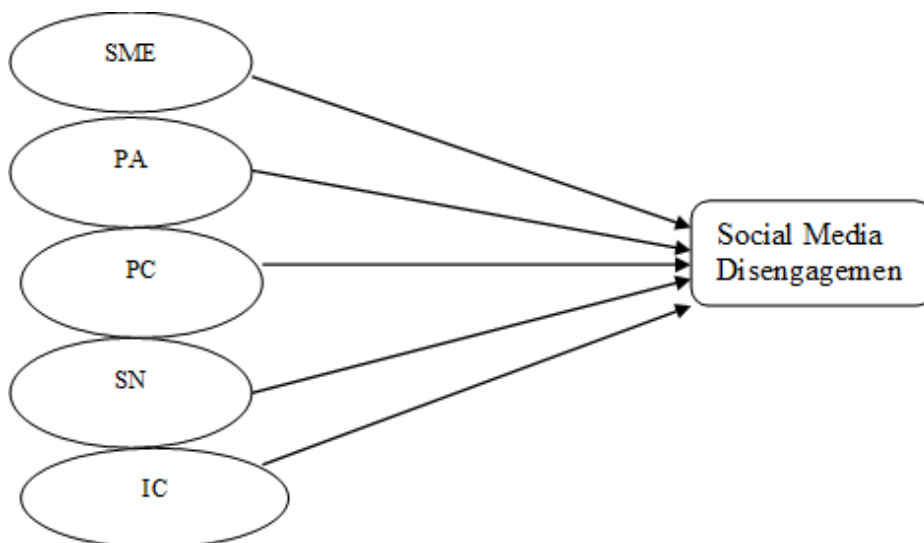
The present study employed a quantitative survey to address the research question, as there exists a relationship between SMD and PA, PC, SN and to identify widely used social networking sites among GenY and Z. The study employed a snowball sampling technique based on the usage of social media for at least three hours a day.<sup>55</sup> Researchers administered a tool booklet consisting of a few demographic details and items pertaining to social media disengagement (SMD), perceived anonymity (PA), social media experiences (SME), perceived credibility (PC), and subjective norms (SN). All instruments were rated on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree (SDA) to strongly agree (SA). Demographic details (individual characteristics) considered for the study were gender, family type, and widely used social media like Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

### Sample and Data Collection

The study selected its sample from Bangalore, India. Bangalore is the silicon city of India as it is a leading information technology hub. The city hosts many educated families and hence the use of social media is high among the public. The study sent out a survey of 800 participants and obtained 532 responses. Among them 278 were male and 254 were female ranging in age from 18 to 35 years.

### Analysing of Data

The present study employs a quantitative design to understand the relationship between SMD and SME, PA, SN, and PC. The study found differences in SMD among demographic variables such as gender, family type, and widely used social media. Figure 1 presents a schematic of the study design.



**PICTURE 1:** Design of the study

Source: own processing, 2021.

<sup>55</sup> See: DUTOT, V., MOSCONI, E.: Understanding Factors of Disengagement Within a Virtual Community: An Exploratory Study. In *Journal of Decision Systems*, 2016, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 227-243. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304067260\\_Understanding\\_factors\\_of\\_disengagement\\_within\\_a\\_virtual\\_community\\_an\\_exploratory\\_study](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304067260_Understanding_factors_of_disengagement_within_a_virtual_community_an_exploratory_study)>.

### Hypotheses of the study

The present study framed the following null hypothesis to test the research questions.

- There is no significant relationship between Perceived anonymity and social media disengagement.
- There is no significant relationship between social media experiences and social media disengagement.
- There is no significant relationship between Perceived Credibility and Social media disengagement.
- There is no significant relationship between Subjective Norms and Social Media disengagement.
- There is no significant difference between social media disengagement among demographic variables gender, and family type.
- There is no main or interaction effect between social media disengagement and the widely used social media.

