

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

SOCIAL DICTIONARIES

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SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Edited by Mirosław Lakomy and Tomasz W. Grabowski



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S O C I A L
D I C T I O N A R I E S

S O C I A L
C O M M U N I C A T I O N

EDITED BY

Mirosław Lakomy
Tomasz W. Grabowski

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Foreword

In 2019, the team members of the Ignatian Social Forum decided to continue the work that was initiated by the publication of the *Social Dictionary* in 2004. Scientists from both Polish and foreign academic centres contributed to this publication, which contains over one hundred extended essays that discuss the findings of recent humanities and social science research.

This new project is more extensive than the original *Social Dictionary*: over twenty volumes present the state of humanistic and social knowledge in the third decade of the 21st century. This knowledge concerns man, who is developing within diverse civilizations, cultures and societies, who adheres to many religions, and who exhibits diverse patterns of behaviour. Like the first four volumes (already published in Polish and in English; electronic versions are also available), each new volume is devoted to a research area that is considered particularly important to the humanities and social sciences: each investigates man and his social environment, political and public affairs, and international relations. The analyses of these areas are undertaken from diverse research perspectives; thus, they lead to a more thorough presentation of the problems typically addressed by only one discipline and substantially broaden the scope of the reflections offered by the Authors of the articles. These Authors look for an 'interpretative key' that will allow them to present the most significant issues related to each of the

volumes' main research areas, which are sometimes controversial or debatable among scientists. These research areas give the titles to the volumes of the new *Social Dictionary*. This 'interpretative key' would not be important if the articles published in each volume resembled succinct encyclopaedic entries; however, it becomes significant because the entries take the form of 20-page articles that follow a uniform pattern. The considerations presented by the Authors focus on the essence of the concepts they analyse, including their history, subject matter, and practical aspects. Written by Polish scientists representing not only different academic centres and scientific disciplines but also different 'research sensibilities', the twenty volumes are based on theoretical reflection accompanied by practical considerations. We also treat Catholic social teaching as an element of the 'interpretative key' because it is impossible to ignore twenty centuries of the legacy and richness of Christianity.

We hope that this volume will satisfy Readers as it offers not only an opportunity to learn about scientific approaches to the vital problems faced by contemporary man, states, and societies, but also an insight into sometimes difficult aspects of modernity as viewed from a Catholic perspective. We also hope that Readers will appreciate the effort of Polish scientists who, while undertaking original reflection on these issues, go beyond the mere presentation of other people's thoughts as they are aware of the importance of the intellectual achievements of Polish science.

Series editors
Wit Pasierbek and Bogdan Szlachta

Introduction

In seeking the meaning of the term 'social communication', let us begin with the *Dictionary of Foreign Words*, where the editors trace 'communication' to the Latin *communicatio*, meaning exchange, connection, or conversation. They also note that it may refer to movement enabling contact between distant places by means of land or water routes (channels), as well as to mutual understanding, the transmission of thought, and the sharing of information (Tokarski & Szkiłdź, 1990).

In the context of this volume of the *Social Dictionaries* series, it should be emphasised that our focus lies primarily on the relations among people forming specific communities, drawing on philosophical sources that reach back to Aristotle. At the core of his thought is the idea of the human being as a social creature – *zoon politikon* – a communal being who must live with others within the framework of a community (*oikos, polis*). For this Greek philosopher, communication was the bond that united people, the source of happiness (*eudaimonia*) and justice (*dikaiosyne*). He underscored the significance of rhetoric, conceived as the art of persuasion, consisting of *ethos* (authority), *pathos* (emotion), and *logos* (reason). As Michał Gołoś observes:

the human being is the only being capable of communicating through speech, which serves not merely for interacting but also for discerning what is good and right, what is useful and what is harmful, and ultimately, what is just and what is unjust and deserving of condemnation. In this way, only human beings can formulate laws grounded in the distinction between good and evil. Guided by this principle, humans are able to live within a community, within the framework of the state (Gołoś, 2009, p. 96).

Social communication may thus be defined as the process of human interaction

through the creation, exchange, or transmission of information in different social contexts, for example, between individuals, groups, or organisations. (...) In these interactions, people transmit information in sign-based and symbolic forms (verbal, non-verbal, textual, visual, etc.) and for various purposes (Ptaszek, 2025, p. 5).

One of the most important functions of social communication is therefore the achievement of mutual understanding through the formation of semiotic communities based on shared mechanisms of interpreting signs and symbols.

This volume contains twenty articles addressing different aspects of social communication. The introductory article has been entrusted to Professor Iwona Hofman, Director of the Institute of Social Communication and Media Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, President of the Polish Society for Social Communication, Chair of the Committee on Social Communication and Media Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and member of the Council for Scientific Excellence. In her article *Communication theory as a field of research: Robert T. Craig's seven traditions*, she presents a synthetic account of the development of communication theory as an interdisciplinary research field. Her discussion takes as its starting point the conception developed by Robert T. Craig, who identifies seven research traditions: the art of persuasion (rhetorical tradition), mediation by signs (semiotic tradition), dialogue (phenomenological tradition), the flow of information (cybernetic tradition), interaction (socio-psychological tradition), the (re)production of social order (sociocultural tradition), and the use of communication as a tool of power and ideology (critical tradition). According to Hofman, "the seven traditions outlined by Craig remain a vital tool for analysing communicative reality".

The following three articles – *Interpersonal communication* by Anna Zasuń, *Organisational communication* by Monika Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, and *Mass communication* by Sławomir Czapnik – are closely connected with the work of Denis McQuail and his model of the communication pyramid. In analysing the categories of participants in communication processes, this British scholar of political and mass communication

distinguished several levels (or domains): intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, institutional (organisational), and mass. McQuail made a substantial contribution to the study of social communication and media, and his work has inspired many successors. In light of his rich legacy, we have therefore chosen to present three of the themes mentioned above.

From a social perspective, interpersonal communication is the most widespread form, involving the entire human population. According to Anna Zasuń, it is an interdisciplinary concept examined in relation to many variables, such as social and cultural context, linguistic and communicative competence, the psychological characteristics of participants, and both verbal and non-verbal levels of exchange. Interpersonal communication, as we noted earlier in connection with Aristotle's *zoon politikon*, is fundamental to the building of communicative community. In McQuail's pyramid, it forms the base.

As noted above, the human being is a social creature and therefore enters into relationships with others. These relationships often take the form of organised activity, that is, activity with a clearly defined goal consisting of several stages: preparation, task execution, and evaluation of results. According to Monika Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, organisational communication is a continuous process of gathering and transmitting information, with exchanges occurring through both formal and informal channels.

The concept of mass communication is addressed by Sławomir Czapnik, who observes that the term is defined, on the one hand, as the social process of transmitting information through mass media, and, on the other, as an attempt to build a global community through communication. Mass communication is characterised by one-way, impersonal transmission. However, as Manuel Castells argues, in the era of Web 2.0, we are dealing with individualised mass communication – conceptualisation that captures the essence of social media: simultaneously personalised and mass in character. Nevertheless, traditional approaches to mass communication remain focused on radio, television, and the press.

Małgorzata Łosiewicz examines informational communication in light of conceptualisations of 'communication' and 'information'. She defines it as:

Informative communication is the process of conveying information in an objective, precise, and measurable manner, free from persuasive, emotional, or manipulative intent. It integrates technological aspects (such as the automatization of data analysis, AI, and big data) with social dimensions (including education, administration, and science). The goal is to provide recipients with objective access to knowledge, which is necessary for rational decision-making.

It is worth emphasising that this understanding should constitute an inviolable ethical standard for journalists across all media. Łosiewicz also highlights contemporary challenges in this context, including information overload, disinformation, digital inequalities, social polarisation, and Eli Pariser's 'filter bubbles'.

Persuasive communication is the subject of the following article by Klaudia Cymanow-Sosin. Today, persuasive communication is widespread in advertising, public relations, and political communication, though its origins lie in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the practice of eristics. According to Cymanow-Sosin, its essence lies in

shaping behaviours, fostering appropriate attitudes and values, and building awareness of the principles of cooperation and effective communication. These are key principles in the existence of social groups and communities.

She further emphasises that persuasive communication should be understood as an ethical form of influence.

Sławomir Soczyński takes up a rarely discussed topic: catallactic communication. At its core, this approach involves openness to others and the communication of positive values. In his view, such an attitude fosters harmony and cooperation, creating a new plane of social integration grounded in respect for human dignity and freedom. This concept was popularised in Poland by ethicist and media scholar Michał Drożdż, who defines catallactic communication as rooted in the social dimension of the human being, emphasising intangible and spiritual values in interpersonal relations, thereby contributing to the common good.

Agnieszka Walecka-Rynduch devotes her article to political communication, which she regards as a component of both social and public communication. She defines it as:

the exchange of political messages between actors involved in the creation and implementation of politics. These include broadly defined political actors – both

collective and individual – as well as citizens/voters, with communication taking place through both traditional and digital media channels.

This is a particularly pressing issue in democratic systems and one that has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis. Walecka-Rynduch traces the beginnings of research on political communication to the postwar period, when propaganda was the dominant focus. The term itself, however, only entered use in the 1960s, subsequently becoming established in the United States, Europe, and Poland.

In a sense, Marek Żyromski's article, *The two faces of propaganda – using architecture and art for propaganda purposes*, continues this theme. As is characteristic of the classical approach, he begins with the Latin root *propagare*, meaning to spread or disseminate. He defines propaganda as deliberate action aimed at shaping specific views and behaviours within a community, thus it is inherently persuasive. What is novel in Żyromski's treatment is his attention to propaganda communicated through architecture and urban planning – an angle rarely addressed by other scholars.

Religious communication is the focus of the next article by Marta Cerkaska, who regards it as an integral part of social communication. She defines it as the transmission of theological content (evangelisation and catechesis) aimed at building Christian community and religious identity. She also notes that the Church has adapted this process through mediatisation, evolving from oral communication to print, radio, television, and now to social media and mobile applications.

The topic of extrapersonal communication, understood as a result of the evolution of cognitive technologies, is addressed by Mirosław Lakomy. This issue has emerged from the rapid development of new technologies, which, according to William Ogburn's hypothesis of cultural lag, provoke transformations in the immaterial sphere of culture. In this context, extrapersonal communication refers to interactions between humans and ontologically indeterminate non-human entities. It may be defined as interpersonal communication extended to include non-human actors endowed with human-like characteristics (through anthropomorphisation and genderisation) and functioning as both senders and receivers of messages. Adapting this term to the study of social communication requires acknowledging and defining the concept of a hybrid society, in which people and intelligent machines coexist and communicate at

multiple levels. The Author emphasises, however, that despite the new possibilities of transcending human nature through technology, we must remain mindful of John Paul II's personalist philosophy, which underscores the need to preserve human-centrism and protect human dignity.

In his article *Mediatisation and medialisation*, Damian Guzek continues the discussion of the impact of media technologies on immaterial culture. He defines mediatisation as a process of social change driven by transformations in media technologies and their modes of use. Medialisation, in turn, refers to users' perception of media and media technologies as tools permeating various aspects of social life.

The topic of social mediatisation is taken up by Malwina Popiołek. She describes this process as one in which an increasing number of areas of human activity, including communication itself, are mediated by social media. With more than two decades having passed since the emergence of these platforms, more comprehensive assessments of their social impact are now possible. Unfortunately, as the Author notes, such assessments are largely critical and negative:

Social mediatisation has brought about a host of challenges that are difficult to resolve. Many early hopes have proven to be illusory, and numerous widely held beliefs have since been called into question. [...] The ongoing acceleration of social mediatisation demands in-depth reflection, greater user awareness, and enhanced media literacy education.

Michał Urbańczyk devotes his article to the highly topical issue of freedom of expression in public discourse. The right of individuals and groups to express thoughts and opinions and to seek and disseminate information is fundamental to the functioning of a free society. As the Author points out, this right is subject to certain limitations, but these must not undermine the very essence of freedom itself.

The next article addresses the important issue of the right to privacy in cyberspace. Katarzyna Chałubińska-Jentkiewicz observes that "in a technologically advanced environment, maintaining privacy according to traditional standards has become increasingly challenging". The use of big data and the application of AI create new challenges that must be addressed.

In the following article, Krzysztof Flasiński examines the algorithmisation of social communication. He explains what an algorithm is,

what algorithmisation entails, and the consequences of its application for media functioning and communication more broadly. His pertinent observation is that safe and effective participation in the new information environment requires specific competencies in content consumption.

The next three articles explore topics at the intersection of communication studies, security studies, and international relations. Włodzimierz Fehler addresses information security, which he defines as “a state – and a sequence of states – in which the high quality of information is ensured, information is effectively protected against threats, and the freedom to produce, access, collect, process, and transmit this information is guaranteed”. Today these are of critical importance for individuals, organisations, and states alike. Andrzej Krzak devotes his article to disinformation, describing it with reference to instructive historical examples, characterising its contemporary forms, and identifying methods of counteracting it. Tomasz W. Grabowski examines sharp power – a form of power and influence in international politics that relies primarily on information. Sharp power is wielded by authoritarian states against democratic ones and involves the aggressive and sophisticated use of information to undermine and discredit the opponent’s political system.

The final (twentieth) article, in keeping with the convention of *Social Dictionaries*, offers a perspective on the volume’s themes from the standpoint of Catholic social teaching. Rafał Łętocha analyses numerous papal documents, noting that the Church is concerned with the media’s growing role in contemporary life, while emphasising the importance of appropriate spiritual formation for all participants in the informational process.

The twenty articles collected in this volume do not, of course, exhaust the broad and complex subject of social communication. They have, however, been selected to illuminate the main levels and types of communication and the most pressing problems, challenges, and risks in the communicative sphere today. We hope that this book will attract interest and prove useful to scholars, doctoral candidates, students, and all those engaged with communication and media.

Volume editors
Miroslaw Lakomy
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Communication theory as a field of research: Robert T. Craig's seven traditions

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: This article presents seven definitions of communication developed within various research traditions, as identified and characterised by Robert T. Craig.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: A historical overview of these seven theories demonstrates that communication can be conceptualised in various ways. Depending on the research problems and methodologies adopted, it has been understood as the art of persuasion (rhetorical tradition), mediation by signs (semiotic tradition), dialogue (phenomenological tradition), the flow of information (cybernetic tradition), interaction (socio-psychological tradition), the (re)production of social order (socio-cultural tradition), and a tool of power and ideology (critical tradition).

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: The central hypothesis posits that communication theory is an interdisciplinary research field concerned with diverse aspects of communication. Different approaches to communication stem from varying analytical perspectives and the framing of communication through specific problems and methodologies.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Communication theory as a field of research continues to evolve dynamically, and the seven traditions outlined by Craig remain a vital tool for analysing communicative reality. New technologies, shifting communication models, and challenges related to disinformation and

post-truth drive the development of communication research, integrating different theoretical traditions to better understand contemporary communication processes. The traditions distinguished by Craig increasingly overlap as current research problems require an interdisciplinary approach.

Keywords: communication, communication theories, traditions of communication

Definition of the term

Communication theory is an interdisciplinary field of research concerned with various aspects of communication, ranging from language and signs to the structure and functioning of media. Robert T. Craig proposed a theoretical model in which he identified seven research traditions within communication theory. Each of these traditions is based on a distinct analytical approach to communication and views it through the lens of specific problems and methodologies. Craig argues that although communication theory is not yet a fully unified field of research, it has the potential to develop into a coherent dialogical and dialectical discipline grounded in two principles: (a) the constitutive metamodel of communication, and (b) the conception of communication theory as a metadiscursive practice. His proposal integrates two traditions of media research rooted in the humanities and the social sciences, reflecting the multi-genetic nature of the discipline.

Since the publication of Craig's proposal, the subject matter of communication and media studies has undergone significant transformation, with social media emerging as a central arena for human activity and the circulation of media content. These platforms have given rise to new practices, value systems, and boundary conditions of human behaviour (including communication). They are shifting the boundaries of our knowledge and radically (qualitatively) redefining the status and functioning of traditional media – once known as mass media – as well as the broader institutions of the cultural industry. These developments are now being examined by researchers across all seven traditions identified by Craig. One of the most prominent current directions of inquiry focuses on fake news and post-truth, which intersect with several of the traditions of communication research discussed below.

Historical analysis and discussion of the term

The rhetorical tradition

Rhetoric is the oldest theoretical tradition concerned with communication as the art of effective persuasion. In ancient Greece, Gorgias and

Aristotle analysed the mechanisms by which language and argumentation influence audiences. Craig defined rhetorical communication as a practical art of discourse in which the intentional formulation of messages plays a central role in persuading an audience.

In Poland, rhetorical studies were significantly developed by Walery Pisarek (1970, 2002), who investigated journalistic rhetoric, treating it both as a field of descriptive and applied knowledge and as a characteristic property of language (i.e., the rhetorical nature of language). In more recent communication studies, rhetoric is understood as a dimension of social activism, and scholars examine how organisations communicate and how activists employ strategies of dissent, such as during the Black Protest in Poland (Kiełbiewska, 2018). This tradition also includes the work of Jerzy Bralczyk (1986, 2004), Jakub Zdzisław Lichański (2000, 2003), Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca (2015), Michał Rusinek (2003, 2024), and Michał Rusinek and Aneta Załazińska (2005). Bralczyk studies the persuasive features of public language, including political and advertising, and highlights mechanisms of manipulation and audience influence. He also distinguishes propaganda as a specific form of mass communication. Rusinek applies rhetorical tools to the study of visual imagery, treating rhetoric as a theory of discourse focused on persuasion, topoi, and figuration. Załazińska explores the links between rhetoric and nonverbal communication, analysing persuasive strategies in public discourse. The rhetoric of advertising has been addressed by Piotr H. Lewiński (2008). An important development in this research area is the study of visual and multimodal rhetoric (Kampka, 2010; Maćkiewicz, 2018). Umberto Eco argued that rhetoric, understood as a socially accepted repertoire of persuasive forms, includes nonverbal messages. In 'visual messages' – as he referred to nonverbal visual messages – a range of rhetorical devices is employed in, for example, the realm of images, metaphor, metonymy, litotes, and oxymorons. Research on the rhetoric of visual imagery seeks to identify analogies and connections between textuality and visuality, treating both written texts and images as signs. Visual rhetoric examines how images, symbols, and multimodal content influence communication processes.

Contemporary rhetorical research also explores the effectiveness of both rational and emotional argumentation, especially through insights drawn from social psychology regarding how modern audiences respond

to communication. This includes analysis of emotionally charged social media posts, the dominance of emotional expression over rational deliberation, and the prevalence of hate speech and online hostility.

The semiotic tradition

Robert T. Craig traces the origins of the semiotic tradition to John Locke's theory of language. In this paradigm, communication is understood as intersubjective mediation through signs. Semiotic scholars focus primarily on issues of (re)presentation and transmission of meaning. They contend that signs help construct their users (or 'subject positions'); meanings are public yet inherently indeterminate; understanding is a practical gesture rather than an intersubjective mental state; and communication codes and media are not merely neutral structures or channels for transmitting meaning but rather possess their own meanings, resembling signs (the code shapes the content, and the medium itself becomes the message (McLuhan, 1964)). Communication as the creation of meaning is contrasted with communication understood as the transmission of information. In constructing this distinction, John Fiske opposed two schools of thought: the semiotic and the communication process. As he noted, while the communication process school studies the transmission of messages between sender and receiver, emphasizing intentionality and the efficiency of transmission, the semiotic school views communication as the production and exchange of meanings, focusing on the analysis of texts and the ways they are interpreted. For semioticians, a message is a construction of signs that generate meaning through interaction with the receiver. In discussions about the assignment of meaning, a distinction is made between communication and signification (the process of creating or assigning meaning; 'marking reality') (Barker, 2010, p. 15; Mrozowski, 2001, p. 272). In this perspective, as suggested by Peirce and Eco, among others, communication – understood as the intentional (deliberate, volitional) transmission of information – is a narrower concept than signification; it is its subset or specific instance. Signification is understood as the primary layer of meaning, whereas communication is regarded as a secondary function (Barański, 2007). Different categories of signs are also situated

within the frameworks of signification and communication. From this standpoint, within the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, communication is seen as the intentional and conventional exchange of information (i.e., symbols). Peirce's pragmatic logic addresses signification as encompassing both intentional communication and other modes of meaning – those that are unintentional and motivated (such as indices or iconic signs) (Barański, 2007, p. 195). Following Peirce's classification of signs into symbols, indices, and icons, J. Barański argues that the symbol functions within the realm of communication, the index within the realm of signification, and the iconic sign is "a borderline case as it functions as a symbol while belonging to the domain of signification" (Barański, 2007, p. 155). Aneta Załazińska emphasises that a sender may communicate unconsciously and that signhood is determined by the receiver: "A sign is a sign insofar as the receiver interprets it as such" (Załaźińska, 2006, p. 50). A semiotic perspective can also be found in the works of Wojciech Burszta, who stressed that:

A message is a construction of signs that create meanings through interaction with the receiver. Human communication is achieved through expressive actions – that is, those that say something about the state of the world or aim to change it by metaphysical means (Burszta, 2007, p. 10).

In this view, as Kulczycki noted,

the main focus of communication researchers is not the information transmitted per se, but the socially constructed meaning, and communication occurs not through effective transmission and decoding of content, but through the understanding of context and defining of the situation (Kulczycki, 2012, p. 40).

In Poland, semiotic research on communication is carried out by the aforementioned Jerzy Barański, as well as Marek Hendrykowski (2014, 2017), Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz (2019), Ewa Szczęśna (2019), and Marta Wójcicka (2019, 2024). Marek Hendrykowski explores, among other topics, the semiotics of moving images and the language of film. Barański focuses on sign theory and the analysis of semiotic code structures within culture. His work on the relationship between signification and communication provides analytical tools for examining media messages. Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz investigates media semiotics, while Ewa Szczęśna examines multimodality and

the semiotic strategies of narration in digital media, emphasising the importance of intertextuality and polysemiotic forms of communication in contemporary information society.

The semiotic tradition also encompasses contemporary continuations of the theories developed by Stuart Hall and John Fiske. Stuart Hall's theories fundamentally reshaped the understanding of how media operate, drawing attention to issues of domination, ideology, and popular social (media) practices, as well as the interactions between them. Hall integrated semiotic approaches with concepts from the political economy of the media. The interdisciplinary legacy of the Birmingham School significantly influenced later research on audience activity and the mediated nature of popular culture. Hall's model of encoding and decoding media discourse has become a foundational element in theories of media message reception and media genres. It bridges micro-level semiotic approaches – focused on 'structures of knowledge' shared (or not) by producers and audiences – with macro-level approaches that emphasise systemic and structural factors (such as 'relations of production' and 'technical infrastructure') that discursively contextualise mass communication. This model has not only profoundly impacted studies on media content reception (hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional) but has also been used as a framework for the conceptualisation of media genres defined, following Hall, as formal and content-related properties of specific media messages shared by producers and audiences alike.

A second influential line of thought is John Fiske's theory of popular culture, in which it is conceptualised as an active process of generating and circulating meaning and pleasure within a social system. According to Fiske, popular cultures are created by people at the intersection of two domains: one shaped by the products of cultural industries and the other emerging from everyday life. For Fiske, cultural industries play a secondary role; he sees them as repositories of content from which people – conscious and creative – continually construct their own popular cultures. A television show or music video is (merely?) a 'text' – that is, a discursive structure of potential meanings and pleasures, serving as a major resource for popular culture. A key aspect of participation in popular culture is the creative process through which people assign new meanings to media content and cultural products and share these meanings with others. The popular nature of culture implies that it is (1) created and reproduced by

people, (2) pleasurable and entertaining, and (3) political. “Popular culture always is part of power relations; it always bears traces of the constant struggle between domination and subordination, between power and various forms of resistance to it or evasions of it” (Fiske, 2001, p. 19). Both of these theoretical frameworks are currently being continued and developed in relation to new media by scholars based in Lublin, including Jakub Nowak (2017) and Ewa Nowak-Teter (2023).

Today, semiotics holds particular significance in the study of visual communication, multimodality, and the rhetoric of images. Scholars such as Umberto Eco examine how symbols and icons influence audiences and how sign systems structure messages within popular culture and the public sphere. Cultural signs, the language of clothing, advertising, and architecture are interpreted as carriers of meaning that shape the social understanding of reality. As Bogusław Skowronek emphasises, multimodality can be examined on several levels, where it is viewed as (1) the interaction of different semiotic layers within a given text; (2) remediation, i.e., the relationships between the source medium with its specific modes and the target medium with its ‘own’ modes; and (3) the incorporation of modes that come from ‘outside’ media technologies into media messages. Skowronek links this third level with tactility (secondary tactility) (Skowronek, 2018, pp. 15–16). A semantic tension arises between image and text, which necessitates reading such complex multi-coded texts as coherent wholes. Semiotic and multimodal analyses of memes and texts of collective memory are the focus of Marta Wójcicka’s research (2019, 2023).

The phenomenological tradition

Phenomenology focuses on communication as a subjective and dialogical experience. Drawing on the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, researchers in this tradition explore how individuals experience interactions and ascribe meaning to them. In 20th-century phenomenology, spanning from Husserl through hermeneutic phenomenologists to thinkers such as Martin Buber, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Carl Rogers, communication is defined as dialogue or the experience of encountering otherness. Craig emphasises that within

phenomenology, communication is understood as a process of mutual understanding and the unveiling of diverse perspectives. In the context of intercultural communication, phenomenology examines how different social and cultural groups interpret meanings and what barriers may hinder authentic understanding. It challenges the semiotic view that intersubjective understanding is mediated solely through signs, as well as the rhetorical assumption that communication necessarily involves the strategic or inventive use of signs. In this tradition, communication is regarded as a process through which meaning and identity are co-created in interaction. Language is not merely a tool for describing reality but actively shapes it. Phenomenology is particularly relevant to intercultural communication, where the humanistic coefficient introduced by Florian Znaniecki is essential. This involves analysing social and cultural phenomena from the perspective of the participant (the Other), rather than from an external standpoint.

In Poland, phenomenological communication has been explored by scholars such as Józef Tischner (1981, 1990, 1998), who analysed intersubjectivity and the relationship between language and experience. Tischner introduced the concept of “dialogue as encounter”, highlighting the ethical dimension of communication based on mutual recognition of the interlocutors’ subjectivity. His philosophy of dialogue has been applied in studies of interpersonal and political communication. Michał Drożdż (2009) contributed to this tradition by investigating the phenomenology of the mediasphere, drawing from McLuhan’s conception. A comprehensive phenomenological framework encompassing the body, art, intersubjectivity, theology, cognitive science, feminism, and psychoanalysis is presented in the monograph by Jacek Migasiński and Marek Pokropski (2017).

The cybernetic tradition

Cybernetics views communication as the flow of information within systems. Rooted in the works of Norbert Wiener and Claude Shannon, this tradition conceptualises communication in terms of sender, channel, and receiver. It encompasses systems theory, information science, cognitive science, artificial intelligence research, functionalist social theory,

network analysis, and the Batesonian school of interpersonal communication. In the cybernetic tradition, communication is understood as information processing that explains how complex systems – living and non-living, micro and macro – function, and why they often malfunction. Communication problems are seen as interruptions in information flow due to noise, overload, or misalignment between structure and function.

This tradition draws a clear distinction between information and communication. Information is regarded as a fundamental constituent of reality, alongside matter and energy. Dominant themes include ‘computational centrism’ (viewing the universe as an information-processing machine) and the ‘information-consuming’ nature of organisms. *Homo sapiens* is often described as an ‘informational species’. Informing is also understood as notifying, which informs the study of information content in texts using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Researchers analyse the speed of information flow; Twitter, for example, is considered emblematic of immediacy.

Analyses of information often highlight its excess and fragmentation, as reflected in terms such as ‘information overload’ (and ‘information scarcity’), ‘the speed paradox’, ‘information bomb’, ‘information ecstasy’, mass passivity, ‘fast-thinkers’ versus ‘slow-thinkers’, the hegemony of fragments, historical shortsightedness, ephemerality, and the ‘unreliability of information placement’. This perspective frames communication as a process of message transmission and prompts inquiry into individual components of communication models, including media reception.

In Poland, contributions to the study of social cybernetics were made by Władysław Szostak (1978) and Marian Mazur. The latter developed a theory of social cybernetics in which communication is analysed as a mechanism for regulating social processes. His work on dynamic systems and feedback loops in social interaction (1966, 1970) significantly influenced communication research. Mazur applied his theory of autonomous systems – those capable of self-regulation and resistance to losing this capacity – to human beings, conceptualising personality as a set of fixed control parameters. According to Tomasz Goban-Klas,

cybernetic conceptual tools have created the first bridges between disciplines once seen as distant, such as semiotics and sociology. Thus, they have contributed to the unification of the language of communication science (sender, channel, message, noise, etc.) (Goban-Klas, 2013, p. 17).

Cybernetic communication theory is now employed in studies on automation and the robotisation of communication. In light of contemporary challenges such as disinformation and fake news, cybernetics provides tools for analysing information flow and manipulation. Current research focuses on content control mechanisms in digital media and algorithmic processes. Models of user interaction help elucidate the influence of media on social and political processes.

The socio-psychological tradition

The socio-psychological tradition explores communication in the context of psychological and social processes. It focuses on how individuals influence one another through communicative acts, examining the cognitive and emotional mechanisms that shape the interpretation of messages. In this tradition, communication is understood as expression, interaction, and influence. While semiotic approaches emphasise the role of signs and sign systems in mediating communication, socio-psychological perspectives highlight the importance of individual psychological predispositions, such as attitudes, emotional states, personality traits, unconscious conflicts, and social cognition. This approach seeks to explain the causes and consequences of social behaviour and to develop practices aimed at influencing or managing these dynamics. Researchers in this tradition address topics such as persuasion, attitude formation, group processes, and the effects of media on individuals.

One of the foundational figures in this field was Paul Lazarsfeld, whose pioneering work focused on the influence of media on electoral behaviour. Today, socio-psychological research extends beyond studies of media agendas and their influence on public agendas or analyses of the effectiveness of messages formulated by political actors. It encompasses investigations into new patterns of creating and circulating political messages within networked media environments. It raises questions about the motivations behind the growing activity of previously passive audience members, the new mechanisms for granting visibility to media content (a redefinition of gatekeeping), and the structural conditions shaping campaign messages – conditions now determined by private companies that offer social media platforms as the new environments

in which electoral campaigns are conducted. Contemporary research continues this line of inquiry by analysing the influence of new media, including social media, on decision-making processes and the perception of reality. This tradition is reflected in the study of media influence, which is understood as the result of negotiation. It takes into account the agency of audiences, who (co-)construct the meanings of media messages. Within this approach, research focuses on active media audiences (the active audience paradigm; the uses and gratifications theory). This tradition also gave rise to studies on the role of cognitive and cultural schemas and scripts in information processing and interaction, thus contributing to the field of media psychology.

In Poland, prominent scholars working in this tradition include Bogdan Wojciszke and Dariusz Doliński. Wojciszke investigates mechanisms of social perception, emphasising how communication contributes to the formation of the image of others. His research addresses, among others, attribution processes and the influence of emotion on message interpretation. Doliński specialises in the psychology of social influence, analysing mechanisms of persuasion and manipulation in both interpersonal and mass communication contexts. Socio-psychological approaches to communication in Poland also include research on the influence of mass media on public opinion, focusing on how media messages shape attitudes and reinforce stereotypes. A growing area of interest involves the impact of fake news and disinformation on audiences, as well as the development of strategies to combat media manipulation. In the context of contemporary communication challenges, the socio-psychological tradition provides valuable tools for analysing interactions in digital environments and understanding the role of emotion in receiving information. It also draws on insights from pragmalinguistics. Researchers are increasingly examining topics such as the psychology of online hate, the dynamics of information bubbles, and the cognitive effects of algorithmically personalised content on users.

The sociocultural tradition

The sociocultural approach to communication emphasises its role in constructing social reality. It draws inspiration from Ludwig Wittgenstein's

theories of language and symbolic interactionism. Research in this tradition examines, among other things, the influence of media on cultural identity and the role of language in creating social norms. Communication is understood as the (re)production of social order, i.e., a symbolic process through which reality is produced, sustained, repaired, and transformed. Communicative – or discursive – practice is the actual means of expression within a community. Communication creates and reproduces shared socio-cultural patterns. Understood in this way, communication explains how social order (a macro-level phenomenon) is created, enacted, maintained, and transformed through micro-level interaction processes. We function in a socio-cultural environment that is constituted and sustained largely through symbolic codes and means of communication. Our interactions with others depend to a significant extent on pre-existing shared cultural patterns and social structures, largely ‘reproducing’ the existing socio-cultural order. However, social interaction is also a creative process that enables, and indeed requires, a high degree of collective improvisation. Conflicts, misunderstandings, and communication difficulties tend to intensify when social conditions lead to a lack of shared rituals, rules, and expectations among members. Such conditions often result from technological change, the breakdown of traditional social orders, urbanisation, the rise of mass society, bureaucratic rationalisation, and, more recently, postmodern cultural fragmentation and globalisation. Sociocultural theory promotes communicative practices that acknowledge cultural diversity and relativity, value tolerance and understanding, and place greater emphasis on collective rather than individual responsibility.

Several conceptual frameworks shape this tradition:

- a) Raymond Williams’ (1958) theory of double articulation of the media, which highlights that media must be analysed not only in terms of content but also in terms of how they are used in specific socio-cultural contexts.
- b) Roger Silverstone’s (1994) reinterpretation of double articulation of the media, which views media as more than communication technologies. Understanding media involves reconstructing the concrete ways people interact with them within specific cultural and historical contexts. Methodologically, this includes identifying the symbolic and discursive dimensions of media technologies when assessing

their socio-cultural status. Every medium exists within a historical moment – embedded in time and space – and also functions as a symbolic text or message, situated within the currents of a specific socio-cultural discourse (Livingstone, 2007; Silverstone, 1994).

- c) The concept of cultural imaginaries (Lyon, 2018, drawing on Williams, 1958), which are composed of symbolic and material practices and are complex, context-bound, and continually redefined. In this framework, a medium is shaped not only by its usage but also by how it is imagined and conceptualised by users (Carey, 1983, p. 305).

In the sociocultural tradition, media are treated as social practices and as communication structures that emerge at the intersection of communication technology, economics, politics, and society. Media practices are defined as routinised and creative social practices, involving interactions with both media technologies and media actors (e.g., journalists, PR professionals), and grounded in culturally shared definitions of media (Mattoni, 2012, p. 159). The theory of media as practices explores how individuals integrate media into their everyday and social (collective) lives.

This tradition also includes research on mediatisation. The term was originally used primarily in analyses of how the ‘logic’ of the media influences other specific spheres of human life, with particular emphasis on the study of mediatised politics (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). The following decades of the 21st century have seen the development of mediatisation as a socioconstructivist approach, which views social change as co-produced by transformations in media technologies and the ways they are used (Hjarvard, 2013; Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2015). In this sense, mediatisation generally avoids seeking specific ‘logics’ of individual media or establishing direct cause-and-effect links between media technology and particular social (cultural, political) transformations. Media are instead viewed as a force that ‘shapes’ certain possibilities for human action, always situated within specific contexts (Hepp, 2012).

Researchers working within this tradition also study historical narratives, communication in organisations and social movements, and the impact of popular culture on contemporary social processes. Communication practices are analysed here as components of broader social structures.

The sociocultural tradition emphasises the role of communication in shaping social reality. It is based on the assumption that language and social interaction not only reflect reality but also construct it. This approach draws from the theories of symbolic interactionism developed by George Herbert Mead, as well as the social constructionism of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann.

In Poland, key figures in the study of the sociocultural aspect of communication include Antonina Kłoskowska, Jerzy Szacki, and Wojciech Burszta. Antonina Kłoskowska explored the culture of communication and the influence of language on national and social identity. Her research also addressed the processes of cultural transmission of knowledge and values through intergenerational communication. Jerzy Szacki analysed the social construction of reality and the role of language in modernisation and social transformation. His work significantly influenced studies on the shaping of ideology through social discourse. Wojciech Burszta focused on communication as an element in the construction of cultural identity, examining the influence of media on identity narratives. His work also explored popular culture as a space of sociocultural interaction.

The critical tradition

Critical theory, originating with the Frankfurt School (notably Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas), views communication as a vehicle of power and ideology. It examines how communicative structures reinforce social inequalities and how media contribute to the maintenance of cultural hegemony. Contemporary research within this tradition addresses issues such as propaganda, the role of social media in shaping political narratives, and mechanisms of information control in authoritarian regimes.

The broader tradition of critical social theory extends from Karl Marx through the Frankfurt School to Habermas, while also encompassing currents of late Marxism, post-Marxism, and more recent theoretical approaches such as political economy, critical cultural studies, feminist theory, and frameworks associated with new social movements, including postcolonial theory and queer theory. From the perspective of critical communication theory, the central 'communication problem' in society

stems from material and ideological forces that suppress or distort discursive reflection. Communication, understood in this way, explains how social injustice is perpetuated through ideological distortions, and how justice can potentially be restored through communicative practices that enable critical reflection or raise awareness in order to expose these distortions, thereby allowing for political action aimed at liberating or emancipating participants from them. Critical theory appeals to universal values such as freedom, equality, and reason. It challenges the assumed naturalness of the social order and questions the rational legitimacy of all authorities, traditions, and conventional beliefs, focusing on the analysis of communication as a tool of power and ideology. Scholars within this tradition emphasise that communication is not a neutral process, but one that often reflects and reinforces social inequalities and mechanisms of ideological control.

This tradition centres on questions of power, ideology, and domination in communication processes. Its objective is to uncover and challenge the social structures that maintain inequality and restrict individual autonomy. Communication is not neutral; it serves either the maintenance or the transformation of power. The aim of critical theory is to expose mechanisms of control and mobilise for social change.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aligns with the assumptions of this theory. According to CDA, language is a form of power and control, as argued by Norman Fairclough. It shapes and sustains relations of power and social inequality, and discourse reflects ideology. The goal of CDA is not merely analysis but also the exposure of social injustices and the pursuit of change.

Critical internet theory also falls within this tradition. It draws attention to the contemporary internet as both an environment and a set of services offered to users by market-driven entities that act in their own interests and influence how the network and its platforms function. Social media do not operate on neutral or 'transparent' algorithms; rather, through editorial practices and algorithmic design, they influence, for example, the visibility of online content (Gillespie, 2018), contributing to the rise of fake news and, more broadly, delineating the often-unquestioned boundaries of human agency in digital environments. Critical internet theory also raises concerns about the collection of users' private data by large digital corporations, highlighting issues of corporate and state

surveillance (Lyon, 2001), as well as the growing phenomenon of grass-roots (horizontal) surveillance (Lyon, 2018). In this context, the approach known as datafication has emerged, addressing the problem of user data being exploited, e.g., for market exchanges. Critical network theory also partially intersects with activism studies, which integrate media, sociological, and political science perspectives (Treré, 2018; Meikle, 2020; Bonini & Treré, 2023).

In Poland, Mirosław Filiciak conducts research on communication from a critical perspective, focusing on digital culture and its impact on the dynamics of social relations, including hegemonic structures within social media.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

Communication theory as a field of research continues to evolve dynamically, and the seven traditions outlined by Craig remain a vital framework for analysing communicative reality. New technologies, shifting communication models, and challenges such as disinformation and post-truth drive the development of communication research, integrating different theoretical traditions to better understand how communication functions today. The traditions distinguished by Craig increasingly overlap, as current research questions require an interdisciplinary approach. For example, the study of post-truth and fake news intersects with multiple traditions: rhetorical (examining the persuasive effectiveness of content on social media, particularly the effectiveness of fake news and post-truth narratives), cybernetic (analysing new patterns of content circulation), sociopsychological (fake news and post-truth in relation to contemporary election campaigns and voter behaviour), sociocultural (exploring how false content undermines existing media, political, and cultural orders; post-truth as counter-hegemony or a new form of hegemony), and critical (understanding fake news as reinforcing stereotypes). Research on post-truth in communication studies is thus inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on fields such as propaganda analysis, political communication, and media ecosystem studies.

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Interpersonal communication

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Interpersonal communication refers to the direct or indirect exchange of information between at least two people, a sender and a receiver, in which context and both linguistic and communicative competencies play a crucial role. This communication typically occurs on both verbal and non-verbal levels, and its effectiveness depends on the shared commonality of meanings between the participants.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: Systematic research into communication began in the early 20th century, initially focusing on transportation. Over time, as urban centres and the printed media developed, attention shifted toward mass communication, particularly in response to the rise of totalitarianism and the manipulation of the masses. In the 1960s, major branches of research emerged: empirical, critical, cultural-semiotic, and technological determinism. These areas encompass all key communication theories that remain influential today.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Interpersonal communication, as the most prevalent form of communication, is an interdisciplinary concept. Its analyses incorporate the nature of the communication process, its components, the social and cultural contexts, linguistic and communicative competencies, the psychological traits of participants, and both verbal and non-verbal levels. Based on this framework, various descriptive and functional communication models and theories have been developed. These models are complementary and together provide a holistic understanding of communication.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Building a communicative community relies on its members knowing the principles of communication, which underscore its universality and effectiveness. Given that communication forms the foundation of human interaction across various levels, numerous concepts with practical applications that address its specific challenges have emerged within the field of communication.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, verbal communication, non-verbal communication, language competence, communication competence

Definition of the term

The concept of communication as a system comprising three elements – sender, message, and receiver – dates back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. In discussing the art of expression, Aristotle highlighted the roles of the speaker, speech, and listener, laying the foundation for later communication models in which it is treated as a craft, art, or skill. Over time, numerous definitions and theories have emerged to explain the nature of communication, with scholars attempting to categorise them according to specific criteria. T. Goban-Klas proposed several categories for understanding communication, including transmission (the transfer of information in general), understanding (the process of enabling mutual comprehension), impact (the act of influencing one another), and community building (the process by which language is used to unite a group), as well as social interaction and the exchange of meanings (Goban-Klas, 2006, pp. 42–43). Defining communication includes, but is not limited to, its social, biological, and cybernetic aspects, which relate to any interaction between two systems (living organisms or machines). Communication can be broadly defined as all (technical, biological, mental, and social) processes of transmitting information, while in a narrower sense it refers to the transfer of information (meanings) between living beings (Pisarek, 2008, p. 18). If communication is understood as mere transmission, the sender and receiver do not necessarily have to be human. However, when communication involves intellectual and emotional content (Pisarek, 2008, p. 17), it is called interpersonal communication, which is a process, relationship, or interaction occurring between two or more people in private, social/public, or organisational space.

Most researchers agree that communication is an interaction between a sender and a receiver, but its definitions often emphasise different components and aspects of this interaction. Many definitions highlight that communication is fundamentally a process which takes place within society, serving as the foundation for its existence, functioning, and the relationships that shape it. Additionally, communication plays a crucial role in sustaining and transmitting symbols and meanings within a specific community. Consequently, social communication is regarded as “the broadest process of communication, which encompasses all

other, narrower processes related to communication between human individuals” (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2006, p. 62). This social dimension is also reflected in constructivism (i.e., a system of theories focused on the role of personal constructs in cognitive processes), which is based on the assumption that cognitive processes are not merely a reflection of reality, but rather an interpretation and attribution of meaning to the social, physical, and mental world. In this view,

humans are inherently communicative beings, constantly engaged in the process of creation, which drives social change; through communication, social reality is continuously defined and redefined (Nęcki, 2000, p. 24).

The social significance of communication is also evident in M. Mrozowski’s definition, which states that behaviour acquires communicative value when it is assigned meaning by its environment. The process of assigning meaning is inherently social, as it can only occur within interactions among members of a specific social group. Mrozowski defines communication as a type of contact established through senses or specialised tools (means of communication) between at least two people, where one conveys conceptual content or emotions to the other using mutually understandable signs, with the intent of eliciting specific reactions (Mrozowski, 2001, p. 14). Communication is a distinctly human activity – intentional and purposeful – as well as a social practice. It occurs between individuals, groups, or institutions, serving to exchange thoughts, knowledge, information, and ideas through various means, ultimately producing specific social effects (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2006, p. 63).

Interpersonal communication is primarily characterised by the number of participants (fewer people), their proximity (closer physical distance), the use of multiple sensory channels, and the presence of immediate, comprehensive feedback. These factors differentiate it from intergroup, public, or media communication, where the sender and receiver constitute a large group, an organisation, or a broader audience. From an interpersonal perspective, communication can be seen as a transactional process in which participants exchange messages whose meaning is shaped by the history of their relationship and individual experiences (Głodowski, 2001, p. 24). In a specific context, this exchange of signals or symbols is aimed at achieving a higher level of cooperation (Nęcki, 2000, p. 94).

Definitions of communication are shaped by different conceptual frameworks and perspectives of various research disciplines. Hence, it is necessary to simplify this complex field. B. Sobkowiak identified several fundamental characteristics of communication: 1) it is a symbolic process (in communication, a sign replaces an object or event); 2) it is a social process (it involves the exchange of symbols between people); 3) it is a relationship (it can be either symmetrical or asymmetrical, depending on the relationships between participants); 4) it is based on individual interpretation of the message (it assumes a community of meanings); 5) it takes place in specific contexts (interpersonal, organisational, public, mass, and intercultural); 6) it is a conscious and purposeful activity; 7) it consists of continuous and alternating verbal and non-verbal interactions (Sobkowiak, 1987, pp. 6–7; Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 14).

Given the absence of a universally accepted definition of interpersonal communication, its most frequently mentioned characteristics serve as a foundation for understanding it as a process of exchanging information between individuals or small groups. This exchange occurs across various levels – both verbal and non-verbal – and through different channels, leading to diverse effects and feedback. Thus, as a process, interaction, and exchange, communication is inherently social and involves at least two people. It is also a dynamic process which occurs in specific situations and contexts that shape both the participants and the process itself.

Historical analysis of the term

The term ‘communication’ originates from the Latin words *communico* (to make common, to connect) and *communio* (community, a sense of connection). It was introduced into modern languages in the 14th century with a meaning closely aligned to its original Latin roots. For a long time, it primarily referred to ‘community’ and ‘participation’. It was only in the 16th century – with the expansion of postal services and road networks – that the term acquired additional meanings such as ‘transmission’ and ‘message’. In the 19th and 20th centuries, these new meanings became central to understanding communication, particularly

in relation to the rapid development of transportation and long-distance information transmission (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 11; Gustowski, 2012, pp. 19–20). The traditional view of interpersonal communication as face-to-face interaction has evolved alongside advancements in technology and tools that mediate this process, as well as social changes that have influenced its character. The understanding of communication has adapted to the transition from an industrial society to an information and media society, driven by, first, the growing value of information (capital); second, the changing methods of information dissemination (media); and third, the individuals or institutions controlling the distribution of information (power) (Goban-Klas & Sienkiewicz, 1999; Goban-Klas, 2006; McQuail, 2005).

The growing interest in communication initially focused on practical aspects arising from urban development, where mass production required the employment of large workforces and efficient communication within factories. Advancements in transportation in the 19th century led to a major shift in the functioning of societies. This progress led to theories that connected communication with transportation (the network of communication connections) and connectivity (the management of relations between the centre and the periphery) (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 40). The final two decades of the 19th century were dominated by the concept of mass society and psychological perspectives on the nature of the masses, including those of G. Le Bon. In communication analyses, the focus shifted towards mass communication, particularly due to the rise of the press as a mass medium (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, pp. 40–41). During this period, the pioneer in communication studies was Ch. Cooley, who defined communication as “the mechanism through which human relations exist and develop – all the symbols of the mind, together with the means of conveying them through space and preserving them in time” (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 12).

The foundations of independent, interdisciplinary communication science were established in the 1920s and 1930s. Initially, research in this field focused primarily on interpersonal communication and was largely driven by psychological studies, alongside the emerging study of mass communication within journalism. One of the earliest definitions of communication science was proposed by A. Berger and S. Chaffee, who described it as a science which

seeks to understand the production, processing and effects of symbol and signal systems by developing testable theories, containing lawful generalisations that explain phenomena associated with production, processing and effects (McQuail, 2005, p. 16).

The emergence of communication research is also closely linked to the development of the Chicago School, which adopted a cultural perspective, recognising communication as a symbolic process through which culture is shaped, and to the rise of American social pragmatism, where communication was understood as both a tool of social pressure and the foundation of all human relationships, essential for the existence and development of interpersonal interactions (Goban-Klas, 2006, p. 45; Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, pp. 42–44). The mid-20th century saw a significant expansion of communication research within psychology, sociology, and political science, driven by increasing public participation in political life and rising political awareness among citizens. It was also a period of rapid mass media development, which spurred interest in mass communication research, with foundational contributions from scholars such as H. Lasswell, P. Lazarsfeld, and C. Hovland. The study of interpersonal communication, particularly as a tool for persuasion, propaganda, and manipulation – shaped by the political experiences of emerging totalitarian regimes in Europe – further fuelled interdisciplinary research in the field (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 46). In the mid-20th century, communication science flourished within the social sciences, leading to the development of fundamental communication models and setting the trajectory for future research.

Contemporary research orientations in communication science emerged in the late 1960s, forming two primary branches. The first, the empirical (or empirical-functional) school, focuses on studying the impact of communication on various aspects of the functioning of individuals in society (e.g., attitudes, needs, motivations, adaptations, and behaviours). This approach is rooted in H. Lasswell's linear model: "who?", "says what?", "in what channel?", "to whom?", and "with what effect?". The empirical school includes several subfields, such as sociological functionalism, which emphasises mass communication, and the interdisciplinary Palo Alto school, which integrates, among others, psychology, anthropology, and sociology, and views all human behaviour as communicative. Another key perspective within this branch

is interactionism, which represents a sociological theory of interpersonal communication understood as an interaction at the micro-level of daily life. Notable figures in this tradition include P. Lazarsfeld, K. Lewin, H. Lasswell, C. Hovland, B. Berelson, W. Schramm, and G. Gerbner (Pisarek, 1984, p. 15; Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, pp. 54–62).

The second branch, the critical school, encompasses various perspectives within the critical paradigm, drawing from political-economic and ideological-cultural theories. The theory of communication was shaped by critiques of contemporary industrial society and mass culture as key factors influencing social relations. It was also influenced by economic and political analyses of post-industrial society, as well as cultural studies. Centring on analysing mass media, it posits that these media serve as instruments in the hands of those in power, who use them to control human knowledge of reality. Scholars representing this branch include E. Fromm, T. Adorno, J. Habermas, D. Smyth, H. Schiller, and S. Hall (Pisarek, 1984, p. 15; Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, pp. 62–72). While both the empirical and critical schools encompass the major contemporary theories of communication, they do not exhaust the full scope of research in the field.

In the 1960s and 1970s, C. Lévi-Strauss introduced a cultural-semiotic approach which posits that all messages are reproductions of fixed cultural themes, and that culture shapes how they are received. This perspective integrates communication studies with research on culture and language (Pisarek, 1984, p. 16). Another distinct perspective is technological determinism, which argues that the nature of culture is shaped by the dominant technology used to transmit information. From this viewpoint, technology not only shapes the structure of social organisations but also influences how humans perceive reality. As a result, the communication channel becomes a fundamental element of the communication process, playing a key role in the development of civilisation (Pisarek, 1984, pp. 17–18; Wiejak, 2001, p. 209).

The evolution of communication studies has been, on the one hand, a response to transformations in social reality and, on the other, a reaction to emerging demands within communication science itself (e.g., the critical orientation was a response to the empirical-functional perspective, while the cultural-semiotic approach was a response to both the critical and the empirical-functional perspectives). As a result, contemporary

communication research is defined by interdisciplinarity, conceptual and methodological complexity, and internal complementarity. This means that various research approaches in communication do not exclude but rather complement each other in terms of their assumptions and objectives. The field has an evolutionary nature, with its development shaped by the ever-changing context in which communication takes place.

Discussion of the term

The communication models developed in recent decades share a common understanding of communication as a system of interconnected elements, typically including the sender/source, encoding, message, channel, receiver, and decoding. These models also recognise that communication is always an interaction, where the sender's actions are consistently linked to the receiver's responses or actions at each stage of the process (Głodowski, 2001, p. 17; Mrozowski, 2001, p. 25). This framework serves as the foundation for the development of more complex theories that explore various levels of communication, with interpersonal communication being the most common and frequent form. Communication models can be categorised based on several criteria: 1) schematicity (theoretical models that present a simplified communication pattern or define the desired state toward which it should proceed); 2) utility (descriptive models that detail the elements of the communication process; operational models that enable measurement and forecasting through communication analysis; functional models that help define relationships between process elements); 3) structure (linear models, where communication always flows from sender to receiver; concentric models, where communication is dynamic, with the roles of sender and receiver being fluid) (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, pp. 75–76). Additionally, classification may consider one or more key elements integral to the nature of communication (e.g., “dominant factor” models) or encompass all relevant elements (synthetic models), making these models universal in application (Pisarek, 2008, p. 102). Finally, communication models can also be categorised by their primary goals: 1) transmission models (the goal is to transmit information from the sender); 2) expressive/ritual models (aimed at sharing and maintaining

common beliefs); 3) publicity models (intended to capture the receiver's attention); 4) reception models (which emphasise encoding and decoding of the message, with a focus on its interpretation from the receiver's perspective) (Goban-Klas, 2006, pp. 53–73).

One of the most widely recognised models is H. Lasswell's communication model, categorised as both descriptive and linear; such models are most common in communication science. In this model, communication is understood as a sequence of interactions that involves five key elements: sender, message, communication channel, receiver, and the impact the message exerts. This process is one-directional, which is one of its primary limitations as it excludes the possibility of the receiver influencing the sender when roles in the communication process change (Głodowski, 2001, p. 17–18; Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 77–78). Despite this limitation, the model is highly applicable as it both describes communication as transmission and serves as an example of a dominant factor model (where the dominant factor is the impact on the receiver as an aim of communication). It also acts as a universal model, providing a foundation for numerous other descriptive models. Lasswell's model can be applied to analyses of both interpersonal and mass communication, particularly where the sender seeks to influence the attitudes or behaviours of a mass audience (Goban-Klas, 2006, p. 57).

Another influential five-element model, categorised as a transmission model, was proposed by C.E. Shannon and W. Weaver. In this model, communication is described as a system of the following elements: source (sender), transmitter, receiver, addressee (receiver), and noise. Although initially developed to describe the transmission of signals in technical systems, its elements were easily adapted to the typical linear structure of interpersonal communication. Alongside Lasswell's model, this framework has become one of the most influential models of interpersonal communication (Goban-Klas, 2006, p. 57–58; Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 78–79; Głodowski, 2001, p. 18–19). It was revised within the humanities by W. Schramm, who emphasised the relationship between the sender and receiver by introducing the concept of a 'field of experience', which encompasses the attitudes, ideas, and symbols shared between the sender and receiver, significantly influencing the effectiveness of communication. In this view, communication means sharing experiences and participating as part of a community

with others, a process that entails three factors: the sender (a person or an institution), the message, and the addressee/receiver (a person or an audience of mass media).

Thus, this model – also classified as a transmission model – is applicable to both interpersonal and mass communication (Goban-Klas, 2006, p. 63; Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 79). The shared experiences of the sender and receiver – a common code and symbols – is a key determinant of communication in this framework, playing a crucial role in shaping the process. Both parties actively engage in interpretation, making communication a cycle of continuous interactions between people, thereby establishing the model's non-linearity (Głodowski, 2001, p. 20; Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 80–81; Goban-Klas, 2006, p. 63).

Another non-linear model is the dynamic psychological model proposed by G. Gerbner, which also applies to both interpersonal and mass communication. Here, communication is viewed as a sequence of events initiated by an occurrence perceived by the sender. How the event is perceived is shaped by the sender's individual perception, which always involves selective interpretation of the event rather than an objective recording of it. Therefore, the content and form of the message depend on how the event is perceived, meaning the message is never identical to the event itself. This model highlights that communication is influenced by both selection and distortion, which arise from the cognitive traits of the sender (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 83–84).

In contrast, A. Tudor's socio-cultural model operates under different assumptions. In this model, communication is determined by two contexts: social structure and cultural context. These factors shape various aspects of communication, such as language, values, norms, and one's position within the social structure (e.g., age, profession, etc.). Tudor's model sees communication as a complementary process of interaction between the sender and receiver within a complex socio-cultural environment, where each party holds unique cognitive, expressive, and evaluative frameworks. The effectiveness of communication depends heavily on the sender's awareness of the receiver's culture, religion, beliefs, and values (Goban-Klas, 2006, p. 65–66; Głodowski, 2001, p. 21–22).

In addition to these examples related to interpersonal communication, many other micro-theories have been developed, though the vast majority pertain to public and mass communication. However, based

on the discussed models, interpersonal communication can be characterised as follows: 1) it is direct and interactive (involving at least two people who influence each other in direct contact); 2) it maintains the unity of time and space (the sender and receiver are physically present next to each other at the same moment); 3) it entails immediate feedback, which naturally results from 1) and 2); 4) it occurs on both verbal and nonverbal levels; 5) it is concentric and dynamic (the sender and receiver alternate roles); 6) it takes place at the phatic level (the goal is to maintain contact between the sender and receiver), the instrumental level (the sender and receiver strive for mutual understanding), and the affective/emotional level (communication involves sharing feelings and emotions); 7) it depends on the relationship between the sender and receiver (this relationship can be formal, where communication is asymmetrical and official, or informal, occurring in a private setting where communication is symmetrical); 8) it depends on the broader context in which the sender and receiver operate (including social and cultural contexts) (cf. Dobek-Ostrowska, 2006, pp. 73–74).

Interpersonal communication is almost always understood as conversation and is typically perceived through the lens of language, which is a perspective reflected in linguistic and semiotic communication models. A. Awdiejew is notable in this approach, being a pioneer of communicative grammar, which posits that communication is shaped by both the grammatical accuracy of messages and their usefulness in the communication process. Awdiejew's model also assumes specific conversational strategies (such as informational-verificational, behavioural, and axiological-emotive), which are designed to coordinate the actions of participants of interactions, the aim being successful communication.

The psychological and sociological perspectives highlight that interpersonal communication is only partially conveyed through words, with a significant portion depending on context (Giddens, 2021) and nonverbal cues. In light of this, the conditions under which communication occurs are considered crucial and can be categorised as physical (environmental factors influencing both sender and receiver), historical (past experiences and memories of both parties), psychological (attitudes, including biases and predispositions toward the other), and cultural (values, norms, and symbols that form a shared cultural script between the sender and receiver) (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 15). Two types of communicative

competence (a term coined by N. Chomsky) have been identified that build on this: 1) linguistic competence, which refers to the internalised knowledge of a language that enables the creation and comprehension of new sentences, including the ability to distinguish between grammatically acceptable and unacceptable sentences; 2) communicative competence (described by D. Hymes), which, in addition to linguistic competence, includes the ability to select and understand extra-linguistic means appropriate to the communication situation (circumstances, time, place of communication, senders' characteristics, their social roles, beliefs, value system, etc.) (Pisarek, 2008, pp. 63–64).

Additionally, some scholars recognise cultural competence, which entails familiarity with cultural norms and scripts embedded in language, as well as the ability to identify elements of art proper to a given culture (Pisarek, 2008, pp. 66–67). Social competence is another key dimension, defined as knowledge of social rules governing communicative interaction, i.e., behaviours and communication styles appropriate for a given situation, as well as the ability to adhere to formal and informal communication conditions, etc (Głodowski, 2001, p. 27). Thus, it can be concluded that interpersonal communication relies on the linguistic and communicative competencies shared by the sender and receiver which belong in their common sphere of understanding.

Interpersonal communication typically occurs on both verbal and non-verbal levels. Verbal communication (oral or written) uses language as its primary tool. It enables the transmission of information and opinions and provides a means to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Through language, we describe, label, and define our experiences as we share them with others; it allows us to assess reality based on our own value systems, recount personal experiences, and even engage in discussions about language itself (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, p. 25). Language is versatile, enabling the communication of both simple ideas, such as telling the time, and complex meanings, such as conveying personal experiences or intricate thoughts.

As a tool for communication, language is characterised by several key features. It is 1) efficient and creative (e.g., we generate new phrases and interpret words in various ways); 2) specialised, i.e., its role is limited to communication); 3) fleeting, i.e., words are available only when spoken (though written words can retain some permanence due to modern communication

technologies); 4) arbitrary, i.e., there is no intrinsic connection between a word and the object or concept it describes; 5) able to transmit, i.e., convey information about things that are present, past, or future, distant in space, as well as real or imagined; 6) a carrier of culture, as learning a language means learning the names, phenomena, and people from the culture where this language is used (Głodowski, 2001, pp. 176–179).

Understanding the meanings embedded in a message is a crucial aspect of interpersonal communication, which is an active process involving both the sender and the receiver. Meaning does not exist independently: it emerges through social interaction and is negotiated via language, especially through the ability to name things (i.e., to designate specific objects, experiences, etc.). G.H. Mead and H. Blumer called this process symbolic interactionism, (Griffin, 2019, p. 53). P. Watzlawick, a psychotherapist specialising in, among others, dysfunctional family patterns, and a representative of the interactional approach in communication, arrived at a similar conclusion from a different perspective: the meaning of words resides not in the words themselves, but in the individuals using them. The meaning of a word extends beyond what the word directly describes. The meaning conveyed by the same word can vary significantly between the sender and the receiver – it depends on factors such as who they are, their emotions, knowledge, and past experiences. As a result, no two people interpret the same word in exactly the same way (Głodowski, 2001, pp. 179–181). Therefore, the meanings embedded in words are often subjective, which has profound implications for interpersonal communication.

Verbal communication is often regarded as the primary form of communication because it is universal (it serves all areas of human activity) and foundational, i.e., it forms the basis of human thought (Goban-Klas, 2006, p. 41). However, the non-verbal level constitutes a vital aspect of communication. Non-verbal communication refers to

all signals occurring in an interpersonal interaction that do not involve spoken or written words. These signals encompass all other messages which exert an impact on the participants involved (Głodowski, 2001, p. 224).

These signals include kinesics (gestures, facial expressions, body and limb movements, posture, gaze, etc.), proxemics (the physical distance between the sender and receiver), haptics (touch in sender–receiver

interactions), paralanguage (voice signals other than words, such as tone, pitch, intonation, speaking rate, etc.), and self-presentation (clothing, hair-style, weight, height, etc.). Non-verbal communication tends to be more innate and less consciously controlled than verbal communication and serves several important functions, such as 1) informative (non-verbal signals provide information not present in the verbal message, often communicated unconsciously); 2) complementary (it supports and reinforces the verbal message, helping to strengthen, regulate, or emphasise the message); 3) expressing emotions and attitudes; 4) defining relationships (it reveals the nature of the relationship between the sender and receiver, indicating its symmetry or asymmetry); 5) shaping and directing impressions (it helps define the participants in a communicative situation and influences the impression they create) (Głodowski, 2001, pp. 228–235).

B. Dobek-Ostrowska proposed a different classification of non-verbal functions, distinguishing between emblems (gestures that replace sentences or thoughts), illustrators (gestures that complement and clarify verbal messages, often emphasising or revealing emotions), regulators (gestures that control or regulate verbal messages, such as eye contact, facial expressions or head movements), and adapters (gestures that ease tension or reduce stress, such as scratching the head or squeezing hands) (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1999, pp. 28–29).

Non-verbal communication is a crucial complement to verbal communication. In fact, interpersonal communication without non-verbal signals is often less effective. The most complete form of communication occurs in direct contact between the sender and receiver. Understanding the non-verbal basis of communication is also a key component of communication competence. As different cultures have their own non-verbal communication rules, knowing these rules helps avoid communication misunderstandings. Indeed, “most forms of non-verbal communication can only be clearly interpreted within the culture in which they occur” (Głodowski, 2001, p. 236). Nevertheless, certain aspects of non-verbal communication suggest its universal nature, including 1) the same parts of the body being used to convey non-verbal signals; 2) non-verbal channels being used to transmit similar information; 3) non-verbal messages accompanying verbal communication; 4) motives for using non-verbal channels being similar across cultures; 5) non-verbal messages being used to coordinate and control multiple contexts and relationships (Głodowski, 2001, p. 236).

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

Interpersonal communication is a fundamental human activity, encompassing cognitive, intellectual, and emotional dimensions. As such, it is a complex skill that we continually develop throughout our lives. Several key principles underlie communication: 1) it is inevitable (communication is constant, whether intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious); 2) it is irreversible (once a message is sent, it creates a new situation, and what has been said cannot be unsaid); 3) it always involves both content and relational aspects (the sender and receiver not only describe the world but also define their relationship through the manner in which they exchange information); 4) it requires mutual adaptation (the participants must form a communicative community and share a common code) (Głodowski, 2001, pp. 74–82). Interpersonal communication also requires the ability to detect and understand signals as its success depends on not only transmitting but also obtaining information. These principles can form the foundation for developing strategies and techniques that promote effective communication across various social and intercultural contexts. Effective communication is particularly important in negotiations, mediation, conflict resolution (both interpersonal and military), diplomacy, and the creation of international agreements. These interactions often involve a range of goals and expectations, including understanding, informing, influencing, normalising relationships, sharing emotions and expressing ideas.

Communication science, alongside theoretical models and micro theories, also provides valuable concepts that address practical communication challenges. One of them is interpersonal deception theory, introduced by D. Buller and J. Burgoon, which addresses social situations where individuals engage in deception (lying), a common form of communicative behaviour. Understanding its dynamics is a key area of communication research. Another example is J. Burgoon's expectancy violation theory, which is related to non-verbal communication (specifically proxemics). According to this theory, communication occurs as the sender and receiver interpret each other's behaviour based on shared expectations, assessing whether their actions respect or violate personal space (Griffin, 2019, pp. 79–90). I. Altman and D.A. Taylor's

concept of social penetration explains interpersonal communication as a gradual process of disclosing personal information. Using the metaphor of peeling an onion, they describe how relationships begin with the exchange of superficial details, progressing to deeper layers of personal identity. In new relationships, communication often follows the reciprocity rule, governed by the “minimax” principle – seeking to maximise benefits and minimise losses (Griffin, 2019, pp. 93–104). Additionally, M. Sherif’s social judgement theory connects communication with social group as a reference point for our norms and values. In this view, communication is a process of negotiating and evaluating messages based on their alignment with one’s personal attitudes, leading to acceptance, rejection, or disengagement. It can also create a contrast effect (where an opinion is perceived as more contradictory than it is), or an assimilation effect (where opinions are distorted to seem more in line with one’s own) (Griffin, 2019, pp. 171–181).

In conclusion, research on interpersonal communication constitutes a unique area of knowledge, as its insights not only reveal the intricacies of communication but also provide a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships and human nature. The concept of the ‘communicative community’ underscores the social and cultural contexts, which imply a certain universalisation of communication, enabling it to serve as a shared process that connects individuals within a community. This is particularly significant in culturally diverse societies, where communication needs may differ depending on the sender’s and receiver’s cultural backgrounds. Universalisation should also address generational divides, which are increasingly evident in a media-driven society where modern communication tools favoured by younger generations may inadvertently exclude others.

A key takeaway from communication studies is that communication forms the foundation of society and represents one of the most essential human activities, underpinning all relationships at both the micro and macro levels. In light of this, it is crucial to integrate this extensive knowledge into the education of younger generations. While the education system equips us with linguistic skills, it would be prudent to also prioritise the development of communicative competence as a core element of both our personal and professional lives. The significance of these skills is evident not only through the wealth of communication

models and micro-theories, but also in the practical insights provided by research on communication in everyday contexts. These could serve as a valuable basis for curriculum design in educational programmes or training, enhancing our ability to communicate effectively.

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Organisational communication

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Organisational communication (also referred to as communication within or communication of organisations) is a continuous process devoted to collecting and transmitting information. Exchanges take place through both formal and informal channels.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: Because communication lies at the centre of message-exchange processes, organisational communication can be approached simultaneously as a field of practice and as an academic discipline. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars looked to organisational communication for ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of rapidly expanding organisations. The 1980s introduced a focus on power relations, while the 1990s witnessed the emergence of feminist research and theory. In the new century, analyses have addressed ongoing transformations within organisational communication and their implications for ethics, community, and corporate social responsibility.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Traditionally, organisational communication processes are examined in vertical, horizontal, and diagonal configurations and are carried out through a wide array of media and communication techniques. Two communication networks are recognised – formal and informal – and activities are divided into internal and external domains.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: As a managerial process, organisational communication is crucial to the organisation's effective functioning. The processes

of organisational communication are directed toward specific objectives and tasks, and the degree to which they are achieved determines the effectiveness of the communication in question.

Keywords: communication, organisation, media,
internal environment, external environment

Definition of the term

The literature offers numerous definitions of the term 'communication'. A close examination of this body of work also reveals that, in Polish-language scholarship, the noun *komunikacja* (communication) is used interchangeably with the gerund-like phrase *komunikowanie się* (communicating).

A. Potocki, R. Winkler, and A. Żbikowska treat the notions of communication and communicating as synonymous, arguing that they are social necessities. These processes allow people to initiate and carry out activities, coordinate their actions with the behaviour of others, perform social rituals, meet their emotional needs, and clarify the meaning of activities – both their own and those of others (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 11).

Communication is a two-way process: information is exchanged through an appropriate channel between sender and receiver, enabling messages to flow in a form intelligible to both parties (Ober, 2013, p. 258).

The importance of communication within an organisation (hereafter organisational communication) is captured succinctly by Potocki, Winkler, and Żbikowska: "Business organisations are social systems whose existence depends on the efficiency of communication" (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 9). They further observe that organisational communication builds trust around the organisation and thereby stimulates interest in its products and services (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 9).

Organisational communication is a continuous process that involves collecting and transmitting information (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 9) that flows through both formal and informal channels (Rydzak, 2011, p. 74).

Historical analysis of the term

W. Charles Redding is widely regarded as the father of organisational communication (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999, p. 331). Redding placed communication at the centre of message-exchange processes and saw organisational communication as at once a practice and an academic discipline. He used the term 'communication' to "refer to those behaviours

of human beings, or those artifacts created by human beings, which result in ‘messages’ being received by one or more persons” (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999, p. 331).

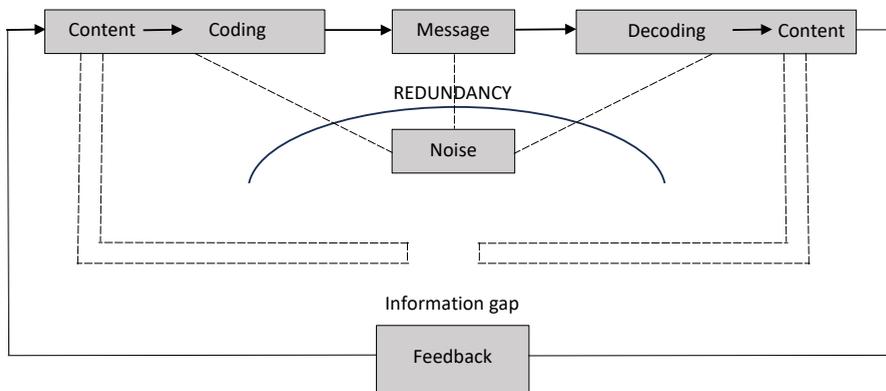
Charles Conrad and Michael Sollitto note that the 1960s and 1970s – years of rapid economic growth and profound social upheavals and transformations – sparked interest in the democratisation of organisations. Organisational communication was viewed as a means of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of rapidly expanding enterprises. Organisations were conceived of as ever-changing entities with complex systems of interpersonal interaction, while communication served to motivate and inspire members to act effectively. Consequently, researchers increasingly sought to apply insights from interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. During the late 1960s and 1970s, researchers of organisational communication investigated managerial communication, management by objectives, theories of organisation-environment interdependence, and the phenomenon of groupthink. By the late 1970s, the field had become closely aligned with organisational behaviour, organisation theory, and social psychology (Conrad & Sollitto, 2017).

According to Conrad and Sollitto, arguably the most significant development of the 1980s was the growing focus among organisational communication scholars on the concept of power. The 1990s ushered in feminist perspectives, prompting studies of gendered attitudes and practices that discriminate against women and establishing feminist research on organisational communication. In the new century, the field has expanded to address emerging challenges: scholars now examine ongoing transformations within organisational communication and their implications for ethics, community, and corporate social responsibility (Conrad & Sollitto, 2017).

Discussion of the term

The communication process is typically represented by a model that contains the following elements: message, code, channel, information gap, noise, feedback, and frame of reference (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1. The communication process



Source: Gros, 1994, p. 70.

Communication models presuppose that communication takes place between a sender and a receiver. However, as Potocki, Winkler and Żbikowska observe, “calling a particular person the sender or the receiver is always relative” (2011, p. 31).

Potocki and colleagues define the sender or the initiator of the process as the person who formulates a message and has a specific aim in conveying it to someone else. They identify several variables that shape message formulation:

- Characteristics of the sender. These include knowledge, experience, organisational or social position, prestige, value system, convictions, and personal perspective on the issue that prompted communication.
- The receiver. The individual to whom the message is addressed also exhibits distinctive traits, stands in a particular relationship to the sender, and is situated in a specific time and place – factors that may influence decoding. A message should therefore be crafted to maximise the receiver’s ability to decode it. To this end, communicators employ redundancy measures (Latin *redundantio*, ‘excess’) such as repetition or compliance with formal composition rules to reduce uncertainty about how the message will be interpreted. Because redundancy consumes channel capacity, it should be minimised where that capacity is limited or costly (Mikułowski-Pomorski, 1998, p. 73).

- **Decoding.** This is the reconstruction of the meaning of the message through the interpretation of signs and symbols, each containing cues about their interrelations. An awareness of this compels the sender to choose signs and symbols that the receiver can decode correctly. Communication is deemed effective only when understanding occurs, i.e., the process of assigning meaning to the message (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 32).
- **Communication channel.** The pathway by which the sender reaches the receiver. U. Gros notes that

the information channel is not a measure of physical distance between sender and receiver; it lengthens with every intermediate stopping-point. These points may distort the message, and the carrier can change within them. At least two interconnected channels form a communication network (Gros, 1993, p. 11).

K. Weinstein distinguishes three principal communication channels (Weinstein, 1998, p. 298): (1) oral (one-to-one, in small groups, by telephone, in public presentations and direct meetings, such as negotiations or deliberations, and their mediated equivalents via telephone, television or the internet); (2) written (memos, on-screen text, and text-based internet messaging); (3) visual (charts, diagrams, photographs, and videos). Channel selection depends on the nature of the information, ease or difficulty of encoding, dissemination possibilities, information importance, need for feedback, user preferences, and task requirements.

- **Information gap.** The discrepancy between the content the receiver seeks and the content actually obtained from the sender (Gros, 1993, pp. 11–12). Gros distinguishes two types of information gap: a gap of expectation (the receiver accepts the shortfall, believing it will be closed by future information) and a gap of disagreement (the receiver disputes the content supplied) (1993, p. 12).
- **Medium.** The specific carrier of content and its route to the receiver. Time and place of delivery are chosen according to message importance, its structure, the sender's habits and preferences, available media, communication conditions, and the nature of the interaction (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 31).

Traditional analyses examine organisational communication in three directions – vertical, horizontal, and diagonal – each employing

a variety of media and communication techniques (Potocki et al., 2011, pp. 14–15).

Vertical (hierarchical) communication can move in two directions within the organisational structure: downward or upward. Downward communication involves conveying information on organisational goals and principles, informing employees about practices and procedures, issuing detailed task directives, stating expectations for members, notifying employees of their performance, evaluating, motivating, advising and instructing them, and encouraging them to present their own views, positions, and opinions (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 14).

Upward communication includes providing feedback on progress in carrying out assigned directives, reporting problems encountered in the work process (technical, organisational, or interpersonal), expressing opinions and suggestions (ideas), and communicating individual expectations, requests, and grievances (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 14).

Horizontal communication includes the above elements and, in addition, involves consulting and verifying information, developing and coordinating joint positions, exchanging supplementary information, and maintaining informal contact networks (Potocki et al., 2011, pp. 14–15).

The third organisational communication process is diagonal communication, which involves the exchange of messages across different management levels, largely outside the formal chain of command; its objectives, however, are identical to those of horizontal communication (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 15).

B.A. Sypniewska points to two organisational communication networks: formal and informal. The formal network corresponds to the vertical communication mentioned above (Sypniewska, 2013, p. 86). Formal communication accompanies task execution according to prescribed rules; informal communication, by contrast, grows out of interpersonal relations – affinities, similarities, and shared views – that create an unofficial information circuit parallel to the official hierarchy. Informal communication is generally more efficient and quicker than formal communication, often outpacing official messages (Sypniewska, 2013, p. 86).

Informal communication is unstable and short-lived: it operates only for as long as organisational uncertainty, the prevailing atmosphere, or friendly bonds within informal groups sustain it. B.A. Sypniewska

emphasises that its typical vehicles are gossip, rumour, and accidentally overheard remarks (2013, p. 87). These channels matter because they can be a source of information that proves useful and adds value to organisational processes (for example, by boosting employee engagement), but they can just as easily spark a crisis. Informal communication should therefore never be ignored; it must be identified and actively managed.

Communication techniques are defined as “consciously and deliberately executed ways of conveying a message, using designated channels and a set of agreed rules and procedures” (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 15; Pszczołkowski, 1978, pp. 224–225). The repertoire of communication techniques is extensive; therefore, the organisation’s crucial task is to select the specific techniques that will most effectively support its organisational communication processes. Examples include administrative annotations, surveys, plant-radio broadcasts, bulletins, brochures, folders, posters, films and recordings, newsletters, instructions, intranet notices, letters (paper or electronic), MBWA (Management by Walking Around), reports (statements, evaluations, protocols, opinions), memoranda, negotiations, memos, meetings (briefings, sessions, assemblies, conferences, tele- and videoconferences), written complaints, personalised correspondence, occasional letters, applications, employee manuals, regulations, conversations (official, social or informal, telephone, IRC), training sessions or workshops, noticeboards (organisation-wide or departmental), speeches (policy addresses, lectures, papers, presentations) and interviews (Potocki et al., 2011, pp. 15–18).

The scope of an organisation’s communication with its internal and external environments delineates distinctive task- and relationship-oriented domains, as set out below.

In an organisation’s communication with its internal environment, communication processes are examined at four levels (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 24):

- interactions between individual members (interpersonal exchange, e.g., supervisor–subordinate, employee–employee),
- relationships between an individual and a specific social subsystem,
- within a social system (intra-group communication inside units or teams),
- between social subsystems (inter-group communication).

In an organisation's communication with its external environment, the following relationship domains are identified (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 24):

- between an organisation and another entity (enterprise, organisation, or institution);
- between an organisation and a distinct segment of its environment (system, association, or institution);
- between an organisation and a client.

In an organisation's communication with its internal environment, it is essential to foster communicative openness by cultivating mutual trust and a culture of communication. Continuous improvement of the communication process is likewise necessary.

In an organisation's communication with its external environment, the principal challenge centres on the organisation–client nexus. Stakeholders expect that the delivery of any product, service, or idea will be accompanied by messages that clearly convey the organisation's intentions and objectives. Communication that accompanies the execution of the organisation's core mission is important in that – beyond the proper decoding of the aforementioned intentions and objectives in the short term – it enables the building or strengthening of the organisation's image and exerts a positive impact on its reputation.

When analysing communication within an organisation, attention should also be paid to the methods by which it is conducted. It is generally accepted that there are two broad methods of communication: verbal and non-verbal.

Verbal communication relies on methods of creating, conveying, and receiving information such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which means that content and meaning are encoded in words and their equivalents (Potocki et al., 2011, p. 70).

Non-verbal communication, by contrast, "is a communication exchange that does not use words or uses words to carry more meaning than the strict definition of the words themselves" (Griffin, 2016, p. 377). It therefore takes place through artefacts and means unrelated to speech. The body language conveyed in this way may be deliberate and intentional, or it may be an unintentional form of communication when the sender does not pay attention to its elements, meaning, and role. Professional communication nonetheless requires control over

one's own non-verbal communication, as well as competence in interpreting the receivers' non-verbal signals.

In non-verbal communication, ten basic types of non-verbal acts are distinguished (Potocki et al., 2011, pp. 71–74):

1. Gestures, i.e., movements of the hands, fingers, arms, head, and torso.
2. Facial expression as the primary channel for transmitting emotional states.
3. Touch and physical contact, including handshakes, hugs, kisses, pats, and placing a hand on the shoulder.
4. Eye contact and the exchange of glances, in which the eyes are the key information carriers: direction of gaze, duration of looking, and frequency of glances.
5. Spatial distance, understood as the invisible zone surrounding an individual within which most interpersonal contact occurs. In non-verbal communication, the breadth of this zone signals the type of relationship: the closer the relationship, the shorter the distance, and vice versa. Distance is expressed through the appropriate ranges of the intimate, personal, social, and public zones.
6. Body position – standing or sitting postures that indicate inner tension or relaxation.
7. Physical appearance and dress, which can convey attachment to tradition, personal individuality, or social affiliation.
8. Non-verbal aspects of speech conveyed by voice intonation, accent, and speaking rhythm.
9. Paralinguistic sounds defined through a spectrum of communicative signs and emotional expressions (such as laughter, crying, yawning, humming, grunting, whistling, and sighing).
10. Elements of the physical environment, including the size, location, furnishings, and layout of interiors.

When analysing organisational communication, two areas of activity are distinguished: communication with the internal environment (intra-organisational communication) and communication with the external environment. This typology reflects the degree of relationship with the environment. The internal environment is the closest to the organisation, is directly tied to objective achievement, and is usually governed by

formalised dependencies (for example, employment contracts or loyalty between employer and employee) (Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, 2015, p. 61). The external environment is linked to the organisation through relationships of another kind – often informal, of varying strength, yet keenly interested in the organisation's activity, whether to advance its own interests (which may coincide with or diverge from the organisation's objectives), or to support the organisation's objectives. Because the external environment is by definition broad and can encompass many groups, it is sometimes subdivided by successive degrees of 'proximity' of interest to the organisation, such as a distinction between nearer and more distant external environments (Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, 2015, pp. 61–62). Best practice therefore calls for every organisation to review the groups of publics surrounding it so as to maximise the effectiveness of its communication efforts; examples of entities frequently found in the nearer and more distant external environment are listed below.

The internal environment typically comprises employees at every level (executive and supervisory: board of directors, chief executive officer/president, supervisory board, etc.; middle management, department heads, etc., and the remaining workforce) as well as labour organisations (e.g., trade unions or employee clubs). Some organisations also include employees' families and close relations in the internal environment, although communication with this group is comparatively rare.

Assuming its division into nearer and more distant environments, the external environment may include the following entities:

- nearer: the local community, local authorities, local and trade media; online communities (e.g., those gathered around a corporate blog or a fan page, etc., and visitors to the organisation's website); opinion leaders in new media and within the organisation's milieu; current customers; cooperating partners and contractors; suppliers; dealers; competitors; financial institutions that cooperate with the organisation (e.g., banks); a variety of local organisations, e.g., environmental, charitable, educational, academic, cultural, or consumer-oriented (e.g., a municipal consumer advocate, etc.), and investors.
- more distant: central authorities, nationwide media, former or potential customers, professional associations, business federations, trade-union organisations, and legislative bodies.

A. Żbikowska also identifies ad-hoc environments, which consist of groups that coalesce under special circumstances, most often when a crisis arises within the organisation (Żbikowska, 2005, p. 55).

Communication processes in an organisation unfold within a specific media space. Depending on whether the organisation's communication addresses its internal or its external environment, it employs different sets of media instruments, each chosen in line with the objectives of the communication in question.

A basic way to divide this media space is by the legal status of the media and the obligations that flow from it. This perspective yields two zones (Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, 2013, pp. 110–115):

1. An institutional-media zone, comprising media entities that operate on the basis of registration under Polish law (media broadcasters).
2. A non-institutional-media zone, consisting of information, communication and relationship spaces that are not registered as broadcasters in the legal sense.

In the early years of social-media expansion, the media landscape was divided differently in the sphere of traditional media, meaning the triad of press, radio, and television, and a sphere of online media, including social media. Although this was a considerable simplification, it offered an easy way to classify content and messages produced for the older media, which generally fell into the institutional media category mentioned above, and for the newer media, which often had no counterparts in the established formats (Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, 2013, pp. 110–115). Today that split – traditional versus new (online, social) media – has lost its rationale because virtually all media now have an internet presence.

When planning communication – both internal and external – it is important to recognise the paradigm shift that occurred with the advent of internet media: the audience has also become a sender of content. For those responsible for organisational communication, the interactions that emerge and the heightened engagement of participants are crucial. Audiences can move from passive recipients to active senders, whether co-creators or creators of content. This development opens the way for far more two-way communication and genuine dialogue between the organisation and its environment (Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, 2013, p. 26).

A particularly significant field within organisational communication is crisis-communication management, which comprises preventive measures (taken in advance to reduce crisis risk) and managerial actions during an ongoing crisis. Crisis management involves operational and strategic steps that must be accompanied by well-organised communication. Such communication is a key component of effective crisis management; it demands highly precise procedures as well as workflows and approval schemes for distributed contents (Tworzydło, 2017, p. 188). During crisis-communication management, the organisation must address both internal and external audiences. This communication typically includes the crisis team, the management board and other governing bodies, employees, stakeholder groups (often from the external environment) and the media (Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, 2015, pp. 159–160). In so sensitive a context, strict adherence to professional ethical standards in all communications is especially important (Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, 2015, p. 160; Tworzydło, 2017, p. 194).

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

Organisational communication is a managerial process that is fundamental to the proper functioning of an organisation.

The process of formulating a message requires taking into account the following elements: the characteristics of the sender and the receiver, decoding, redundancy, the communication channel, the information gap, and the communication medium employed.

In the traditional view, communication processes in an organisation are analysed in vertical, horizontal, and diagonal configurations, each designed to accomplish specific tasks and objectives; all three rely on multiple media and communication techniques.

Efficient communication within an organisation requires two distinct communication networks: the formal and the informal. The formal network corresponds to the vertical channel and is linked to the performance of tasks under established rules, whereas informal communication develops from employees' interpersonal relations – sympathy,

similarity, and shared views – and generates an unofficial information circuit outside the lines of authority.

The scope of communication with an organisation's internal and external environments delineates distinct task- and relationship-oriented areas, and the key tasks that determine overall communicative effectiveness are situated within these two spheres.

Dividing organisational communication into internal and external areas reflects the degree of relationship with each environment. It is considered good practice for every organisation to review the audience groups in its environment in order to maximise the effectiveness of its communication efforts.

When planning both internal and external communication within an organisation, it is worth recognising a paradigm shift introduced by the internet era: the media audience has also become a sender of content, thus increasing interaction within communication processes and deepening stakeholders' engagement in organisational communication.

A particularly important area within organisational communication is crisis communication management, which encompasses both preventive measures (aimed at anticipating crises and mitigating their risk) and managerial actions undertaken during an ongoing crisis. Crisis communication management involves addressing both internal and external environments.

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Mass communication

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: The concept of mass communication refers to the social process of transmitting information through mass media and, simultaneously, to the attempt to build a human community through communication. For a long time, mass communication was largely unidirectional; today, with the rise of algorithms that personalise content, we are witnessing almost instantaneous interaction and a feedback loop. This understanding forms the conceptual horizon of the reflections presented in this article.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: In the last century, mass communication was often viewed through the lens of the culture industry (as theorised by the Frankfurt School). This perspective also illustrates how the cultural imperialism approach interpreted the phenomena of globalisation and the Americanisation of the media. In recent decades, the digitalisation of the media, their domination by online networks, and the dialogic nature of social media have become particularly significant.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: This section describes the specificity of mass communication against the backdrop of communication in general; it explores the category of media institutions, highlighting the roles of different types of media professionals; it analyses the economic dimensions of media operations; it addresses the processes of encoding and decoding messages, and it introduces the concept of the demotic turn and the role of narcissism in the online media.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: This section encourages in-depth reflection on the

history, present, and – above all – the future of mass communication, including its technological dimensions. It also demonstrates that mass media sometimes function as instruments of non-communication: rather than bringing people together – locally and globally – they divide them into segments based on commercial criteria.