### Tools used for the study

1. Social media disengagement (SMD) adapted from Dutot and Mosconi<sup>56</sup>
2. Perceived anonymity (PA) by Hite et al.<sup>57</sup>
3. Social Media Experiences (SME) by Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou<sup>58</sup>
4. Perceived credibility (PC) adapted from Forbes<sup>59</sup>
5. Subjective norms (SN) adapted from Sanne and Wiese<sup>60</sup>
6. Demographic Pro-forma (Individual Characteristics) constructed by researchers

#### Individual characteristics/ Demographic details

- Gender (Male & Female)
- Family type (Joint & Nuclear)
- Most widely used social media (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter)

#### Social Media Disengagement scale

- The content shared by members does not interest me.
- My needs or interests have changed.
- The benefits I get from the community (expertise, exchange) are no longer clear to me.
- My surroundings are no longer involved in the community.
- I cannot get attention from the community.
- The community is not friendly.
- The technical platform (design) no longer pleases me.

<sup>56</sup> See: DUTOT, V., MOSCONI, E.: Understanding Factors of Disengagement Within a Virtual Community: An Exploratory Study. In *Journal of Decision Systems*, 2016, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 227-243. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304067260\\_Understanding\\_factors\\_of\\_disengagement\\_within\\_a\\_virtual\\_community\\_an\\_exploratory\\_study](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304067260_Understanding_factors_of_disengagement_within_a_virtual_community_an_exploratory_study)>.

<sup>57</sup> See: HITE, D. M., VOELKER, T., ROBERTSON, A.: Measuring Perceived Anonymity: The Development of a Context Independent Instrument. In *Journal of Methods and Measurement in the Social Sciences*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 22-39. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/jmms/article/809/gallery/804/view/>>.

<sup>58</sup> See: THOMAS, A. M., VELOUTSOU, C.: Beyond Technology Acceptance: Brand Relationships and Online Brand Experience. In *Journal of Business Research*, 2011, Vol. 66, No. 1, p. 21-27. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251511471\\_Beyond\\_technology\\_acceptance\\_Brand\\_relationships\\_and\\_online\\_brand\\_experience](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251511471_Beyond_technology_acceptance_Brand_relationships_and_online_brand_experience)>.

<sup>59</sup> See: FORBES, J. E.: *Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Credibility, Engagement, Interactivity and Brand Metrics of Social Network Sites*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Baton Rouge, LA : Louisiana State University, 2010, p. 2-71. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2512&context=gradschool\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2512&context=gradschool_theses)>.

<sup>60</sup> See: SANNE, P. N. C., WIESE, M.: The Theory of Planned Behaviour and User Engagement Applied to Facebook Advertising. In *SA Journal of Information Management*, 2018, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 1-10. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325452848\\_The\\_theory\\_of\\_planned\\_behaviour\\_and\\_user\\_engagement\\_applied\\_to\\_Facebook\\_advertising](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325452848_The_theory_of_planned_behaviour_and_user_engagement_applied_to_Facebook_advertising)>.

**Perceived Anonymity scale**

- It is difficult for others to identify me as an individual
- I am confident that others do not know who I am
- I believe that my personal identity remains unknown to others
- I am easily identified as an individual by others (reverse coded)
- Others are likely to know who I am (reverse coded)
- My personal identity is known by others (reverse coded)

**Social Media Experiences**

- The web page layout is appealing.
- It is easy to navigate
- Results are always returned promptly
- The results are always up to date
- Accurate search results are always returned

**Perceived Credibility scale**

- Social media is dependable
- Social media is honest
- Social media is reliable
- Social media is sincere
- Social media is trustworthy
- The information in social media is produced by experts
- The information in social media is produced by experienced people
- The information in social media is produced by knowledgeable people
- The information in social media is produced by qualified people
- The information in social media is produced by skilled people

**Subjective Norms**

- People who are important to me think I should be active user on SM
- People who influence my behaviour think I should be more participative in SM
- Others I know expect that people like me should be on SM

**TABLE 1:** *Showing the items of all the instruments used in the study*

Source: own processing, 2022.

## 3 Results

### Validity and reliability of the instruments

Researchers have established the content and face validity of all instruments with the help of a panel of subject experts. Researchers diligently incorporated the suggestions provided by the experts and thoroughly checked all the adapted items of the instruments. A pilot study was conducted to re-establish the reliability of all the instruments to a small representative sample. Table 2 presents the reliability results of all instruments used in the study.

Instruments	Perceived Anonymity	Social media Experiences	Perceived Credibility	Subjective Norms	Social media disengagement
Cronbach's Alpha value	0.792	0.721	0.714	0.757	0.752

**TABLE 2:** *Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistics*

Source: own processing, 2022.