Keywords: communication, encoding and decoding, mass media, television, internet

Definition of the term

In classical communication theory, as R.E. Hanson (2022, pp. 4, 6–7) observes, four primary modes of communication are distinguished: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and mass communication. Communication is understood not as a static phenomenon, but as a dynamic process that enables individuals, groups, and institutions to interact. People typically engage in communication across multiple levels, often transitioning between them almost instantaneously. It is therefore inappropriate to assume that every communicative act can be neatly categorised within a single type.

Mass communication constitutes a particularly significant social process. Its definition is often tautological, frequently reduced to the notion of communication through mass media. It is described, for example, as a society-wide process in which an individual or institution uses technology to transmit messages to a large audience, most of whom are unknown to the sender. The sender is separated from the audience in space and sometimes also in time (Hanson, 2022, p. 6). The aims of this form of communication are to inform, connect, and influence people (Luttrell & Wallace, 2025, p. 5).

According to some scholars, mass communication represents the dominant cultural force in contemporary societies. A key difficulty in defining it lies in the fact that the media so thoroughly permeate our social lives that the average recipient is often unaware of their influence, or even of their presence (Baran, 2023, p. 11).

M. Castells emphasises that human beings are social animals who develop consciousness and shape their lives through mutual communication:

Our neural networks connect with the neural networks of other human individuals and with the networks of our natural and cultural environment. Communication is the construction of meaning through the exchange of information (Castells, 2024, p. 9).

Mass communication may also be understood teleologically as an effort to build a global community through communication.

The term 'communication' can refer both to information exchange and to physical means of transportation. For millennia, the speed

of long-distance communication was equivalent to the speed of transport: whether on foot, by horseback, or via river or sea. T. Goban-Klas notes that discussions of communication often invoke aquatic, nautical, and maritime metaphors. He points out that the oldest of these relates to channels – a term still used today in phrases like television channels or communication channels. Rivers, together with artificial waterways such as canals or channels, were among the earliest relatively safe, convenient, and rapid means of human communication and transportation. These formed networks that laid the foundations for economic systems and cultural exchange (Goban-Klas, 2011, pp. 41–42).

As J.W. Carey observes, communication is a symbolic process through which reality is produced, maintained, and transformed. It is a process rooted in everyday life, one that shapes how we perceive, interpret, and construct our understanding of reality and the world (Baran, 2023, p. 7).

The fundamental units of thought and emotion are signs – culturally developed and socially accepted forms of behaviour and their products, to which people assign specific meanings. These signs are associated with particular thoughts and feelings or are regarded as simplified representations of other people and their experiences, phenomena, or situations (Mrozowski, 2001, p. 15). It can be argued that the invention of the sign defined the human species as it enabled communication about things that are absent or not directly visible (Pisarek, 2008, p. 10).

The sender encodes the message into a material form, which is then decoded by the receiver. At any point, the receiver may choose to terminate communication with the sender. The quality of communication is closely linked to communicative competence, which is defined as the entirety of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that determine one's capacity to participate in information exchange – that is, acting as both sender and receiver of verbal and non-verbal messages (Mrozowski, 2001, p. 26).

Before the rise of mass media and the development of internet networks, mass communication was typically perceived as a one-way process. Traditional mass communication offered limited opportunities for feedback. In contrast, the emergence of advanced internet-based communication networks has introduced interactivity, thereby significantly expanding the possibilities for reciprocal exchange (Hanson, 2022, p. 6).

Historical analysis of the term

The first communication network was developed by the Catholic Church, which had established a reliable system for transmitting messages across Europe by the 12th century (Hanson, 2022, p. 25). In the mid-15th century, the advent of the printing press enabled the mass production of books and other publications, leading to significant cultural transformations. Books, magazines, newspapers, and other printed media became increasingly accessible. However, printed materials remained expensive until the introduction of the steam-powered printing press, which became widespread in the 19th century. This was followed by the emergence of recorded music, radio, film, and television. These forms of media enabled the commercial production of content that could be distributed to households quickly and at low cost (Hanson, 2022, p. 25).

For many years, communication theory focused primarily on the history, political orientation and freedom of the press. However, with the emergence of mass-circulation and sensationalist newspapers, scholarly attention shifted toward the press's impact on public consciousness and mass culture, its role in stimulating mass consumption, and its engagement with urgent urban issues such as juvenile delinquency.

This line of research interests was further developed when new forms of media arose, such as cinema and radio, and later television. This growing interest was reflected in the emergence of the term 'mass media', a neologism that became useful for advertising agencies, which regarded the press, radio, and television as effective channels for delivering messages to a mass audience (Goban-Klas, 2011, p. 45).

The concept of the culture industry, developed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, became a particularly influential approach to mass communication in the mid-20th century. According to the authors, "Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together". Moreover, "Films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimise the trash they intentionally produce" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, pp. 94–95). Of course, this critique was directed primarily at advanced capitalist societies, especially the United

States, and applied to the standardised, mass-produced media, which operated as an industry rather than as autonomous cultural forms. Any distinctions, such as those between A- and B-grade films or among different printed magazines,

do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organisation, and identification of consumers. Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 97).

According to Adorno,

the term 'mass media' shifts the emphasis toward something seemingly harmless, even though the issue at stake is not primarily the masses or the communication technologies themselves but the spirit that animates them. The culture industry exploits references to the masses in order to replicate, solidify, and reinforce their mentality, which is presumed to be fixed and unchanging. Its entire practice transfers the logic of profit to marketable products (Czapnik, 2014, p. 38).

Horkheimer and Adorno drew attention to a profoundly important issue which remains highly relevant in today's media landscape, which is marked by the proliferation of artificial intelligence-generated content and unprecedented levels of marketing-driven surveillance.

The more densely and completely its techniques duplicate empirical objects, the more easily it creates the illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in the cinema (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 99).

The authors emphasised what they viewed as the central function of media-based culture industries: maintaining the control wielded by the ruling elites over the masses, which is a deception on a grand scale, ultimately serving capitalist production. As they put it, the masses "have their aspirations. They insist unwaveringly on the ideology by which they are enslaved" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 106).

In the second half of the last century and the beginning of the present one, globalisation became a phenomenon of considerable importance, particularly in the realm of the media, where it was addressed, among others, by the theory of cultural imperialism. This theory was closely

linked to the process of decolonisation in the Third World, especially in Latin and South America, as well as in Africa.

The theory of cultural imperialism sought to explain the manifestations and consequences of the United States' dominance in mass communication since the interwar period. It is worth recalling that, in 1941, press magnate Henry Luce (head of the Time-Life conglomerate) proclaimed the arrival of the 'American Century'. In his vision, the new embodiment of power lay in the United States' capacity to control images and shape public opinion abroad.

It must be emphasised, however, that fears of the Americanisation of the media – and, by extension, of society itself – during the Cold War era were not limited to developing nations. These concerns were also felt across the Eastern Bloc, where anxiety over American cultural products such as music (initially jazz, later rock and roll) and Hollywood films became symbolic of broader ideological tensions. To some extent, these anxieties also persisted in post-socialist countries, where unprecedented openness to American mass culture led to noticeable resistance among many conservatives, particularly against the consumerist values promoted in American music, films, and television series. Over time, however, the global flow of media products became more balanced. Notable examples include the international success of Latin American productions (especially soap operas), South Korean cinema and K-pop, Japanese manga, and Turkish television dramas, all of which vary in artistic quality yet achieve considerable reach across global markets.

While it may have been accurate half a century ago to claim that, on a global scale, 'the media are American', such a statement today invites much greater scepticism. Even though American social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and X continue to enjoy worldwide popularity, the success of the Chinese platform TikTok cannot be overlooked. Moreover, the impact of media content – regardless of its origin – is far from straightforward, as will be discussed in subsequent sections.

As S.J. Baran (2023, p. 34) notes, today's media industries face a series of challenges that may fundamentally alter their relationship with audiences. Ownership concentration and media conglomeration risk reducing the number and diversity of voices accessible to increasingly fragmented audiences. These changes are largely driven by

convergence, i.e., the erosion of traditional distinctions between various forms of the media. Content once associated with a specific medium can now be delivered through a wide array of platforms, and platform-independent users – those who do not prioritise any single medium – appear largely satisfied with this arrangement.

As R. Luttrell and A.A. Wallace (2025, p. 16) explain, social media platforms use algorithms to curate content most likely to engage users, based on their previous interactions and preferences. While this strategy maximises user engagement, it tends to expose individuals to content aligned with their existing beliefs and attitudes. This has raised concerns about the role of social media platforms in fostering informed and diverse public discourse.

Discussion of the term

B. Dobek-Ostrowska offers a useful characterisation of mass communication that distinguishes it from other communication systems:

- the recipient engages only a limited number of senses – primarily sight and hearing – in the process of message reception;
- the impersonal nature of communication, wherein participants are isolated, unfamiliar with one another, and have no direct interaction;
- the presence of a gatekeeping function, also known as media selection. Mass communication requires the involvement of numerous individuals and a complex system of social organisation and institutions to transmit messages from the communicator to the audience across time and space;
- delayed feedback. Informational noise may disrupt the communication process, while the nature of mass media transmission inherently delays audience response (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2002, p. 144).

It is important to recognise the diverse understandings of the nature and functioning of the media across different socio-political systems. In capitalism – even in the case of non-commercial or public branches of the media – the dominant perspective frames the media in terms of market competition.. Under real socialism, however, as T. Kowalski aptly notes,

the economic dimension of the media was obscured. The media were ideologically driven, with unclear property rights, and were therefore perceived by audiences as “a unique category of cultural goods requiring state – or, more precisely, party-state – patronage and public funding” (Kowalski, 1998, p. 1).

As discussed in *Media i pieniądze (The media and Money)*, the media transform information – broadly defined – into a tangible product: an article, a television broadcast, a film, or an online post (Kowalski, 1998, p. 27). Although not always evident to the untrained eye, such products typically result from the collaborative efforts of many individuals, combining intellectual and physical labour in varying proportions. Media products occupy a unique position within the market for goods: media organisations produce prototypes that are subsequently reproduced:

The constant need to consume novelty ensures the continuity of media production, while simultaneously limiting the timeliness of content. In a sense, the media sustain themselves through the persistent demand for what is new (Kowalski, 1998, p. 29).

At this point, it is necessary to introduce the concept of media institutions. These include broadcasting entities (such as radio and television stations, video game producers, and print publishers), as well as organisations involved in media content production or in supporting broadcasters and publishers (e.g., advertising agencies, news agencies, journalism schools), and regulatory bodies tasked with overseeing the media’s operations (such as Poland’s National Broadcasting Council). The primary function of broadcasting institutions is to introduce messages into public circulation, thereby initiating and directing the process of mass communication (Mrozowski, 2001, p. 46).

As M. Mrozowski explains (2001, pp. 47–48), there are three main types of broadcasting institutions: the commercial media, the public media, and the non-commercial media. The commercial media are profit-driven, operate according to market principles, and are typically owned by private individuals, partnerships, or corporations. The public (state-funded) media fulfil a public service mission in the areas of culture, education, and information. They generally enjoy a degree of independence and often have guaranteed funding, usually in the form of licence fees. The non-commercial (non-profit) media are most often embedded

within broader organisational structures, such as religious institutions, trade unions, NGOs, or political parties.

It is also essential to examine how media outlets sustain themselves financially (Mrozowski, 2001, p. 51). The commercial media derive revenue from three key markets: the consumer market (e.g., cinema tickets, streaming service subscriptions), the advertising market (e.g., the sale of ad space or airtime), and the content market (e.g., the sale of completed programmes or production licences). While the non-commercial media may also access these revenue streams, they typically do so on a much smaller scale. Instead, they rely on funding from parent organisations, sponsorships, public fundraising, grants from government or municipal institutions, and other nonprofit sources. The public media are generally in a more secure financial position, benefiting from legally guaranteed funding (most often through state-collected licence fees and direct public subsidies). However, concerns arise when the majority of funding for the public media comes from advertising, as this may compromise their public service mission.

The advertising market holds immense and continually growing significance for most media outlets. In today's era of media convergence and multimedia integration, competition unfolds not only between individual media companies, but also among entire media sectors. The online media, search engines, and social media platforms play an increasingly dominant role in the advertising landscape, progressively capturing a substantial share of advertising budgets from companies and media agencies. The media remain essential to advertisers due to their ability to capture audience attention – a limited resource, particularly in terms of time (Kowalski, 1998, p. 35). Through communication channels, advertisers are able to deliver persuasive messages that transform readers, viewers, and listeners into consumers. Ultimately, the media do not merely sell advertising space or airtime: "In reality, the media offer access to their audiences, who are potential customers" (Kowalski, 1998, p. 35). Today, advertising is primarily targeted, often employing microtargeting techniques.

Since the early days of mass communication, the media have faced criticism – voiced from leftist, liberal, and conservative perspectives, including those rooted in religious motivations – accusing them of manipulating audiences, entire societies, and eventually global populations

numbering in the billions. These accusations are manifestly linked to the construction of a distorted representation of reality, the economy, and the principal social institutions, which are made to appear to the public as neutral entities working in the service of the common good. This line of reasoning is well illustrated by the argument developed by H.I. Schiller:

The mass media, too, are supposed to be neutral. Departures from even-handedness in news reportage are admitted but, the press assures us, result from human error and cannot be interpreted as flaws in the basically sound institutions of information dissemination. That the media (press, periodicals, radio, and television) are almost without exception business enterprises, receiving their revenues from commercial sales of time or space, seems to create no problems for those who defend the objectivity and integrity of the informational services (Schiller, 1973, p. 12).

The debate on the social influence of mass media has traditionally ranged between two extremes: belief in the all-powerful impact of the media (the 'hypodermic needle theory', based on simple behavioural conditioning, as demonstrated in Pavlov's experiments) and the assertion that the effects of the media are minimal, highly mediated, and filtered through a variety of intervening factors.

As T. Goban-Klas insightfully notes:

Both political and commercial interest in mass media was based on their easily observable appeal and broad social reach, taken as evidence of considerable social power. This was precisely how Vladimir Lenin articulated the significance of film when he wrote in 1920, "Cinema is the most important of all the arts". Similarly, Bulgarian communist Georgi Dimitrov described the press as "a great force". This view was shared not only by Hitler and his propaganda minister Goebbels, but also by leaders of the so-called free world (Goban-Klas, 2011, p. 45).

Various empirical studies have sought to demonstrate differing hypotheses – particularly through detailed examinations of the impact of violent imagery on viewers, especially minors – highlighting both the potentially beneficial and the alarmingly harmful effects of media exposure, particularly television. Many of these studies, however, are inconclusive. Closely tied to this is the issue of audience agency: whether media consumers are active or passive participants. One of the most influential frameworks in this context is the encoding/decoding theory developed by British cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall. Although

originally devised to analyse television programmes, this theory can be generalised to all forms of media communication.

Hall emphasises that media messages are created through signs generated by specific broadcasting institutions using defined technological infrastructures – a process he terms ‘encoding’. On the receiving end, decoding is carried out by audiences possessing varying degrees of media competence. The worldviews presented in television programmes are inherently ideological, responding to the needs of current economic, social, or cultural agendas. While broadcasters may strive for “perfectly transparent” communication, in reality, they engage in “systematically distorted communication” (Hall, 1993, p. 101).

Hall identifies three ways of decoding a television message (Hall, 1993, pp.101–103):

1. Dominant-hegemonic position (in other words, preferred) – this decoding fully aligns with the sender’s intended meaning;
2. Negotiated position – the recipients modify the message, filter it through their own experiences, beliefs, and social position. In other words, it is “a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements”;
3. Oppositional position – this involves the recipients rejecting the objectivity and neutrality of the sender’s encoding and actively seeking alternative interpretations.

Importantly, audiences may shift their interpretive position – sometimes instantaneously and unconsciously – in response to different “communicative events”. In some instances, viewers may not fully understand the literal, and especially the connotative, layers of a message. Hall’s encoding/decoding model seems to insightfully capture a certain degree of correspondence between message production and reception, though this correspondence can never be complete. Any full alignment would negate the agentive activity of the audience (Hall, 1993, pp. 100–101).

If we adopt the cultural studies approach, treating a message as a text – not merely as an informational conduit but an organised system of signs – then it is the reader who ultimately determines its meaning. In this sense, K. Popper’s remark that there is no single book, only as many books as there are readers, is apt, thus, “the further we move from the act of reading, the more firmly the text exists as our interpretation” (Mikułowski Pomorski, 2009, p. 39).

The 21st century has seen a marked increase in opportunities for ordinary people to appear in mass media, particularly television and the internet. For some scholars, this represents a visible sign of media democratisation. The media, once remote, exclusive, and admired from a distance – especially those involving film or television stars – have become increasingly accessible. This democratisation is said to result from the near-unlimited visibility of average individuals made possible by the digital revolution, which has opened the media space on an unprecedented scale. Reality shows and user-generated online content are frequently cited as examples of this shift. However, it may be more accurate to describe this not as democratisation but as a demotic turn, where ‘demotic’ refers to matters concerning ordinary people (Turner, 2010, p. 1). G. Turner emphasises that the idea of the demotic turn helps us

better understand the cultural function of a commercial media system that is more focused on the distribution of entertainment and the production of cultural identities than ever before (Turner, 2010, p. 6).

It is evident that:

Success in the content market – measured by the ability to attract a substantial audience (substantial in relative terms, that is, in relation to the medium’s core demographic) – creates the conditions for success in the advertising market (Kowalski, 1998, p. 37).

This raises doubts about the overly optimistic assumption that more diverse (in terms of identity) media representations necessarily lead to more democratic politics. Diversity – whether generated from the top down or bottom up – is not inherently democratic (Turner, 2010, p. 17). At first glance, it may simply be a strategy for expanding the commercial potential of the media: the more precisely the media can target specific audience segments (such as African Americans or LGBTQ+ communities), the more effective the associated marketing efforts become.

It is increasingly difficult to avoid the conclusion that the very concept of ‘mass media’ may need to be re-examined, reframed, or even fundamentally rethought. Ch. Rojek suggests that understanding the media as a ‘mediating apparatus’ is no longer adequate. Increasingly, the media – more specifically, the powerful corporations that own platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok – function in ways traditionally

attributed to the state. These entities have become, in effect, a source of power that no longer merely mediates between people and their interests but instead organises representations in service of its own interests (Turner, 2010, p. 20). It is plausible, then, that the ultimate aim of the media is power itself, and that ownership concentration in this sector is merely a means to that end. This power is global in scope: powerful media conglomerates have learned to commodify and market identity constructions detached from any particular social or cultural context (Turner, 2010, p. 25).

A defining feature of the internet-based media – especially social media, which have expanded rapidly since the late 20th century – is that they are saturated with narcissism and behaviours centred on the self. As M. Szpunar observes:

Dozens of applications serve many purposes, but above all they support the celebration of the self. More than any other medium, social media amplifies and sustains individuals' narcissistic tendencies, making self-presentation and carefully constructed self-image paramount. By intensifying the highly visual tendencies of contemporary culture, it becomes a source of a narcissism epidemic (Szpunar, 2016, p. 146).

Every day, millions of people attempt to convince others (and perhaps themselves) that they lead interesting lives. They strive to attract attention and gain popularity, despite presenting an artificial version of life on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (Szpunar, 2016, pp. 146–147). For this reason, social media platforms have become

forms of digital self-advertisement, enabling users to freely (and often falsely or exaggeratedly) construct their personal biographies, curate flattering photos, and display extensive "friend" lists – all designed to demonstrate their social appeal (Szpunar, 2016, pp. 147–148).

This trend appears to confirm the thesis of the demotic turn, as the promotion of individualistic narcissism directly enhances the media industry's capacity to market the self. This process has significantly increased the number of individuals whom the media can attract and transform into commercially viable products (Turner, 2010, p. 19).

At this point, as Szpunar suggests, we can refer to the concept introduced by Józef Tischner of the 'man in hiding' (*człowiek*

z kryjówki) – a person who fears both other people and the outside world and is afraid of “the truth about his inner self – his own fears, phobias, desires, and aggression”. As a result, he withdraws from himself and lives in hiding, avoiding others” (Szpunar, 2016, p. 157). The ‘man in hiding’ is a narcissistic individual, neurotically fearful of others and of himself. As Szpunar puts it, “He disturbs others with his emotions – with cold indifference, outbursts, excessive speech, and unjustified grievances” (Szpunar, 2016, p. 157).

As M. Castells notes, the diffusion of digital communication technologies has been faster than that of any previous technology. To reach 50 million users took airlines 64 years, automobiles 62 years, telephones 50 years, electricity 46 years, television 22 years, computers 14 years, mobile phones 12 years, and the internet 7 years. Facebook achieved this in just 4 years. In comparison, by 2023, ChatGPT reached 100 million users in only 2 months (Castells, 2024, p. 1).

R. Luttrell and A.W. Wallace observe that the digital space is participatory in nature. It enables us to initiate conversations in real time about what matters to us as members of society, using text, GIFs, or memes which allow us to express our point of view. These interactions have transformed mass media from a one-way to a two-way model of communication. As a participatory audience, we now have the opportunity to become citizen journalists, assuming roles both as gatekeepers and as content creators (Luttrell & Wallace, 2025, p. 11).

As M. Castells notes:

The appropriation of communication messages is ensured by corporate control over the networks of communication, and government control over the corporations, thus combining their technical and legal capacity to accumulate and distribute information selectively to targeted audiences. A digital society is characterised by a digital hypertext that is at the same time constantly produced and modified and constantly assessed, recombined, remixed, and redirected by the communicating actors. Under the conditions of digital information and communication, there is simultaneously an increasing centralisation of information and a decreasing monopoly over communication (Castells, 2024, p. 31).

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

Commercialised mass media, which serve social control by excessively satisfying (or, more often, actively fuelling) the narcissistic inclinations of audiences, may be contributing, through microtargeting, to the emergence of a quasi-caste system. Mass media also play a central role in the pervasive commercialisation of life: both life and death, ultimate concerns, and existential matters are increasingly commodified. The phenomenon of celebritisation has penetrated politics (with Donald J. Trump as a prime example), religion (treated as a spiritual service designed to deliver personal satisfaction, offered by numerous actors in a highly competitive market), and culture.

If we accept that communication entails the creation and shaping of human community – that is, the act of connecting – then, following J. Mikułowski Pomorski, we may observe that mass media sometimes serve purposes that diverge from social communication. It is worth remembering that connection may occur between sender and receiver or among receivers themselves. Many broadcasters tend to frame all of their informational activity as inherently important – aligning with agenda-setting theory – suggesting that news is published because it is objectively significant. In this way, broadcasters distance themselves from their audiences: “Broadcasters do not wish to build relationships with their audiences because they see themselves as mere messengers of the gods, nature, fate, or the spirit of history” (Mikułowski Pomorski, 2009, p. 39). This raises fundamental questions about the role of mass communication: whether the inventions of the mass press, radio, television, cinema, phonography, and the internet – which have radically reduced time and space as barriers to global information flow (Pisarek, 2008, p. 11) – truly contribute to human connection and understanding.

The next step in the evolution of mass communication, as sketched by W. Pisarek, would involve the ability to implant (“upload”) directly into the human brain – without the mediation of conventional signs (though still using them) – desirable knowledge from fields such as law, literature, history, and possibly even foreign languages. Of course, in both public and private life, we would continue to communicate using traditionally acquired signs, including those of our native language (...). Likewise, the capacity to acquire knowledge without symbolic

mediation (perhaps even “soul-to-soul”) would not eliminate the traditional methods of transmitting and receiving information through signs (Pisarek, 2008, p. 12).

Clearly, although mass communication is shaped to a significant extent by the technologies at our disposal, it would be a mistake to adopt a technologically deterministic view. While television undoubtedly had substantial entertainment potential from the outset, there are channels – particularly in Scandinavian countries – that have effectively served a public mission by, e.g., cultivating aesthetic sensibility and hosting debates on socially significant issues.

It now seems evident that the future of mass communication will, for the first time in human history, be determined on a truly global scale. It remains an open question whether the media will foster unity in diversity – a sense of community that honours even the smallest groups and every individual – or instead reinforce divisions and hostility. What is increasingly clear is that the future shape and role of the media will be decided by the outcomes of ongoing social, political, and economic struggles in the coming decades.

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Informative communication in light of the conceptualisation of the terms ‘communication’ and ‘information’

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Informative communication is the process of conveying information in an objective, precise, and measurable manner, free from persuasive, emotional, or manipulative intent. It integrates technological aspects (such as the automatisisation of data analysis, AI, and big data) with social dimensions (including education, administration, and science). The goal is to provide recipients with objective access to knowledge, which is necessary for rational decision-making.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: The concept of informative communication has evolved alongside the development of societies, from early oral and written forms of communication to the invention of printing and, ultimately, digital technologies. Each technological breakthrough has enriched the transmission of information, shaping social and economic structures in the process.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Today, informative communication faces significant challenges, including information overload, disinformation, and digital inequality. While personalisation algorithms enhance the efficiency of content delivery, they also risk creating ‘information bubbles’ and deepening social polarisation. Additionally, concerns persist regarding the accountability of digital platforms for the content they host and the ethical management of user data.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Key recommendations include, first, fostering media literacy to encourage critical engagement with information; second, implementing legal frameworks, such as the Digital Services Act, to enhance the accountability of digital platforms. Equally crucial is the promotion of global cooperation regarding data protection and the fight against disinformation. Ultimately, informative communication should be viewed as a dynamic process that demands an interdisciplinary approach that bridges technology, education, and ethics

Keywords: informative communication, disinformation, personalisation algorithms, digital regulations, neutrality of information

Definition of the term

With the rise of the internet, social media, and advanced data analysis systems, communication has entered a new era. It no longer serves only to disseminate information; it now also plays a crucial role in building social connections, fostering cooperation, and facilitating knowledge exchange. In the digital age, information and communication technologies (ICT) have transformed the ways in which information is collected, processed, and shared. Data transfer has become faster and communication methods have become more diverse, thus affecting numerous aspects of social life.

At the same time, new challenges have emerged linked to information overload, disinformation, and the difficulties in verifying sources. The widespread distribution of false content on social media, the manipulation of data through algorithms, and the growing difficulty of identifying reliable information make media literacy more essential than ever. In this context, informative communication – which refers to the process of shaping the reliable circulation of information in a digital society – plays a key role.

Although informative communication plays a crucial role in analysing contemporary communication practices, academic literature reveals a gap in defining this term, which is often conflated with the mere transmission of information, leading to terminological inconsistencies. To clarify the scope and usage of this term in the literature, a frequency analysis has been conducted to compare its occurrence with the more commonly used terms ‘communication’ and ‘information’. This analysis has also identified the thematic contexts in which the term appears and has examined differences in its application across Polish and English-language literature.

The study examined scientific publications from 1990 to 2025 available in the Google Scholar, Google Books, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. The search included the following key phrases in Polish sources: ‘komunikowanie informacyjne’, ‘komunikacja’, and ‘informacja’. In English-language sources, terms like ‘information communication’, ‘informative communication’, ‘communication’, and ‘information’ were used.

The analysis revealed that in the Polish-language literature, the term ‘komunikowanie informacyjne’ [‘informative communication’] appears

significantly less frequently in academic databases than 'komunikacja' ['communication'] and 'informacja' ['information'] and is primarily used in technological, bibliographic, and computer science contexts. In media and communication studies, its occurrence is sporadic and often linked to discussions on propaganda and political communication (Dobek-Ostrowska et al., 1997).

A similar pattern has emerged in English-language literature, where 'information communication' is rarely recognised as a distinct analytical category. In contrast, 'informative communication' appears more frequently, particularly in educational, technological, and social contexts, including discussions on propaganda, knowledge, and business communication. However, both terms remain marginal compared to the widespread use of 'communication' and 'information'.

The study has also highlighted not only the low frequency of 'komunikowanie informacyjne' in scientific databases but also its absence from Polish dictionaries, language corpora, lexicons, and glossaries of media terminology. This lack of formal recognition underscores the term's underdeveloped conceptualisation in academic literature and suggests the need for further theoretical refinement to establish it as an independent analytical category in communication research.

One challenge in defining 'informative communication' might lie in delineating the precise relationship between 'communication' and 'information'. Wendland (2012, p. 139) examines these relationships and critiques the transmission-informational approach to communication, arguing that reducing communication processes to mere information transfer can result in oversimplifications.

He identifies five possible types of relationships between 'communication' and 'information'. The first treats them as synonymous, overlooking their distinct characteristics. The second assumes their complete separation. The third establishes a hierarchy in which communication is positioned above information. The fourth highlights the expansiveness of information, treating it as a broader category that encompasses various forms of records and data, regardless of the communication process. The fifth assumes a partial overlap of both concepts at the semantic level.

This variety of perspectives on the relationships between communication and information highlights their dynamic interdependence,

making it difficult to precisely define 'informative communication'. To gain a deeper understanding of these relationships, it is essential to examine the historical evolution of these concepts in light of their original meanings. For this purpose, an etymological analysis has been conducted, offering insight into how communication and information have permeated each other and how their definitions have evolved over time in response to changing social and technological demands.

The first step in this analysis is to explore the origins of the term 'communication', which derives from the Latin *communicatio*. In its classical sense, *communicatio* meant 'mutual exchange between members of a community', 'making common', 'participation', and 'sharing'. Related terms such as *communis* ('general', 'common'), *communio* ('community'), and *communitas* ('society') highlight the fundamental function of communication as a tool for creating community and building social bonds. In modern times, the term's meaning expanded to include transmission and the message, particularly in the context of the development of communication infrastructure such as the postal system and telegraph. From the 17th century onward, the term 'communication' in Anglo-Saxon culture came to refer to both interpersonal processes and the technological aspects of data transmission. Today, the term integrates its original sense of community with modern needs related to the flow of information (Majewski, 2022).

The evolution of 'information' follows a similar trajectory. Its etymology traces back to the Latin *informare* (meaning 'to give shape' or 'to put into form'), which frequently referred to intellectual development or idea formation. The related term *informatio* originally referred to 'idea' or 'concept'. Historically, this term was understood as the process of imparting knowledge or gaining understanding (Mikułowski-Pomorski, 1988, p. 17). In medieval scholastic philosophy, 'information' was associated with intellectual formation, emphasising its active role, particularly in education and philosophy, where intellectual formation was the end goal. In the 20th century, with the development of telecommunications technology, the term 'information' acquired a more technical meaning. The introduction of concepts such as encoding and data processing provided new theoretical frameworks for the analysis of information.

Shannon and Weaver (1949) defined information as a measure of entropy reduction in data transmission, enabling its quantitative

analysis and driving advancements in information and digital technologies. These developments were pivotal in the rise of new industries, such as telecommunications and network services, which became fundamental to the realisation of McLuhan's concept of the global village.

The evolution of the term 'information' reveals that its meaning is shaped by not only technological advancements but also scientific and social perspectives. This raises questions about the role of 'informative communication' as a distinct concept, which has received far fewer definitions in Polish academic literature than the well-established terms 'communication' and 'information'. According to Robert Merton, as early as the 1950s there were already more than 160 definitions of 'communication' (Goban-Klas, 1999, p. 33), while 'information' has been defined in at least 21 different ways in the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences* (2017) alone. Compared to these extensively studied terms, 'informative communication' remains largely undefined.

Dobek-Ostrowska (2006) defines 'informative communication' as a neutral and precise process of conveying content without the intention of influencing recipients' attitudes or behaviours. Filipiak (2004) adopts a similar perspective, emphasising the importance of neutrality and the utility of the transmitted content. This perspective is particularly relevant in the digital era, where reliable and impartial information transfer underpins many interactions.

In English-language literature, the term 'informative communication' appears primarily in educational, technological, and social contexts. Rowan (2003, p. 432) describes it as a form of discourse whose aim is to "create awareness of new information or to deepen understanding of not-yet-comprehended material". Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) point to neutrality as a key characteristic of 'informative communication', emphasising the significance of presenting facts in a way that allows recipients to form their own conclusions. In the *Dictionary of Media and Communications*, Marcel Danesi (2009, pp. 45–50) defines 'communication' as the process of producing and exchanging messages through various means, such as signals, speech, gestures, or writing, while 'information' is defined as a measure of entropy, emphasising its role in mechanical transmission systems and downplaying its more complex functions in social processes; the category of 'information communication' is not identified.

These conceptions confirm the significance of neutral and precise messages in communication processes. Based on this understanding, 'informative communication' can be defined as the precise, neutral, and systematic exchange of information intended to support recipients' cognitive processes and enable informed decision-making. This process is characterised by the exclusion of persuasive and emotional influences and relies on technologies that ensure the reliability and objectivity of the message. 'Informative communication' encompasses both technological elements – such as big data, artificial intelligence, and automatised content analysis – and social dimensions related to education, knowledge management, and public administration.

Understanding the role of 'informative communication' requires situating it within classical communication models, which have evolved alongside digital technologies. Unlike mass or interpersonal communication, informative communication prioritises the precise and structured transmission of data, eliminating persuasion, emotional bias, and interpretative distortions. It is defined by its measurability and transparency, which together ensure the reliable exchange of knowledge and the effective management of content.

While 'information' is a set of data that can be stored, transmitted, and interpreted independently, 'informative communication' refers to structured information that is neutral and tailored to the cognitive and decision-making needs of its recipients. A key element of this process is the deliberate organisation and selection of content that is free from persuasive influence, subjective interpretation, or distortion. 'Informative communication' is not merely a neutral transfer of data but also involves hierarchising, selecting, and structuring information according to principles of reliability and cognitive usefulness. Unlike raw information, informative communication requires a conscious approach to the way in which information is presented and the context of its reception. This enables more effective content management in the digital environment, particularly in response to the challenges of disinformation and information overload.

This approach builds on the earlier definitions proposed by Dobek-Ostrowska and Filipiak, who emphasise neutrality and the absence of persuasive intent. However, it additionally incorporates the technological and decision-making dimensions, making it more applicable

to contemporary communication practices. This perspective reflects the increasing significance of big data analysis and message automation, extending Lasswell's model (1948) by integrating the impact of technology on every stage of the communication process: from the sender and content structure to the interpretation of messages by recipients.

Lasswell's model, a foundational framework for communication analysis, is structured around five key questions: "who?", "says what?", "in what channel?", "to whom?", and "with what effect?". Digital media and information technologies have significantly altered this framework, shifting it from a linear model to a multidirectional flow of information, often governed by algorithms and automated content selection systems. Incorporating 'informative communication' into this model enables the analysis of new mechanisms, such as automated filtering, content organisation, and selection, which redefine the roles of sender and receiver, transforming them into participants in a dynamic information system controlled by algorithms.

The concept of 'informative communication' builds on the work of Shannon and Weaver, suggesting that information in this process is not merely a resource for transfer (measurable and prone to interference) but also serves as a foundation for the social construction of knowledge, expanding the model to include aspects of its selection and organisation.

Today, information systems go beyond simply minimising communication disruptions; they actively shape the content of the message. In this context, 'informative communication' as an analytical category offers valuable insights into how algorithms influence the reliability and credibility of information, which is essential in an era characterised by algorithmisation and dynamic shifts in content circulation.

Historical analysis of the term

The concept of informative communication has evolved in tandem with the development of societies, beginning with the earliest forms of communication, such as speech and gestures, progressing through the invention of writing, and advancing to digital technologies. As civilisation and technology advanced, the need for effective information transfer

became increasingly important, leading to the emergence of various communication forms, including informative communication. Analysing its historical development offers valuable insight into its role in shaping modern societies and information systems.

In early human societies, speech, gestures, and symbols were the primary tools of communication, facilitating information exchange within small groups. The invention of writing – cuneiform in Mesopotamia, hieroglyphics in Egypt, and the Phoenician alphabet – was a major breakthrough in communication history. Writing enabled the recording and transmission of information across distances and between different communities, which initiated the process of the systematisation and organisation of knowledge.

Ancient Greece and Rome saw the emergence of more complex and formalised forms of communication. Aristotle, one of Greece's most influential philosophers, laid the foundations of rhetoric, shaping the principles of argumentation and influencing both interpersonal and public discourse. Rhetoric not only shaped the methods of argumentation but also functioned as a tool of power, allowing influence over social and political decisions. In Rome, public notice boards such as the *Acta Diurna* functioned as an early prototype of structured informative communication, offering a formalised way to disseminate information in public spaces.

A further breakthrough came in the 15th century with the invention of the printing press, which revolutionised access to information on a global scale. The mass production of books and printed materials significantly contributed to Europe's intellectual and cultural development, accelerating the dissemination of knowledge and ideas.

The advancement of communication technology accelerated in the 18th and 19th centuries with the invention of the telegraph and telephone, both of which revolutionised the transfer of information, significantly enhancing the speed and efficiency of communication. The telegraph enabled near-instantaneous messaging over long distances, while the telephone introduced direct audio exchange. These innovations played a crucial role in facilitating interactions between individuals and institutions.

The next major leap came with the invention of radio and television, which expanded informative communication to a mass scale. Electronic media became central to shaping public opinion, raising ethical concerns about broadcasters' responsibility for the content they

disseminated. While the electronic media of the 20th century revolutionised mass communication, the emergence of the internet in the 1990s ushered in a new age of informative communication, characterised by global reach and instantaneous data exchange. Manuel Castells (1996) emphasises that the flow of information in digital networks has become the primary force shaping modern societies and influencing socio-economic structures and the mechanisms of political power. The internet has fundamentally transformed access to information, facilitating the democratisation of knowledge and unrestricted access to information, while simultaneously exacerbating issues related to disinformation and content manipulation.

In the 21st century, social media, big data, and artificial intelligence have introduced both new opportunities and unprecedented challenges in the field of informative communication. Content personalisation algorithms, language recognition technologies, and automated information management systems are reshaping traditional sender-receiver dynamics. At the same time, these increasing threats encourage deeper reflection on the ethical dimensions of contemporary communication, especially regarding disinformation, social polarisation, and the potential abuses of control over content flow.

The evolution of informative communication reflects not only technological advancements but also shifts in social and cultural norms. Each breakthrough in communication has transformed not just the technical aspects of information transmission but also fundamental values such as truth, justice, and equitable access to knowledge. This raises critical questions about the influence of emerging technologies on power structures and ethical considerations in interpersonal interactions. Specifically, it is essential to assess whether tools like content personalisation algorithms and automated information management systems contribute to social equality or, conversely, reinforce existing disparities and biases.

Discussion of the term

Can informative communication, with its growing role in the digital world, remain both effective and ethical? Is it possible to effectively combat disinformation in a reality dominated by algorithms? What values

should guide the development of informative communication? Answers to these questions have become essential in the face of contemporary challenges, where digital technology positions informative communication at the heart of global and social issues. One pressing challenge is maintaining a balance between the increasing amount of data available and people's ability to process it effectively. This, in turn, raises the question of how to ensure clear and concise communication in an era of information overload.

In the digital age, access to information is virtually limitless, leading to information overload and, simultaneously, a greater need for skills in critical thinking and source verification. However, information overload is not just a matter of quantity as it also concerns the quality of the available content. One of the most frequently discussed problems within informative communication today is disinformation, which has grown in importance with the rise of social media. Fake news spreads faster than factual content, with serious consequences for democracy, public health, and social trust. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this issue, demonstrating how the uncontrolled spread of false information can endanger people's health and lives. This raises questions about the responsibility of digital platforms in counteracting disinformation and their role in ensuring the reliability of the content they share.

In response to the challenges posed by disinformation, many countries have implemented legal regulations aimed at limiting the spread of false information and increasing the accountability of digital platforms for the content they publish. The European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA) is one such example, mandating content-monitoring mechanisms and obligating large online platforms to take action against disinformation. Individual countries are also introducing additional measures. In France, for instance, digital platforms must respond promptly to reports of fake news, while companies in Germany face heavy fines if they fail to remove harmful content within a designated timeframe.

Although legal regulations can effectively curb disinformation, another significant challenge of the digital age is digital exclusion, which exacerbates existing social inequalities. Despite the rapid development of technology in many regions worldwide, including rural areas of developed countries, internet access remains limited in certain parts of the world. This lack of access makes it difficult to use public services, obtain

education, and participate in the labour market, further deepening socio-economic disparities. In Poland, for example, data from the Public Opinion Research Centre (2024) reveals that only about half of people aged 65–74 use the internet, and the percentage drops to just a quarter for those over 75, indicating that seniors are particularly vulnerable to digital marginalisation.

In addition to the problem of digital exclusion, there are significant risks associated with the excessive personalisation of content by algorithms which influence how information is received and interpreted. Pariser (2011) highlights the phenomenon of filter bubbles, which limit the diversity of perspectives, deepen social polarisation, and undermine the quality of public discourse. These filter bubbles occur when algorithms selectively present content based on users' previous preferences, isolating them from alternative viewpoints and narrowing the range of available opinions. This, in turn, makes constructive social dialogue difficult and can, over time, weaken the very foundations of democracy. Deliberative democracy, which relies on open debate and the exchange of ideas, requires access to diverse sources of information that foster the development of an informed civil society, whose members draw from reliable data.

The phenomenon of content personalisation, which exacerbates the mechanisms of filter bubbles, is also tightly linked to privacy and data security concerns. In response to the risks posed by excessive personalisation and the monitoring of user activity, educational initiatives focused on personal data protection are becoming increasingly important. For example, Finland has implemented educational programmes targeted at various social groups to promote understanding of personal data protection. These efforts complement EU regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which fosters transparency in data management and gives users greater control over their privacy.

Beyond educational and regulatory efforts, global technology corporations like Google and Meta play a crucial role in shaping the digital ecosystem. These platforms control the flow of information and manage the data of billions of users worldwide. While these platforms facilitate the rapid exchange of content, they also raise concerns about the monopolisation of knowledge and limited access to independent sources of information. Algorithms that personalise content can result in

selective information provision, fostering social polarisation and hindering constructive public discourse.

However, the influence of these platforms extends far beyond data management as their technologies also profoundly impact how people relate to one another and perceive their identities. Automation, algorithms, and big data, while offering unprecedented opportunities in communication and information analysis, can also contribute to the dehumanisation of interpersonal interactions. Relationships built in a digital space often lose their empathetic dimension, which can lead to weakening social bonds and a growing sense of alienation.

In the age of pervasive digital technologies, the collection and processing of personal data raises questions about the boundaries of privacy and the responsibilities of institutions that manage such data. Global corporations must be held accountable for their data management practices, with clearly defined limits on their scope of activities, especially in light of current regulations such as GDPR in the European Union. While GDPR represents a step toward greater user protection, its effectiveness relies on strict enforcement of regulations and increased user awareness of privacy rights. Furthermore, clear boundaries must be established for digital platforms' responsibilities to prevent situations in which the monopolisation of information leads to violations of fundamental individual rights.

The responsibility of digital platforms for managing personal data is closely tied to the need to adopt universal values, such as equality and fairness in access to information. In an information society, the question arises of which values should guide the global management of data. Responsible technology implementation must address ethical dilemmas concerning the potential monopolisation of knowledge by global corporations and the digital marginalisation of certain social groups.

At the same time, the growing reliance on information technologies calls for deeper reflection on their impact on individual well-being. Phenomena such as digital marginalisation are closely tied to the social and emotional pressures arising from the constant need to stay connected. Issues like FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and information overload are increasingly affecting quality of life, leading to heightened stress and cognitive fatigue. As a result, strategies for managing time spent online and promoting healthy technology habits must become an essential part of public policy.

These challenges, which span both global and individual technological concerns, reveal the complexity of the process of informative communication. Will the rise of artificial intelligence in informative communication amplify or alleviate existing social inequalities? This remains an open question, urging reflection on the path we are taking as a global society in the era of digital transformation. Addressing these dilemmas requires a blend of interdisciplinary research, international cooperation, and investment in media literacy, which together foster critical thinking and ensure the reliability of information sources.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of informative communication requires a multifaceted approach that considers its role in the information society, its technological foundations, and its socio-cultural consequences. Informative communication not only shapes social processes but also plays a key role in the functioning of contemporary communities.

Among the main challenges related to informative communication is the issue of ensuring equal access to information, which is a fundamental condition for social justice and building cohesion within society. The information ecosystem requires concerted efforts to combat disinformation, digital exclusion, and privacy violations, which is achievable only through broad technological, educational, and regulatory collaboration. Unequal access to information leads to the marginalisation of certain groups and weakens social bonds, which, in the long run, may contribute to growing social divisions and the deepening of inequalities.

To effectively counter these threats, media literacy initiatives must be intensified to promote information competence and critical thinking. It is also crucial to cultivate the ability to verify information sources and use digital media in a conscious way. Educational programmes should target not only children and young people but also adults, especially the elderly, who often face difficulties in adapting to the rapidly evolving digital world.

Alongside educational initiatives, it is essential to ensure equal access to technology through investments in the development of internet

infrastructure, particularly in rural and underdeveloped regions. Expanding telecommunications infrastructure is a cornerstone for reducing digital exclusion and enhancing social cohesion.

In addition to educational and investment efforts, legal regulations that foster a level playing field in the digital environment are equally vital. International cooperation, such as the implementation of EU standards like the Digital Services Act (DSA), can help combat disinformation and hold online platforms accountable for the content they host. An integrated approach, combining the efforts of government institutions, the private sector, and non-governmental organisations, forms the foundation for effective management of information challenges.

However, it should be emphasised that legal regulations and international cooperation alone are insufficient if they do not address the ethical dimensions of informative communication. Reflecting on this process involves key issues such as protecting human rights, ensuring accountability for published content, and defining the ethical boundaries of technology's influence on interpersonal relationships. Challenges like the dehumanisation of communication, information burnout, and privacy erosion require in-depth analysis and the development of strategies to support mental well-being and foster a sense of security in the digital environment.

Informative communication is a dynamic, multidimensional process, whose effectiveness hinges on the seamless integration of technology, education, and cross-sectoral collaboration. The approach outlined in this article facilitates a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in modern communication. Responsible information management, support for media literacy, and the creation of an equitable system of access to technology are fundamental pillars in mitigating the risks associated with the information ecosystem.

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Persuasive communication

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Persuasion plays a fundamental role in shaping behaviours, fostering appropriate attitudes and values, and building awareness of the principles of cooperation and effective communication. These are key principles in the existence of social groups and communities. In this context, persuasive communication is understood as an ethical form of influence, distinct from manipulation, which is regarded as an immoral means of control in both interpersonal and institutional relationships.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: A historical perspective on persuasion involves analysing the works of numerous social science and humanities scholars, as well as drawing insights from practical applications. Persuasion, a phenomenon dating back to antiquity, is now central to promotional and image-driven communication, including advertising, branding, public relations, politics, business, and social and media interactions.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Literature on the subject categorises persuasion into three primary types. Persuasion, understood as influence – closely aligned with negotiation – aims to achieve mutual agreement among all participants in the communication process. Propaganda focuses on convincing the audience of the sender's ideas and viewpoints. Agitation involves the implementation of the sender's assumptions and intentions, which can, at times, be unethical.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Persuasive communication is a vital skill in interpersonal

interactions, decision-making, attitude negotiation, and community-building based on shared values. The ability to communicate effectively facilitates collective action and decision-making at the community level, while respecting individual identity.

Keywords: communication, manipulation, persuasion, influencing, advertising

Definition of the term

The starting point for exploring persuasive communication is the assumption that, throughout human development, people have employed various methods of inducement, conviction, and influence, drawing on their intellectual and emotional resources as their personal potential.

The widely used term 'persuasive communication' encompasses both the space of social interactions and the omnipresent media. Analysis of this phenomenon reveals not only principles and strategies of influence that have been known for centuries, but also emerging trends and techniques. Persuasive communication is inherently linked to the concept of persuasion itself, with many scholars even treating the two as synonymous (Osika, 2005, p. 2). At its core, persuasive communication seeks to influence the recipient's behaviour, guiding decision-making and, over time, shaping attitudes and values. To achieve this, the sender employs specific strategies and mechanisms of effective persuasion. However, the recipient's response remains voluntary. While the sender undoubtedly benefits from the act of persuasion, whether the recipient also gains is dependent on various factors. In some cases, the recipient may benefit, even if the advantage is not immediately apparent, such as in educational settings, where a parent encourages a child to adopt healthy habits (e.g., "Put on your cap so you don't get sick"). Advertising offers another example, where the perceived benefit to the recipient is more debatable. Persuasion does not always yield unequivocally positive outcomes for consumers of products or services, even though marketing messages often suggest mutual benefit.

Persuasive communication has been defined in various ways. Philip Zimbardo describes it as deliberate efforts to change other people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours by presenting arguments that support a specific agenda (Zimbardo, 1997, p. 675).

The Latin noun *persuasio* has both a verbal (active) dimension (to persuade, to reassure) and a nominal one (belief, opinion, superstition, gentleness), while the verb *persuadere* encompasses meanings such as convincing, coaxing, and even charming. Persuasive communication integrates intellectual, emotional, and moral elements, evaluated both cognitively and in relation to emotional responses. However, persuasion is not a monologue but an interactive process that culminates in the

adoption of a particular belief. In *The Psychology of Attitude Change and Social Influence*, Zimbardo and Leippe (1997, p. 127) explain that persuasion

consists of presenting arguments and facts, reasoning, drawing conclusions, and spelling out the positive results of a recommended course of action – all in the hope of convincing an audience to pursue that course of action. (...) Persuasion (...) is a method of influence that begins with changing beliefs and knowledge: the cognitive component of the attitude system. Persuasive messages present information aimed at changing beliefs (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991, p. 127)

and these, in turn, lead to changes in attitudes. Importantly, persuasive communication differs from propaganda. Scholars such as Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson argue that while propaganda exploits human prejudices and emotions to align the recipient with the sender's perspective, persuasion invites discussion and debate, allowing individuals to make an informed decision for or against a given position (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001).

Researchers in social communication and media studies as well as related disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and ethics identify three fundamental principles of persuasive communication. The first involves recognising social behaviours, i.e., the mechanisms that govern human interaction. The second principle entails an understanding of cognitive processes, i.e., the various ways in which individuals acquire and process information and knowledge about the world, which serve as the foundation for decision-making. These decisions are influenced not only by the quantity of available data but also by personal value systems and past experiences. The third principle pertains to the affective sphere, recognising that persuasive communication is driven by emotions and motivation; thus, it can reinforce, strengthen, or weaken existing behaviours as well as shape new behaviours and decision-making processes.

While informative communication primarily seeks to transmit information, persuasive communication aims to confirm, reinforce, or weaken behaviours and attitudes. This often involves modifying existing behaviour, but persuasion shapes entirely new attitudes in some cases, which is particularly evident in the first experiences of children and adolescents. Unlike purely informational messages, which aim to spread facts, opinions, knowledge, ideas, and values without the

intent to influence behaviours or attitudes, persuasion is not about conveying content neutrally and objectively but is inherently focused on actively influencing the recipient. Both influence and persuasion are integral to human behaviours and interactions. However, influence has a broader scope, encompassing all behavioural, cognitive, and emotional effects on an individual. This is further supported by research from the authors of *The Psychology of Attitude Change and Social Influence*, who broaden the concept of influence to encompass actions that the targeted individual may not even be aware of (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). As a result, influence can overlap with manipulation.

Within both information transmission and persuasion, an informed recipient can easily recognise the process because its intent is not concealed from him. This key distinction sets both concepts apart from manipulation. In manipulative communication, the recipient remains unaware that the sender is influencing their thoughts and decisions or that the sender is advancing their own interests at the recipient's expense. While manipulation is inherently unethical, persuasion remains an axiologically neutral concept.

Another issue in the scientific reflection on communication is diagnosing the ultimate goal of the entire communication process. Walery Pisarek addressed this topic, highlighting the difficulty of drawing a clear distinction between strictly informative and persuasive influence in communication practice. A well-known classification by Jonathan Lazar identifies three types of communication based on their objectives: informative communication aims to increase awareness and knowledge; persuasive communication seeks to develop new attitudes or modify existing ones; and propaganda is designed to provoke specific behaviours (Goban-Klas, 2000, pp. 56–57). However, since the process of message transmission, with its intended meaning, is not identical to the process of message reception, the nature of a message can be fluid. Within social communication and media studies, most contemporary communication models assume that meaning is not simply decoded by the audience but actively negotiated. While persuasive intent is rarely mistaken for purely informative content, scholars often emphasise that persuasion is inherent in all forms of social and media-mediated communication.

In this context, Iwona Hofman has raised an important question in the title of one of her articles: *Czy istnieje jeszcze informacja dziennikarska?*

[*Does journalistic information still exist?*] (Hofman, 2009, pp. 13–23). In subsequent years, her research expanded to explore the responsibilities of communicators within qualitative journalism, noting that persuasive communication has not only dominated political marketing, public relations (Tworzydło & Olędzki, 2008), advertising, and brand communication (Cymanow-Sosin, 2020) but has also more broadly permeated all areas of social communication and the media.

Historical analysis of the term

The theoretical and research approaches to persuasive communication are primarily rooted in the humanities and social sciences. Given its goal of influencing people and their behaviour, persuasion has broad practical applications and has been extensively studied by pragmatists, who examine the relationship between signs and their interpreters in the context of use. Persuasion, i.e., the art of convincing others to embrace one's viewpoint, first recognised in antiquity, has since been acknowledged as a vital skill in logic, rhetoric, and eristics.

The history of persuasive communication traces back to humanity's earliest communicative exchanges, where individuals sought to influence others to recognise and adopt their viewpoints. Across the civilisations of the Far East, as well as in Greek and Latin cultures, mediation practices emerged as tools for conflict resolution, alongside the evolving art of argumentation in philosophical discourse. Examples include the legacy of ancient Greece in the 5th century BC, particularly the works of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Their exploration of ideas and values was rooted in logical argumentation, which later became a cornerstone of persuasive communication theory. Another key aspect of this tradition was its practical application referred to as the art of rhetoric and eristics. A prime example is *De Oratore (On the Orator)*, written by Cicero in the 1st century BC. Philosophers, ethicists, and rhetoric experts emphasised that the ability to persuade others toward virtuous actions was a crucial ethical skill. However, they also recognised that similar techniques could be wielded for manipulation. Scholars of the rhetorical tradition further noted that language appeals to three fundamental aspects of human nature: intellect, emotions, and will.

Initially, persuasive communication was primarily associated with the use of words, i.e., a linguistic system and a wide range of stylistic devices, such as rhetorical figures and syntactic structures. These elements not only conveyed thoughts and emotions but also shaped context and fostered a connection between the persuader and the audience. The strategic use of rhetorical techniques, whether to create emotional resonance or aesthetic impact, served a single purpose: convincing others of one's arguments, ideas, or values.

In antiquity, persuasive communication was a prime example of rhetorical speech, understood as a mode of expression that incorporated a specific use of structure (syntax), style, and emotional tone. The most prominent forms of this speech included:

- epideictic speech, delivered to honour or criticise individuals during significant events and ceremonies, either through praise or condemnation,
- deliberative speech, designed to influence opinions and guide decision-making about future actions,
- judicial speech, centred on evaluating the morality of an event or person and anticipating future consequences.

Rhetorical speech serves as an example of persuasive communication, illustrating that this form of discourse involves three essential components:

- *logos*, which appeals to logical reasoning and argumentation, influencing the audience's intellect;
- *pathos*, which taps into emotions, aiming to engage the audience's senses and make the message personally meaningful;
- *ethos*, which draws on the speaker's credibility, highlighting trustworthiness and authority through the power of words. It is important to note here that a lack of credibility can result in what is known as the 'boomerang effect', i.e., an outcome that runs counter to the speaker's intended purpose (Wojciszke, 2004, p. 219).

The aim of rhetorical speech was not only to persuade but also to foster enduring relationships with the audience. To achieve this, the speaker needed to:

- understand the listeners' character;
- select the appropriate method (adapting the style and persuasive techniques as needed);

- win the listeners over (establishing trust and adjusting to the context).

A historical analysis of persuasive communication demonstrates its pivotal role in shaping major social events (such as heraldic, political, and military speeches, appeals, and protests) that have significantly impacted history (O’Keefe, 2002). This influence arises from the symbolic nature of persuasion, which is rooted in the effective use of words and rhetoric (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1997).

Throughout history, persuasive communication has evolved dynamically across various fields, playing a particularly crucial role in politics, diplomacy, and business. Today, its significance in mediated communication is fundamental, as social and media communication rely heavily on creating ideas, reinforcing opinions and beliefs, and encouraging specific behaviours.

Examining persuasion from social and communicative perspectives allows for a temporal analysis of the phenomenon. This approach reveals both the enduring principles and strategies that guide persuasive messages, as well as emerging trends driven by the evolution of language and media.

Today, persuasion is a pervasive phenomenon not only within promotional and image-focused communication, although it does play a key role in its advertising, branding, and public relations branches. Effective advertising no longer relies solely on the traditional methods of persuasion understood as influence but instead makes use of propaganda and agitation. This is achieved through the use of suggestive slogans, powerful imagery, creative thought combinations, and social engineering tricks. The contemporary paradigm of advertising persuasion is based on indirect messaging, which not so much delivers information but evokes associations and utilises symbols to trigger those associations. As demonstrated in both empirical research and academic discourse, such as *Influence: Science and Practice* (Cialdini, 2001), advertising is closely linked to the concept of argumentation, understood as a statement or event used to confirm or challenge a specific thesis. Among the various forms of argumentation known in rhetoric and eristics – such as logical argumentation (based on induction, deduction, or analogy) and factual argumentation (based on referring to data, experience, or knowledge) – the most frequently used in advertising are argumentation

that appeals to authority and, most notably, emotional argumentation, which appeals to feelings, beliefs, or ambitions. As such, this element of advertising in which argumentation is employed becomes a kind of advertising *punctum*, capable of making a strong impact in today's visual advertising.

In this context, argumentation also carries persuasive implications as it captures and focuses the audience's attention, facilitating the adoption and anchoring of the message, making it a powerful tool for persuasion. In line with the principles of the functioning of cognitive processes, emotional arguments appear to be particularly effective (Cymanow-Sosin, 2020, p. 40).

Discussion of the term

The pervasiveness of persuasive communication was diagnosed by Walery Pisarek. In 2014, drawing from his extensive research, he published the following insight:

I have long been firmly convinced that conscious communication is always persuasion. In the past, to avoid provoking protests from listeners or readers, I would first say: "most often" or later add: "almost always". Today, I have the courage to state unequivocally that conscious communication is always persuasion. Ultimately, I can add, virtually always. From the cry of an infant demanding something to suck on, to the dying person's plea for God's mercy. Persuasive communication, aimed at gaining supporters and eliminating competitors and opponents, operates on three levels: symbols, images, and narratives (Pisarek, 2014, p. 10).

Recognising the dominant role of persuasive communication across various spheres of social and media life also serves as the foundation for the book *Perswazyjność w komunikacji wizerunkowej i języku* [*Persuasiveness in Image Communication and Language*]. In this work, the central issue is examined within the context of building media literacy, defined as

the ability to correctly interpret media messages and those emerging from direct interpersonal interactions as well as competences in communication (Cymanow-Sosin, 2020, p. 13).

To better understand this phenomenon, it is worth referring to the three main types of persuasive communication, categorised by their intended purpose, as described by Mirosław Korolka in his *Sztuka retoryki* [*The Art of Rhetoric*] (Warszawa, 1998, p. 34–35). He calls the first *convincing persuasion* [*perswazja przekonująca*], which seeks to prove the validity of assumptions, and the truth of the facts presented. This form of communication is based on honest premises, reliably obtained information, and the belief that both the sender and recipient are active participants in the communicative process. The second type is what he calls *persuasive persuasion* [*perswazja nakłaniająca*], often referred to as propaganda. Importantly, although today the term ‘propaganda’ carries a negative connotation, in the past it was neutral, simply referring to the promotion of an idea. This type of persuasion seeks to attract others to one’s way of thinking and to promote such ideas and values that would gain the largest possible group of supporters by appealing to their intellect and emotions. The final type is what he calls *stimulating persuasion* [*perswazja stymulująca*], or agitation, which aims to win over individuals or groups to adopt a specific idea or value, so that their beliefs align with and support a particular view, idea, or cause.

The long-term effectiveness of persuasive communication depends on a combination of factors, including:

- accurately identifying and defining the target audience of the message, considering key factors such as human preferences, needs, and values from the outset of message creation;
- striking a balance between logical arguments and emotional appeals to effectively engage the audience;
- incorporating relevant examples and evidence to reinforce the main points and strengthen the message;
- leveraging the authority of a trusted figure to enhance the credibility of the message;
- referencing undeniable material and intellectual sources to support the message.

Persuasive communication has a broad scope of influence across multiple domains. It plays a crucial role in negotiations (the social aspect), in business (the marketing aspect), and in other areas, including the spiritual realm.

In the world of the media, the intrinsic difficulties of communications are often exacerbated by ideology, the desire for profit and political control, rivalry and conflicts between groups, and other social evils. Moral values and principles apply also to the media (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005, point 416).

Regardless of the specific objective, persuasion strategies generally fall into three main categories:

- the narrative approach – capturing the audience’s attention by telling stories rooted in values, a technique commonly referred to today as storytelling;
- the rhetorical approach – using rhetorical devices (e.g., metaphors, metonymy, and hyperbole) and techniques (e.g., rhetorical questions and understatements) that evoke emotional responses;
- the motivational approach – making a direct appeal to the audience to take action, often referred to as a call to action.

Persuasive communication employs three primary techniques to influence the audience:

- appealing to the audience to adopt a specific position in order to take action;
- suggesting desired interpretations and evaluations;
- providing logical justifications for the validity of the presented views (Lakomy & Lakomy, 2016).

The core principles of persuasive communication involve clearly defining the objective and expected outcomes of the communication process; selecting an appropriate strategy (whether based on logical argumentation, emotional appeal, or a combination of both); tailoring the approach to the audience’s attitudes and behaviour patterns; using clear and understandable language (ensuring clarity of reasoning); applying one of the motivational systems; building credibility to win the audience’s trust in both the communicator and the message (an attractive and cohesive message); and, when necessary, negotiating and countering opposing arguments.

Robert Cialdini, one of the most recognised theorists in the field of persuasion, identified six key principles of influence (Cialdini, 2001). These include the following:

- the principle of reciprocity, which suggests that people are more likely to comply with requests from those who have previously done them a favour or yielded (compromised) on some issue;

- the principle of social proof, which implies that individuals tend to conform to behaviours or requests that align with what others think or do;
- the principle of liking, which indicates that people are more inclined to agree with those they find likable;
- the principle of authority, which suggests that individuals are more likely to comply with figures they perceive as authoritative;
- the principle of commitment and consistency, which posits that people are more likely to agree with requests that align with their own existing beliefs;
- the principle of scarcity, which claims that people place greater value on things that are difficult to obtain.

Cialdini also refers to the *halo effect*, which is a cognitive bias in which people tend to attribute additional positive traits to attractive individuals. This effect extends beyond physical appearance and can also apply to similar behaviours and beliefs (Cialdini, 2001, pp. 141).

Persuasive communication, as defined by Zimbardo, Leippe, and McGuire, can be viewed as a process aimed at achieving effectiveness, which unfolds in several stages. A key factor in the success of persuasive messages is the understanding that persuasion follows a sequence of stages, including:

- exposition, i.e., presenting the message;
- overcoming informational noise, ensuring that the message stands out amid competing stimuli (the sphere of attention processes);
- reaching the recipient (understanding the message);
- the recipient accepting the message and integrating it into their own belief system (accepting the sender's arguments);
- reinforcing the pattern within the realm of endorsed values (by maintaining the suggested attitude or value, or shifting to a new perspective);
- translating the mental shift into tangible behaviour as a confirmation of attitude change (Wojciszke, 2004, p. 213).

In the context of marketing and advertising, these stages are represented by the AIDA decision-making process model (and its subsequent modifications), which stands for A – attention, I – interest, D – desire, and A – Action. Later research also incorporated customer loyalty and engagement into this framework.

The most significant factors that hinder the effectiveness of persuasive communication include:

- presenting a message that deviates too far from the recipient's established attitude;
- failing to reference the recipient's values;
- the psychological inability to accept the persuader's views, often due to a lack of credibility.

The mechanisms that enhance the effectiveness of persuasion encompass clearly defining the action's goal and demonstrating the benefits for the audience; providing evidence that refers to these goals and the reasoning behind the message; offering persuasive content as a set of options for the audience to consider; using motivating language to stimulate emotions; and ensuring the message is credible, presented attractively, and clearly concludes with actionable takeaways.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

Today, persuasive communication is continuously evolving, driven by advanced technologies and new media, particularly social media. Users leverage strategies such as branding, online reputation management, and relationship-building, all of which are increasingly personalised and tailored to the individual preferences of the audience.

The scope of persuasive communication is still most commonly linked to advertising and public relations, where persuasion often relies on emotional appeals or a combination of cognitive and emotional elements (central and peripheral persuasion strategies). Richard Petty and John Cacioppo's well-known elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion, which is a dual process theory describing the change of attitudes, explains this dynamic. According to the theory, there are two pathways to attitude change:

- central strategy (based on the rational component of an attitude and on logical argumentation),
- peripheral strategy (based on emotional elements, superficial evaluations, attractiveness, message connotations, and heuristics in processing information). According to Cymanow-Sosin,

[t]he authors of *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change* have distinguished between the central persuasion technique, which involves logical reasoning, and the peripheral strategy, which is based on our emotions. As their research shows, even when recipients believe they are immune to emotional stimuli, their lack of knowledge about specific persuasive tactics can still make them susceptible to influence (Cymanow-Sosin, 2020, p. 40).

This also ties into the cognitive response model proposed by Greenwald and Petty, which suggests that a change in attitude depends on the recipient's favourability toward the message and the number of cognitive responses it triggers. The greater the number of positive responses, the stronger the persuasive impact (Wojciszke, 2004, pp. 214–215).

Persuasive communication in social contexts holds much greater significance and is deeply intertwined with the rapid development of media and remote communication technologies. Researchers examining this sphere of communication highlight its application not only in direct interactions between individuals but also, more importantly, in media-mediated exchanges. This has far-reaching relational implications, encompassing both existential and spiritual dimensions.

The very rapid expansion in ways and means of communication “in real time”, such as those offered by information technology, the extraordinary advances in computer technology, the increased volume of commerce and information exchange all bear witness to the fact that, for the first time since the beginning of human history, it is now possible — at least technically — to establish relationships between people who are separated by great distances and are unknown to each other (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005, point 192).

Recent research also highlights the persuasive influence of machines and algorithms on humans. AI's role in steering consumer preferences, influencing purchasing decisions through recommendation systems, and shaping social opinions and attitudes is a testament to this emerging influence. While this development presents new opportunities and challenges, it also exposes modern individuals to risks, particularly in terms of algorithm-driven influence.

As Mirosław Lakomy observes,

(...) advertising (and more broadly, persuasive communication) can be viewed in the context of cultural imperialism, which seeks to reshape ideas, values,

and cultural symbols (acculturation). The saturation of media messages with the ideals of dominant cultures leads to the influence of these cultures, often resulting in the abandonment of the local ethnos. Such projects of social engineering result in identification with new symbols, brands, or ideologies (Coca-Colonization, McDonaldization, or Americanization, as described by Herbert Schiller). With the rise of new media, particularly Web 2.0, we face what Tom McPhail defines as “electronic colonialism is the dependency relationship established by the importation of communication hardware, foreign-produced software, along with engineers, technicians, and related information protocols, that vicariously establish a set of foreign norms, values, and expectations which, in varying degrees, may alter the domestic cultures and socialisation processes” (McPhail, 1981) (Lakomy, 2021, p. 174).

This systematic reflection brings us to a crucial conclusion: the need to seek truth in all forms of communication, whether direct or mediated, is paramount. The ability to differentiate between facts, judgments, half-truths, and outright lies is essential for accurately assessing all aspects of communication, both informative and persuasive. Raising awareness that social interactions inherently involve influence and persuasion is a core element of media education (Instructional & Developmental Communication). It is vital to spread knowledge of persuasive communication principles, as these principles underpin negotiations, mediation, opinion formation, and the search for truth.

Experts in media, sociology, and psychology are familiar with the strategies for strengthening resistance to unwanted influence outlined by Zimbardo. These strategies include:

- promoting active engagement with currently held attitudes,
- equipping people with the necessary knowledge,
- encouraging the development of counter-arguments in response to persuasive tactics,
- cautioning against persuasive attacks (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1997, pp. 230–232).

Ultimately, only media literacy, specialised knowledge, and awareness of influence techniques can effectively prevent individuals from falling victim to manipulation by those who violate the fundamental principle of cooperation. Overcoming the barrier of ignorance in decision-making and choices will serve as a practical dimension of understanding key communication concepts such as information, persuasion, and manipulation.

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Catallactic communication

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Catallactic communication entails opening oneself to others and communicating one's system of values and commitment to the good. This stance promotes harmony and cooperation, establishing a new foundation for social integration and, in turn, increasing the effectiveness of the exchange of material goods. For catallactic communication to be meaningful, it must occur within social structures that uphold human dignity and freedom, as these conditions significantly enhance the quality of interpersonal cooperation.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: The term 'catallactics' was introduced into scholarly discourse in 1831 by Richard Whately to denote the study of exchange. Ethicist and media scholar Michał Drożdż links the notion of catallaxy to communication and immaterial values, emphasising that human exchange and interaction play a crucial role in fostering social integration. Thus, catallactics underscores the significance of interpersonal relationships within the broader framework of exchange, encompassing not only material goods but also the immaterial world of values.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Catallactic communication is grounded in man's social dimension. Within the context of the exchange of goods, this communication places particular emphasis on immaterial values and the spiritual relationships between people. Cooperation in this dimension fosters mutual discovery and contributes to the creation of the common good, which transcends material outcomes and is founded on respect for human dignity.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Catalactic communication in ethically driven media enterprises – those that prioritise the exchange of values, uphold the principle of solidarity, and centre their strategies on the good of man – would undoubtedly contribute to the production of high-quality media products. This, in turn, builds audience trust and increases the appeal for advertisers.

Keywords: media ethics, human dignity, integration, cooperation

Definition of the term

The notion of catallactic communication is not defined in any widely recognised dictionary. The term ‘catallaxy’ itself derives from the Greek verb *katallasso* (καταλλάσσω), which originally meant ‘to exchange’, but also ‘to admit into the community’ and ‘to change from enemy into friend’. It was first introduced into academic discourse in the early 19th century by the English economist Richard Whately, who used it to describe the ‘science of exchange’. In the 20th century, the concept was further developed and popularised by Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, who applied it to the economic processes of the free market.

Within the context of communication processes, the term catallaxy was first employed by Polish ethicist and media scholar Michał Drożdż, who argued that the aim of media ethics should be to uncover and foster catallactic communication. According to Drożdż, catallactic communication involves opening oneself to others, offering them a specific good, and communicating to them one’s system of values – while simultaneously remaining open to others and receiving the good they communicate. Thus, catallaxy primarily reveals the personal dimension of communicative action and encompasses all that occurs between two individuals who engage in a relationship through an act of exchange. This form of communication promotes harmony and cooperation while mitigating the risk of discord and destructive competition. When communication accompanies the exchange of material goods, while also taking spiritual values into account, the utility and effectiveness of material exchange are both enhanced and deepened. In this way, a new platform for human integration is established (Drożdż, 2005, p. 497 ff). This integrative dimension is essential to understanding catallactic communication, as catallaxy ultimately constitutes a method of value-based integration – a form of ethical integration that underpins both the quality and the efficacy of cooperation for the benefit of the individuals participating in it, as well as the common good.

For catallactic communication to take place, it requires social structures founded on respect for man and his freedom (Drożdż, 2008, p. 34).

Historical analysis of the term

The term ‘catallactics’ denotes the ‘science of exchange’ and is primarily associated with systematic reflection on the market. As previously mentioned, it was introduced into scholarly discourse by Richard Whately in 1831 at Oxford, during his Drummond Lectures on political economy. He challenged the widely accepted academic definition of political economy as the science of wealth proposed by Adam Smith. Instead, he emphasised the act of exchange itself – as a distinctly human act, alien to all other species – rather than the objects being exchanged. He therefore proposed to term catallactics the ‘science of exchange’. Notably, Whately also recognised the subjective nature of the value of exchanged goods, observing that “the same thing [...] [is] wealth to one person and not to another” (Whately, 1832, p. 8), which is a principle that underpins all exchange activity. In subsequent years, scholars associated with the Chair of Political Economy at Trinity College, which Whately had established, carried forward the catallactic tradition and the subjective theory of utility in various directions and with varying degrees of success.

Although the origins of the catallactic approach are rooted in Oxford, it is Friedrich August von Hayek, a leading figure of the Austrian School, who is most frequently credited in the literature with popularising the term ‘catallaxy’. However, Hayek himself acknowledged that it was the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises who had rediscovered the concept, particularly in his seminal work *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*. Jarosław Poteraj also contends that it was Mises who gave “catallactics the most substantive content in the history of economic thought” (Poteraj, 2015, p. 32). Hayek continued the study of catallactics within the field of economics and published the results in his 1988 book *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, where he also analysed the dynamics of the free-market economy. Hayek argued that associating the market with the economy was a conceptual error and stressed the need to differentiate between economics and catallactics. He found the traditional term ‘economy’ – used to describe the market economy and rooted in the idea of ‘household management’ – misleading, as it implied that economists somehow direct or control the market. In response, he adopted the term ‘catallaxy’ and explained that he fell in love with this word when he discovered that in ancient Greece it meant

not only 'to exchange' but also 'to admit into the community' and 'to change from enemy into friend'. Hayek, a Nobel laureate, suggested that the use of 'economy' should be limited to its original meaning: a deliberately coordinated system of activities aimed at achieving a pre-defined hierarchy of values and objectives (Banach, 2002). In contrast, he maintained that the term 'catallaxy', not 'economy', better captures the essence of the market order, which is not a simple outcome of the realisation of intended goals, but a complex system of interconnected economies in which all actors pursue their own objectives.

The term 'catallactic', as derived by Hayek from the Greek, etymologically traces back to the verb *katallatein* or *katallassein* (καταλλάσσω), which means not only 'to exchange', but also 'to admit into the community' and 'to change from enemy into friend'. The Greek language lacked a noun form of this verb, but following Hayek's reasoning, if such a noun had existed, it would have taken the form *katallaxia*. From this imagined form, Hayek coined the term 'catallaxy', which he used to describe "the special kind of spontaneous order produced by the market through people acting within the rules of the law of property, tort and contract" (Hayek, 1982, p. 109). Hayek believed that this market game, which he termed the "game of catallaxy", is a wealth-creating game. Exchange takes place through "admitting into the community" and "changing from enemy into friend", thereby facilitating the flow of goods and the satisfaction of participants' needs in accordance with certain rules and dependent on skill, strength, or good fortune (Hayek, 1982, p. 115).

Hayek was a prominent representative of the Austrian School of Economics, also known as the school of classical liberalism. This intellectual tradition originally regarded economics as a branch of moral philosophy, primarily concerned with the subject of economic activity. Hayek's thinking was profoundly shaped by his mentor, Ludwig von Mises:

It was Mises, building on the work of earlier Austrian economists such as Carl Menger, who finally reconstructed economics "upon the solid foundation of a general theory of human action" (Callahan, 2004, p. 21).

Mises defined human action as:

purposeful behavior. Or we may say: Action is will put into operation and transformed into an agency, is aiming at ends and goals, is the ego's meaningful

response to stimuli and to the conditions of its environment, is a person's conscious adjustment to the state of the universe that determines his life (Mises, 1998, p. 11).

He also pointed out that all action is fundamentally rooted in choice.

Choosing determines all human decisions. In making his choice man chooses not only between various material things and services. All human values are offered for option. All ends and all means, both material and ideal issues, the sublime and the base, the noble and the ignoble, are ranged in a single row and subjected to a decision which picks out one thing and sets aside another. Nothing that men aim at or want to avoid remains outside of this arrangement into a unique scale of gradation and preference. The modern theory of value widens the scientific horizon and enlarges the field of economic studies (Mises, 2007, p. 3).

Mises's emphasis on the human subject and his action led to a shift in economic thinking and the emergence of the concept of human capital.

In this way, economic thought, by its own choice, tends toward a richer philosophical anthropology. Many classical liberal thinkers – even those who do not openly profess theism – share a vision of man as a free and self-determining being. According to this view, the life of each individual carries profound moral significance, both for the person himself and for the dynamic *élan* of culture as a whole (Novak, 1999, p. 13).

It was on this conception of economics – one in which the personal subject plays a central role – that Hayek founded his catallactic vision of economic order.

Catallaxy refers to a certain natural order that arises through spontaneous evolution, without the interference of external regulatory forces. Hayek defined it as “the special kind of spontaneous order produced by the market through people acting within the rules of the law of property, tort and contract” (Hayek, 1982, p. 109). He emphasised the importance of the rules of private property because they

demarcate for every individual a range of permitted actions by designating (or rather making recognisable by the application of rules to the concrete facts) ranges of objects over which only particular individuals are allowed to dispose and from the control of which all others are excluded (Hayek, 1982, p. 107).

This understanding implies that, alongside private property, other foundational values of the catallactic order include freedom and commutative justice. The latter stems from the obligation to respect rules that safeguard ownership and govern exchange. Commutative justice aims to achieve a fair balance between gain and loss, while distributive justice seeks to balance excessive giving and excessive taking. The distinction between these two forms of justice originates with Aristotle. Commutative justice rejects external interference or control, seeking instead to balance the outcomes of exchange by identifying a fair middle ground. As such,

commutative justice cannot be reduced to the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*, since parties may enter into agreements that disproportionately benefit one side or shift the burden of loss onto third parties (Soniewicka, 2010, p. 47).

In the early 21st century, Michał Drożdż, examining the continuing advance of globalisation in the context of the integration of socio-economic processes, people, and value systems, drew attention to the catallactic character of these processes, which are also co-shaped by individuals' subjective engagement in media activities (Drożdż, 2005, p. 496). Combining Hayek's notion of catallaxy with a personalist perspective, he argued that:

The notion of catallaxy is closely linked to communication processes, revealing the personal dimension of communicative and media-related actions. In its broadest sense, it refers to everything that occurs between two individuals who engage in a relationship through any act of exchange (originally limited to economic exchanges), and it includes the transmission of intangible values. Catallaxy demonstrates that such communicative actions are more than the mere exchange of material goods: they involve the communication of spiritual values, the discovery of the other person, and, at the same time, the discovery of oneself. In exchanges where participants must consider the other party, their behaviours and attitudes are transformed, and seemingly conflicting views and interests are reconciled (Drożdż, 2005, pp. 497 ff).

Thus, catallaxy serves as a method of integration at the level of values, and catallactic communication fulfils one of the fundamental functions of communication: integration.

Discussion of the term

The starting point of catallactic communication lies in the inherently social nature of man, who, in pursuing actions aimed at satisfying his material needs, inevitably influences others, both materially and immaterially. This capacity for influence is rooted in man's fundamental agency and ability to act. Through action, people not only achieve their specific goals and their external reality but also transform themselves and those who are directly or indirectly affected by their actions. One of the goals of human action that distinguishes people from other living creatures is their desire to create a space in which they feel safe and 'at home', where they can 'be themselves' while opening up to others and communicating positive values. It is not enough for them merely to have; they also want to be. They actively seek and create environments imbued with a sense of 'domesticity', where they feel well, are treated not as instruments but as subjects, and where the dignity of every person is upheld as an ontic value. Otherwise, they close themselves off to others and to their world of values. As inherently social beings, people are inclined to collaborate with others in environments where they feel at ease, that is, environments that are friendly and full of trust, where they can contribute to the common good and participate in the shared discovery of the world of values. They seek to engage in this cooperation freely and rationally, contributing to the creation of goods not only in the material realm but also in the axiological and spiritual dimensions.

Given this foundation – that man is a social person that acts with agency and seeks to enhance both the common good and the individual good within a familiar and friendly environment – catallaxy draws attention to the exchange of immaterial values that accompanies the exchange of material goods. In the course of everyday economic interactions, individuals automatically enter into communicative relationships in which the inherent dignity and value of the acting person endows this communication with a catallactic character. In the catallactic act of exchange, the exchange of material goods is accompanied by the communication of immaterial values: the communication of spiritual values, the discovery of the other person, and, at the same time, the discovery of oneself. The inclusion of the axiological and spiritual dimension in cooperation represents a stage in the development of joint action.

It involves incorporating into the process of cooperation a concern for the good of the other, the communication of spiritual values to others, and, at the same time, an openness to the good done by the other and to the world of values he communicates. Given the integral nature of the human person in both the personal and spiritual dimensions, it is difficult to separate these spheres. *Homo oeconomicus* and *homo faber* is, at the same time, *homo communicans*, who serves others through the good he communicates (Drożdż, 2005, p. 32). It is worth noting that a catalactic exchange in which participants must consider the other party transforms their behaviours and attitudes, reconciling points of view and interests that may initially appear to be in conflict (Drożdż, 2005, p. 497). Through catalactic communication, original divergences of interest give way to shared goals. Thus, it is oriented toward the search for what unites, contributing to the construction of the common good, grounded in respect for human dignity and freedom.

By the common good, we refer here not only to material goods and organisational structures that serve participants of social life, but also to the entire social space in which individuals can realise themselves and their values. This includes the network of communicative interactions through which immaterial values are exchanged, enabling the discovery of both the other and oneself as an ontic value. In this way, human production and consumption acquire a personal dimension. Economic life is no longer directed solely toward maximising profit or accumulating goods but is now focused on the creation of the common good, including in its axiological and spiritual dimensions.

However, the construction of the common good depends not merely on collective action: it also relies on participation. Collective action, by itself, says little about its quality: it simply denotes a plurality of subjects acting together. Participation involves a person's free choice:

man chooses what others choose – sometimes even choosing because others choose – while at the same time choosing it as his own good and the end of his own striving. What he then chooses is his own good in the sense that he as a person fulfills himself in it. Participation renders man capable of such choices and such action together with others (Wojtyła, 2021, p. 396).

It is only through cooperation understood in this sense that the good, which is not privately owned by man, becomes truly shared.

As a method of integration, catallactic communication aims at unification on the level of values. This unification, however, does not consist in fusing previously separate elements into a single whole. The uniqueness of each person means that it is more accurately understood as the realisation and expression of unity and wholeness grounded in complexity and manifested in the context of diversity. Because it pertains to the psychological and spiritual spheres, it implies psychological integration and spiritual convergence, that is, internal development and human enhancement. This process is decidedly more than universalisation, globalisation, or standardisation. It constitutes an effort to establish a sphere of community and cooperation among persons who share common goals that are oriented toward the common good and axiological-ethical integration. It is not about unification at the cost of suppressing individuality or the identity of a person, but about the shared discovery and affirmation of universal values that constitute a foundation of all genuine development and progress. These universal values emerge from the truth about man that tells us of his integral spiritual-material nature and the inalienable worth of his dignity as a person.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

Catallactic communication also extends to institutional communication. The complexity of contemporary market goals and functions, along with the multiplicity and often contradictory nature of interests, can frequently give rise to conflict. On one side stand business owners, driven by the pursuit and need for profit; on the other, social expectations, which often diverge from the economic objectives of entrepreneurs. This tension is especially evident in the media market, which holds particular social significance and fulfils essential social functions. Conflicts stemming from the diversity and contradiction of goals, as well as from intense competition, reveal that existing market regulations do not always align with the expectations of key stakeholders. Moreover, the rapid pace of technological advancement we have been witnessing in recent times has made it difficult for the bodies responsible for its regulation to respond quickly and effectively to the changes taking place. A clear

example of this issue is artificial intelligence, which is developing so rapidly and in such unexpected directions that the institutions tasked with its regulation are unable to keep pace with establishing legal norms governing the principles of communication involving this tool.

Thus, there is a growing need to establish such forms of cooperation and a market order within the media sector that reconcile the interests and expectations of all actors involved in communication processes, ultimately serving the common good of all participants.

A catallactic perspective on the economic activity of media enterprises opens the door to analysing them not solely through the lens of profit and loss, but also in terms of their service to man. Placing the person at the centre draws attention to the conditions of labour and interpersonal relationships within the enterprise, which is particularly relevant to media enterprises, whose functioning is inseparable from the involvement of personal subjects. Despite the significant technological advances aimed at enhancing communication, such tools remain ineffective without man. It is man who serves both as the initiator and participant in communication processes. Messages – the core element of any communicative process – can originate exclusively from man, as a being who possess the capacity to create them.

Actions undertaken by enterprises operating in the spirit of catallaxy do not imply a renunciation of profit. Rather, they reflect an openness to a broader horizon: the recognition that media products are not merely commodities but also carriers of spiritual values that can either enrich or diminish man's development. If we acknowledge that the media exert real influence, then we must also recognise that individuals participating in communication processes respond behaviourally to media content and that, in the post-communication phase, their behaviour is determined by the messages they have received. Although some theories argue that media content merely reinforces pre-existing attitudes and beliefs rather than transforming them, such views appear to have lost traction over time (Pöttker, 1989, p. 92). The agenda-setting theory contends that while the media may not dictate what to think, they significantly shape what we think about. The media compile lists of popular topics among the public, which then become the basis for conversations taking place within society. The cultural norms theory states that the press influences behaviour by selecting and highlighting

certain issues in ways that reflect the audience's valued norms. A growing body of empirical research confirms that the media, by selectively constructing the realities they present, do in fact affect audiences. This does not mean, however, that this influence occurs automatically or intentionally. Rather, it refers to an effect that manifests differently in each individual case. Communication that had no impact would, in fact, be meaningless, useless, and unnecessary. Communication is an exchange of values – an action that calls for a response; without such a response, it ceases to be communication. If the media did not influence people or contribute to their development, they would lose their economic and social purpose.

Awareness of the media's influence should compel media enterprises to adopt ethically responsible behaviour. Their operations should be guided not solely by the pursuit of material profit, but also by a commitment to man's dignity and his good. They should be guided by the principles of solidarity and understanding, rather than narrowly focusing on the good of a company. Journalistic and economic strategies within media enterprises should be interconnected, each oriented toward man and his good. According to Garelo, "Man does not produce and initiate actions solely for themselves, but for others; without customers there is no profit; without the exchange of services, there is no value" (Garelo, 2002, p. 359 ff). For an enterprise to survive – that is, to be needed – it must remain attuned to the needs of its audience, both as individuals and as members of the broader society in which the enterprise operates. As Lis and Sterniczuk observe,

The measure of a corporation's usefulness is not the creation of individual wealth but its service to society by deepening the sense of community through upholding individual dignity and promoting the common good (Lis & Sterniczuk, 2005, p. 94).

Within a media enterprise there should be a constructive dialectic between the pursuit of a high-quality product – defined as one that contributes to human development – and the ongoing goal of profit maximisation. To earn the trust of a broad audience, which also increases the product's appeal to advertisers, a product on offer must meet high standards, understood as the ability to fulfil the expectations of both individual users and society at large. At the same time, the production

of such a quality product depends on the enterprise's financial capacity to sustain its operations. Recognising this interdependence is essential for aligning the goals of media institutions with the needs of their audiences. No enterprise exists solely for itself. Human action, in its very essence, is directed toward both personal growth and the development of others. As John Paul II emphasised:

By means of his work man commits himself, not only for his own sake but also *for others* and *with others*. Each person collaborates in the work of others and for their good. Man works in order to provide for the needs of his family, his community, his nation, and ultimately all humanity. Moreover, he collaborates in the work of his fellow employees, as well as in the work of suppliers and in the customers' use of goods, in a progressively expanding chain of solidarity (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 43).

A catallactic approach to the operation of media enterprises offers a way to integrate these dimensions. It enables the pursuit of economic objectives while maintaining respect for human dignity and freedom. It supports both social and professional integration, affirming the individual's responsibility for personal development alongside their duty to contribute to the society in which they live. As Drożdż observes, "Through accounting for the axiological dimension of catallaxy, catallactic integration creates an opportunity for people to integrate at the level of mutual cooperation and the shared multiplication of the common good" (Drożdż, 2008, p. 35). In this way, the catallactic framework provides media enterprises with a foundation for ethically responsible action.