From Table 2 all the instruments have shown a high reliability ( $r > 0.7$ ) coefficient value; therefore, the instruments are highly reliable.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> See: NUNNALLY, J. C.: *Psychometric Theory 3E*. India: Tata McGraw-Hill Education, 1994.



### Statistical Analysis

The study conducted the following statistical tests to test the hypotheses framed. Correlation test, independent sample t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Correlation tests help in understanding the relationship between the variables SMD and PA, SME, PC, and SN. As researchers are interested in understanding the difference in SMD between the groups of categorical demographic variables, the study employed an independent sample t-test and ANOVA.

### Correlation Statistics

A correlation test was conducted to understand the relationship between social media disengagement and independent variables, perceived anonymity, social media experience, perceived credibility, and subjective norms. Table III presents the results of the correlation tests.

Variables	Perceived Anonymity	Social media Experiences	Perceived Credibility	Subjective Norms	Subjective Norms
Social media Disengagement	0.033**	0.011**	-0.067**	0.040**	0.040**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

TABLE 3: Pearson Correlation Statistics

Source: own processing, 2022.

From Table 3 it is noted that a negative correlation was also observed between social media disengagement and perceived credibility ( $r=-0.067$ ). Social media disengagement was not correlated with perceived anonymity ( $r=0.03$ ), social media experience( $r=0.01$ ), and subjective norms ( $r=0.04$ ).

### Independent Sample t-tests

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine whether social media disengagement differs between gender and family type. Tables IV and V present the results of an independent sample t-test.

		Levene's Test Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI Difference Lower	95% CI Difference Upper
Social Media Disengagement	Equal variances assumed	.178	.673	.393	525	.694	.174	.441	-.693	1.040
	Equal variances not assumed			.393	519.825	.694	.174	.441	-.693	1.040

TABLE 4: Independent Sample t-test between social media disengagement

Source: own processing, 2022.

As shown in Table 4, there was no significant difference in social media disengagement between male and female participants ( $t = 0.393$ ,  $p = 0.694$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis is rejected.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI Difference	95% CI Difference
									Lower	Upper
Social Media Disengagement	Equal variances assumed	.114	.736	-.134	527	.893	-.071	.531	-1.114	0.971
	Equal variances not assumed			-.132	179.368	.895	-.071	.542	-1.141	0.998

TABLE 5: Independent Sample t-test between social media disengagement and family type

Source: own processing, 2022.

As shown in Table 5, there was no significant difference in social media disengagement among participants from nuclear and joint family ( $t=0.134$ ,  $p=0.893$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis is rejected.

### ANOVA

The study conducted ANOVA tests to understand whether social media disengagement differed between participants with various social media pages such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Table 6 and 7 presents the results of the ANOVA.

Social Media Disengagement					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	308.960	3	102.987	4.115	.007
Within Groups	13139.947	525	25.028		
Total	13448.907	528			

TABLE 6: Showing results of ANOVA

Source: own processing, 2022.

From Table 6, there is a statistically significant difference in the mean values of social media disengagement among various social media pages such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. The significance value was found to be 0.007 ( $p < 0.05$ ); therefore, there was a significant main effect between SMD and widely used social media pages. A Tukey post hoc test was conducted to understand the interaction effect among the widely used social media pages.

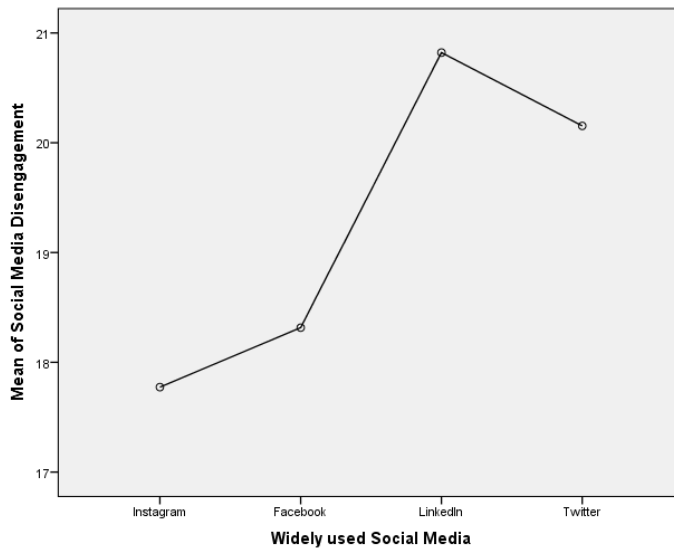
Multiple Comparisons: Dependent Variable: Social Media Disengagement						
Tukey HSD						
(I) Widely used social media	(J) Widely used social media	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Upper Bound	Upper Bound
Instagram	Facebook	-.542	1.171	.967	-3.56	2.48
	LinkedIn	-3.047 <sup>*</sup>	.973	.010	-5.56 <sup>*</sup>	-.54
	Twitter	-2.380	1.407	.329	-6.01	1.25
Facebook	Instagram	.542	1.171	.967	-2.48	3.56
	LinkedIn	-2.506	1.487	.333	-6.34	1.33
	Twitter	-1.838	1.801	.737	-6.48	2.80

LinkedIn	Instagram	3.047 <sup>*</sup>	.973	.010	.54 <sup>*</sup>	5.56
	Facebook	2.506	1.487	.333	-1.33	6.34
	Twitter	.668	1.679	.979	-3.66	4.99
Twitter	Instagram	2.380	1.407	.329	-1.25	6.01
	Facebook	1.838	1.801	.737	-2.80	6.48
	LinkedIn	-.668	1.679	.979	-4.99	3.66

**TABLE 7:** Showing results of Post Hoc Tests

Source: own processing, 2022.

The multiple comparison results above clearly show the interaction effect between various widely used social media pages on social media disengagement. An interaction effect was found between Instagram and LinkedIn with a significant value of 0.010 ( $p < 0.05$ ). It is also evident from Picture 2 showing the mean plot. Participants disengaged from the LinkedIn social media page more than Instagram and they did not differ in their disengagement between Instagram, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



**PICTURE 2:** Showing the ANOVA means plot

Source: own processing, 2021.

## 4 Discussion

Social media disengagement has not been explored much in the Indian context and this study is an attempt at the same. The variables from the study by Nguyen et al.<sup>62</sup> were adopted and analysed for Gen Y and Gen Z. In general, digital disengagement might be a concern for over monitoring by technology in all means of life either through smartphones or wearables. From our literature we can state that social media disengagement is the process by which consumers detach from social networking sites. This study provides the following findings.

<sup>62</sup> See: NGUYEN, L. T. V. et al.: Drivers of Social Media Disengagement: A Study of Young Consumers in Vietnam. In *Young Consumers*, 2020, Vol. 21 No. 2, p. 155-170. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336357070\\_Drivers\\_of\\_social\\_media\\_disengagement\\_a\\_study\\_of\\_young\\_consumers\\_in\\_Vietnam](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336357070_Drivers_of_social_media_disengagement_a_study_of_young_consumers_in_Vietnam)>.

First, the results show that there is no correlation between dependent (social media disengagement) and independent variables (perceived anonymity, social media experience, perceived credibility and subjective norms). Social media disengagement from any social networking site may arise when consumers face a situation of trolling, cyber bullying or when they feel that their identity is revealed, leading to a lack of trust factor, and hence perceived anonymity is at high risk. Technology-based user misbehaviour explored Young<sup>63</sup> and cyber bullying, privacy concerns, exhibitionism and voyeurism investigated by Kefi and Perez<sup>64</sup> provide evidence for the difficult situation faced by online users. However, a report from Indiafacts.in<sup>65</sup> says that the major (80%) youth population of India post feeds that could be considered as private, which may reveal their identity. This supports our finding that the present generation wants to have more exposure to social media by managing and neglecting the negative aspects of media.

The consumers of GenZ and GenY feel more accepted in social media than in real life.<sup>66</sup> Because of digital ignorance, these generation consumers may feel that the online risks do not apply to them and might assume they are not old enough to think about their identity being stolen. Another reason for disengagement from social media might be that 57% (India stats. in) of youth in India do not know how to react or respond when they are cyberbullied. A study in 2020 by the Youth Online Learning Organization (YOLO)<sup>67</sup> and Social Media Matters (SMM), stated that 52% of Indian consumers are ready to sell their data if it is paid, which might also be a reason for the youth to engage themselves as financially independent. In the same study 62% of the younger generation have high hopes that social media can bring positive change which may attract them all time being engaged. India being engulfed by COVID19, has significantly increased the dependency on social media<sup>68</sup> and Priya Chetty<sup>69</sup> has stated that social media consumption has increased to 70% in the first five months of the pandemic. Social media is also used for social benefit during pandemics where GenZ and GenY used it mostly to bridge the gap between needy and helpers. This provides strong evidence for why these generation consumers are not disengaged in 2021. Ever since the pandemic hit, the usage of social media has elevated, forcing youngsters to be cooped up at home, having nowhere to go and nothing much to do. This has increased the habit of switching between multiple apps and scrolling through feeds, also called "Mindless Scrolling". The engagement of social media among Gen Y and Z is at an all-time high which results in the endless spiral of social media scrolling.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See: YOUNG, K. S.: Internet Addiction: The Emergence of a New Clinical Disorder. Internet Addiction: The Emergence of a New Clinical Disorder. In *Cyber Psychology & Behaviour*, 2009, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 237-244. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.1998.1.237>>.