In conclusion, catallactic communication plays a vital role in fostering social integration. Man as a fundamentally social being should seek cooperation and unification with others. Catallactic communication serves as a tool in this integrative process, yet it emphasises the personal and subjective value of the cooperating individuals. As they fulfil their social responsibilities and contribute to the construction of the common good, they must not neglect their responsibility for their own personal development.

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Political communication

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Political communication, as an element of social and public communication, refers to the exchange of political messages between actors involved in the creation and implementation of politics. These include broadly defined political actors – both collective and individual – as well as citizens/voters, with communication taking place through both traditional and digital media channels.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: Research into political communication began in the aftermath of World War II and initially focused on the study of political propaganda. The term itself entered academic discourse in the 1960s, first within research centres in the United States, and subsequently in leading European academic institutions, including those in Poland. The field expanded significantly in the 1990s with increased research activity and scholarly publications. Further milestones are linked to the formation of the fifth and sixth ages of political communication.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: As a subset of social communication, the concept of political communication defies any single universal definition. This article seeks to explore the phenomenon from an epistemological perspective (through a review of definitions) and to outline a research approach from two distinct vantage points: 1) political science, and 2) media and communication studies. It also highlights current research trends in Poland, alongside key academic initiatives in the field.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The evolution of political communication necessitates

ongoing systematic reflection – both on the relationships among political actors, media, and citizens, and on the shifting nature of communication channels within an increasingly mediatised public sphere. Each successive age of political communication sheds light on the trajectories of media, politics, society, and individuals.

Keywords: political communication, ages of political communication, political communication channels, MediaPolis public sphere, trajectories of political communication development in Poland

Definition of the term

The concept of political communication has been richly explored in both international and Polish scholarly literature. However, this wealth of analysis has not led to a single universally accepted definition. On the contrary, emerging theoretical approaches continue to highlight the multidimensional and heterogeneous nature of political communication as a field of study. Key analytical challenges include the wide diversity of research subjects, the variety of explanatory frameworks, and the semiological complexity of the phenomena involved. One of the earliest definitions of political communication was offered by Heinz H. Eulau, Samuel J. Eldersveld, and Morris Janowitz in *Political Behaviour*. They described political communication as a unidirectional process, wherein political messages are transmitted from those in power to the electorate. They also analysed three core dimensions of this communication: political leadership and group structure; the media's role in social mobilisation together with the transmission of political influence between formal institutions of governance and citizens (voters); and the mediation of the relationship between these institutions and the electorate (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012, p. 134). As the field evolved, later definitions adopted the idea of political communication as a bidirectional flow of information and emphasised its constituent elements: political elites, the media, citizens, and the techniques used (such as political marketing, public opinion polling, and advertising).

In Polish academic discourse, several definitions have come to be seen as foundational. According to Tomasz Goban-Klas, political communication involves

the creation, organisation, and dissemination of information (broadly understood as content or even ideas) that is intended to influence or actually does influence the system of power and its exercise (Goban-Klas, 1998, p. 8).

Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska describes it as “a two-way process situated within specific environments: social (social system), political (political system), media (media system), and cultural (cultural system)”. Political communication is a mutual relationship

between two autonomous domains of human activity – politics and communication (...). Communication is understood here as the process of externalising, presenting, or representing politics, encompassing *polity*, *politics*, and *policy* (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012, pp. 129–130).

Stanisław Michalczyk emphasises the importance of distinguishing between the political process and the space of political communication. Thus, two phenomena should be distinguished: the creation (implementation) of politics, which is the political process, and its representation or presentation, which is political communication. Based on this distinction, he defined political communication as “the central mechanism for formulating and articulating political interests and their aggregation (combination), which leads to the implementation and legitimisation of political decisions” (Michalczyk, 2022, p. 20). Ewa Maj views political communication as the process of “creating, transmitting, receiving, and interpreting political content (a political message) between sender and receiver through various tools and techniques designed to ensure the content reaches its destination” (Maj, 2010, p. 10). Mariusz Kolczyński offers a definition based on four “sender-receiver subsystems”: (1) the subsystem responsible for constructing and executing state decisions, (2) the organisational subsystem involving political actors, (3) the media subsystem, and (4) the civic subsystem (Kolczyński, 2007, pp. 26–27). Janina Fras provides a minimalist definition that refers to political communication simply as “communication within the political sphere” and underlines its three core features: “its processual nature, the political content of messages, and the political intentionality of participation in the communicative interaction” (Fras, 2005, pp. 30, 32). According to Grażyna Ulicka, political communication is

a space where the diverse views and positions of three groups of actors who are entitled to speak publicly on political matters intersect. These actors are politicians on one side, and public opinion on the other, with a third group – journalists – situated between them (Ulicka, 1996, p. 157).

Marek Mazur focused on the flow of news and information, which

give structure and meaning to the political process. Political communication involves not only the elites, who send signals to the mass public, but also a wide range of informal acts and processes of communication in society that influence

politics, shape public opinion, contribute to the political socialisation of citizens, or spark interest (Mazur, 2001, p. 44).

Some scholars have approached political communication through the lens of symbolic interactionism. In this view, its essence lies in the creation of a specific community of interacting subjects who share the same symbols, which enables them to establish new relationships and modify existing ones (Marciniak, 2012, p. 20).

In the Polish academic context, the concept of political communication – its history, theoretical evolution, and contemporary relevance – has been comprehensively examined by several scholars. Notable contributions include Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska's *Rozwój badań nad komunikowaniem politycznym w Polsce w kontekście światowym* [*The development of political communication research in Poland in the global context*] (2023), Ewa Maria Marciniak's *Komunikowanie polityczne w ujęciach interpretacyjnych* [*Political communication in interpretative approaches*] (2012), and Agnieszka Łukasik-Turecka's *Teoretyczne aspekty komunikowania politycznego* [*Theoretical aspects of political communication*] (2023).

Historical analysis of the term

Over the past century, there have been numerous definitions of the concept of political communication. This plurality, and the resulting ambiguity in understanding the term, stems from a number of factors, including the differing methodological approaches, research practices, and the diversity of academic disciplines that have attempted to define political communication from their own perspectives. Its semantic ambiguity is further compounded by the dual nature of its usage: on the one hand, it refers to a field of academic inquiry, which is a 'technical' approach; on the other hand, it describes and analyses the broader realm of political life, which can be seen as a 'practical-technical' approach (Łukasik-Turecka, 2023). Researchers define the process of political communication from various perspectives. The literature outlines several notable approaches, including Michael Rush's sociological approach, Ralph Negrine's media studies approach, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch's

systemic approach, Brian McNair's three-element approach, Robert Denton and Gary Woodward's political science approach, and Richard Perloff's communication studies approach (see: Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012; Maj, 2017). To this catalogue, Dorota Piontek has added a structural approach that is relevant to the post-political age, positing that the system of political communication consists of elements drawn from two distinct domains: politics and the mass-media public sphere (Piontek, 2011). Thus, in a broad sense,

political communication is the process of exchanging political messages between broadly defined political actors (both individual and collective) and the citizens/voters who are affected by the creation and implementation of politics, using mass media – and in the past decade, also social media – on a large scale (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2023) (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2023).

Internationally, leading epistemological theorists in the field include Jay G. Blumler, Michael Gurevitch, Robert Denton, Brian McNair, Richard M. Perloff, Michael Rush, Ulrich Saxer, Dominique Wolton, and Gary Woodward (see: Łukasik-Turecka, 2023).

Most scholars trace the origins of political communication as a scholarly discipline to the post-World War II period, particularly in the context of political propaganda research. Another major development occurred in the 1960s, beginning in the United States and subsequently spreading to key academic centres in Europe, including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Poland (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012, 2023; Piontek, 2011). The 1990s marked a significant phase of global expansion in the field, evidenced by the publication of foundational works by scholars such as B. McNair, R. Negrine, J. Street, J. Stanyer, S. Oates, D. Wring, A.I. Langer, M. Mortimore, S. Atkinson, W. Schulz, H.M. Kepplinger, F. Esser, B. Pfetsch, D.L. Swanson, P. Mancini, D. Hallin, and many others. According to Dobek-Ostrowska, political communication research during this period developed within various disciplines in Poland, including political science, sociology, psychology, and media studies (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2023).

Today, political communication is widely regarded as an interdisciplinary research approach, applied in a mosaic-like fashion across academic domains. Its methodological underpinnings can be found in

political marketing, political advertising, political public relations, political sociology, political psychology, and political linguistics. The Polish academic understanding of political communication has been shaped by numerous scholars who approach the concept from distinct angles, often beginning their analyses with observable phenomena in the public and political spheres. Significant contributions have been made by T. Sasińska-Klas, S. Michalczyk, D. Piontek, M. Mołęda-Zdziech, A. Hess, K. Kopecka-Piech, K. Brzoza-Kolorz, M. Lakomy, T. Olczyk, A. Stępińska, and M. Kaczmarek-Śliwińska in studies on mediatisation, medialisation, de-mediatisation, and the tabloidisation of politics. Research within the area of disinformation and unethical communication has been conducted by A. Łukasik-Turecka, A. Węglińska, and K. Bąkiewicz. Scholars including E. Marciniak, E. Nowak-Teter, and M. Brodzińska-Mirowska have explored symbolic interactionism and relationship theory in political communication. The issue of personalisation in political communication has been addressed by M. Kolczyński and M. Mazur. On the topics of the politicisation and depoliticisation of political communication, relevant work has been done by A. Turska-Kawa, J. Flis, R. Klepka, P. Kuca, D. Szczepański, P. Szostok-Nowacka, S. Ossowski, B. Biskup, and W. Furman. In the realms of political communication discourse, critical discourse analysis, and digital media discourse, the contributions of K. Adamczewska, M. Adamik-Szysiak, M. Bukowski, B. Dobek-Ostrowska, B. Łódzki, D. Kasprowicz, K. Koc-Michalska, R. Marzędzki, G. Piechota, M. Pielużek, A. Szymańska, J. Kołodziej, and J. Żurawski have been particularly noteworthy. The political-linguistic domain has been enriched by the work of S.J. Rittel, J. Fras, K. Ożóg, K. Kłosińska, and E. Szkudlarek-Śmiechowicz. A relatively new area of exploration concerns political communication in the context of religious communication, studied by R. Leśniczak, D. Guzek, and K. Pokorna-Ignatowicz.

Mapping the development of political communication research in Poland also involves identifying the academic centres that play a central role in shaping this discourse. Among the most active institutions in Poland are the following: in Krakow, Jagiellonian University, the University of the National Education Commission, and Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University; in Warsaw, the University of Warsaw and SWPS University; in Silesia, the University of Silesia in Katowice, the University of Wrocław, and DSW University of Lower Silesia; in Lublin, Maria

Curie-Skłodowska University and the John Paul II Catholic University; Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń; and the University of Rzeszów.

Discussion of the term

In the literature, the concept of political communication has been approached from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including political science, media studies, sociology, law, economics, psychology, pedagogy, and linguistics (Michalczyk, 2022, pp. 25–31). It has also been examined through various analytical frameworks such as behavioural, structural-functional, interpretive, dialogical, and market-oriented (marketing) approaches (Dobek-Ostrowska & Wiszniowski, 2002; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012). Contemporary research typically draws on two main methodological approaches that stem from these perspectives:

- I. grounded in political science, which focuses on political actors.
- II. grounded in communication and media studies, which emphasises discourse.

I. Political science approach

According to the classical definition,

Political communication is a form of social communication. All definitions of political power – as a relationship between unequal actors – emphasise a continual exchange of information. This includes articulating needs and interests, formulating and disseminating ideas and programmes of action, decision-making, and the acceptance or rejection of those decisions. (...) A well-developed communication network contributes to expanding political participation, fostering more constructive relations with the opposition, and counteracting political alienation. As a result, it can strengthen the legitimacy of both the political system and ruling elites, while also facilitating the relatively smooth implementation of changes demanded by some participants in the system. (...) The process of political communication is closely linked to the level of democracy within political systems (Antoszewski & Herbut, 1998, p. 152).

According to this definition, the central figure is the political actor – an individual, group, or political institution actively engaged in socio-political

life. This actor, by establishing communication with recipients of political messages (citizens, audiences, or the political public), seeks to maintain or enhance their position, shape their public image, and influence audiences both emotionally and through rational argumentation (Szczepański, 2023). The literature generally identifies four key categories of actors involved in political communication: politicians, the media, society, and experts. These actors participate in the formation of two primary communication networks. One is created for internal functions, such as those maintained by state institutions that collect and process administrative data, such as statistical offices, intelligence services, or government-controlled opinion polling agencies. The other consists of mass communication networks that are either seemingly or genuinely independent, including both traditional media and digital or interactive platforms.

Within the political science context, particular attention is paid to the degree of control over the communication channels. Three types are typically distinguished: (a) channels that are directly or indirectly subordinate to governing institutions and convey content supportive of them; (b) channels aligned with opposition forces – whether inside or outside the political system, which vary in how fundamentally they challenge that system; and (c) channels that are relatively independent, seeking to present a balanced perspective on political life (Antoszewski & Herbut, 1998). From the perspective of systems theory, the inclusion of media elements introduces two key models of interaction: (a) horizontal interaction, which refers to situations where representatives of different groups are equally involved in preparing a political message, engaging collaboratively in the communication process (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2011, pp. 181–182); (b) vertical interaction, which concerns the direction of information flow.

In a public sphere increasingly saturated with traditional and new media channels, several directional patterns and types of message senders can be identified.

1. top-down institutional channel – overt
2. top-down institutional channel – covert
3. bottom-up social channel – overt
4. bottom-up institutional channel – covert

Among these channels, in the process of political communication, political actors tend to focus most intently on the top-down overt, top-down

covert, and bottom-up covert channels. However, the bottom-up overt channel also carries significant political value and, in certain cases, may prove just as influential as the others.

Table 1. The significance of political communication channels in public discourse

	Overt top-down institutional channel	Covert top-down institutional channel	Covert bottom-up institutional channel	Overt bottom-up social channel
Sender	Official, political institution.	Anonymous. Content created by institutional, political, or media actors, but suggesting either objectivity of judgment or authorship by another entity – political or media-related.	Anonymous. Content created by institutional, political, or media actors, but suggesting affiliation with a bottom-up (covert) group – supporters or opponents.	Unofficial, anonymous. Content created by participants in social media – supporters and opponents of specific political options.
Purpose	Phatic function; relational and emotional engagement-building.	Phatic function; fostering a sense of community and shared views.	Phatic function; building a sense of identity-based community and the community of shared views; ritualisation of the message.	Phatic function; building a sense of identity-based community and the community of shared views; ritualisation of the message.
Type of content	Commercial, persuasive materials.	Persuasive content (in favour of a political or media actor), referencing objectified content; rationalisation of the message.	Persuasive content (in favour of a political or media actor), referencing individual content created by members of a specific communication community.	Individually created content by members of a specific communication community.

Tools	New media: social media accounts, own channels (TV), YouTube accounts, vlogs, animations, short videos, games, memes, TikToks. Traditional media: radio, press, television, and use of (non-) new channels in a performative manner.	New media: platforms, messaging apps, YouTube accounts, vlogs, animations, short videos, games, memes, TikToks. Traditional media: radio, press, television, and use of (non-) new channels in a performative manner.	New media: platforms, messaging apps, YouTube accounts, vlogs, animations, short videos, games, memes, TikToks. Traditional media: radio, press, television, and use of (non-) new channels in a performative manner.	New media: platforms, messaging apps, YouTube accounts, vlogs, animations, short videos, games, memes, TikToks. Traditional media: radio, press, television, and use of (non-) new channels in a performative manner.
Place of exposure	Traditional media, Public Information Bulletin (BIP), National Electoral Commission (PKW). Social media, online platforms, party committee websites, party and individual social media accounts, party and individual streaming channels.	Traditional media, social media, online platforms, dedicated network groups, communication platforms.	Traditional media, social media, online platforms, party committee websites.	Traditional media, social media, online platforms, dedicated network groups, communication platforms.

Source: own elaboration.

II. Communication and media studies approach

From the perspective of media and social communication studies, political communication encompasses

communication within the political sphere as well as the processes of mutual communicative interaction between political actors. These include representatives of power, those aspiring to power, and citizens, who, on the one hand, are the targets of efforts from representatives of power and those aspiring to power and, on the other, seek to influence both by participating in the social process

of negotiating opinions on political matters (Wolny-Zmorzyński, Doktorowicz, Płaneta & Filas, 2024, p. 359).

Additionally, a key concern in defining political communication is establishing the boundaries between politics and communication. These boundaries significantly shape the nature of their mutual influence and interaction, ultimately positioning political communication as a central mechanism in the functioning of social, individual, and media communication, as well as media policy (Pisarek, 2006, p. 99). An illustrative example of this evolving relationship is found in the model of the ages of political communication, developed within communication and media studies. First proposed in the 1990s by Jay G. Blumler and Dennis Kavanagh in their work *The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features*, the model outlines a chronological framework that demonstrates how political communication has been shaped by transformations in postmodern (late postmodern) society and the media landscape.

During the first age, spanning the 1940s and 1950s, political communication was subordinated to relatively strong and stable political institutions and beliefs. Political messaging was focused on issues and was not mediated by mass media, which at the time lacked a cohesive and widespread audience.

The second age, beginning in the 1960s, witnessed a more mobile electorate. Political parties became increasingly professionalised, tailoring their messages to align with the news values and formats of limited-channel television – a dominant medium of the time. Voters exhibited less loyalty to parties and became more selective in the media content they consumed (the strategy of ‘getting into the news’).

The third age, contemporary to the time of Blumler and Kavanagh’s writing, was marked by media abundance and a series of concurrent developments. These included growing professionalisation of political messaging, intensified competition, rising anti-elitist populism, a process of ‘centrifugal diversification’, and changes in how people received politics. The authors emphasised that this system – marked by growing tensions and mounting pressure – reshaped research priorities through the pervasive presence and expanding influence of the media. Among the most significant developments were the emergence of permanent campaigns and the proliferation of fast-paced journalism, often lacking the

time or space for critical reflection. This environment gave rise to a new form of politics based on fostering a sense of identity with audiences. Concurrently, the need for politicians to engage professional institutions – namely, political public relations – intensified, along with their involvement in image construction. At the same time, there was a noticeable decline in public interest in day-to-day politics – the phenomenon of ‘disappearing voters’ – which appeared to prompt a shift toward attack campaigning (Piontek, 2011; Walecka-Rynduch, 2019; Łukasik-Turecka, 2023).

The fourth age emerged in the 21st century and was proposed by Jay Blumler in 2013 during a keynote address at a workshop on online political communication, when he talked about the Age of the Internet (*The Fourth Age of Political Communication*). This age is characterised by an even greater prominence and ‘abundance’ of communication, reflected in the vast number of available media channels and the resulting amplification of communicative influence on audiences. Communication in this age is characterised by its dual-layered structure, often referred to as “an ecology of two different levels of political communication”. In this age, (a) the audiences/recipients of political messages have changed: even if they are politically indifferent, they are nonetheless unable to escape the constant exposure to political content in an increasingly mediated environment; and (b) the role of centrifugal diversification, already a hallmark of the third age of communication, has grown. The internet has significantly accelerated and reinforced two-way communication by empowering civic associations to mobilise support, coordinate activities, and maintain regular contact with members and sympathisers. All this has given rise to a dynamic communicative sphere that opens new avenues for expression, exchange, and education. Importantly, in the fourth age of political communication, the role of impression management and the broader process of image construction in the media gained unprecedented prominence for politicians as political actors (the dimension of personalisation, public relations, and celebritisation). This age also witnessed the disintegration and fragmentation of the communication landscape, contributing to the radicalisation of political attitudes and deepening polarisation. These shifts have been further intensified by the rise of selective and highly targeted modes of communication.

The current phase, which may be described as the fifth age of political communication, reflects a fundamental shift in the paradigm of political

communication between politicians and voters. From the perspective of political communication, this emerging age is characterised by the following developments: (a) the definition of the public sphere – the MediaPolis; (b) the rise of a new identity- and media-oriented type of politician – a MediaEgo; (c) a transformation in the modes of communication between political actors and the electorate, reflected in the emergence of a new paradigm. The term ‘MediaPolis’ denotes a reconfigured public sphere in which the boundaries between high culture and popular culture are increasingly blurred. Within this sphere, a diverse array of communication channels coexist, including media that have assumed a performative character. ‘Performative media’ are those that adapt dynamically to the content they present. They encompass both new media – such as digital platforms, social networks, online television, and entertainment or gossip portals – and traditional media, including creative non-fiction, partisan television stations, and hybridised formats in converted print and radio. These performative media facilitate the widespread repetition of political messages, often grounded in recognisable symbols and rhetorical topoi. Their performative nature ensures that, in the MediaPolis, selected political communicative contexts remain accessible to broad audiences, regardless of individual media preferences (Walecka-Rynduch, 2019). A MediaEgo represents a distinct type of political actor, particularly in terms of communicative strategy. This figure follows the evolution of earlier archetypes, such as the ‘politician with a face’, the charismatic showman, and the celebrity politician (Michalczyk, 2022, pp. 50–53). As a media-centric *homo politicus*, a MediaEgo relies heavily on performative media and employs an array of strategic tools and techniques to shape and promote their public image across multiple channels. A defining trait of this figure is their initial anonymity or limited public recognition. However, in response to rapidly unfolding political events, they must quickly accomplish two critical goals: to earn the trust of the electorate and to craft a persuasive personalised narrative that conveys their background, family, traditions, culture, and core values – including, where relevant, religious beliefs (Walecka-Rynduch, 2019).

The paradigm shift described here is part of a broader historical trajectory: the continual expansion of media reach and its evolving function within the sphere of political engagement.

Table 2. Three dimensions of the political communication paradigm in the Media-polis sphere

Function	Means of political communication
Intended	<p>New narrative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standardisation of the communicative message; communicative topoi • pauperisation of language • new rhetoric based on the mechanisms of propaganda, populism, demagoguery, and post-truth • emphasis on narrative identity; emotionalisation of the message
Transmitted	<p>Associative communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integration of both new and (non-)new media channels into the communication process with the electorate
Performed	<p>Performative communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • – performative nature of communication channels (performative media) • communicative mimicry and mimesis: social media, messaging platforms, email services, gossip portals, internet and television platforms, gamification, creative non-fiction

Source: own elaboration based on Walecka-Rynduch, 2019, 2021.

The next anticipated age in the evolution of political communication – the sixth age – is symbolically projected to emerge in the 2030s. This period is expected to be shaped by the growing influence of artificial intelligence on political and social processes. Central themes will likely include the proliferation of disinformation within the broader context of cognitive warfare, as well as the rising impact of non-political actants on national policy-making. The latter factor appears particularly significant as it may contribute to the emergence of a new type of politician (or an influential figure). Building on the concept of a MediaEgo politician from the fifth age, this new archetype – referred to here as a HyperEgo – will likely distinguish themselves through the creation and dissemination of political and social messages via exclusive personalised communication channels (own media), effectively marginalising other media channels.

The advancement of the digital society, along with the ongoing evolution of political communication within it, has led to an expanding field of research focused on emerging phenomena such as the mediatisation of politics and the politicisation of the media.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

There is a noticeable increase in interest in systematising research on political communication as an integral part of public communication. The work of the Political Communication Section of the Polish Communication Association (PTKS; *Polskie Towarzystwo Komunikacji Społecznej*), which unites scholars from leading academic centres across Poland, is a prominent example of this trend. This section fosters collaborative initiatives, including the Summer Discussion Seminar, which is regularly held at various academic hubs throughout the country, joint discussion panels at national and international scientific conferences, and publication projects. One such publication is a comprehensive overview of the current state of research and the field of contemporary political communication in Poland, featured in two issues of *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* (issues 3 and 4, 2023), published by Jagiellonian University in Kraków. In the Polish academic landscape, several thematic conferences have become permanent fixtures. These include the rotating PTKS Congress, the *Knowledge – Communication – Action (Wiedza – Komunikacja – Działanie)* conference in Kraków, *Media Communication in Research and Practice (Komunikacja medialna w badaniach i praktyce)* in Ustroń, and *Political Communication in Postmodernity (Komunikowanie polityczne w ponowoczesności)* in Lublin. On the international stage, significant initiatives include the Political Communication Section of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), the Central and Eastern European Communication and Media Conference (CEECOM), the Political Communication Section of the American Political Science Association (APSA), as well as ongoing activities of the International Communication Association (ICA) and the Centre for Politics and Communication (CPC).

The need to redefine foundational concepts and modernise perspectives on political communication in the context of digital realities has also become a central theme in recent publications that have appeared in the Polish academic market in recent years. Some of the most notable ones from the 2022–2024 period are K. Brzoza-Kolorz's *Polityka kobiet czy kobiety polityki? Płeć jako element obrazów medialnych kobiet [Women's Politics or the Politics of Women? Gender as a Component*

of *Media Representations of Women*] (Katowice, 2024); R. Klepka's *Stronniczość mediów. Świat w lustrze czy w krzywym zwierciadle [Media Bias. The World in a Mirror, or a Funhouse Mirror?]* (Kraków, 2024); and *Komunikowanie polityczne w teorii i praktyce [Political Communication in Theory and Practice]*, a volume edited by W. Furman and P. Kuca (Rzeszów, 2023). Further contributions include Katarzyna Adamczewska's *Rola mediów we współczesnych modelach przepływu informacji politycznej [The Role of Media in Contemporary Models of Political Information Flow]* (Poznań, 2023); W. Rafałowski's *Kampanie parlamentarne w Polsce: analiza programów i apeli wyborczych w perspektywie paradygmatu ekspozycji treści [Parliamentary Campaigns in Poland: Analysis of Programs and Campaign Appeals from the Perspective of the Content Exposure Paradigm]* (Warsaw, 2023); S. Michalczyk's *Komunikowanie polityczne. Skrypt dla studentów dziennikarstwa i komunikacji społecznej oraz politologii [Political Communication: A Guide for Students of Journalism, Media, and Political Science]* (Katowice, 2022); M. Siudak's *Twitter w komunikacji politycznej w Polsce [Twitter in Political Communication in Poland]* (Olsztyn, 2022); and *Partie polityczne w obliczu kryzysu zaufania społecznego: perspektywa komunikacyjna [Political Parties in the Face of a Crisis of Public Trust: A Communication Perspective]* by B. Mirowska-Brodowska and M. Jacuński (Warsaw, 2022).

It is also worth mentioning the renewed academic interest in a particular form of political communication: propaganda – particularly its modern manifestations, such as computational propaganda, disinformation, and other forms of unethical communication. Promising research in this area is currently being conducted at institutions such as Jagiellonian University, the University of Warsaw, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, and SWPS University.

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The two faces of propaganda – using architecture and art for propaganda purposes

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: The original Latin meaning of *propagare* is ‘to extend’ or ‘to spread’. Propaganda is most commonly defined as a deliberate action intended to shape specific views and behaviours of members of a community. Crucially, such action must be intentional – propaganda is never carried out unconsciously or inadvertently.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: Historical examples of propaganda include the artistic patronage of popes and propaganda expressed through architecture and urban planning in totalitarian states.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: To evaluate specific propagandistic actions, it is necessary to address at least three questions: Who is propagating, what is being propagated, and by what means (or methods)?

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Today, in public consciousness, propaganda generally carries a distinctly negative connotation. It is frequently associated or even equated with manipulation, indoctrination, or the dissemination of fake news. Yet, in principle, the term ‘propaganda’ ought to be value-neutral.

Keywords: propaganda, urban planning, popes, Catholic Church, totalitarianism

Definition of the term

Today, the term ‘propaganda’ generally carries a distinctly negative connotation. It is frequently associated or even equated with manipulation, indoctrination, or the dissemination of fake news. Perhaps for this reason, the recent 400th anniversary of the establishment in Rome of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (founded in 1622) passed almost entirely without notice. Much like the Spanish Inquisition – whose ‘black legend’ is skilfully dismantled by Henry Kamen in his recently published volume in the “Ceram series” (PIW 2025) – propaganda has likewise become burdened with stereotypes and myths. Yet the term itself, like a number of other concepts in the social sciences (such as the ‘elite’, which I examine in the volume *The sociology of politics and political psychology*), ought to be – at least reasonably – value-neutral. One might argue, of course, that the very act of propagating something is inherently non-neutral. But if that were the case, then the term ‘politics’ (regardless of its aims or the means employed) could not be value-neutral either. The original Latin *propagare* simply means ‘to extend’ or ‘to spread’. Propaganda is most commonly defined as deliberate action intended to shape specific views or behaviours among members of a community. Crucially, such action must be intentional – propaganda is never carried out unconsciously or inadvertently.

Historical analysis of the term

In evaluating specific propaganda activities, it is essential to address at least three questions: Who is propagating, what is being propagated, and by what means (or methods) is this achieved? These questions, however, are by no means always consistent with one another. For example, Hitler – undoubtedly one of the greatest criminals in human history – was a staunch opponent of smoking; he not only propagated non-smoking but also introduced a ban on smoking on public transportation in Germany. Moreover, propaganda may but does not necessarily rely on falsehood. During a brief period of ‘relative calm’ in the USSR, between the end of the horrific famine (*Holodomor*) and the onset of the equally brutal era of Stalinist purges, the 1934 musical comedy *The Jolly*

Fellows (Vesyolye Rebyata) was produced. Yet, as Joseph Goebbels, the consummate master of Nazi propaganda, is said to have remarked: “a lie repeated often enough becomes the truth”.

Discussion of the term

It is undeniable that the same (or at least similar) methods and tools can be employed in propaganda efforts of radically different kinds. Accordingly, this article will examine two entirely distinct ways in which works (and sometimes even masterpieces) of architecture, art, and urban planning have been used for propagandistic purposes. On the one hand, it will discuss the promotion of the Catholic faith through displays of the Catholic Church’s power, particularly in competition with Protestant movements. On the other, it will analyse the use of entire urban–architectural complexes by totalitarian states (especially Nazi Germany and Mussolini’s Italy) to project the strength of the state in contrast to weaker (and, indeed, not only at that time) democratic states.

The artistic patronage of the popes

It is often difficult to avert one’s gaze from the beauty of Christian churches, cathedrals, and basilicas. It is worth recalling, however, that neither the term ‘basilica’ nor its architectural form originally had any connection with religious worship. When Emperor Constantine (the founder of Constantinople, i.e., modern-day Istanbul) recognised Christianity as the state religion in the early fourth century (through the Edict of Milan in 313), a practical problem arose. Until then, Christians, as a persecuted religious group, had conducted their ceremonies and buried their dead in catacombs beyond the city walls (*extra muros*). Even the largest of these catacombs were far too small to accommodate the great numbers of worshippers after the persecutions ended in the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284–305). The basilica was originally a secular building, housing shops, craft workshops, exchange offices, or simply serving as a meeting place. Its classical form, with a raised central nave flanked by lower side aisles, proved ideally suited to the needs

of the rapidly expanding Christian liturgy. The central nave of the Basilica of Maxentius, for example, measured 80 metres in length, 25 metres in width, and an impressive 38 metres in height. The Basilica of St. John Lateran (San Giovanni in Laterano) in Rome, whose construction began shortly after Constantine assumed power, has a nave almost as long (75 metres).

It may therefore be argued that the monumental form of the Roman basilicas arose primarily for practical reasons: the need – indeed the necessity – to accommodate ever-growing congregations. The propagandistic function likely emerged only much later, when the Catholic Church faced an increasingly aggressive (and propagandistic) Protestant challenge. In Raphael's celebrated fresco *The School of Athens* (Vatican Museums, Raphael Rooms), we still see philosophers debating beneath a Renaissance-style vision of the new St. Peter's Basilica. The foundation stone, laid in the presence of Pope Julius II (Giuliano della Rovere, who occupied the papal throne from 1503 to 1513), was placed on 18 April 1506. Barely eleven years later, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican was completed in the Baroque style roughly a century later. Besides its undeniable artistic merits, this far richer, more ornate, and considerably more expensive style was intended to display the power of the Catholic Church, in line with the aims of the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Given the high rates of illiteracy at the time, the visual arts carried far more weight than they do today. By erecting such costly buildings, the Church demonstrated that it was wealthy and powerful enough to afford such monumental works; the implicit message was that it was therefore not worth abandoning Catholicism in favour of Protestantism. The cost of building the magnificent and monumental (218 metres in length) St. Peter's Basilica, together with Bernini's still more expensive colonnade, is estimated (in modern currency) at around nine billion US dollars.

We have already mentioned Pope Julius II, the nephew of Pope Sixtus IV, both from the Roman *della Rovere* family. "Under Julius II the Papal State, the Patrimonium Petri, became the supreme state in Italy; for the first time for centuries the papal throne ranked as a great European power" (Lotz, 1995, p. 13). In 1511, he initiated the creation of the Holy League against the Turks. The Raphael Rooms (*Stanze*

di Raffaello) were Julius II's papal apartments; he refused to reside in the low-ceilinged rooms of his predecessor, Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia – of rather dubious, or at least unconventional, renown), located one floor below and now housing an exhibition of contemporary religious art. It was also during Julius II's reign that Michelangelo magnificently painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In one of the papal chambers (*Stanza di Eliodoro*), we find two depictions of the head of the Church:

one as himself, observing the scene from the left, and another as the high priest Onias, praying before the altar. It is seen as an allusion to the expulsion of foreign powers from the Papal States (Shaw, 1994, p. 197).

The power of Julius II is also conveyed in the statue of Moses in the church of *San Pietro in Vincoli*, although it was intended merely as part of an enormous papal tomb designed by Michelangelo. Julius II also commissioned two new streets in the centre of Rome (*Via Lungara* and *Via Giulia*). In both his political and social roles (as patron of the people of Rome), Pope Julius II consciously modelled himself on the ancient Roman emperors (Żyromski, 2009, p. 152).

Of course, the construction of so vast, magnificent, and costly a complex as St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican – together with its square and colonnade – exceeded the capacity and time horizon of a single pope (or architect). It was Pope Paul III (1534–1549; Alessandro Farnese) who entrusted Michelangelo with the task of building St. Peter's. At his initiative, the Council of Trent was convened, the Capitoline Hill (*Piazza del Campidoglio*) was redesigned by Michelangelo, and the splendid Palazzo Farnese was erected (now housing the French Embassy and the *École française de Rome*). Pope Pius IV (1559–1565) commissioned Michelangelo to convert part of the Baths of Diocletian (the *tepidarium*, measuring 59 metres in length, 24 metres in width, and 30 metres in height) into the beautiful church of *Santa Maria degli Angeli*. The church's dedication cleverly alluded to the pope's own name, Giovanni Angelo. His first name, meanwhile, was commemorated in the naming of the *Porta Pia*, one of the gates leading into the city centre. It was not until the pontificate of Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590), a Franciscan, that the dome of St. Peter's was completed. With a diameter of 43 metres – comparable to that of the Pantheon (42.3 metres) – the dome is more than twice the height of the Pantheon's dome. Under

Pius IV, the Vatican Library was established, numerous Roman palaces (the Vatican, Lateran, and Quirinal) were restored, and two new squares were created in the historic centre of *Roma aeterna* – the “Eternal City”: *Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore* and *Piazza del Popolo*.

Pope Paul V (1605–1621), Camillo Borghese of Siena, gave his name to the Villa Borghese park and was also responsible for the *Acqua Paola* aqueduct, which brought water from Lake Bracciano, north of Rome, to the Janiculum Hill. The aqueduct ends in a beautiful monumental fountain, complete with an honorific inscription. Most significantly, Carlo Maderno built the monumental façade of St. Peter’s (1607–1612) during his pontificate. Unusually, Paul V was buried not in St. Peter’s but in *Santa Maria Maggiore*, in a specially constructed chapel.

Urban VIII (1623–1644; Maffeo Barberini), the longest-reigning pope of the 17th century, left his mark throughout central Rome, where the bees of the Barberini coat of arms can still be found: on Bernini’s *Fontana del Tritone*, on the Palazzo Barberini (home to Raphael’s celebrated *La Fornarina*), and elsewhere. Above all, it was thanks to Urban VIII’s initiative that two of Bernini’s masterpieces can be admired in St. Peter’s: the great bronze baldachin (1624–1633) and the *Cathedra Petri* (1656–1666). Interestingly, the baldachin above the Apostle’s tomb is as tall as the central nave of St. Mary’s Basilica in Kraków. The bronze for the baldachin was taken from the Pantheon’s portico, prompting Romans to joke that “what the barbarians [in Italian *i barbari*] did not destroy, Barberini completed”. Bernini also created Urban VIII’s monumental bronze-and-marble tomb (1628–1647) in St. Peter’s. The pope’s brother, Cardinal Francesco Barberini, purchased the grand Palazzo Barberini (1628–1633). “From Urban VIII’s reign on the most important building tasks were handed on to the most distinguished architects” (Wittkower, 1986, p. 141).

Pope Innocent X (1644–1655; Giovanni Battista Pamphilj) is perhaps best-known today for Velázquez’s magnificent 1650 portrait, now in the National Gallery, London. As pope, however, he spent vast sums creating the “Pamphili Centre, the Piazza Navona with the family palace and S. Agnese” (Wittkower, 1986, p. 141). On the Piazza Navona stands Bernini’s masterpiece, the *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* (1648–1651), while his rival Francesco Borromini built *Sant’Agnese in Agone* alongside it.

His successor, Alexander VII (1655–1667; Fabio Chigi), played a particularly important role in the urban development of the Eternal City:

None of the great building popes from Julius II to Urban VIII, not even Sixtus V, changed the face and the image of Rome as much as Alexander. His are Piazza S. Pietro, Piazza Colonna, Piazza del Popolo; his S. Maria della Pace and its square, his S. Maria in Campitelli and Piazza del Pantheon” (Krautheimer, 1985, p. XIII).

He oversaw the creation of the *Via del Corso*, connecting *Piazza Venezia* with *Piazza del Popolo*, where *Santa Maria del Popolo* stands. Most famously, during his pontificate Bernini erected the grand colonnade encircling St. Peter’s Square, symbolising the Church embracing its faithful. Alexander VII’s tomb in St. Peter’s (Bernini, 1671–1678) is notable for its originality: a figure of Death lifting a curtain. He also supervised and financed the enlargement of the Quirinal Palace (*Palazzo del Quirinale*), now the residence of the President of the Italian Republic; the Quirinal, the highest of Rome’s seven hills, was valued for its healthy air.

The pontificate of Pius VI (1775–1799), another pope who made significant contributions to the embellishment and modernisation of Rome’s centre, coincided with the turbulent years of the French Revolution. His predecessor, Clement XIV, had dissolved the Society of Jesus, likely in line with prevailing Enlightenment trends. As pope, Pius VI organised the *Museo Pio-Clementino* and the *Pinacoteca Vaticana*, both, of course, adorned with appropriate honorary inscriptions. During his reign, an ancient obelisk was erected in front of the Quirinal Palace, flanked by statues of Castor and Pollux, the mythical twin brothers. In 1789, another obelisk was placed at the *Trinità dei Monti*, at the top of the Spanish Steps, and in 1792 a third was set up in the *Piazza di Montecitorio*. He also oversaw the reorganisation of the *Piazza del Popolo*, complete with a triumphal arch marking the city’s northern gateway. Pius VI’s reign, lasting twenty-four years and eight months, was the longest since the time of St. Peter. “Pius’s dedication to St. Peter’s was the fruit of both personal experience and an instinct for effective propaganda” (Collins, 2004, p. 88). It was above all the ‘Baroque popes’ who skilfully harnessed the Church’s financial resources and its architectural and artistic potential, both to beautify Rome and to display the power of the Catholic Church – not merely to compete with Protestant denominations

but also to engage in propaganda and secure the papacy's place among the great powers of contemporary Europe (as in the case of the Holy League). Thus,

each pope sought to make and, preferably, leave his mark in Rome, not only in establishing his family in the forefront of society, but also in creating lasting monuments that, though they might strike both his contemporaries and posterity as testimonies to his own glory, were means to proclaim the glory of Holy Church as well (Rietberger, 2006, p. 8).

Already in the early Middle Ages, the Church had become the largest landowner on the Italian Peninsula:

These funds enabled the papacy to carry out through the fifth century an ambitious building program, including S. Sabina, S. Maria Maggiore, Sto. Stefano Rotondo and work in the Lateran complex (Krautheimer, 2000, p. 70).

Particularly notable in this regard was Pope Sixtus III (432–440), whose construction of *Santa Maria Maggiore* best illustrates the Sixtine Renaissance. By the fifth century, “Church building was no longer planned and financed by the parish congregations or by wealthy individuals” (Krautheimer, 2000, p. 52). During the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590–604), the first pagan building was Christianised in Rome when the Pantheon was converted in 609 into *Santa Maria Rotonda*. Pope Leo III (795–816) undertook significant work on the Lateran Palace, adding a vast dining hall (*triclinium*) over 50 metres in length. At its centre stood a porphyry fountain, and it is worth recalling that since the days of the ancient Roman Empire, porphyry had symbolised imperial authority (the Byzantine emperors bore the epithet *Porphyrogenitus*, i.e., ‘born in the purple’). It is therefore unsurprising that the papal throne in *Santa Maria in Cosmedin* (‘in adornments’, such as in the splendid mosaic floors) incorporates a porphyry disc, which, together with depictions of lions, represents the pope as ruler of the Christian world (which was important during the Investiture Controversy). The only Gothic church architecture in Rome is represented by *Santa Maria sopra Minerva*. It was only in the Renaissance that Rome became the artistic capital of Europe, largely through the initiatives of successive popes.

One figure of particular importance was Sixtus IV (1471–1484), who, even in his very name, alluded to Sixtus III. He commissioned not only

churches (e.g., *San Pietro in Montorio* and *Santa Maria del Popolo*) and chapels, but also streets (*Via Sistina*), aqueducts, and bridges (the *Ponte Sisto* leading to Trastevere), in the manner of the emperors of the Roman Empire. His pontificate marked the rise of the *della Rovere* family, and he was responsible for the Sistine Chapel. On every structure he commissioned, an appropriate honorary inscription was placed. With this pope – the uncle of Julius II – we symbolically close the circle, bringing to an end this brief survey of the artistic, architectural, and urban patronage of the popes.

Propaganda through architecture and urban planning in totalitarian states

In my book on propaganda in totalitarian systems, I argue that

there is an inverse relationship between propaganda and repression in totalitarian systems. Where repression was relatively limited (as in Mussolini's Italy) propaganda had to be especially intense, diverse, and, above all, effective. In my view, Hitler's Third Reich maintained a certain balance between repression and propaganda (...). At the opposite extreme from Fascist Italy, in terms of the relationship between repression and propaganda, was undoubtedly the Soviet Union – particularly during the dictatorial rule of Stalin (Żyromski, 2015, p. 6).

All three states were oriented toward external expansion, most visibly in the Third Reich's drive to acquire 'living space' (*Lebensraum*) in the East. Mussolini, seeking to revive the grandeur of the Roman Empire of the first two centuries of our era, aimed to dominate all the shores of the Mediterranean (the *Mare Nostrum* conception). His military expansion was therefore directed toward Ethiopia (Abyssinia), Albania, Greece, North Africa, and southern France. Soviet imperialism was skilfully disguised under the banner of 'proletarian internationalism'.

Mussolini sought to not only break with the pacifist orientation of much of Italian society but also end what he perceived as 'decadence' in art and architecture. He ordered the demolition of entire quarters of medieval buildings in central Rome, for example, to create the *Via dell'Impero* (now *Via dei Fori Imperiali*) and the *Via della Conciliazione*, leading to St. Peter's Square and Basilica. As Flavia Marcello demonstrated

in her noteworthy (though, unfortunately, unpublished) doctoral dissertation, Rome was to be remodelled as the capital of a fascist nation, and behind this transformation lay the idea of *renovatio urbis* (Marcello, 2001, p. 17). The new Rome was to be not only a more splendid capital of Italy but the capital of a new fascist Italy – a city directly associated with the *Duce*, a *città mussoliniana*. The capital was again to represent and propagate power, but this time it was the power of Fascism, and above all of the *Duce* himself. For this reason, the construction of monumental buildings was prioritised over residential development. “In 1931 Mussolini’s government set forth a master-plan for the remaking of Rome” (Hughes, 2011, p. 446). The explicit goal was to create vast new urban–architectural complexes in the capital that would be the largest in the world (*Foro Mussolini, Città Universitaria, Esposizione Universale di Roma*).