<sup>64</sup> KEFI, H., PEREZ, C.: *The Dark Side of Social Media: A Consumer Psychology Perspective*. United Kingdom : Taylor & Francis, 2018. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-7163-9\\_110217-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-7163-9_110217-1)>.

<sup>65</sup> See: *INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AMONG YOUTH IN INDIA: MCAFFEE REPORT POST AUTHOR BY INDIAFACTS: WordPress*. 2021. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://indiafacts.in/internet-social-media-usage-among-youth-india-mcafee-report/>>.

<sup>66</sup> See: MATHUR, G.: The Art of Retention, Leveraging Social Media for Generation Y Retention. In *International Journal of Application or Innovation in Engineering & Management*, 2016, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 99-108. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.ijaiem.org/Volume5Issue1/IJAIEM-2016-01-23-21.pdf>>.

<sup>67</sup> See: INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNANCE, POLICES & POLITICS & SOCIAL MEDIA MATTERS & YOUTH ONLINE LEARNING ORGANISATION: *Patterns Of Internet Usage Among Youths In India*. 2020. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.socialmediamatters.in/patterns-of-internet-usage-among-youths-in-india#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20data%20majority,OTT%20platforms%20other%20than%20YouTube>>.

<sup>68</sup> See: GAO, J. et al.: Mental Health Problems and Social Media Exposure During COVID-19 Outbreak. In *PLOS ONE*, 2020, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 1-10. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0231924>>.

<sup>69</sup> CHETTY, P.: *The Growing Use of Social Media Networks Among Teenagers in India*. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://www.projectguru.in/the-growing-use-of-social-media-networks-among-teenagers-in-india/>>.

<sup>70</sup> EXELMANS, L., SCOTT, H.: *Social Media Use and Sleep Quality among Adults: The Role of Gender, Age and Social Media Checking Habit*. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <<https://dx.doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/eqxdh>>.

Sometimes, when consumers feel that the source page platform, content, or influencer is found to be judgmental or if it is untrustworthy, the credibility of the site goes down leading to social media disengagement. The younger generation tends to embrace new technology, apps, or webpages when they are highly recommended by a peer group or social group. Countries such as India which are known for their cultural diversity, will tend to have a strong influence through referral groups where negative experience from a cohort will lead to disengagement. Young consumers become disengaged when a social media page experience is not appealing, navigation becomes difficult or when the information is outdated, and this may also differ across generations.

Second, an independent sample t-test has proven that irrespective of gender social media disengagement is the same. All humans are social animals and hardwired to match themselves with others through social media, regardless of whether they are male or female. In countries like India where gender disparity is high and when it comes to digital literacy, females participate equally to men, which is a welcoming factor where disengagement is the same across gender. The third finding states that there is no relationship between family type and social media disengagement. The family set-up in India irrespective of joint or nuclear and being dual-income parents, these generation consumers have more freedom in their usage of mobile phones where parents have less eyes on children may pave way for over usage of social sites.<sup>71</sup> The current pandemic has provided more space for the usage of gadgets where they connect to social sites, equally with online classes.