“Between 1928 and 1932, Enrico Del Debbio designed the *Stadio dei Marmi* at the *Foro Mussolini*. Of all areas of the capital, the *Duce* most frequently visited this complex” (Nicoloso, 2008, p. 48). Although the *Foro Mussolini* now bears the more neutral name *Foro Italico*, a tall obelisk inscribed *Mussolini Dux* (designed by Costantino Costantini in 1929) still stands at its entrance – a symbol of the growing personality cult in Italy (*Ducismo* ideology). The original complex covered 85 hectares, but in 1936 the site was enlarged nearly fivefold (to 410 hectares) in preparation for the planned 1944 Summer Olympics. These plans were, of course, thwarted by the Second World War; the site later hosted the 1960 Olympic Games and the 1990 FIFA World Cup. Each Italian region was required to sponsor one of the numerous statues of young male and female athletes surrounding the *Stadio dei Marmi* (*Marble Stadium*). “About sixty giant stone athletes in the *Stadio dei Marmi* at the EUR are still standing on their original bases” (Hughes, 2011, p. 450).

One of the most practical projects of Fascist Rome’s reconstruction was the creation of what was then the largest university campus in the world, the *Città Universitaria*. Naturally, such an undertaking also (if not primarily) had a propagandistic purpose. “Mussolini hoped to make Rome the intellectual and political capital of the nation” (Shapiro, 1987, p. 193). Built in just three years (1932–1935), the complex of sixteen buildings, designed by Marcello Piacentini, occupies 22 hectares between *Castro Pretorio* (the barracks of the ancient Roman

Praetorian Guard) and the *Via Tiburtina*. The campus layout clearly drew on ancient models, following the basilica plan with a central axis and a symmetrical arrangement of buildings. Entry is through a monumental gateway building, the *propylea* (a deliberate allusion to the Athenian Acropolis), designed by Arnaldo Foschini. The 80-metre-long entrance portico bears a Latin inscription declaring that “During the reign of Victor Emmanuel III and when Benito Mussolini was governing the Italian state, the old University of Rome was moved into this site, worthy of Roman magnificence”. The scale of the campus is exemplified by the Rectorate (*Rettorato*), whose façade measures 120 metres. In front of it stands a statue of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom (by Arturo Martini). The Rectorate building (by Marcello Piacentini) houses the library and the great assembly hall (the *Aula Magna*). Its façade is clad in local travertine, in keeping with the policy of autarky adopted after the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy for its invasion of Abyssinia. The campus was inaugurated on 21 April 1935, i.e., the traditional birthday of Rome.

One of the least-visited (and quite undeservedly so) districts of the Italian capital is EUR. As one art historian has observed, “EUR is considerably more sophisticated as a piece of urbanism than Speer’s Berlin would have been” (Sudjic, 2006, p. 72). The acronym EUR refers to the *Esposizione Universale di Roma* (Rome World Exposition), scheduled to take place in the Italian capital in 1942 to mark the 20th anniversary of the Fascist March on Rome. EUR was conceived as a ‘City of Civilisation’, just as the *Foro Mussolini* was intended as a ‘City of Sport’. The complex covers roughly 400 hectares (Rossi, 1991, p. 134) and was planned as the largest exhibition area in the world. Among the buildings erected there during the Fascist era, the most striking is the Square Colosseum (*Colosseo Quadrato*), a deliberate reference to its ancient predecessor, the Colosseum (*Amphitheatrum Flavium*). Like the ancient structure, it features three orders of columns, but its plan is square rather than elliptical. Completed in 1937, the Square Colosseum – officially the *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana* – “was intended to symbolize the greatness of Italy through the centuries” (Shapiro, 1987, p. 228). Also notable is the church of SS. Pietro e Paolo (1938–1966), which, rather than adopting a basilica form, was built on a circular plan inspired by the ancient Pantheon. Another major building is

Adalberto Libera's Congress Hall, less obviously classical in its inspiration, with its flattened dome rising over a white stone box. Its entrance is marked by a colonnade of fourteen grey granite columns set in a dazzling snow-white marble screen (Sudjic, 2006, p. 73).

On its front façade, a quadriga was planned as the Italian counterpart to the four-horsed chariot atop Berlin's Brandenburg Gate. EUR's design also included a vast square (300 × 130 metres) surrounded by four monumental buildings intended for various exhibitions. Plans called for a 26-metre-high cascade, as well as a massive altar modelled on the ancient *Ara Pacis Augustae*, but 40 metres high, constructed of aluminium and steel, and illuminated at night by powerful spotlights (Gentile, 1993, p. 259).

In the Third Reich, as in Mussolini's Italy, "art was considered one of the most important elements in building the new Reich and the new man. Political aims and artistic expression became one" (Adam, 1992, p. 9). Hitler valued the classical architecture of ancient Greece and Rome far more than the artistic achievements of other eras, considering both Gothic and Renaissance styles to be overly Christian. At the same time, practical functionality was essential: the underground sections of many buildings were designed to serve as air-raid shelters if necessary.

One of the most significant newly built administrative structures in Nazi Berlin was the New Reich Chancellery (the old Chancellery had been housed in the former Radziwiłł Palace). It was erected at an exceptionally rapid pace (from January 1938 to January 1939) by more than 4,500 workers labouring in two shifts.

Even the process of building the Chancellery was presented as a demonstration of German technical and organizational superiority over other races. Speer and Hitler conspired a little misleadingly to suggest that the whole project took just a year to complete, from start to finish (Sudjic, 2006, p. 20).

However, this officially given construction time omitted the earlier demolition work and site preparation. The Reich Chancellery was designed by Albert Speer, Hitler's favourite architect. During the war, the Third Reich owed much of its ability to keep its economy functioning (virtually until the end of 1944, despite intensifying Allied bombing) to Speer's organisational skills. The Chancellery itself was 422 metres long, with a floor area of 15,143 square metres. Entry into this vast building was far from

straightforward: visitors first crossed the 'Court of Honour' (*Ehrenhof*), then ascended a staircase flanked by two monumental statues by Arno Breker, titled *Wehrmacht* and *Partei* (names that need no translation). Each statue was eight times the height of an adult. As art historian Deyan Sudjic observes:

Albert Speer had designed this courtyard, a prelude to the Chancellery itself, as a world within a world, from which there was no way out except on Hitler's terms. Its blank, floodlit walls shut out the city to create a hollow space open to the sky (...). The void of the courtyard was filled by shouted orders and the sound of marching boots on stone. Here was a practical demonstration of the expression of political power through building, its symbolic quality put to use for highly specific purposes (Sudjic, 2006, p. 15).

A key feature of the Reich Chancellery was the 146-metre-long Marble Gallery – twice the length of the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, on which it was modelled. Most important, however, was Hitler's own office, accessed through massive bronze doors more than five metres high. Its dimensions were more suited to a throne room: 27 metres long, 14.5 metres wide, and 9.75 metres high. Inside, a giant globe on a stand dominated the space; it was later famously parodied by Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*. The polished marble floor was intentionally chosen so that foreign diplomats would be forced to walk slowly and carefully before reaching the Führer.

Three years earlier, in 1936, the new Air Ministry for Hermann Göring had been completed on Wilhelmstrasse in the heart of the government district. More than 250 metres long, it became the largest administrative building in Europe, with seven floors, 4,000 windows, and 7 kilometres of corridors (Moorhouse, 2011, p. 101). Remarkably, it survived the war intact. "Goering's Air Ministry building was transformed into the DDR's House of Ministries by the simple addition of East Germany's hammer and compass insignia to the exterior" (Sudjic, 2006, p. 122). Today it houses the German Federal Ministry of Finance. A year earlier, in 1935 – and after only eight months of construction – Berlin's Tempelhof Airport had opened. "Its facade, with a near-total absence of decoration, is military to the core" (Adam, 1992, p. 248). During the Berlin Blockade (24 June 1948 – 12 May 1949), American aircraft landed there every few seconds with aid for the population of the besieged city, delivering essential provisions, including coal. For the 1936 Olympic Games, Berlin also

saw the construction, at a cost of 77 million *Reichsmarks*, of a stadium built from Franconian stone to seat 100,000 spectators, along with a tall Olympic Tower.

Yet all this was merely the modest beginning of the Führer's architectural ambitions for the Third Reich.

Hitler foresaw nothing less than a new heart for the capital, centred on two intersecting central axes, one running north–south and another east–west. Along these thoroughfares, over a hundred new public and ceremonial buildings would be located, all of them conceived on a grand scale (Moorhouse, 2011, p. 102).

On 30 January 1937 (exactly four years after becoming Chancellor), Hitler officially appointed Albert Speer *Generalbauinspektor für die Reichshauptstadt* ('Inspector General of Building for the Capital of the Reich'). The building programme was scheduled for completion in 1950, supervised by a team of about 150 architects. By then, Berlin was to host a World Exposition, and its population was expected to double from four to eight million. The North–South Axis was planned to be 7 kilometres long and 120 metres wide, linking two railway stations, the main station being the southern station. "Speer was particularly proud of the design for the four-level station" (Sudjic, 2015, p. 65). At more than 300 metres wide, it would have been far larger than New York's Grand Central Terminal. Inside, passengers would have been transported by both lifts and escalators. In front of the station, an immense square – 1,000 metres long and more than 300 metres wide – was planned. "Paved with granite, Adolf Hitler Platz encompassed over 50 hectares and was intended to be large enough to hold a million people" (Moorhouse, 2011, p. 108). Intended for military parades and mass demonstrations, carefully choreographed by the regime, the square would have been decorated with heavy tanks and artillery captured from the Red Army.

To either side, elegant, four- or five-storey, neo-classical buildings would frame the plaza; hotels, restaurants, a swimming-pool complex, and the 'KdF block'—a site to provide entertainment for German workers (Moorhouse, 2011, p. 146).

The old Reichstag building – today's Bundestag, topped by Norman Foster's celebrated glass dome – would have been retained, forming the eastern boundary of the vast plaza. "The army high command and Hitler's new palace would have made up the other two sides" (Sudjic, 2006, p. 40).

From this enormous square, the two largest planned structures of the Nazi capital – the People’s Hall (*Volkshalle*) and the Triumphal Arch – would have dominated the view. The design of the *Volkshalle* was inspired by the Roman Pantheon, still admired for its perfect proportions (its height equal to its diameter – 42.3 metres). Like the Pantheon, the Berlin hall was to have no windows, only an oculus at the apex of the dome. However, while the Pantheon’s oculus measures 5 metres across, Berlin’s was to be an extraordinary 46 metres in diameter. The dome would have risen from an immense podium – a square 315 metres on each side and 74 metres high. The total height of the structure was projected at 290 metres, with the dome itself spanning 250 metres. The interior would have been sixteen times larger than that of St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican (Balfour, 1990, p. 94), accommodating about 180,000 people (some seated, most standing) to hear speeches from the Führer. In the northern section of the hall, a massive niche (50 metres high and 28 metres wide), decorated with golden mosaics, would have framed Hitler’s podium. The dome was to be clad in copper and “surmounted by a globe that itself carried an eagle, its wings open, its claws bared” (Sudjic, 2006, p. 39). This monumental eagle symbolised Hitler’s position as ruler of the world. It is unsurprising that Hitler was frequently photographed with a model of the *Volkshalle*. The projected cost of the People’s Hall was initially estimated at 2.5 billion *Reichsmarks*.

Approximately five kilometres from the *Volkshalle* was to stand a triumphal arch – again, the largest in the world. This monumental Neo-Romanesque Berlin arch (*Triumphbogen*) was conceived as a vastly enlarged replica of the *Arc de Triomphe* on Paris’s *Place Charles de Gaulle* (formerly *Place de l’Étoile*).

It was intended to serve as a memorial to the fallen of the First World War. Decorated with seventy-five bas-reliefs, it was to bear the names of the nearly two million Germans who had died in that conflict (Moorhouse, 2011, pp. 106-107).

The Berlin arch was designed to rise over 117 metres – twice the height of Napoleon’s *Arc de Triomphe* – and to measure 170 metres in length and 119 metres in depth.

In the centre of the new Berlin, an enormous Hitler Palace was also envisioned.

Hitler’s palace was to be situated at the heart of the new Berlin, unencumbered by the constraints of existing streets – or budgets. With its gardens,

palm houses and courtyards, it sprawled over 2.5 million square feet. Diplomats would have been obliged to trudge half a kilometre from the ceremonial entrance to Hitler's desk. By that time, there would be no more diplomacy, just the rendering of tribute to the supreme leader of the world from his vassals (Sudjic, 2006, p. 34).

Hitler also sought an even larger and more costly Reich Chancellery (at a projected cost of 750 million marks, compared to the original 138 million).

In Munich, plans were drawn for a colossal railway station. Continuously revised and expanded by Hitler, the final design reached extraordinary proportions: 378 metres in width, with a dome 270 metres in diameter and 136 metres high. The station would have been roughly six times the size of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. "There was to be a giant new railroad station, the largest steel construction in the world" (Adam, 1992, p. 237). This Munich station was intended to connect the Reich's railway network with destinations across Eastern Europe, including Istanbul and even Moscow. It was to be the starting point for a broad-gauge railway line – four metres wide – extending as far as Rostov-on-Don in Russia.

The Soviet Union under Stalin (1928–1953) also planned to erect the largest buildings of the era, though it did not seek to rebuild Moscow in its entirety, as was envisioned for Rome or Berlin. In the late 19th century, Moscow's centre was dominated by the Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. After its demolition in the early 1930s, the site was earmarked for the Palace of the Soviets (*Dvoretz Sovetov*), which, naturally, was intended to be the tallest building in the world. "The most important symbol architecturally of the bright communist future was to be the never-completed project for the construction of a Palace of Soviets" (Gill, 2011, p. 127). Following an extensive competition (160 submissions) involving prominent architects, including foreigners such as Le Corbusier, the winner in June 1933 was Boris Mikhailovich Iofan, a Soviet architect of Jewish origin trained in Italy. During the design process, the planned height increased from 260 to 415 metres, surpassing the recently completed Empire State Building in New York. The design featured six stacked towers, topped by an enormous statue of Lenin, leader of the revolution, measuring over 90 metres (three times the height of the Statue of Liberty in New York). The statue's fingers were

to be 6 metres long. The main feature of the interior of the Palace of the Soviets was a congress hall with 21,000 seats, covered by a massive dome 100 metres high and 160 metres in diameter.

Construction began in 1937, but by January 1938 – as water began seeping in – it became clear that the building’s foundations lay 20 metres below the surface of the Moskva River. Efforts to solve this problem failed, and after Nazi Germany’s invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941, “the palace’s structural steel, by this time reaching as high as the eleventh floor, was dismantled for war use” (Sudjic, 2006, p. 62). After Stalin’s death, at the start of Khrushchev’s rule, the site was converted into a swimming pool. For more than a third of the 20th century (1958–1994), it was home to the world’s largest open-air heated swimming pool – remarkably, a perfectly round pool with a diameter of 129.5 metres. In 1995–2000, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was rebuilt on the site, its dome rising 103 metres above ground.

Near the end of Stalin’s life (1947–1953), seven skyscrapers (two of the planned nine were never completed) were erected in Moscow, popularly known as ‘Stalin’s high-rises’ (*Stalinskie Vysotki*). Laid down in 1947 to mark the 800th anniversary of Moscow’s founding, their most prominent example is the main building of Moscow State University (*Moskovskiy Gosudarstvennyy Universitet* – MGU), whose central tower was completed shortly after Stalin’s death (1 September 1953). Rising to nearly a quarter of a kilometre (240 metres), it remained the tallest building in Europe until 1990 and is still the tallest educational building in Europe.

The next tallest, at 198 metres, was the Hotel Ukraina (now the Radisson Royal Hotel), which is 34 storeys high. Until 1975, it was the tallest hotel in the world; today, after extensive renovation (reopened 28 April 2010), it has 505 rooms and 38 suites. The “Seven Sisters” (as these skyscrapers are known in the West) also include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building (172 metres, 27 storeys), an administrative building (133 metres), another hotel – the Hilton Moscow Leningradskaya (formerly the Leningradskaya Hotel) (136 metres, 26 stories) – as well as two residential buildings: Kotelnicheskaya (176 metres) and Kudrinskaya (160 metres).

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

This article has sought to demonstrate that – contrary to popular and journalistic narratives – propaganda need not (though it certainly can) be associated exclusively with manipulation and falsehood. Much depends on who is attempting to persuade whom, and above all, to what end. For this reason, two extreme examples of the propagandistic use of works of art, architecture, and even entire urban planning schemes have been deliberately selected. The positive example is the Catholic Church, and in particular the activity and patronage of a number of Baroque-era popes who showcased the power of the Church, especially in competition with the expansion of Protestant denominations. At the same time, they sought to improve the living conditions of the broader population of Rome by opening new streets, constructing aqueducts and bridges, and erecting obelisks (as orientation points) on piazzas designed by their architects. In the case of totalitarian states, however, the aim was not only to compete with the achievements of democratic states (e.g., Moscow's Palace of the Soviets versus New York's Empire State Building), but also to rival one another, as exemplified by the two opposing pavilions of the Third Reich and the USSR at the 1937 Paris World Exhibition. The models for such undertakings were the architectural (e.g., Trajan's Column, the Column of Marcus Aurelius, the triumphal arches of Titus, Septimius Severus, and Constantine) and urban (e.g., the Roman Forum and later imperial fora) achievements of the emperors of the early Roman Empire (the Principate period, 27 BC – AD 284), which was the era of the Empire's greatest splendour. The colossal plans of Hitler and Speer for the reconstruction of Berlin (the *Volkshalle* and the Triumphal Arch) illustrate the maxim that 'better is the enemy of good', and that excess is rarely a virtue – not only in architecture.

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Religious communication

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Religious communication is an integral part of social communication, encompassing both the transmission of theological content and the organisation of religious life. In the era of mediatisation, the Church adapts to new technologies using media as tools for evangelisation and community building.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: The history of religious communication illustrates its development alongside the evolution of media: from oral communication in tribal societies, through Gutenberg's printing press, radio, and television, to social media and mobile applications.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Religious communication in 21st-century media requires the adaptation of both language and format to meet the expectations of contemporary audiences. Striking a balance between modernity and authenticity is essential. Podcasting has emerged as a new tool of evangelisation, offering accessibility, intimacy, and content diversity, though it also presents distinct challenges.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Religious communication is a flexible form of messaging, open to new methods of content creation. From the spoken word to digital media, it fulfils an evangelising function, fostering community and religious identity. Mediatisation demands the adaptation of language and format while preserving authenticity. Content quality, ethical responsibility, and the use of new technologies remain key considerations.

Keywords: religious communication, Church mediatisation, evangelisation in mass media, message authenticity, participatory media

Definition of the term

Religious communication constitutes an integral component of the broader process of social communication, in which messages related to faith, doctrine, and religious practices are conveyed through a variety of forms and channels. The essence of religious communication stems from the mission and nature of religion itself, which shapes its distinct goals and functions.

Two dimensions of religious communication can be identified: direct and indirect. Direct religious communication includes acts of faith contemplation, such as prayer and interactions with clergy through sermons and catechesis. It extends beyond the mere transmission of doctrinal truths to include efforts aimed at strengthening the community of believers and cultivating religious identity across diverse social contexts. This communication functions on multiple levels – from central church authorities, through dioceses, to local parish communities – and facilitates the exchange of content not only between clergy and laity, but also among members of the faith community. Indirect religious communication involves the individual's engagement with religious content disseminated through various formats and communication channels. These may include sacred scriptures, religious art, or materials distributed via mass media.

The importance of indirect religious communication has grown significantly in the context of rapid media development and the ongoing process of mediatisation. Today, religious content is present across nearly all media platforms: print, radio, television, websites, blogs, social media, podcasts, and mobile applications. In the Catholic context, contributors to this content include clergy (priests, monks, and nuns), lay individuals formally trained in religious education (theologians and catechists), lay believers who share their personal experiences of faith, and others who do not explicitly identify their religious stance (e.g., journalists and their interviewees). In addition to individual creators, religious content is also produced and disseminated by institutions and organisations (such as charitable foundations, Catholic universities, religious orders, and various movements and associations), operating in both direct and indirect modes of communication.

Like other institutions, the Catholic Church continually adapts its communication strategies to evolving technological and social conditions.

Modern religious media have become not only instruments of evangelisation, but also platforms for interaction, particularly in the digital sphere, where believers can participate in religious life in new ways. These platforms allow individuals to deepen their knowledge of the faith, moral principles, and religious practices, while also offering spiritual support in times of personal difficulty or crises of belief.

Today's audiences are increasingly attentive to how religious messages are communicated. They expect forms of expression that resonate with their lifestyles and social environments. For this reason, the format of religious content plays a crucial role in effectively reaching the faithful. A notable example of adaptation to changing social and technological conditions was the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a surge in online broadcasts of religious services and retreats. In this way, the media enabled the continuation of religious practices despite restrictions on access to places of worship.

One distinct form of religious communication is institutional communication conducted by the Catholic Church (or other religious communities), which entails conveying information, values, and institutional objectives to both internal and external audiences. Its core function is to foster positive and lasting relationships with a range of stakeholders. In the context of the Catholic Church, the internal audience includes clergy and the faithful, who build their relationship on the basis of values grounded in belief in Jesus Christ. The external audience encompasses entities such as the media, state authorities, public opinion, and others. The official Church structures engage in communication with these stakeholders in order to build or maintain a positive image and relationships, guided also by the Church's mission. This form of communication becomes particularly significant in situations involving public scrutiny, especially when concerns arise regarding potential shortcomings or misconduct within Church structures.

Religious communication is not exclusive to the Catholic Church: it encompasses other Christian denominations as well as non-Christian religious communities. Its form and character vary depending on each tradition's theological orientation and openness to using modern communication technologies. Nonetheless, across contexts, religious communication fulfils comparable functions: organising spiritual life and building relationships within the community.

Historical analysis of the term

While analysing the history and nature of religious communication, three key aspects must be considered: the origins of the need for religious communication, the stages of its historical development, and the factors that have shaped its contemporary form.

The need for religious communication is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Catholic Church. As an integral element of the Church's mission, religious communication has been regarded as a central task of the faith community from the earliest days of Christianity. The activity of the Apostles, based on Christ's missionary mandate, focused primarily on proclaiming the Good News, which formed the foundation of their ministry. In this context, preaching the Word was not merely one of many tasks but a fundamental priority, as it shaped the identity of the Christian community and enabled its expansion.

In one of its most significant moments of reform in the Church during the 20th century, the Second Vatican Council emphasised the central role of the clergy in the process of religious communication. Conciliar documents clearly stated that a priest's primary duty is to be a preacher of the Word of God, thereby continuing the mission entrusted to the Apostles by Christ. The Council not only reaffirmed this message but also highlighted the need to adapt methods of evangelisation to evolving social and cultural realities. One of its fundamental aims was to seek more effective strategies for proclaiming the Gospel in the contemporary world. Confronted with rapid civilisational changes, the Church recognised the necessity of redefining its actions to ensure that its message could reach all nations. A key element of this renewed strategy was the emphasis on the need for a "new evangelisation", understood not merely as the transmission of faith content, but also as its adaptation to the cultural context and mindset of its recipients.

A continuation of this conciliar teaching can be found in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, issued by Pope John Paul II in 1995, in which he reaffirmed the Church's responsibility in the realm of religious communication. He emphasised that the new evangelisation must go beyond the general transmission of doctrine and reach individuals directly, engaging both their hearts and consciences. This approach illustrates that from a historical perspective religious communication

is not a static process but a dynamic reality, evolving in response to the needs of the faith community and the challenges of the contemporary world.

The dynamic nature of proclaiming the Word of God parallels the dynamic development of communication itself. Drawing on the history of human development and technological advancements, scholars often distinguish three major eras in the evolution of interpersonal communication: the tribal era, the Gutenberg era, and the Marconi era.

In tribal societies, oral communication was the primary method of transmitting content. Spoken language played a foundational role in shaping community identity and preserving tradition, reinforced through rituals, stories, and songs. Over time, ideographic writing emerged in Eastern cultures, while alphabetic writing began to play a central role in medieval European civilisation. This gradually supplemented and ultimately transformed the model of religious communication.

According to Marshall McLuhan's theory, language can be considered humanity's first technology – a tool that extended speech and enabled more precise expression of reality. Oral communication was valued not only for its content, but also for the direct contact it facilitated between individuals. Religious gatherings served not only informational functions, but also integrative ones, enabling the communal experience of spiritual events and the intergenerational transmission of important religious messages, ensuring they were not forgotten.

The invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 15th century marked a new era in religious communication. Print technology enabled the mass production of texts, diminishing the dominance of oral transmission in favour of the written word. As a result, religious content became more accessible and standardised, which significantly contributed to theological development and more effective doctrinal instruction. A landmark moment was the publication of the Gutenberg Bible in 1455. Until then, sacred texts had been copied by hand, thus their availability was limited. The invention of movable type enabled the widespread distribution of Scripture, making it accessible to a larger number of clergy and intellectuals and fostering more intensive theological study. The Church also began using print to publish catechisms, sermons, and prayer books, which greatly facilitated evangelisation and the deepening of faith among the laity.

The turn of the 20th century ushered in a new era of communication – the age of electricity and electronics. The inventions of Guglielmo Marconi enabled the development of radio, which became a powerful tool for the mass transmission of religious content. Radio facilitated broadcasts of religious services and the dissemination of Church teachings through catechetical and homiletic programmes. The first radio transmissions of the Holy Mass began in the 1920s, allowing the elderly, the sick, and those in remote areas to participate in the liturgy. A symbolic milestone came in 1931 with the first papal address delivered by Pius XI via Vatican Radio, marking the beginning of a new strategy for evangelisation and global outreach. Religious radio programmes soon became an important part of spiritual life. One of the best-known Catholic broadcasts in the United States was *The Catholic Hour*, which first aired in 1930.

The next stage in the evolution of religious communication was the rise of television. As early as the 1940s and 1950s, televised Masses were being broadcast, further expanding participation opportunities for those unable to attend in person. Television also facilitated the development of evangelisation programmes and telesermons, which gained massive popularity in the United States. One of the most famous televangelists was Billy Graham, whose sermons reached millions worldwide, beginning in the 1950s.

The pontificate of John Paul II coincided with the rapid growth of television, which the pope skilfully used for evangelisation. His pilgrimages, homilies, and public audiences were broadcast live, allowing the global faithful to engage with his teachings. Particularly symbolic was the 1979 broadcast of Mass during his pilgrimage to Poland, which contributed to strengthening both religious and national consciousness during the Communist era. Television also became a key medium for covering major religious events such as canonisations, World Youth Days, and papal funerals. A striking example was the funeral of John Paul II in 2005, watched by millions around the world, underscoring the role of television in modern religious communication.

The turn of the 21st century brought intense transformations in the field of communication due to the emergence of digital technologies. The digitisation of traditional media formats – text, speech, image, and sound – enabled unprecedented possibilities for editing, storage, and distribution. This development gave rise to a distinction between traditional

media (i.e., press, radio, and television) and new media, characterised by digital structures, interactivity, global reach, and content personalisation. The rapid advancement of digital technologies opened new avenues for religious communication, and virtual space became a site for evangelisation and formation, as exemplified by online platforms and religious websites. Platforms such as *Vatican News* and *Opoka* provide current news, theological commentaries, and educational materials, supporting believers in deepening their spiritual lives.

At the turn of the century, another significant shift occurred in the media landscape. Introducing the term 'new new media', Paul Levinson highlighted the emergence of social media, which differs from earlier digital communication forms in that users themselves create content. This shift gave clergy, laypersons, and theologians new tools for expressing and disseminating religious messages both within institutional structures and in more personal ways. Social media platforms have become essential channels for religious communication. The use of blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok by clergy and theologians has enabled interactive dialogue, the sharing of reflections, and responses to the spiritual questions of followers. A notable milestone was the launch of Pope Benedict XVI's official Twitter account (@Pontifex), which was continued by Pope Francis, reaching millions of users around the world.

Alongside social media, religious podcasts and audiobooks have grown significantly in popularity. Examples include *The Bible in a Year* by Fr. Mike Schmitz, and the Polish initiative *Pogłębiarka*, both offering systematic spiritual reflection and religious education. Mobile applications that support spiritual life – such as *Laudate* or *Modlitwa w drodze* – have also gained traction, offering daily Scripture readings, prayers, and meditations.

Contemporary digital media not only extend the reach of religious communication but also facilitate greater interactivity and customisation of content to meet individual users' needs. Tools such as *Click to Pray*, promoted by Pope Francis, exemplify a new dimension of communal prayer in virtual space. As communication technologies continue to evolve, religious communication faces the ongoing challenge of integrating traditional content with new forms of interaction, while preserving its authenticity and spiritual depth.

Discussion of the term

An examination of religious communication within contemporary media reveals two significant aspects that meaningfully affect its quality and effectiveness. First is the language used in religious communication and its particular characteristics in the context of 21st-century media discourse. Second is the setting of religious communication, especially the new communicative space provided by participatory media ('new new media'), such as podcasting. The use of this format has become a regular practice across national media, academic institutions, and commercial entities. It is therefore worthwhile analysing both the opportunities offered by podcasting for religious communication and the challenges this format entails.

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis emphasised the need to adapt methods of evangelisation to the contemporary world, in which the media plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse. He noted that in fulfilling its mission, the Church should employ current and accessible forms of communication, including modern technological tools. The message of the Gospel should be presented in a way that is both understandable and engaging – what the Pope refers to as a “new language of parables” (Nęcek, 2016). He also highlighted the importance of courage in seeking new signs, symbols, and communication methods that can better reach modern man. Similarly, Cardinal Walter Kasper stressed the need to abandon abstract and didactic language in favour of a message that is simple, open to dialogue, and free from excessive simplification (Kasper, 2015). Contemporary evangelisation, therefore, requires not only modern communication tools but also a change in the style of communication that should consider the audience’s sensitivities and the dynamics of modern media.

Religious communication in the context of contemporary media presents a substantial challenge for both theologians and practitioners engaged in conveying the content of faith. There are fundamental differences between the characteristics of media language and traditional modes of conveying religious content. The media demand conciseness and a succinct presentation of issues, which often stands in contrast to the expansive nature of theological narrative or biblical exegesis. Consequently, a key challenge is how to formulate religious messages

in ways that are appealing to modern audiences while retaining their depth and authenticity.

One of the primary difficulties in religious communication is adapting its language to the demands of contemporary media. Traditional language – marked by hermetic theological vocabulary and references to cultural or biblical codes – can be difficult to grasp for audiences without specialised religious knowledge. On the other hand, overly colloquialising religious messages risks trivialisation and desacralisation. This raises the question of the optimal model of religious language in the media: should it remain faithful to theological formulations, or should it be adapted to contemporary linguistic norms?

A crucial dimension of religious communication is its authenticity. In a world saturated with information, religious messages must stand out through sincerity and genuineness in order to resonate effectively with contemporary audiences. They should also avoid an aggressive or intrusive tone, which could make the message seem biased or even mocking towards religious themes. At the same time, excessive neutralisation of religious content could result in the loss of its distinct character and spiritual depth.

The rapid development of social media has opened new opportunities for disseminating religious content. Digital platforms have become not only spaces for evangelisation but also important areas for interaction, especially among younger generations who often do not actively participate in traditional forms of religious life. Public expressions of faith shared online can contribute to conversions, but they also carry the risk of exposing viewers to content that may negatively influence their religious attitudes. In this context of change, it is essential to develop a religious language that can engage Generations Y and Z, who are shaped by visual culture and typically use media primarily for entertainment and commercial purposes.

Equally important is how religious communication addresses socially controversial topics such as bioethics, sexual ethics, *in vitro* fertilisation, abortion, and clerical abuse. Communication on these issues must be not only clear but also responsible, free from prejudice, and shaped by a concern for audience understanding.

Religious language in the media must be both dynamic and flexible, while preserving essential elements of religious tradition and cultural

heritage. Although it must adapt to contemporary forms of communication, it should not be overly simplified or reduced to a purely secular mode of expression. The right balance between modern accessibility and the preservation of the sacred nature of religious messages enables effective outreach to both believers and those seeking answers to fundamental existential questions. Linguistic standards must also be upheld, particularly regarding the spelling and usage of religious terms, names of holidays, rituals, and saints – further highlighting the importance of linguistic correctness in religious communication.

In the context of contemporary media, religious communication is a complex process that requires continuous adaptation of both language and form to changing media and social conditions. The challenges of the digital era call for a consciously crafted religious language that is understandable and communicative, while remaining faithful to the theological and spiritual heritage of Christianity.

Podcasting, as a rapidly evolving form of digital communication, has gained significant popularity in recent years. Its unique features, such as on-demand availability, the intimacy of the audio format, and its capacity to reach diverse audiences, have made it an appealing tool across various fields, including the religious domain. In the context of religious communication, podcasts have become a contemporary medium for delivering spiritual, educational, and informational content in ways tailored to the current needs of faith communities.

Traditionally, religious communication relied on direct forms of interaction, such as sermons, liturgies, and community gatherings. However, the development of mass media – and later, digital media – transformed these traditional methods. The Catholic Church in Poland, like many religious institutions worldwide, has recognised the need to adapt to new modes of communication in order to reach the faithful more effectively in an evolving media environment. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated these changes, prompting the search for alternative ways to reach audiences amid restrictions on traditional gatherings.

Due to its flexibility and accessibility, podcasting has become an effective tool in religious communication. Its advantages include on-demand access, which allows users to engage with content at their convenience, thereby increasing its reach. The audio format fosters intimacy, enabling the formation of a close relationship between speaker and listener,

which is especially valuable in the context of spiritual content. Because the barriers to entry are low (podcasting does not require sophisticated equipment or substantial financial resources), even small religious communities can produce content in this format.

Religious podcasts serve a variety of functions, including religious education through catechetical content, theological lectures, and scriptural analysis. They support spiritual formation by providing online retreats, meditations, and prayers in audio form. They also function as sources of news and updates, sharing information on community life, parish announcements, and commentary on current events from a religious perspective. Additionally, they present testimonies and conversations that highlight conversion stories, spiritual experiences, and interviews with individuals active in religious life.

Despite these advantages, using podcasting for religious communication presents certain challenges. These include ensuring the substantive quality and appeal of the content to attract and retain listeners. Promotion and content distribution pose an additional challenge as capturing the attention of potential audiences overwhelmed by the vast array of online content available to them is not an easy task. While the technological barriers are relatively low, maintaining good audio quality and a consistent publishing schedule requires specific skills and sustained effort.

Nonetheless, the prospects for the development of podcasting in the religious sphere are promising. As more people turn to this medium and as technology becomes increasingly accessible, podcasts may become a core component of the communication strategies of religious communities. They offer the opportunity to reach a wide audience and respond to the needs of contemporary believers, who seek spiritual content (such as themed programmes, reflections, and expert interviews) in formats aligned with their lifestyles.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

An analysis of religious communication reveals its complexity and evolutionary nature within the context of technological and societal transformations. Religious communication is not limited to the transmission

of doctrinal content and plays a key role in community-building and the formation of religious identity across various media environments. Its dynamic development reflects the ongoing need to adapt modes of communication to changing technological and cultural conditions.

A historical perspective on religious communication demonstrates that its roots date back to the origins of Christianity, when apostolic activity was based on oral proclamation. A major turning point came with Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, which enabled the wide dissemination of religious content and had a profound impact on evangelisation. Subsequent developments, such as the advent of radio and television, further expanded the reach of religious communication. In the 21st century, digital and social media have come to play a dominant role. This evolution has also been shaped by pivotal events such as the Second Vatican Council, which emphasised the need to adapt methods of evangelisation to new socio-cultural contexts.

Contemporary religious communication is influenced by the phenomenon of mediatisation, meaning that religious institutions must align their communication strategies with prevailing media forms. Social media, podcasts, and other digital platforms have become tools for evangelisation and spaces for interaction and relationship-building with the faithful. However, maintaining a balance between modernity and the authenticity of the message in order to preserve its spiritual dimension remains a key challenge for the Church and other religious communities. While new technologies enable outreach to much wider audiences, they also require a rethinking of both the content and the format of communication.

The language of religious communication in contemporary media must be adapted to effectively reach its audiences. Traditional theological language, often marked by complex terminology and references to classical texts, may be inaccessible to many recipients today. However, excessive simplification risks undermining a message's depth. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a model of religious language that combines clarity with spiritual richness, as reflected in Pope Francis's call for a new language of parables. Generational differences must also be considered as interactive multimedia content may appeal more to younger audiences, whereas older believers often prefer more traditional modes of communication.

Podcasting is a notable example of a contemporary form of religious communication that enables flexible outreach to diverse audience groups. Its intimate format fosters a sense of connection with the faithful, while its accessibility enhances the impact of the message. During the COVID-19 pandemic, podcasts and online broadcasts became vital components of religious practice, enabling participation in liturgies and retreats under conditions of restricted access to places of worship. The importance of interactivity has also grown: online broadcasts often incorporate features that allow for real-time audience engagement, such as submitting questions or commenting on content.

Despite its many advantages, religious communication in the digital age entails several challenges, including ensuring the substantive quality of content and its effective dissemination. Contemporary audiences are accustomed to dynamic and engaging forms of communication, which requires religious institutions to implement modern communication strategies. It is also essential to consider the broader social and cultural contexts that shape how religious content is received. In this regard, adherence to media ethics and the avoidance of oversimplification are critical to preventing the dilution or instrumentalisation of religious messages.

In summary, religious communication is a dynamic process that demands continual adaptation to evolving media and societal conditions. Finding the right balance between tradition and innovation is essential to ensuring that religious messages remain authentic and compelling. Religious institutions should continue to explore new forms of communication – such as social media and podcasting – while preserving the depth and quality of their content. In light of current challenges, the language of religious communication must be tailored to different audiences while maintaining its theological and spiritual integrity. The future of religious communication will depend on the capacity to integrate traditional values with modern media tools, enabling the effective fulfilment of the Church's evangelising mission in a changing world. Furthermore, the increasing role of artificial intelligence and recommendation algorithms in shaping the distribution of religious content must not be overlooked. When used thoughtfully, these technologies can enhance outreach to new audiences and enable personalised messaging. However, their application also demands careful ethical reflection within religious contexts.

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Extrapersonal communication – a result of the evolution of cognitive technologies

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Extrapersonal communication – interactions between humans and non-humans – is a result of the dynamic development of cognitive technologies. It extends the concept of interpersonal communication to include non-human actors that exhibit human-like traits (anthropomorphisation) and assume the roles of both senders and receivers of content.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: Contemporary social communication studies have yet to fully establish the concept of extrapersonal communication. This article draws on Denis McQuail's classical conception of the communication pyramid. Traditional communication models overlooked the advancements in cybernetics pioneered by Norbert Wiener. Today, the concept of extrapersonal communication, which includes human-computer interactions, has become an essential component of the communication process.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: The integration of the term 'extrapersonal communication' into social communication studies requires acknowledging a hybrid society in which humans and intelligent machines coexist and interact across various levels. This phenomenon results from the anthropomorphisation and genderisation of technology, enabling machines and other technological artefacts to take on the roles of both senders and receivers of messages.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Transhumanism, as proposed by Julian Huxley, envisions the potential for humans to transcend their biological nature through technology. Key ideas within transhumanism include Donna Haraway's notion of a cyborg, Homo Cyborg, and Max More's extropianism, which advocates the technological extension of human life. While technology plays a role in brain evolution, it also has the potential to lead to dehumanisation and reification. Maria Kronfeldner explores the fear of anthropomorphising machines, while John Paul II's personalist philosophy emphasises the need to preserve humanocentrism and protect human dignity.

Keywords: extrapersonal communication, Norbert Wiener, hybrid society, artificial intelligence, transhumanism

Definition of the term

The pioneers of research into extrapersonal communication discussed in this article include Norbert Wiener (1948), Alan Turing (1950), and John McCarthy, who introduced the term 'artificial intelligence' in 1956 during a scientific conference in Dartmouth. They were among the first to explore the possibility of human–machine communication. Other researchers soon became interested in human–computer interactions, most notably Stuart K. Card, Allen Newell, and Thomas P. Moran. In 1983, they published the monograph *The Psychology of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)*, in which they examined direct communication between users and computers, classifying this interaction as analogous to human-to-human dialogue.

In 1992, the international scientific conference *Proceedings IEEE International Workshop on Robot and Human Communication* marked the beginning of systematic efforts to describe a new research paradigm for HRC (Human–Robot–Computer) communication. One of the leading contributors at the time was Japanese researcher Yuichiro Anzai from Keio University in Tokyo.

In 1996, Cambridge University Press published a monograph by Clifford Nass and Byron Reeves entitled *The Media Equation: How People Treat Computers, Television, and New Media Like Real People and Places*. The book's central thesis, supported by experimental research, posits that people naturally attribute human-like characteristics to computers, media, and other inanimate objects, creating an illusion of social interaction. The authors contend that these relationships are inherently social and occur naturally, independently of our conscious awareness. According to Steven Littlejohn, this mechanism is a form of anthropomorphism which stems from, among others, humans' tendency to minimise cognitive effort. Further evidence of anthropomorphism has been provided by specialised studies conducted by Sören Krach, Frank Hegel, Britta Wrede, Gerhard Sagerer, Ferdinand Binkofski, and Tilo Kircher from the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at RWTH University in Aachen. Using magnetic resonance imaging, this research team traced human brain activity during interactions with four different entities: a notebook, a LEGO-built robot, the humanoid BARTHOC Junior, and a human. The results showed that activity in the medial prefrontal cortex and the

right temporoparietal junction increased in direct proportion to the degree of anthropomorphisation of the interaction partner. The more human-like the machine appeared, the stronger the activation in brain regions associated with attributing mental states (Krach & Kircher, 2008).

In the context of social communication and media studies, it must be acknowledged that the rapid advancement of cognitive technologies is reshaping the communication landscape. These changes extend beyond the technical conditions of information exchange to redefine the very nature of communicative actors. The interaction between media users and non-human actors – capable of speaking, reading, writing, and reasoning – introduces a qualitatively new form of communication, which remains largely unexplored within communication research and requires in-depth analyses. One attempt to address this complex issue is Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT), which posits that both humans and technologies are actors that shape communication processes. Central to this theory is the concept of an actant, which can be both a human and an object (Latour, 2005). In his opinion, this implies that humans and non-humans are equally important.

In this article, cognitive technologies are understood as an interdisciplinary field of science (drawing from cybernetics, psychology, neurobiology, and computer science) based on artificial intelligence (AI) whose task is to replicate human cognitive functions. These technologies are used for modelling, interpreting, and automating complex cognitive behaviours such as thinking, decision-making, machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and computer vision (including facial, image, and sound recognition).

As Aleksandra Skrzypiec observes, the rise of cognitive technologies is gradually shifting

the paradigm of social communication towards intensified interactions between humans and products of technology. (...) We must acknowledge that machines are becoming communication partners. This is evidenced by the turn towards extrapersonal interaction – between humans and virtual assistants or robots. Consequently, the relationships between people and modern technological tools are based on a gradual balancing of the statuses of human actors and non-human agents in the communication process (Skrzypiec, 2023; emphasis – M.L.)

As these processes unfold, new networks emerge that are composed of human and non-human actors working together and form hybrid social structures.

The definition of extrapersonal communication is grounded in the assumption of the existence of interactions within complex systems that involve both humans and non-humans. This communication can be examined in several dimensions:

- Interspecies – communication between humans and animals or plants.
- Cognitive – research into how the human brain perceives messages from non-human actors.
- Socio-cultural – behavioural studies on the effects of communication with non-human actors.
- Technological – interactions with machines, such as Human-Machine Interaction (HMI) and Human-Machine Communication (HMC). In this context, extrapersonal communication emerges as a result of the dynamic development of cognitive technologies. It is defined as an extension of interpersonal communication that incorporates interactions with non-human (or extra-human) communicative actors, which exhibit human-like characteristics (anthropomorphisation) and function as both message senders and receivers of content.