Anova results state that there is a difference in social media disengagement and usage in different social sites among these generations and Instagram being highly engaged<sup>72</sup> and LinkedIn least engaged. The attractive features of Instagram such as stories, live, IGTV and now reels have constantly encouraged consumers to engage with it and become a new edge in online marketing for international luxury brands to rare vintage finds. Hence this social site has put India as the leading country with 180 million Instagram users (Statista.com, 2021). The reason behind the disengagement with LinkedIn might be that it is meant for professional networking rather than socializing or entertaining and possibly more “to real and practical for the Gen Z and millennial audience”. Instagram encourages users to post pictures along with the content that promotes high engagement and maybe this method when replicated in LinkedIn may attract a higher audience who have previously shunned it. Florenthal (2015)<sup>73</sup>, pointed out that ignorance among students about the LinkedIn network and the perception that it is purely meant for professional networking to be initiated after graduation might be the barriers among students on less usage of this site.

As these generations indulge in mindless scrolling on “Fear of Missing Out” (FOMO) leads to disengagement from social media. Being avid users, it is high time to increase awareness about safe, healthy internet usage and a psychiatrist from a leading chain of hospitals in India has stated that social media fatigue may also result in various health complications such as insomnia, relationship problems, anxiety issues, depression, and low academic performance. As they are born and raised in a high-speed connected world these generations are overloaded with

<sup>71</sup> See: HUSSAIN, T., IMTIAZ, I., IQBAL, A.: Family Relations after the Emergence of Social Media: A Comparative Analysis of Single-Family and Joint Family Systems. In *Global Regional Review*, 2020, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 544-551. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348035224\\_Family\\_Relations\\_after\\_the\\_Emergence\\_of\\_Social\\_Media\\_A\\_Comparative\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Single-Family\\_and\\_Joint\\_Family\\_Systems](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348035224_Family_Relations_after_the_Emergence_of_Social_Media_A_Comparative_Analysis_of_Single-Family_and_Joint_Family_Systems)>.

<sup>72</sup> See: KAUR, K., KUMAR, P.: Social Media Usage in Indian Beauty and Wellness Industry: A Qualitative Study. In *The TQM Journal*, 2020, Vol. 33, No. 1, p. 17-32. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342478548\\_Social\\_media\\_usage\\_in\\_Indian\\_beauty\\_and\\_wellness\\_industry\\_a\\_qualitative\\_study](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342478548_Social_media_usage_in_Indian_beauty_and_wellness_industry_a_qualitative_study)>.

<sup>73</sup> See: FLORENTHAL, B.: Applying Uses and Gratifications Theory to Students’ LinkedIn Usage. In *Young Consumers*, 2015, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 17-35. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276172688\\_Applying\\_uses\\_and\\_gratifications\\_theory\\_to\\_students'\\_LinkedIn\\_usage](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276172688_Applying_uses_and_gratifications_theory_to_students'_LinkedIn_usage)>.

information, and they never know a world without social media. Thus, the study suggests that digital detoxification and social media usage in moderation might provide a better environment for users and for marketers when they declutter irrelevant posts, interactive and guiding<sup>74</sup> on their page and transparency in dealing with consumer data may reap long-term engagement with them.

## 5 Conclusion

Active usage of social media has already changed the way of marketing a virtual bazaar which may lead to more innovative business models. The study says that GenY & Z do not disengage with social media is an invite to marketing analysts to explore more in this area by creating a healthy cyberspace for profitable business. Understanding the reason for social media disengagement irrespective of platforms will foster long-lasting relationships in these platforms benefitting markets and consumers.

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<sup>74</sup> See: CHELLASAMY, A., NAIR, J.: Antecedent Factors in Adolescent's Consumer Socialization Process through Social Media. In *ICT for an Inclusive World*. Springer, 2020, p. 191-208. [online]. [2022-04-01]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338926650\\_Antecedent\\_Factors\\_in\\_Adolescents\\_Consumer\\_Socialization\\_Process\\_Through\\_Social\\_Media](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338926650_Antecedent_Factors_in_Adolescents_Consumer_Socialization_Process_Through_Social_Media)>.

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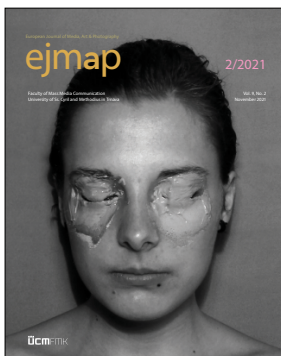
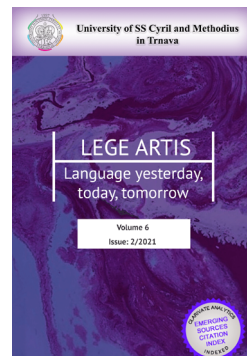
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