Historical analysis of the term

In contemporary social communication studies, two overlapping terms are used interchangeably: 'extrapersonal communication' and 'HMC' (Human-Machine Communication). The latter has been gaining prominence in global academic literature (e.g., in the works of Andrea L. Guzman) as part of a new wave of research. However, the title of this article refers to a term rooted in Denis McQuail's traditional and well-established concept of communication domains, which serves as the foundation for the reflections discussed here.

It is important to note that this term has not been sufficiently explored within social communication and media studies, and it is more frequently encountered in fields such as cognitive science, cybernetics, psychology, artificial intelligence, and robotics. Although direct references to this concept are scarce in classical media studies texts, the idea of communication with non-human entities originates from analyses of media influence on social interactions, making it an integral part of broader discussions on communication in the 21st century.

The term 'HMC' (originally HCC – Human-Computer Communication) gained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s with the widespread adoption and increasing accessibility of ICT technologies. It was initially used to describe new forms of human-machine interactions, such as text-based command interfaces in MS-DOS. As these interactions became more complex and artificial intelligence advanced significantly, communication with 'machines' began to resemble natural human interactions. Modern systems not only respond to simple commands but also 'understand' context, detect users' emotions, and react in increasingly sophisticated ways. This presents a major challenge for social communication and media studies. Interactions within HMC can be considered a form of extrapersonal communication, as they involve communication with non-human entities that extends beyond traditional interpersonal relationships. Significantly, this area is crucial for the future of communication in the digital age, particularly in the context of emerging technologies such as robotics, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (IoT).

In his 1987 monograph *Mass Communication Theory*, Denis McQuail identified six levels of communication: intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, group communication (which includes both intragroup and intergroup communication), institutional or organisational communication, and mass communication (society-wide networks) (McQuail, 2002, p. 18). McQuail presented this conception in the form of a pyramid, with a few cases at the top and many cases at the base. This means that intrapersonal communication is experienced by every person, while mass communication involves relatively few senders whose messages reach a mass audience. McQuail's pyramid was formulated in the 1980s as a response to the dominant position of mass media in the public sphere. This period also marked the rise

of personal computers (PCs) and the first clumsy attempts at computer networking. At the time, mass communication was primarily understood in terms of a one-to-many dissemination model – messages being sent from a small group of individuals to a vast, widely dispersed audience. This model was characterised by its one-way flow of information and a hierarchical structure (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001, pp. 365–366).

However, significant advancements in information and communication technologies (ICT) during this time paved the way for the breakthrough that occurred in the early 1990s with the advent of the first-generation internet, or Web 1.0. This marked the beginning of a shift toward decentralising and democratising communication and the gradual breakdown of the mass media paradigm. The real transformation, however, did not fully materialise until after the dot-com bubble crisis (1999–2002), which led to the development of Web 2.0, the second-generation internet.

Web 2.0 integrated earlier developments in a saprophytic way that allowed for active user participation, enabling community-building, blogging, content sharing, and a transition to a many-to-many communication model. Thus, it can be said that, at this stage, the internet evolved from a consumption phase to a participation phase, becoming, in a way, more socialised. Key social features of Web 2.0 include user-generated content (UGC), the application of folksonomy, the formation of large communities around platforms, the ability to forge connections, the leveraging of network effects, and the use of collective intelligence (Lakomy, 2013, pp. 45–46).

In this context, Manuel Castells argued that digital media display what he termed “mass-self communication,” which is characterised by the ability to send a message from many senders to many receivers (Castells, 2013, p. 81). The mass aspect of this form of communication stems from its potential to reach a global audience through individualised messages within networks, such as viral communication or buzz. While the concept Castells introduces might seem paradoxical, it holds practical validity. For instance, Facebook, as a whole, is a mass medium with a vast social reach, connecting billions of users. However, within this platform there are ‘micromedia,’ like user profiles and fan pages, each catering to unique audiences or ‘friends’. These receivers form what Castells calls ‘circles,’ where each member has their own group of friends. This creates a presumption-driven, cascading network of senders and receivers, facilitating the swift spread of information on

a global, many-to-many scale, as illustrated in the ‘small-world’ theories of Watts, Strogatz, and Barabási. Consequently, this model of communication calls for the expansion of McQuail’s pyramid to include Castells’ notion of mas-self communication.

Both Denis McQuail and Manuel Castells overlooked the emergence of a technological strand that has, since the late 1940s, gained increasing significance on the periphery of the dominant traditions in social communication studies. This strand is represented by Norbert Wiener, a key figure in American communication studies, particularly within the Palo Alto school and the cybernetic paradigm. In 1948, Wiener published *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. With this work, he founded the science of cybernetics, which centres on the control, transmission, and processing of information within technological, biological, and social systems. A core component of cybernetics is control theory, which inspired researchers to develop both theoretical and practical models for intelligent machines, particularly those utilising neural networks and artificial intelligence. Additionally, cybernetics intersected with linguistics, notably in the realm of machine translation. The practical culmination of these studies, initiated in the 1930s, is seen in modern technologies like ChatGPT. In 1950, in response to growing interest in his earlier work, Wiener published *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, which was directed at non-technical readers and broadened his focus to include sociological and political dimensions. It is crucial to note that Wiener, in defining cybernetic systems, included not only computer prototypes but also the human brain. In his opinion, the essence of the interaction between these systems lies in the ability of both technical and biological components to perceive, store, and exchange information. This laid the groundwork for the concept of extrapersonal communication, which refers to the interaction between humans and non-humans. The prefix *extra* is to be understood as ‘beyond’, ‘outside,’ or ‘beyond the reach of something,’ hence the term ‘extrapersonal communication.’ The wood engraving known as the *Flammarion engraving* (Camille Flammarion, *L’Atmosphère. Météorologie Populaire*, 1888), which depicts a person – driven by a curiosity to understand the universe – reaching beyond the firmament and crossing the boundaries of known reality is a fitting representation of this moment in scientific history.

Building on this, McQuail's pyramid should be revised to incorporate the levels of communication outlined above. The revised version of the pyramid would include intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, extrapersonal communication (conceived as an extended form of interpersonal communication), group communication (comprising both intragroup and intergroup communication), institutional/organisational communication, mass communication (social-wide networks), and mass self-communication.

Discussion of the term

Adopting the term 'extrapersonal communication' within the field of social communication and media studies necessitates the recognition of a hybrid society as a complex system of human-technology relations which demands detailed examination. This society is, in fact, a result of the anthropomorphisation and even genderisation of machines in communication. In this context, Aleksandra Skrzypiec noted that "artifacts equipped with characteristics typical of human beings join the circle of communication actors, thus playing the roles of both senders and receivers of content" (Skrzypiec, 2023). Her work focused primarily on Human–Computer Interaction (HCI) and Robot–Computer Interaction (RCI). Andrea L. Guzman makes a similar call for redefining communication relationships in this context in her 2018 publication *Human-Machine Communication. Rethinking Communication, Technology, & Ourselves*. This pivotal monograph, and especially the forthcoming publication,

serves as an introduction to Human–Machine Communication (HMC) as a distinct research field within communication studies (encompassing HCI, HRI, and HAI) and to emerging research opportunities in the area of HMC (Guzman, 2025).

The Infuture.Institute, based in Poland, predicts that due to the rapid advancement of robotics and artificial intelligence, we will soon reach a point where these artifacts will be present in our social, economic, and personal spaces. This will give rise to a hybrid society that "includes interaction between humans and advanced robots and AI systems in workplaces, education, healthcare, and other sectors" (Infuture.Institute).

These new forms of social interaction will require the establishment of legal and ethical standards to regulate the integration of robots and AI into society, along with transformations in the labour market, daily life, and interpersonal relationships in the context of interactions with machines.

Current achievements in social communication and media studies have largely focused on traditional understandings of social communication. However, extrapersonal communication, which includes interactions between humans and technological interfaces, presents new challenges that will significantly impact social relations. This shift raises concerns about the role and place of humans in a digital world increasingly dominated by intelligent machines.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

In 1860, Jacob Burckhardt, a leading champion and populariser of the Renaissance, argued in his book *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* that the 15th century marked a return to antiquity, a kind of *renovatio hominis*, and the rise of humanism – *l'uomo universale* – representing a culture where humanity was at the centre. However, in the 20th century, amid rapid technological expansion accompanied by profound cultural transformations, this philosophical tradition and its inherent anthropocentrism were rejected and replaced by posthumanism. Posthumanism breaks with the tradition that placed humans at the centre of the world and grants increasing importance to non-human actors. As Marcin M. Bogusławski observes, “in posthumanism, the status of a person is extended beyond the human, which means that non-human actors, such as animals, plants, texts, and even dead bodies, also possess agency” (Bogusławski, 2019, p. 17). A more radical ideology, transhumanism, was first articulated by Julian Huxley in his 1957 essay collection *New Bottles for New Wine*. Huxley proposed that the human species has the potential to transcend its current form and become a radically different being. Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner even contend that “a new term is necessary: ‘post-human’” (Ranisch & Sorgner, 2014). However, there is no consensus among

transhumanists about what this radical transformation of the posthuman being would entail. The spectrum of proposals ranges from the idea that the posthuman

will remain a biological organism (...) to the suggestion that it will become a being of pure information, i.e., a mind detached from the body and transferred onto an artificial medium (Zawadzki & Adamczyk, 2018).

One example of a conceptual framework that blends human biological functions with technological elements is the metaphor of a cybernetic organism (Wiener, 1948, p. 51), initially introduced by Norbert Wiener and later developed by Donna Haraway in her 1985 *Cyborg Manifesto*. Krzysztof Loska argues that Homo Cyborg “becomes, for Haraway, a hybrid being, neither purely technological nor purely organic; the cyborg’s body is, in a sense, *ex definitione*, transgressive” (K. Loska, 2018). Anne Balsamo defines the concept in two ways (Balsamo, 1997, p. 11): it may represent a combination of human and mechanical or electronic elements, or it may describe an entity embedded in a cybernetic information system, possessing only a digital body.

Another example of a transhumanist intellectual movement is extropianism, developed by Max More. He defines extropy as the opposite of entropy, which signifies disorder, energy dissipation, and, in biological terms, extinction. In his publication *The Principles of Extropy*, More argues that the central idea of this concept is the extension of life and even the attainment of immortality through the continuous advancement of biomedical technologies. This idea has sparked an intense debate, often framed as the conflict between biological life and artificial life, or Alife (from a posthuman perspective). The term ‘Alife’ was first introduced by Christopher Langton in 1987 during the Workshop on the Synthesis and Simulation of Living Systems at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Langton systematically explored this idea in a series of publications on artificial life. However, at the time, according to Piotr Zawojski, these were largely thought experiments and speculations on

‘life’ as an issue to be considered on a philosophical (epistemological and ontological) level and ‘life’ as a characteristic feature of beings that are part of nature (biology), as well as man-made products that belong to the postbiological realm (Zawojski, 2016).

Deeper exploration of this issue led to the emergence of two research fields centred on the concepts of autopoiesis and allopoiesis. Autopoiesis, derived from the Greek words for 'self' and 'creation', refers to the uniqueness of a self-sustaining system such as a living cell that ensures its survival and continued existence, including its ability to self-repair. Niklas Luhmann argues that living systems (*Lebende Systeme*)

create specialised environments, i.e., organisms, for their cells, which protect them and enable their specialisation. These systems maintain themselves through material boundaries in space (Luhmann, 1998, p. 45).

Allopoiesis describes systems that rely on external resources to sustain themselves, consuming raw materials and energy.

Proponents of extropianism, including techno-optimists such as Ray Kurzweil and Nick Bostrom, advocate the idea that technological progress, particularly in biotechnology and artificial intelligence, will eventually eliminate aging and mortality. They foresee a future in which the human mind can be transferred into a virtual world, enabling a new form of existence beyond the physical body. However, such advancements would inevitably result in the reification and depersonalisation of the human being. This was demonstrated in practice by David Baker, who has created a new synthetic protein, thus ushering in the era of 'biological machines'. Meanwhile, Demis Hassabis and John Jumper have developed AlphaFold2, a revolutionary AI model capable of predicting the structures of nearly all 200 million classified proteins. In recognition of their achievements, Baker, Hassabis, and Jumper were awarded the 2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Another major point of scientific debate in the posthumanist context is the relationship between natural and artificial intelligence (AI). While artificial intelligence is developed through engineering, natural intelligence emerges from the human mind. A key distinction between the two lies in AI's inability to make decisions based on emotions, empathy, or feelings. Contemporary AI research follows two approaches: symbolic and connectionist. The former seeks to develop artificial intelligence through cognition independent of the brain's biological structure, whereas the latter focuses on building artificial neural networks that mimic the brain's structure. Both models centre on essential aspects of intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and language use.

These advancements lead to the following conclusions and recommendations. As digital technologies progress and non-human actors become increasingly present in a society that has historically been biologically homogeneous, the risk of dehumanisation and desocialisation grows. The AI-driven technological revolution signals the dawn of a new era in human civilisation – one that remains largely unpredictable yet demands the adoption of a universal consensus regarding systemic humanocentrism. In *The Routledge Handbook of Dehumanisation*, Maria Kronfeldner highlights the fear caused by robots that appear ‘too human’ (anthropomorphisation), while humans, in turn, risk becoming less human, deprived of empathetic and spiritual responses such as friendship, brotherhood, sympathy, and nobility. (Czarnecki, 2011). Similarly, in their monograph *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*, Gary W. Small and Gigi Vorgan observe:

The current explosion of digital technology not only is changing the way we live and communicate but also is rapidly and profoundly altering our brains. Daily exposure to high technology (...) stimulates brain cell alteration (...), gradually strengthening new neural pathways in our brains while weakening old ones. (...) Besides influencing how we think, digital technology is altering how we feel, how we behave. (...) This evolutionary brain process has rapidly emerged over a single generation and may represent one of the most unexpected yet pivotal advances in human history (Small & Vorgan, 2008).

Given these risks – particularly the potential reification and depersonalisation of the human being – it is crucial to reaffirm the principles of personalist philosophy, as advocated by John Paul II. This philosophy

places the good and development of the human person at the core of the value system, recognising them as the supreme principle to which all specific goods, realised by the person as a result of his free acts, are subordinated (Chudy, 2006, p. 233).

Thus – humans before machines.

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Mediatisation and medialisation

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Mediatisation is a process of social change driven by advancements in media technologies and evolving patterns of their use. At the same time medialisation refers to how users perceive media and media technologies as tools that permeate various aspects of social life.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: This section outlines the historical development of the concept of mediatisation and the evolution of research in this field. It begins with an overview of the foundational media theories that underpin mediatisation. It then explores research on the influence of media logic on social institutions and the diverse characteristics of mediatisation. Particular emphasis is placed on the concept of deep mediatisation and the contributions of Polish academic circles to this area of study.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: This section provides a concise synthesis of mediatisation, focusing on key aspects such as the scope of mediatisation, its theoretical significance, the three main research approaches, deep mediatisation, and the final mediatisation effect.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: This section proposes potential directions for future research on mediatisation in the context of rapid technological advancements, including artificial intelligence. It identifies three key research challenges related to mediatisation in Poland whose resolution could significantly enhance the quality of studies in this field.

Keywords: mediatisation, deep mediatisation, medialisation, three perspectives of mediatisation, mediatisation effect

Definition of the term

Distinction between the terms

The terms ‘mediatisation’ and ‘medialisation’ are often used interchangeably to describe the significant role of media technologies in social life, but they have distinct meanings. On the one hand, mediatisation refers to actual social change resulting from advancements in media technologies or shifts in the culture of their use. In this context, it covers mediatisation of areas such as politics, religion, and leisure activities (e.g., sports and family life). On the other hand, medialisation concerns how media and media technologies are perceived by users as tools that permeate different spheres of social life, particularly politics (Sasińska-Klas, 2014).

Mediatisation is closely linked to the presence or absence of the mediatisation effect, i.e., a measurable process that reflects changes in media technologies or their usage culture across two time periods. This effect can be assessed quantitatively, qualitatively, or through a mixed approach. Medialisation, however, concerns the media effect itself, i.e., the short-or long-term visible impact of media on users. This impact can manifest in changes in their knowledge, opinions, attitudes, or even behaviours.

Given that both the media effect and medialisation have been central to mass media research for years – and, more recently, to studies on individualised mass communication – this section focuses on mediatisation and its later form of deep mediatisation. Two key factors justify this focus: temporal and geographical.

Historical approach

As far as the temporal criterion is concerned, mediatisation has been a subject of study since the late 1970s. The dynamics of mediatisation studies leads to the identification of at least three distinct currents of analysis of this phenomenon: institutional, constructivist, and material. Within the constructivist approach, *deep mediatisation* emerged as a concept describing media as the dominant force in all contemporary social change, shaping the social world both in and through the media

(Hepp, 2019). Deep mediatisation has transformed the perspective on media users, moving from a scenario where media usage enhanced their lives by blending interpersonal communication with the potential of media communication, to the present state, best described by the metaphor of 'living in the media' or 'immersed existence' in the context of media and media platforms. Essentially, this refers to an existence that cannot be fully understood without the crucial dominant social connectivity realised through media and media platforms. On the one hand, this connectivity occurs through digital, hybrid, and traditional media, which remain largely curated by humans, with clear evidence of human agency. On the other hand, the dynamics of connectivity today are increasingly defined by the actions of social media platforms, which function based on algorithms and interfaces, relegating human agency to more supervisory or co-participatory roles.

The context in which individuals function within media and platforms is so central to contemporary human identity that it can be most effectively understood through Heidegger's concept of *Geworfenheit* ('thrownness' or being 'thrown into the world'). Here, the 'world' refers to the digital realm, where users navigate not only as consumers of information but also as co-creators of its dynamic structures, simultaneously benefiting from and becoming subjects of digital ecosystems.

The geographical scope of the application of the term 'mediatisation'

Mediatisation is a phenomenon limited by the geography of research, primarily concerning Europe, with the exception of the British Isles and Ireland. The main countries where this research is conducted include German-speaking countries, Scandinavia, Southern Europe, and, more recently, also Central and Eastern Europe. Undoubtedly, studies on mediatisation tend not to be prevalent in Anglo-Saxon contexts. In fact, researchers from the USA, Canada, Australia, and the UK are generally reluctant to embrace the concept of media mediatisation, favouring research on media effects and media mediation instead.

To address this limitation, this article provides an analysis of mediatisation research that aligns with contemporary findings in Europe. It thus

challenges the traditional view of mediatisation, which is often incorrectly equated with mediation, as discussed in other works. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon within the context of Poland and, more broadly, the Central and Eastern European region.

Historical analysis of the term

Research foundations

The term 'mediatisation' has a well-established tradition in media and communication research and is characterised by both theoretical maturity and a precisely defined but diverse scope. The study on media change has evolved through multiple stages, giving rise to distinct analytical approaches. The foundations of mediatisation research can be traced back to the 1960s, particularly to the media theories of Harold A. Innis and Marshall McLuhan. Their work laid the groundwork for deep reflection on the impact of media – particularly their technological aspects – on social communication processes. It also paved the way for the emergence of the 'ecology of communication' research trend in the 1970s and 1980s. Within this framework, David Altheide and Robert Snow (1988) highlighted the formative role of the media, arguing that as media saturation increased – referring to the growing presence of media in society – both the media audience and the actors surrounding media institutions began to adapt to the logic of the media. This saturation was believed to result in the consolidation of certain media organisations as powerful, relatively independent entities capable of imposing their own media logic on their audiences.

The evolution of mediatisation research

The next stage of mediatisation research, which broadened analytical perspectives beyond the logic of media institutions, was driven by the dissemination of Winfried Schulz's (2004) framework. Schulz proposed that mediatisation could be studied by examining four dimensions

of change over time and space: extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation. His approach shifted research toward diverse areas of media change.

In Poland, mediatisation research developed along two main lines. One strand analysed specific domains of social change resulting from media change, such as politics, religion, leisure, and family life. The other focused on transformations within particular aspects of social life, precisely defining their core dynamics. Institutions adapting to media logic spurred a surge in institutional mediatisation studies, while research on individual and group behaviours embraced a constructive approach. Ultimately, mediatisation was explored in direct relation to technological advancements in media as material products.

Despite these diverse research directions within qualitative studies, few gained traction within the Polish academic community. This was largely due to Walery Pisarek's earlier interpretation presented in the *Dictionary of Media Terminology* [*Słownik terminologii medialnej*] (2006), which equated mediatisation with media mediation. As a result, Poland became something of a peculiarity in mediatisation studies: while the titles of research papers and conference themes referenced the concept, their content often focused on linguistic pictures of the world disseminated by the media or the media's role in mediating perceptions of reality.

Deep mediatisation research

The next stage in the evolution of the understanding of term '*mediatisation*' is associated with the concept of media hypersaturation, i.e., the pervasive influence of media and social platforms on communication, leisure, and the formation of both individual and collective identities. The term 'deep mediatisation' emerged within constructive studies to refer to a level of mediatisation in which the digital environment becomes the primary force shaping social life and its transformations. Andreas Hepp (2019) explored the specificity of this phenomenon, emphasising how it can be observed through shifts in communicative refigurations (differences in the contextual frameworks within which communication processes take place).

The latest phase of mediatisation research is characterised by the dominance of a materialist approach. Here, the focus moves beyond media as key analytical objects to media and platforms built on algorithmic infrastructures and artificial intelligence. These technologies are increasingly shaping the media environment, influencing mechanisms of media change and dictating the direction of media evolution.

Poland's contribution to mediatisation research

To complement the historical analysis of mediatisation, it is worth mentioning two key aspects that illustrate Poland's contribution to the international academic discourse: research and the institutional framework.

In the institutional dimension, Poland plays a pivotal role in fostering discussions on new research findings. "Mediatisation Studies" journal, edited by Ewa Nowak-Teter and published by the Institute of Social Communication and Media Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin, showcases a diverse range of approaches and methodologies. Complementing the journal is the annual *Mediatisation Conference*, which gathers leading scholars from the region. Additionally, Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech (also from UMCS) organises the cyclical *Towards the Development of Mediatisation Research* conferences, supported by the Academia Europaea Wrocław Knowledge Hub. Structured as a symposium featuring a distinguished international guest in each edition, this event facilitates the exchange of research findings on a European scale.

Regarding research, special attention should be given to studies on the mediatisation of religion, media logic in newsrooms, and the context of leisure and family life. These topics provide interesting case studies of a post-transition society where strong religious ties set Poland apart from other mediatisation research, which is typically conducted in highly secularised contexts. Such analyses also reveal universal mediatisation patterns, linked to both media content production and audience engagement with entertainment. Ultimately, Polish research in this field contributes to discussions on the visibility of selected areas of social activities in the media sphere (Stępniaak, 2020) and the withdrawal of some users from the media, which can be interpreted as a manifestation of demediatisation (Kopecka-Piech, 2023).

Discussion of the term

The attempt to present mediatisation from a synthetic perspective is based on several key elements, the analysis of which helps to understand both the components of this concept and its problematic areas. Within this framework, the following aspects are identified: the scope of the theory (covering its relevance across micro, meso, and macro levels), which raises questions about the theoretical value of mediatisation; three research approaches in analysing mediatisation; deep mediatisation; and the mediatisation effect.

Scope of the theory

Given that numerous studies on media and communication, including those in Poland, are associated with mediatisation, a significant criticism has emerged, equating the approach to a conceptual 'herd mentality' effect. Many of these studies do not directly focus on mediatisation itself but rather on the media effect and medialisation. These analyses span different levels of social life: the micro level, which concerns individuals and small groups; the meso level, relating to larger communities; and the macro level, encompassing entire nations and global social trends. This prompts the question of whether all these levels are suitable for empirical research on mediatisation, and what theories can be built based on the findings of these studies.

The classification of theories into four groups – paradigms, super theories, foundational theories, and middle-range theories – provides a clearer framework for understanding this issue. Unfortunately, at present, mediatisation lacks the foundational support necessary to become a new paradigm that can organise a comprehensive worldview based on scientific and ideological generalisations. Similarly, mediatisation does not qualify as a grand theory because its mediocentric nature hinders the meaningful inclusion of phenomena from other areas of social life. When mediatisation does appear, it is typically in the context of other variables, such as cultural, social, or political factors, rather than as a well-researched causal relationship. Mediatisation also cannot be regarded as a basic theory, as it

does not establish the dominance of any single factor as essential for understanding others.

In contrast to these approaches, mediatisation operates as a middle-range theory. First, it enables the study of observable social changes at the micro and meso levels of social structures. Second, it facilitates the analysis of social subprocesses in which the media variable, although significant, is examined within the broader context of other social variables.

Thus, mediatisation studies can be categorised into three levels: micro, meso, and macro, with the caveat that once the analysis reaches the macro level, it risks overreaching and becomes difficult to capture empirically. In this context, media change is observed through the implementation of varying media logics within institutions, shifts in media usage by individuals and groups, and technological changes that influence everyday social practices. In Poland, there is no shortage of research in these areas, especially regarding political institutions, religious practices, and leisure activities.

Approaches to the study of mediatisation

As empirical analyses of mediatisation strengthen specific research trends on the phenomenon, it is essential to clearly define the three main approaches: institutional, constructivist, and materialist. Additionally, understanding the unique characteristics of research conducted in Poland within each of these frameworks is crucial.

The institutional trend assumes a gradual, though incomplete, differentiation of the media, i.e., their relative autonomy in editorial policies and economic activities. In democratic regimes, this process is linked to the development of media logic and platform logics, which social actors adopt as guidelines for their actions. Notable studies in this approach include research on the mediatisation of public benefit organisations (Hess, 2013) and religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church (Guzek, 2019). Moreover, research focusing on the logic of journalistic work (Nowak-Teter, 2024) and social media platform users (Nowak-Teter & Łódzki, 2024) is also significant.

The constructivist approach examines how mediatisation actors – both individuals and groups – transform the meanings and significance

of social concepts within the context of media technology usage and the technological innovations accompanying it. This approach is particularly evident in studies concerning religious groups. For instance, the research on the evolving understanding of one's role within the Church as a community, which has also migrated to online spaces (Kołodziejka, 2018), is notable. Equally important are studies on the creation of religious content which enables users to construct and update their identities as representatives of religious minorities (Hall et al., 2023). Another example includes the negotiation of the Pope's authority as the leader of a religious community (Guzek, 2024).

The materialist approach stems from the belief that every media change is linked to specific configurations of media usage in which digitisation plays a crucial role. In the context of artificial intelligence, mediatisation involves analysing how these technologies influence the shaping of action areas and the expression of emotions by media users (Kopecka-Piech & Sobiech, 2022). This illustrates that AI not only transforms communication methods but also redefines the boundaries between human and technological spheres.

Deep mediatisation

The concept of deep mediatisation, which has gained traction in recent years, refers to social change occurring in the context of the intensive saturation of social life with media and media platforms, alongside their profound technological interdependence. On the one hand, the media has become a dominant and fundamental driver of social change. On the other, media users have emerged as the central focus of analyses that explore the perspectives of the actors involved.

The key to understanding this process lies in how actors – the users – engage with media and platforms, and how their behaviours and social attitudes evolve under the influence of these media content sets. This is a process of contextual change, constructively defined as the transformation of social reconfigurations. By engaging with specific media sets in particular contexts, actors experience deep mediatisation and find themselves navigating new media configurations and associated contexts.

This transformation affects both individuals and groups, with noticeable shifts in their behaviours. Beyond the aforementioned supersaturation of society with media, this process also involves deep immersion in data and in the infrastructures of algorithms and interfaces. The dynamics of this process are shaped by cross-dependencies between media, the diversity of change trajectories, and the involvement of human reflection on the entirety of these multifaceted developments.

The mediatisation effect

The distinction between mediatisation and medialisation that was made earlier highlights the critical role of the mediatisation effect in understanding the former. This effect is an empirically graspable protocol derived from the observation and analysis of mediatisation understood as social change driven by shifts in media technologies and changes in the culture of their use. In the literature, this is often referred to as the crossing of the ordinary media effect.

A linear analysis of changes driven by the use of specific media is replaced by an opportunity to capture the process of change in individuals and collectives driven by mediatisation. In the institutional approach, the mediatisation effect refers to the search for traces of adherence to specific media logics and their role in driving behavioural shifts within individuals and institutions. In the constructivist approach, the mediatisation effect is seen primarily in changes in the behaviour of actors that result from media reconfigurations.

As previous analyses indicate, in institutional studies, the mediatisation effect did not manifest before the development of the deep ecosystem of media and platforms. For example, studies on the mediatisation of the concept of a secular state (Guzek, 2019) did not observe this effect. On the other hand, following the shift in dynamics brought about by the introduction of artificial intelligence in Polish editorial offices, the mediatisation effect is now clearly evident (Nowak-Teter, 2024).

In constructivist studies, significant changes in media usage culture are particularly noticeable in qualitative research focusing on specific groups within particular institutional religions (Hall et al., 2023; Kołodziej-ska, 2018).

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

The widespread implementation of artificial intelligence mechanisms is driving a significant reconfiguration in the interpretation of various research trends on mediatisation in Poland. Before AI became widely adopted, two approaches dominated: institutional and constructivist, both of which focused on the role of individuals, groups, and institutions in social processes. However, in the current landscape, where AI often substitutes human agency, it is premature to predict which approach will dominate the field of research.

The traditional division into institutional, constructivist, and materialist mediatisation is beginning to dissolve. Rather than concentrating on the logic of media or social reconfigurations, attention must now shift to the mediatisation actor. In institutional research, the challenge lies in the reproduction of various logics within the context of the actor of communication power, who is capable of initiating and concluding communication processes within the media and platform ecosystem. The key question is whether this actor is still under human control or if it has become entirely the domain of algorithms.

From a constructivist perspective, the central focus of mediatisation analysis is now the study of ludic phenomena that emerge from sudden and unpredictable technological shifts in the production of goods and the transmission of information. While references to past technological breakthroughs, like the steam engine or cinematography, no longer evoke technological fear in the contemporary imagination, the questions raised in the context of AI development spark significant controversy. In response to ludic fears of AI potentially causing the destruction of the human race, a more tangible concern is how AI will alter the relationship between human life and technology. To what extent will human existence transform into a true hybrid, where the boundary between the human body and technology becomes profoundly blurred?

Finally, in line with the materialist approach, AI development provides a new impetus for mediatisation research. The algorithmisation and unification of tools supporting mediatisation could enable its measurable observation on a global scale. In the near future, capturing mediatisation within macro-social structures may well become a reality (Leśniczak, 2022).

In Poland, the term ‘medialisation’ has not gained widespread recognition. For a long time, there was ambiguity surrounding the interpretation of the term ‘mediatisation’: should it be understood as the dominant form of mediation through media and communication channels, or as the study of social changes driven by media technologies and the cultures of their use? As research over the past decade has shown, the latter perspective – despite some initial resistance – has begun to gain prominence. Notable examples include the previously mentioned scientific events, *Towards Development of Mediatisation Research* and the *Mediatisation Conference*, the latter of which is linked to the publication of the journal “Mediatisation Studies”.

The mediatisation framework offers an interesting analytical perspective, but its primary challenge remains the continuous need for theoretical updates and the pursuit of new empirical research. Three key issues stand out: Poland’s role in the Central European context, the reliance on foreign analytical models without adapting them to local realities, and the insufficient research into the mediatisation effect.

The existence of a Slavic model of mediatisation seems well-founded, particularly in the context of researching the mediatisation of religion. The shift from the Scandinavian model, which has been developed in a highly secularised context, to the Central and Eastern Europe model highlights the unique role of religious institutions and the lower level of secularisation. Conferences such as *Religious Identity and the Media. Methods, Concepts, and New Research Avenues* (held in 2021 in Warsaw by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Institute for the Study of Religion and Related Didactics at the University of Bremen) and *Digital Religion III: Challenges of Communication and Excommunication* (held in 2023 in Katowice by the Institute of Journalism and Media Communication at the University of Silesia, the Department of Communication Studies at Palacký University in Olomouc, and the Institute of English Studies at the University of Łódź) indicate the increasing significance of this research area in the region.

The lack of reflection on adapting mediatisation-related terms to local conditions remains a problem, as does the frequent adoption of definitions from authors like Stig Hjarvard and Andreas Hepp without considering the local context. For instance, analyses of the mediatisation of religion often overlook Poland’s lower level of secularisation.

Ultimately, a greater emphasis on empirical research could lead to a deeper understanding of mediatisation patterns. Analysing the presence or absence of the mediatisation effect would facilitate the development of case studies and comparative research, significantly enriching mediatisation studies within the contexts of German-speaking, Scandinavian, or even Portuguese-speaking countries like Brazil.

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Socialmediatisation

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Socialmediatisation refers to the process by which social media platforms have come to play an increasingly central role in society, systematically reshaping patterns of interpersonal interaction, communication, and organisational practices across various levels. This phenomenon represents an extension of the concept of mediatisation, which traditionally examines how media influence social structures and processes.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: In Polish academic discourse the term 'socialmediatisation' first appeared in 2015, incorporating elements of related concepts such as algorithmisation and datafication.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Unlike the logic of traditional media, the operational logic of social media – particularly in terms of their legal frameworks and modes of content distribution – differs markedly. If mediatisation is understood as a process of deepening interdependence between media and social institutions, wherein media both mediate social processes and increasingly shape the logic of these institutions, then definitions centred on traditional media must be reconsidered and expanded.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Socialmediatisation manifests at multiple levels: from the individual and organisational, to the societal and global. While it was initially met with widespread enthusiasm, it is now more often viewed as a complex and pressing challenge for contemporary civilisation.

Keywords: socialmediatisation, social media, Web 2.0, social networking services

Definition of the term

Social media constitute a group of digital media platforms built on three core pillars: Web 2.0 technologies that enable user participation in content creation and exchange, user-generated content (UGC), and communities and networks centred around specific platforms (Ahlqvist et al., 2008).

Since the onset of the Web 2.0 revolution, typically dated between 2003 and 2005, social media have progressively become an integral part of everyday communication in both private and public spheres. Their popularity continues to grow, with research indicating that nearly every internet user today is also an active participant on social media platforms.

Broadly defined, socialmediatisation refers to the steadily increasing influence of social media platforms on everyday communication practices. It can be seen as an evolution of the concept of mediatisation, which describes the pervasive impact of media on the processes of social communication. Tomasz Goban-Klas defines mediatisation *sensu largo* as the saturation of all sectors of social life with media, particularly in the political domain (Goban-Klas, 2012). By extension, socialmediatisation can be understood as the deepening integration of communicative activity with social media platforms across micro (individual), meso (organisational), and macro (social) levels. As the use of social media becomes increasingly ubiquitous, conventional communication patterns are being reshaped – both in private interactions and in public discourse. Interpersonal relationships, as well as socio-cultural, political, and organisational communication practices, are undergoing transformations. Some scholars argue that socialmediatisation may even influence cognitive structures at the individual level. Consequently, one may speak of the socialmediatisation of multiple spheres of life: everyday routines, politics, interpersonal communication, marketing practices, etc. It is a misconception to regard social media merely as a ‘virtual’ realm. On the contrary, they constitute a fully real environment as communicative activity within these platforms has tangible consequences in offline life. A more appropriate distinction, therefore, is not between the real and the virtual, but between online and offline realities.

Social media

Understanding the specificity of socialmediatisation requires a clear grasp of what constitutes social media and how these platforms differ from traditional mass media such as newspapers, radio, or television. Social media are best understood as a subset of new media – a broader category often conflated with the internet but encompassing a wider cognitive spectrum.

New media emerged from the intersection of three previously distinct sectors: telecommunications, printed press, and the computing industry. Over time, these domains converged in a process known as media convergence, resulting in hybrid forms. For instance, the fusion of media and telecommunications gave rise to electronic media; telecommunications combined with computer technologies led to the development of mobile phones, and the merging of computer technologies with media introduced new information and data carriers. This convergence laid the foundation for what we now refer to as new media, often grouped under the umbrella of information and communication technologies (ICT), with the internet playing a central role.

As the internet evolved, the early 21st century saw the rise of dynamic, interactive, and user-friendly platforms that significantly lowered the barriers to content creation. Historically, the internet's development can be viewed as a process of expanding user agency: from passive consumers to 'producers' – individuals who both produce and consume media. Initially, the World Wide Web mirrored traditional mass media structures, where content was accessed primarily by entering website addresses. During the 1990s, the first search engines capable of indexing the full content of online documents appeared. This innovation enabled users to retrieve information by entering keywords found directly within the text of web pages. As a result, browsing was gradually supplanted by searching. However, the majority of online content at the time continued to be produced by professionals with technical expertise – mirroring the structure of traditional media, where content is typically created by trained journalists. A pivotal shift occurred as the barriers to online content creation and publication began to diminish. The democratisation of media production paved the way for widespread amateur participation and the emergence of user-generated content (UGC). This moment can

be seen as the onset of the era of socialmediatisation, characterised by socially and collectively created media content that was no longer confined to dedicated platforms, thus being increasingly pervasive across the media landscape. Such content began to appear within traditional media as well, notably through the rise of citizen journalism and the circulation of cultural forms like memes, which now play a vital role in shaping public discourse.

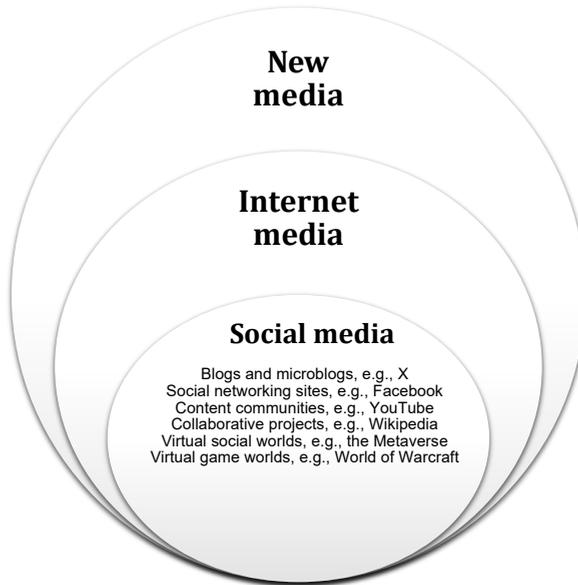
The landscape of internet media is highly diverse – a point worth underscoring, as not all forms of internet media fall under the category of social media. Services such as email, traditional websites, news portals, and search engines do not meet the defining criteria of social media. Even streaming platforms typically do not qualify. It is also a misconception to frame social media merely in terms of new journalistic genres or evolving media formats. For example, while podcasts represent a new form of radio, they remain largely one-directional in their communication structure. A podcast, in itself, is not inherently social media. Whether it falls within the social media ecosystem depends largely on the platform through which it is distributed. Podcasts available on interactive platforms like YouTube are embedded in a far more socially dynamic context than those hosted on the static websites of traditional broadcasters. For this reason, any definition of social media should focus on platforms grounded in what is often referred to as the social media triangle: Web 2.0 technologies, user-generated content (UGC), and communities or networks.

Similarly, wiki-based projects – such as Wikipedia – are sometimes incorrectly excluded from the realm of social media. This may stem from the fact that networking is not their core function. However, this does not negate the existence of active, engaged communities surrounding them. The exclusion of such platforms appears to be rooted in linguistic misunderstandings. In English, distinct terms like social media, social network sites, and social networking sites are used to describe different aspects of online interaction. In Polish, however, these categories are often treated as interchangeable, which leads to conceptual confusion. Social network sites and social networking sites are subcategories of social media and have different functions. Social network sites primarily mirror existing social relationships, facilitating the maintenance of what sociologists refer to as weak ties, as exemplified by platforms

like Classmates or Nasza-klasa.pl. In contrast, social networking sites are designed to foster new connections, such as those created on dating platforms. Unfortunately, such distinctions are largely absent in Polish terminology.

It is also worth mentioning that the Polish term *media społecznościowe* – commonly used in public discourse – is not a literal translation of the English term *social media*. A direct translation would be *media społeczne*, a term that in Polish tends to denote a specific form of ownership. As a result, *media społecznościowe* has become the more contextually appropriate and widely accepted expression. Figure 1 illustrates the position and complexity of social media within the broader structure of new media.

Figure 1. The position and types of social media within new media



Source: Own elaboration based on Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010

The internal diversity of social media becomes clear when examining how various scholars classify these platforms. For instance, Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein divided social media based on the criterion of self-presentation and self-disclosure on one axis, and social presence and media richness on the other. This framework led them to identify

six distinct categories of social media: blogs and microblogs (e.g., X), collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), content communities (e.g., YouTube), virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life), and virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Thus, social media do not form a homogeneous group, and the dominant functions of different platforms vary significantly. This point is further emphasised by Jan H. Kietzmann and Kristopher Hermkens, who introduced the highly practical honeycomb framework to analyse social media. This model identifies seven key functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Each platform emphasises different functions – some are dominant, others secondary, and some largely irrelevant, depending on the platform.

Mass self-communication

Although social media qualify as mass media due to the potentially vast reach of their messages, they differ fundamentally from traditional media. Key distinctions include multidirectional communication, the deprofessionalisation of content creation – where anyone can act as a producer – and the empowerment of audiences, who shift from passive recipients to active participants. This transformation, driven by the process of socialmediatisation, calls for a redefinition of traditional models of mass communication. Manuel Castells (2007) addresses this shift through the concept of mass self-communication. In industrial society, communication was structured around the traditional mass media model, where content was disseminated in a one-to-many format. In contrast, today's communication systems are shaped by global networks of horizontal connections, allowing for both synchronous and asynchronous interactions in a many-to-many model. Mass self-communication is not one-directional, and each user is capable of managing their own information flows. The architecture of social media platforms enables virtually anyone to become a mass communicator while simultaneously consuming highly personalised content. Thus, while socialmediatisation is most immediately visible in the realm of individual content consumption, its implications extend much further.

Social content creation and the transformation of audiences into active participants represent only one dimension of socialmediatisation. The process also has far-reaching global consequences. Multifunctional social media platforms now dominate communication and information flows to such an extent that engaging with them has become almost essential for full participation in modern society. Research shows that opting out of the most widely used social platforms – even when actively using the internet and other digital media – can result in various forms of exclusion (Popiołek, 2018). This reflects a high and steadily increasing level of dependence on social media, which is sometimes mistakenly equated with addiction. However, it is important to distinguish between dependence and addiction. Addiction refers to a behavioural disorder characterised by compulsive engagement in an activity despite its harmful consequences. While it is certainly possible to become addicted to specific activities within social media, regular use alone does not necessarily constitute addiction – it more often reflects dependence. Research indicates that for many people, social media platforms have become the primary – and increasingly exclusive – source of information (see Popiołek, 2018). They are also now the main channel of communication between institutions, organisations, and their audiences.

Historical analysis of the term

Given that socialmediatisation is essentially an extension of the broader concept of mediatisation, its origins are best understood by tracing the evolution of the latter. Initially, mediatisation applied primarily to mass media such as the press, radio, and television, referred to here as traditional media. It was understood as the process through which these media gained increasing influence, eventually becoming the dominant source of information about the world and playing a central role in shaping individuals' perceptions of reality. It was emphasised that media do not merely inform but also select events and impose interpretative frameworks, thereby shaping a sometimes-distorted image of the world.

A thorough and insightful analysis of mediatisation can be found in the work of Stanisław Michalczyk (2009), who not only differentiates between medialisisation and mediatisation but also explores how deeply

individuals are 'immersed' in a reality increasingly mediated by media. According to Michalczyk, the media serve not just as information sources but also as tools of identity formation. In his view, mediatisation is primarily driven by traditional media, particularly television. As he writes:

Life without media at the beginning of the 21st century is no longer possible. Everyday life and media are interwoven, mutually permeating each other. The relationships between media consumption and daily practice are reciprocal. On the one hand, everyday media consumption broadens horizons; on the other, it renders the experience of emotions passive or even diminishes what is often referred to as the 'fullness of life'. The mediatisation of everyday life is tied to a process of individualisation, where individuals seek their identities independently, no longer relying on traditional institutions, values, or social roles. In this process, the media – especially television as the leading medium – play a crucial role. Television becomes a cultural forum, promoting specific lifestyles and offering models to emulate. More broadly, everyday media provide subjective constructions of social reality (Michalczyk, 2009, p. 25).

Because traditional definitions of mediatisation were closely linked to the role of traditional mass media, the rise of new media eventually prompted a conceptual expansion. This led to the emergence of terms such as internetisation, smartphonisation, algorithmisation, and datafication. While internetisation typically refers to the implementation of telecommunication infrastructure, the other terms describe broader processes. The concept of smartphonisation is particularly well-developed in the work of Katarzyna Kopecka-Piech, who emphasises the smartphone's transformative impact on the structures of everyday life. She treats smartphonisation as a component of mediatisation:

Smartphones are regarded both as indicators and drivers of mediatisation – they reflect and generate changes in the relationship between media and the 'lifeworld'. They do so in a multidimensional, comprehensive manner through the "multi-mediation of the lifeworld". [...] Smartphonisation is a fundamental mechanism of everyday mediatisation, which mobile technologies are increasingly 'colonising' (Kopecka-Piech, 2019).

Other concepts, i.e., algorithmisation and datafication, are more directly associated with the realm of social media. Algorithmisation describes the mechanisms underlying commercial new media platforms, which use embedded algorithms to personalise content and adapt it to individual user preferences. Datafication refers to the large-scale

collection and analysis of data – especially big data – by internet service providers, with social media platforms being among the most prominent data collectors. In this context, the concept of socialmediatisation brings together many of these strands. While algorithmisation and datafication are not limited to social media, they are especially pronounced within them.

It is also worth noting that contemporary definitions of mediatisation have become significantly broader, often without specifying the particular media involved. For example, Teresa Sasińska-Klas offers a definition focused primarily on the continuous process of change:

Media [...] actively modify existing forms of communication and alter their rules, which in turn deepens social and cultural transformations. Through this ongoing dynamic, citizens living in media-saturated societies transform society into a media society, whose core characteristic is the mediatisation process. This implies a dynamic process – one that is ongoing and evolving – rather than a static ‘state’ of society (Sasińska-Klas, 2014).

The term socialmediatisation itself is relatively recent, entering academic discourse in 2015 (Popiołek, 2015). It builds upon and extends traditional understandings of mediatisation by focusing specifically on the integration of social media into social structures. It shifts analytical attention toward the consequences of widespread social media use, both for everyday communication and for the functioning of traditional media organisations.

Discussion of the term

Given that some of the aforementioned definitions of mediatisation do not explicitly exclude social media, it might be asked whether it is necessary to introduce new concepts in this area. There are compelling reasons to argue that it is – and two stand out in particular.

First, the concept of mediatisation traditionally places media at the centre. However, social media platforms occupy a hybrid space at the intersection of the media and technology industries. While they often perform functions similar to those of traditional media, their legal and institutional positioning is markedly different. Traditional media – such

as the press, radio, and television – are typically subject to distinct regulatory frameworks, carry specific obligations, and often operate as public institutions. In contrast, social media platforms, particularly those with global reach, are commercial services provided by private companies that explicitly identify with the tech sector rather than the media industry. While there are various reasons for this distinction – chief among them being the desire to evade accountability for content – it also highlights the fact that traditional and social media differ significantly in both their formal status and social responsibility.

Second, the operational logic – or *modus operandi* – of social media, including content creation and distribution, and both formal and informal norms, diverges sharply from that of traditional media. If mediatisation is understood as a process manifesting in the interrelations between social structures and institutions and media – whereby media mediate social processes while their internal logic comes to shape these structures – then it becomes clear that they are two distinct environments. Moreover, contemporary media organisations are themselves increasingly subject to the logic of social media, often at the expense of their own autonomy. This dynamic reflects a broader pattern of socialmediatisation. One particularly telling indicator of this shift is the reconfiguration of the media–audience relationship. Where audiences once sought out media and expressed a degree of brand loyalty, it is now traditional media that must actively compete for users' attention, often by embedding themselves within social media ecosystems.

The influence of social media is now so extensive that these platforms have become tools of warfare and political impact. Consequently, platform usage is increasingly politicised. The most popular global platforms can be banned in some countries, while governments seek greater control over their functioning. This raises a crucial question: is socialmediatisation a global phenomenon? The evidence suggests that it is. While the global social media landscape is not entirely homogeneous – American platforms, for example, are blocked in countries like China and Iran – local alternatives emerge that closely replicate the structure and functionality of their Western counterparts.

In many regions, individuals access social media exclusively through mobile devices, particularly smartphones, bypassing computers altogether. This reinforces the notion that socialmediatisation operates at

a global scale. The widespread adoption of a few dominant platforms has contributed to the emergence of similar communication patterns across different regions, as is evident on multiple levels.

Socialmediatisation at the individual and interpersonal level (micro-socialmediatisation)

At the individual level, the effects of social media manifest most clearly in the transformation of everyday habits and cognitive processes. Scholars studying this phenomenon highlight that regular use of social media technologies can condition user behaviour in profound ways. Nicholas Carr famously characterised social media as interruption technologies. Drawing on the concept of neuroplasticity, he hypothesised that frequent engagement with these platforms may physically alter the brain's structure. Among the observed consequences are diminished capacity for sustained attention, compulsive notification checking, an ongoing need to remain constantly updated, and the fear of missing out (FOMO) (Carr, 2010).

Social media also offer users unprecedented opportunities for self-presentation. The differentiated purposes of platforms – whether oriented toward dating, professional networking, or social interaction – encourage the maintenance of multiple, parallel identities, each tailored to the specific context. At the same time, interpersonal communication is undergoing notable changes. While human relationships have always been embedded in social networks, socialmediatisation intensifies their dependence on the logic of social media platforms (Juza, 2019, p. 185). Individuals now actively manage their interpersonal relationships by, e.g., removing 'unwanted' contacts and curating what content is visible to whom. Another emerging issue is the valuation of self-worth through the metric of positive feedback, i.e., likes. Scholars warn that such mechanisms may reinforce narcissistic behaviours and contribute to self-esteem issues, especially when the volume of positive engagement is perceived as inadequate. These brief, often superficial interactions – sometimes referred to as para-interactions – can also trigger hormonal responses, such as dopamine release, potentially leading to a compulsive search for such stimuli (Przybysz, 2023).

In a social media-saturated world, offline experiences can become secondary to their online representation. Increasingly, individuals are more preoccupied with capturing and broadcasting their presence at an event than with the experience itself. Sharing – one of the foundational functions of social media – has evolved into one of the most dominant forms of digital communication.

This shift has also led to the rise of new authorities and opinion leaders: influencers. These figures have, in many cases, supplanted traditional authority roles. Their influence does not necessarily derive from expertise or accomplishments, but rather from reach – quantified by follower counts, engagement levels, and algorithmic visibility. Given that social media algorithms tend to amplify controversial and emotionally charged content, those who provoke the strongest reactions often emerge as the most prominent voices. Content that elicits strong emotional responses is often more engaging and, as a result, more likely to be widely circulated. Sometimes such content is deliberately introduced into the communication ecosystem to polarise and destabilise entire societies.

Socialmediatisation at the level of organisations and institutions (meso-socialmediatisation)

Socialmediatisation has also become increasingly visible at the organisational level. Today, communication between institutions and their external environments is largely mediated through social media platforms. As Barbara Cyrek observes, “social media have redefined the nature of communication not only between individuals but also between institutions and groups. Business communication strategies have undergone a lasting transformation” (Cyrek, 2016). Engagement on these platforms has emerged as a lasting alternative to traditional modes of communication. On the one hand, social media reduce the distance between organisations and their stakeholders by enabling users to comment on, share, and evaluate institutional activities. On the other, this shift often leads to the neglect of traditional communication practices, forcing stakeholders to conform to the logic of socialmediatisation and thereby legitimising a new communicative paradigm.

Organisations across sectors have embraced new channels enthusiastically. The concept of 'building a community around a brand' has become a guiding principle for many contemporary enterprises. Social media are now leveraged not only for communication, branding, marketing, and advertising, but also for customer service and recruitment. As a result, entirely new professions have emerged, such as content creator, social media manager, and community manager. At the same time, organisations are increasingly aware of the vulnerabilities embedded within this model. Social media platforms are not neutral intermediaries; they manipulate content visibility to maximise profit, often pressuring organisations to invest in paid promotions to maintain their reach. This dynamic signals a deepening dependency: just as individuals who withdraw from social media risk social exclusion, organisations that fail to integrate these platforms into their communication strategies risk becoming invisible in the public sphere.

Traditional media organisations have not remained unaffected. Radio and television broadcasters now routinely encourage audiences to 'like' their Facebook pages or engage with their content on social platforms. Furthermore, major social media services provide on-demand access to content produced by traditional media. In parallel, alternative media that operate outside of the mainstream have emerged. While many of them emulate the formats of traditional journalism, they are anchored in the social media ecosystem and, at least nominally, maintain independence from corporate media, governments, or interest groups. In practice, however, some only maintain the appearance of independence.

At the institutional level, socialmediatisation is not limited to communication between organisations and their audiences but also entails greater transparency and public oversight. Citizen journalism and grassroots investigations now play a vital role in exposing abuses of power, uncovering crimes and fostering a sense of social justice. Advocates of socialmediatisation frequently emphasise that the accessibility of social media enhances civic agency, promotes institutional accountability and transparency, and provides citizens with immediate tools for engagement and response.

Socialmediatisation at the level of societies (macro-socialmediatisation)

At the macro level, the effects of socialmediatisation are most evident in the realm of politics. Social media have fundamentally transformed political communication (see Hess, 2011), influencing not only electoral strategies but also interactions between politicians and citizens, relationships among political actors, and the evolving dynamics between traditional media and politicians. With the widespread adoption of social platforms, politicians can increasingly bypass traditional media. Rather than appearing in television studios for interviews, political candidates now engage directly with prominent social media influencers. Politics in the age of social media is defined by interactivity, personalisation, emotional intensity, and the immediacy of communication. It often adopts the form of infotainment – a fusion of entertainment and simplified informational content. Political news is frequently consumed in fragmented, easily digestible formats such as memes or humorous visuals, which are widely shared in the manner of digital ‘snacks’ shared during online social interactions. This consumption model – referred to as media snacking – erodes the seriousness traditionally associated with political engagement. Complex policy issues are overshadowed by viral blunders or gaffes, which attract greater attention due to their entertainment value. Consequently, voters increasingly appear to value a politician’s performative and entertainment skills over their competence. In this environment, those who are adept at navigating the logic of social media – showmen and digital-savvy figures – are more likely to succeed.

In the early 2000s, social media were hailed by many as promising tools for democratising public discourse, enhancing political transparency, and expanding civic participation. Over time, however, it has become evident that the socialmediatisation of political communication also entails profound risks and unintended consequences. Among the most pressing are the vulgarisation of public debate, the manipulation of public opinion, and the rise of pervasive disinformation. Society – accustomed to a landscape in which ‘everyone lies’ – begins to lose its expectation of truth altogether. Despite public-facing narratives from major platform owners claiming to ‘serve the people’, it has become

increasingly clear that social media are not neutral instruments. Rather, they are powerful and deeply politicised tools of persuasion and manipulation – highly effective weapons in contemporary information warfare. The digital public sphere is ‘polluted’ with disinformation, fake accounts, and bots, making it increasingly difficult for researchers to assess the authenticity and organic nature of online behaviour. In many cases, it is unclear whether online engagement reflects genuine civic activity or coordinated disinformation campaigns, potentially orchestrated by foreign actors (Powierska, 2024).

The politicisation of social media has also become overt. In the past, major platform owners were reluctant to acknowledge their political involvement or their role in shaping public discourse. This changed dramatically following the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal, which revealed how political microtargeting on Facebook had been used to influence elections, sparking global controversy and legal consequences. Yet despite this growing awareness, socialmediatisation continues to accelerate. Rather than retreating, user engagement with these platforms has steadily increased year after year.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

In its early stages, socialmediatisation was met with widespread enthusiasm and optimism. This sentiment dominated public discourse at the turn of the 21st century, coinciding with the emergence of the first social media platforms in the late 1990s. The excitement surrounding the promise of Web 2.0 technologies further intensified between 2010 and 2012, particularly in connection with the events of the Arab Spring. During this period, the role of social media in enabling social mobilisation, disseminating information, and organising protests under authoritarian regimes became strikingly apparent. Social media were hailed as revolutionary tools – not only as mechanisms of resistance and liberation, but also as vehicles for deepening democratic processes and enhancing civic participation (see Lakomy, 2013).

From a cultural standpoint, socialmediatisation was viewed as a gateway for amateur creators to reach wider audiences. Socially, it

was celebrated for fostering global collaboration through initiatives such as wiki-based projects, crowdsourcing, and crowdfunding. It was seen as a driver of greater institutional transparency and citizen empowerment. However, even at that time a few critical voices warned that such optimism was perhaps naïve, particularly given that social media platforms were never fully 'social'. Rather than being grassroots, civic-driven initiatives, the dominant platforms were (and remain) private, profit-oriented enterprises.

More than two decades since their introduction, the prevailing public discourse around social media has shifted markedly. Today, it is increasingly shaped by scepticism and concern. Socialmediatisation has brought about a host of challenges that are difficult to resolve. Many early hopes have proven to be illusory, and numerous widely held beliefs have since been called into question. Nevertheless, within the context of an information society, the ability to access information swiftly and effectively remains fundamental, as information is the essential resource that enables access to all others. Owners and operators of social media platforms have accurately identified the needs of people living in this information-saturated world. At the same time, they have successfully colonised the information and communication landscape, creating a deep societal dependence on their products and services. As a result, the ongoing acceleration of socialmediatisation demands in-depth reflection, greater user awareness, and enhanced media literacy education.

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Freedom of expression in public discourse

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Freedom of expression in public discourse refers to the right of individuals and groups to articulate their thoughts and opinions, as well as to access and disseminate information within the public sphere without censorship or repression. It is a fundamental value essential to the proper functioning of democratic societies and political systems. Although it may be subject to certain restrictions, such limitations must meet strict criteria and must not undermine the very essence of this freedom.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: The roots of the concept of freedom of expression can be traced back to antiquity, but it is the 18th-century revolutions, coupled with the recognition of natural human rights, that mark the true beginning of its modern understanding. Contemporary standards emerged with the development of international human rights protection systems after World War II. Shaped by globalisation and the digital revolution, the late 20th century significantly transformed modes of communication, profoundly affecting how freedom of expression is perceived.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: The key issues that define the scope of freedom of expression include its justifications, its fundamental nature, and the functions it plays within public discourse. A notable phenomenon is the gradual blurring of the boundary between freedom of speech and freedom of the press as the unique nature of the internet increasingly erodes the distinction between the sender and receiver of opinions and information.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The central challenge lies in properly delineating the boundaries of this freedom. Factors that risk imposing excessive restrictions include inadequate approaches to combating hate speech, censorship by private corporations, and the instrumentalisation of freedom of expression in the service of ideological conflicts. Recommendations emphasise the need for proportional limitations and protection of the core of this freedom.

Keywords: freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, hate speech, censorship

Definition of the term

Freedom of expression in public discourse is a fundamental principle for the proper functioning of democratic states and societies. At its core it refers to the right of individuals and groups to express thoughts, opinions, and emotions freely, as well as to disseminate and access information without external interference in the public sphere. These freedoms should be exercised without fear – on account of content – of censorship, repression, or legal sanctions from the state or other actors in the broadly understood public domain (including international corporations, non-governmental organisations, public institutions, or private enterprises). Opinions and information may be disseminated through any available medium, whether in direct interpersonal interactions or through both traditional and digital media.

Freedom of expression is often regarded as an almost absolute value; it is an expression of the inalienable dignity and autonomy of the individual, subject only to rare exceptions. However, it is equally often treated instrumentally as a limited entitlement, subject to broad regulation in the name of protecting a range of ideals, values, goods, and interests, such as national security, public order, morality, or the rights and freedoms of others.

While the concept of freedom of expression may seem self-evident, its meaning quickly reveals ambiguity when examined across different historical, political, and cultural contexts. The scope of inquiry into this freedom extends well beyond narrow legal frameworks, encompassing practical issues related to social change, the consequences of technological transformation, and the evolving boundaries of public authority. Critical questions arise: who truly has access to the public sphere? What mechanisms – legal, political, economic, or technological – shape the boundaries of permissible expression? How should the individual's right to speak be balanced against the potential consequences for the community?

Contemporary debates further complicate this picture, introducing new dimensions such as the role of digital platforms, the globalisation of discourse, and tensions between pluralism and the need for social cohesion. An additional layer of complexity lies in the distinction between freedom of expression as a formal (legal) right and its actual exercise in

everyday public discourse. In liberal democracies, this freedom is legally protected, but its effective availability often depends on factors such as education, economic status, or media control. In contrast, in non-democratic societies, formal guarantees of freedom of speech may be rendered meaningless in the face of widespread censorship.

Today, various terms are used in discussions of expressive freedom. Of these, freedom of thought is conceptually the narrowest, referring to the internal liberty to reflect on any aspect of life. Notably, constitutional protections of freedom of thought are usually grouped with freedom of conscience and religion, rather than with freedom of expression.

Freedom of speech, by contrast, concerns the right to hold and disseminate opinions and information. When such dissemination occurs via print or digital platforms, it falls under the category of freedom of the press (historically, freedom of the printed press). However, neither of these terms captures the broader scope of freedom of expression, which includes all forms of communication, verbal and non-verbal, such as art, gestures, facial expressions, drawings, and internet memes. Additional components of this broader freedom include the right to seek, receive, and impart information through any medium – a right particularly relevant to press freedom. Freedom of expression also encompasses artistic freedom and academic freedom, i.e., the liberty to conduct research, publish results, and engage in teaching without undue constraint.

Historical analysis of the term

Freedom of expression, like other natural rights, has a long and complex history, with its origins traceable to ancient Greece. In his renowned funeral oration, Pericles highlighted the uniqueness of the Greeks, declaring: “[w]e have the ability to judge or plan rightly in our affairs, since instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all” (Pericles, *Funeral Oration*). In medieval England and France, freedom of speech, understood primarily as a parliamentary privilege, was already considered an essential component of political life. The chief limits on speech were offences such as *lèse-majesté* and blasphemy, which were harshly punished on both sides of the Atlantic until the

American and French revolutions. While religious wars ravaged much of Western Europe, the comparatively tolerant Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth upheld freedom of speech and opinion as one of the central elements of the nobility’s civic liberties (Naworski, 2022, p. 34). Because freedom of expression was long intertwined with the freedom to express religious views, the struggle for the right to speak publicly on matters of religion became a foundation for broader freedom of expression in other domains.

One of the most consequential developments in the history of free expression was the invention of the printing press, which also prompted the emergence of various forms of prior (preventive) censorship. It was not until 1689 that the English Parliament passed the Toleration Act, which stripped the king and the Anglican Church of their long-held status as “custodians of absolute truth” – a position that had justified state censorship. This act made England the first country to abolish preventive censorship (Urbańczyk, 2009, pp. 31–32).

The philosophical foundations of modern freedom of expression were laid by early modern thinkers such as John Milton, John Locke, and Montesquieu, whose ideas inspired the revolutions of the 18th century. In *Areopagitica*, Milton formulated the first modern and comprehensive defence of freedom of speech and the press, advocating for the right “to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience” (Milton, 1918, p. 57). John Locke, in his fight for religious tolerance, argued that all opinions unrelated to civil society (excluding atheism) should be freely expressed without state interference. However, he acknowledged that certain opinions could be restricted depending on their content and potential social harm (Urbańczyk, 2009, pp. 40–42). Montesquieu championed absolute freedom of thought and condemned laws criminalising thoughts of high treason, writing that “[w]herever this law is established, not only is there no longer liberty, there is not even its shadow” (Montesquieu, 2002, p. 198). At the same time, he supported penalising speech that incited rebellion or social unrest.

The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1789 in France and the American *Bill of Rights* – the first ten amendments to the 1787 U.S. Constitution – enshrined fundamental liberties, including freedom of speech and the press. From that moment on, the question was no longer whether freedom of expression applied to all individuals, as

both legal frameworks were grounded in the principle of equality before the law. The challenge shifted to determining the limits of those freedoms. Both acts also guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion, leading later philosophical and legal thought to differentiate between religious liberty and freedom of expression as distinct, though related, rights.

In Europe, the French Revolution briefly ushered in full freedom of expression, while the First Amendment to the United States Constitution guaranteed that Congress would enact no laws abridging freedom of speech or the press. However, it must be acknowledged that throughout the 19th century this largely signified the absence of prior (preventive) censorship, in line with the 18th-century doctrine of William Blackstone, which was inherited from the colonial period. Moreover, while the First Amendment limited the powers of the federal government, individual U.S. states retained significant discretion in defining the boundaries of subsequent (punitive) censorship. It was not until the 1919 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Schenck v. United States* (249 U.S. 47, 1919) that a major shift occurred, introducing “the clear and present danger” test, which substantially limited the ability to impose penalties for certain types of speech.

A major turning point in the development of freedom of expression was the emergence of international and European systems of protection for human rights. Through Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), Article 10 of the *European Convention on Human Rights*, and Article 19 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), freedom of expression became an essential and foundational element of modern democratic states and a vital value for 20th-century societies. With the fall of communism and totalitarian regimes in Europe, freedom of expression gained renewed significance in the constitutions of newly democratised states. For example, the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of Poland enshrined freedom of the press (Article 14) as a core principle of the political system. For Europe, the importance of this freedom is further underscored by Article 11 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, which guarantees both freedom of expression and access to information.

This did not, of course, end debates and controversies over the meaning, scope, or permissible limitations of freedom of expression. On the

contrary, the 21st century has been marked by new threats to freedom of expression in public discourse. In 2001, following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the U.S. Congress enacted the *Patriot Act*, which granted the government sweeping new powers that significantly curtailed civil liberties, including freedom of expression. This prompted well-founded concerns about the extent of government intrusion into civil rights and freedoms in the United States. In Europe, challenges arose around offences to the religious sentiments of Muslims. In 2004, Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered following the release of his film about violence against women in Islamic societies. In 2015, a terrorist attack in Paris resulted in the deaths of 12 people after the satirical magazine “Charlie Hebdo” published caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

The rise of the internet, and especially social media, has introduced new challenges for freedom of expression in public discourse. On the one hand, it has enabled the exchange of opinions and information on an unprecedented scale. On the other hand, it has revealed new limitations, including politically motivated censorship by private corporations – often under the pretext of combating hate speech and implemented via impersonal algorithms – and the proliferation of fake news and disinformation. A prominent example is *Murthy v. Missouri* (602 U.S., 2024), in which the Biden administration was accused of pressuring social media platforms to censor conservative viewpoints and criticism of the government.

The invention of language models – that is, chatbots (commonly referred to as artificial intelligence) designed to generate responses based on user input – marks a new chapter in the history of freedom of expression and its boundaries. For the first time, machines have become active participants in public discourse.

Discussion of the term

Freedom of expression today faces numerous challenges that undermine both its theoretical foundations and its practical application, reshaping how this right is understood and exercised. Two key areas are central to redefining why freedom of expression must play a fundamental role in Western culture and contemporary liberal democracies: first, the

justifications found in political and legal thought; second, the nature and functions it performs across the various forms of public discourse. A proper articulation of these issues allows for systematic reflection, conclusions, and recommendations that can help define the legitimate boundaries of freedom of expression in public discourse.

The ability to think freely and express one's opinions in public has long been constrained by efforts to restrict public discourse, exerted not only by state authorities but also by a range of other actors with the capacity to suppress speech (e.g., private corporate censorship on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok). The stronger the arguments supporting freedom of speech, the greater the opportunity to preserve a wide and meaningful space for its exercise.

First and foremost, freedom of expression should be recognised as a natural right inherent in every person. It constitutes a key element of human autonomy and is grounded in human nature itself. This is an inalienable right, rooted in the dignity and rationality of human beings, who are capable of thought and communication. It is a fundamental expression of personal identity that the state is obliged to respect – rather than a privilege that can be arbitrarily granted, shaped, or withdrawn. John Stuart Mill described it as belonging to “the appropriate region of human liberty”:

It comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness; demanding liberty of conscience, in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological (1864, p. 22).

This view is connected to a second argument, which frames freedom of expression as a necessary condition for human self-realisation. It serves as a tool through which individuals develop by freely choosing between competing ideas. It is through the open exchange of diverse opinions that individuals become familiar with them, enabling personal growth and self-improvement through the exercise of their intellectual capacities. Freedom of expression enables people to articulate their beliefs, emotions, and identities, fostering personal fulfilment and contributing to the well-being of both the individual and the broader community. As Mill observed, “freedom of opinion, and freedom of the expression of opinion” are necessary “to the mental well-being of mankind” (Mill, 1864, p. 94).

Third, freedom of expression is justified as the most effective mechanism for discovering truth and expanding knowledge. The open exchange of ideas, even erroneous ones, enables intellectual refinement through debate and critical engagement. The argument regarding the pursuit of truth and the harm of suppressing it holds significance for both individuals and society as a whole. As John Milton wrote,

Bad meats will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction; but herein the difference is of bad books, that they to a discreet and judicious reader serve in many respects to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate (Milton, 1918, p. 18).

Fourth, freedom of expression is a vital component of liberal democracy and justice. It enables citizens to participate in governance, hold those in power to account, and secure fair political procedures. John Rawls emphasised this role by identifying specific principles necessary for the free, comprehensive, and informed circulation of political views (Rawls, 2005, pp. 342–343). A robust regime of freedom of expression serves to prevent abuses of power, reinforcing transparency and pluralism in political discourse. In this respect, both traditional and digital media play a critical role and are protected by the broader principle of freedom of the press.

A final justification for freedom of expression highlights its role as a tool of resistance against unjust governments, authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies of power, and the tyranny of both majorities and minorities. Only freedom of expression enables individuals and groups to expose abuses, assert their rights, and challenge undemocratic tendencies in governance. This rationale derives not only from historical struggles against absolutist and totalitarian regimes, but also from contemporary experiences of resistance (such as the role played by social media shutdowns during the Arab Spring, or the ongoing internet censorship in China and Russia). At its core, freedom of expression entails the ability to disseminate ideas, opinions, and information, as well as the freedom to choose the sources of those ideas, opinions, and information. In doing so, it shapes public discourse within a pluralistic framework that should remain free from political interference.

A consistent element across all theories of freedom of expression is the rejection of any form of preventive (prior) censorship, namely

any legal requirement to obtain state approval before publication. This principle is clearly embedded in binding legal norms. In the Polish Constitution, freedom of expression is recognised as a subjective right of the individual under Article 54, Chapter II, titled “The freedoms, rights and obligations of persons and citizens”, and Article 14, Chapter I, titled “The Republic”, which guarantees press freedom and outlines the fundamental principles of the constitutional order. According to Article 54(1), “[t]he freedom to express opinions, to acquire and to disseminate information shall be ensured to everyone”, while Article 14 states that “[t]he Republic of Poland shall ensure freedom of the press and other means of social communication”. Complementing these, Article 54(2) prohibits preventive censorship of the means of social communication and the licensing of the press, stipulating that the requirement to obtain a licence in advance for operating a radio or television station may be introduced only by statute (law).

There are three primary distinctions between freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The first concerns the subjects to which each freedom applies. Press freedom pertains to mass media, i.e., newspapers, radio, television, and their digital counterparts, which are entities engaged in the professional collection, interpretation, and dissemination of information. By contrast, freedom of speech applies to the individual citizen and other actors who express themselves in non-professional contexts. In both cases, however, the recipients of the content are citizens. The second distinction concerns the ethical and political justifications for each freedom. Freedom of speech is rooted in the fundamental right of an individual to autonomy, which is a right inherent in all human beings. It is understood as a direct manifestation of that autonomy, alongside freedoms of thought and belief. Press freedom, however, is not justified by the autonomy of journalists, editors, media owners, or publishers. Instead, it rests on a utilitarian rationale that emphasises the functions of a free press in a democratic society: safeguarding basic civil rights and ensuring the proper functioning of democratic mechanisms (Sadurski, 1996, p. 96). In this sense, freedom of the press serves as the foundation for the functioning of the mass media.

Nonetheless, certain commonalities can be identified in the justifications for both freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The press serves as a natural extension for the dissemination of individual

opinions. When views initially expressed by individuals gain traction among the public, their continued circulation tends to proceed through the press, radio, television, and, in the 21st century, the internet. Moreover, the primary purpose of press freedom is to safeguard democratic procedures, thereby indirectly protecting individual rights and autonomy. Thus, it is impossible to sustain genuine freedom of speech in a context where press freedom is curtailed. It is generally easier for state authorities to restrict the expression of individual citizens than to impose direct limitations on independent media outlets operating in the media market. Various methods may be used to discourage citizens from expressing opinions that are viewed unfavourably by those in power as ordinary individuals are far more dependent on the state and public authorities – for instance, through social assistance, education, or public security. In contrast, it is significantly more difficult to suppress independent media today. One example is the position of large multinational media corporations, which operate across multiple countries and continents, employ hundreds of journalists, and command huge audiences. It is no coincidence that the first target of totalitarian regimes is the free press, and that one of the defining characteristics of totalitarianism is the attempt to monopolise the public sphere by transforming independent media into instruments of propaganda (Urbańczyk, 2009, p. 178).

The third distinction between freedom of speech and freedom of the press is substantive and concerns the scope of these freedoms. The nature of the rights and obligations associated with these freedoms differs. Licensing requirements, the allocation of radio frequencies, and the obligation to publish corrections pertain exclusively to the press. Likewise, the potential audience reached by an individual opinion is generally limited, while content published in the press or broadcast through television or digital platforms tends to reach a much broader audience.

With the development of new digital tools, particularly social media, users have increasingly taken on the role of content creators, often assuming functions traditionally performed by the press and reaching far wider audiences. As a result, both press freedom and freedom of speech now operate concurrently in the digital sphere. It is also worth noting that online actors frequently act simultaneously as both content producers and consumers, a dual role largely absent in traditional mass

media. Examples of this blurred boundary include citizen journalism, podcasts, and social media channels that, while not run by professional journalists, effectively perform journalistic functions. This has led to a growing erosion of the line separating professional journalists – who enjoy certain entitlements – from ordinary citizens who take on similar roles.

Equally contentious is the distinction between disseminating information (ostensibly objective) and expressing opinions (subjective). Often, editorial choices about which news to report reflect a particular ideological stance. For instance, omitting coverage of public protests may signal support for the government in power, just as ignoring the activities of a political party can reflect a critical attitude toward it. In such cases, the selection of content becomes a form of opinion expression, bordering on media manipulation. Similar challenges arise with social media, where information is often passed on as soon as it is received, such as by sharing or forwarding messages. These developments underscore the growing importance of establishing appropriate legal frameworks that define the boundaries of freedom of expression.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

A key issue raising the greatest number of challenges is determining the appropriate boundaries of freedom of expression in public discourse. While there is broad agreement regarding the essence, justification, and significance of freedom of expression, considerable disputes and controversies arise when its limits are discussed. However, it should be emphasised that, like other rights and freedoms, freedom of expression is not an unlimited right, and its scope is subject to legal regulation. The issue of delineating appropriate boundaries emerges especially when a specific utterance provokes controversy or lacks acceptance by the majority of society. This gives rise to the question of which opinions deserve freedom of dissemination and tolerance, and which – on specific grounds – fall outside the sphere protected by law. Although freedom of expression is widely acknowledged as a general principle, significant disagreements concerning its scope remain. Unquestionably, an individual's unrestricted

exercise of this freedom may infringe upon the rights and freedoms of others. In such cases, a conflict between competing values arises, and resolving it may prove exceptionally challenging.

It is worth noting that, in the Anglo-American tradition, four categories of speech have historically been subject to legal prohibition and penalties: seditious and inciting speech; private defamation; blasphemy; and obscene or indecent content. Contemporary law, both domestic and international, includes numerous provisions that define the boundaries of freedom of expression in public discourse, which broadly correspond to these four traditional categories (for example, criminal and civil law provisions). These limitations typically stem from conflicts with other important legally protected goods and values.

In the Polish Constitution, the boundaries of freedom of expression are defined in Article 31, which stipulates that restrictions on the exercise of constitutional rights and freedoms may be established only by statute, and only when necessary in a democratic state to safeguard its security or public order, or to protect the environment, public health, morality, or the rights and freedoms of others. Such restrictions must not violate the essence of the rights and freedoms concerned. Similar provisions are found in international law. Article 10(2) of the European Convention on Human Rights, adopted on 4 November 1950, identifies as permissible grounds for restriction those that “are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary”. A narrower list appears in Article 19(3) of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which mentions only the protection of national security, public order, public health, and public morals. Both documents emphasise that exercising freedom of expression entails special duties and responsibilities. An illustrative example of a restriction based on national security and the protection of individual rights is the 2025 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the constitutionality of banning the TikTok app. The Court justified the restriction as a necessary measure to protect national security from the potential misuse of user data by China (*TikTok Inc. v. Garland*, 601 U.S., 2025).

The aforementioned requirement that restrictions on freedom of expression be established by statute is intended to protect citizens from unauthorised interference by the executive branch. For example, the Minister of Justice could otherwise introduce additional limitations on freedom of speech through a regulation, which is a sub-statutory act.

Second, the limits of freedom of expression must respect the principle of proportionality: they must be necessary in a democratic society to protect the values and interests indicated in Article 19(3) of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Restrictions are deemed proportional if their existence is essential in a democratic society for the protection of these values, interests, and goods.

Turning to the values whose protection may justify legitimate limitations on freedom of expression, public safety and public order must be mentioned first. The key role in this context is played by the provisions of the Polish Penal Code concerning speech-related offences (Demenko, 2021, p. IX), particularly those contained in Chapter XVI ("Offences against peace, humanity and war crimes"), Chapter XVII ("Offences against the Republic of Poland"), and Chapter XXXII ("Offences against public order"). These provisions correspond to subversive or inciting speech that provokes social unrest. Some of these offences are relatively uncontroversial, such as the criminalisation of praising or inciting aggressive war (Art. 117); praising or inciting war crimes or crimes against peace or humanity (Art. 126a); inciting the commission of a criminal offence (Art. 255); or disseminating material that could facilitate terrorism (Art. 255a). Others raise concerns regarding the scope of protected interests and the proportionality of the penalties involved, such as insulting the Polish nation or state (Art. 133), insulting the President of Poland (Art. 135), or insulting national symbols (Art. 137).

Some provisions, however, have become tools in ideological disputes, and their application gives rise to problems when further restrictions on freedom of expression are at stake. Articles 256 (criminalising incitement to hatred and promotion of totalitarian systems and ideologies) and 257 (criminalising public insult on the grounds of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or lack thereof) serve, in popular discourse, as instruments to combat hate speech. Yet the term 'hate speech' is notoriously ambiguous and has been defined in numerous ways. In the Polish legal context, the Supreme Court judgment of 8 February 2019

(IV KK 38/18) adopted the definition issued by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 30 October 1997, according to which hate speech encompasses expressions and images that insult, ridicule, or degrade individuals or groups based on characteristics that are wholly or partially beyond their control, including membership in natural social groups. These groups are defined either biologically (e.g., gender, skin colour) or socially (e.g., ethnicity, religion, language). The growing emphasis on combating hate speech, particularly evident in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, gives rise to legitimate concerns about overly broad restrictions on freedom of expression that may compromise its core essence. This is particularly evident in the recent amendments to Articles 256 and 257 of the Penal Code. These amendments introduced vaguely defined offences related to selected totalitarian ideologies and ideologies promoting violence as a means of influencing political or social life. Such ambiguous language justifiably raises concerns about potential threats to the fundamental nature of freedom of expression, especially in light of the risk of self-censorship, or the chilling effect, which refers to the reluctance or withdrawal from expressing criticism or participating in public discourse on controversial issues due to fear of legal consequences (Urbańczyk, 2024, p. 55). Similar concerns are being voiced in relation to a pending amendment which, following European jurisprudence, proposes adding four more protected grounds to the hate speech provisions: age, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. While hateful speech based on gender or sexual orientation rightly raises concern, it is debatable whether incitement to hatred on the basis of age or disability constitutes a sufficiently significant societal issue to justify further limiting freedom of expression in these areas.

The second category of speech (defamation) also presents a range of challenges. These are addressed in both criminal and civil law, specifically in the offences of insult (Article 216) and defamation (Article 212) in the Polish Penal Code, as well as in the provisions on the protection of personal rights (Articles 23–24 of the Civil Code). Among these, Article 212 raises the most concern as it has been used to limit press scrutiny of those in power and to restrict political criticism by journalists. Press publishers' associations, journalistic organisations, and numerous NGOs have rightly pointed out that imprisonment of journalists

constitutes a disproportionate restriction on freedom of expression, and that the protection of public figures' reputations should be sufficiently ensured by civil law mechanisms.

The relationship between freedom of religion and freedom of expression has undergone a significant evolution. As previously mentioned, the historical struggle for religious tolerance was a driving force behind the expansion of freedom in the public sphere. However, this changed in the 20th and 21st centuries. Laws protecting religious feelings are increasingly seen as constraints on free speech, particularly when it comes to artistic expression. The issue of offending religious beliefs, like hate speech, has become a tool in political disputes between competing ideological camps. This trend is reinforced by the growing secularisation of European societies. Contemporary art, in its pursuit of visibility through provocation, often adopts a blasphemous or anti-Christian tone, defended under the notion of the 'artist's immunity' (Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 40). Further tensions arise from the presence of an increasingly numerous Muslim minority, which demands recognition of its values and traditions in public discourse – values and traditions that often stand in stark contrast to European ideals of freedom and democracy, particularly due to the absence of a separation between religion and state (Gaweł, 2025, p. 27).

Finally, one last contentious type of speech, particularly relevant in the 21st century, concerns indecent or obscene expressions in pornographic content that is widely accessible online. While there is broad agreement that such content can harm the emotional development of minors, coherent and effective regulatory measures are lacking. Some countries, such as the United States, resist regulation on freedom of expression grounds; others, like the United Kingdom, impose restrictions on digital content providers; and still others, like Poland, have been struggling to adopt any consistent policy.

All of these challenges have been further complicated by global social, political, and technological transformations. The development of digital platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and TikTok has changed public discourse in unprecedented ways. Today, anyone with internet access can serve as both a content creator and a recipient. At the same time, private corporations (such as Meta, Alphabet, X Corp.) have assumed the role of de facto arbiters of public discourse. Twitter's decision to suspend Donald Trump's account in January 2021 following

the Capitol riots, ignited a global debate: do such actions protect democracy from disinformation, or do they undermine freedom of expression by delegating censorship powers to unelected corporate actors? An additional concern is posed by social media algorithms which prioritise sensational content over accurate and balanced information, while applying arbitrary and opaque forms of ex post repressive censorship.

A further issue is the growing ideological polarisation of contemporary societies, which has transformed public discourse into a battleground for clashing worldviews. Political correctness, cancel culture, and woke culture have led to the social condemnation of even widely respected public figures for controversial statements (e.g., J.K. Rowling and her comments on transgender issues). This raises the question of whether freedom of expression includes protection from social consequences. As polarisation deepens, freedom of expression is increasingly treated instrumentally in public discourse rather than as a universal idea safeguarding not only democratic political systems but also fundamental human and civil rights.

A third major challenge is globalisation and the collision of cultures and civilisations. In today's globalised world, freedom of expression is no longer confined to the national sphere but increasingly operates beyond the boundaries of individual states. In China, the Great Firewall blocks access to critical content, and citizens are restricted to a government-controlled version of the internet devoid of controversial information and dissenting views. Similarly, in Putin's Russia the neo-totalitarian authorities maintain a tightly regulated national internet – Runet – along with domestically controlled alternatives to global social media platforms, such as VKontakte and Telegram. In Saudi Arabia, blasphemy against Islam is punishable by death or, in more 'lenient' cases, by torture or public flogging, as evidenced by the case of Raif Badawi. In the crisis-ridden multicultural societies of the West, efforts to balance freedom of expression with the protection of minority rights have led to increasing tensions and accusations of discrimination against the majority.

In such a complex landscape, the key issue appears to be defining the appropriate functions and powers of the state that would serve as instruments for safeguarding the sphere of freedom of speech and ensuring respect for its boundaries. One school of thought argues that the state's involvement should be strictly limited to prohibiting specific content and

prosecuting clear abuses of free speech. An opposing view maintains that the state, precisely in order to safeguard freedom of expression, has a duty to regulate the communication environment, including media markets and the rules governing political discourse and elections. The primary tool for this is the law (Chałubińska, 2015, p. 19). It is essential, however, that any state intervention in these areas, if consistent with liberal democratic principles, be directed toward a single, overriding goal: protecting the essence of freedom of expression by ensuring equal opportunities for all to exercise this right, even if that comes at the expense of other goods, interests, and values. A fundamental principle here is that neither majority nor minority disapproval of a given opinion constitutes sufficient grounds, in a liberal democracy, to prohibit its dissemination. As the European Court of Human Rights famously held in *Handyside v. United Kingdom*, freedom of expression

is applicable not only to “information” or “ideas” that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the State or any sector of the population. Such are the demands of that pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness without which there is no “democratic society” (*Handyside v. United Kingdom*, 1976).

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Privacy in cyberspace

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Privacy in cyberspace concerns personal rights that encompass various elements – including personal data – which, by virtue of the individual’s legitimate separation from broader society, serve to foster personal development and ensure effective functioning within the digital environment. While modern technologies associated with online activity almost invariably raise substantial privacy concerns, the scale of Big Data exploitation and the growing application of artificial intelligence have introduced an unprecedented set of challenges.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: The notion of privacy as a protected personal right originates in the American doctrine of the right of privacy. In the Polish legal system, privacy and its protection have long been the focus of scholarly investigation, resulting in a well-established body of jurisprudence.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: As smart, interconnected technologies increasingly permeate daily life, the urgency of enforcing limitations on data usage continues to grow. Much of the current discourse on privacy and cyberspace fails to adequately address the widening power asymmetry between institutions that collect data and individuals who generate it.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The development of cyberspace entails not only data processing but also the use of that data to construct predictive models. The objective of this analysis is to determine the scope of the legally protected right to privacy of the individual-citizen and to identify new

elements shaping this right in the context of ongoing technological change associated with functioning in cyberspace.

Keywords: privacy, cyberspace, Big Data, personal data, new technologies

Definition of the term

Defining privacy in cyberspace requires identifying its foundational components, particularly the contemporary status of the individual-citizen in cyberspace, as well as the elements of private life that are being redefined in response to technological change. The legal status of the individual-citizen is determined by a specific set of rights and obligations established by legal norms and the decisions of administrative authorities. In this regard, it is essential to distinguish between the sphere of constitutional rights and obligations inherent to all individuals and those rights and duties that pertain specifically to citizens within the framework of the state executive authority, namely public administration. It should be emphasised that definitions proposed in legal doctrine and jurisprudence are generally indicative and non-exhaustive, serving primarily to delineate the boundaries of the private sphere rather than to define its substantive content. Privacy is typically understood as the right to be left alone – a view advocated by, among others, A. Szpunar and M. Safjan (Szpunar, 1982, p. 5; Safjan, 1997, p. 127). According to Szpunar, the right to privacy implies that unauthorised entities should not interfere in an individual's private life. Similarly, Safjan emphasises that the core of privacy lies in the right to seclusion, which enables individuals to shape their personal lives as spaces inaccessible to others and free from interference. The right of each person to control aspects of their life that do not concern others constitutes a fundamental condition for the individual's free development. The most frequently listed characteristics of privacy include:

- an area of inaccessibility protected from the curiosity and intrusiveness of others;
- a sphere free from external interference, in which one may retreat from others and maintain freedom in developing one's personality and private life;
- the right to be left in solitude;
- the right to establish a zone of seclusion (Safjan, 1997, p. 127).

According to a broader interpretation, privacy encompasses more than the protection of an individual's seclusion: it also guarantees the conditions for physical and psychological development, the cultivation of personality without third-party interference, and the attainment of informational

autonomy. Proponents of this broader concept of privacy include A. Kopff and J. Sieńczyło-Chłabcz (Kopff, 1982, p. 37; Sieńczyło-Chłabcz, 2006, pp. 75–76). A central element of this view is informational autonomy and the right of individuals to decide what personal information is shared with others. The legislator also affirms the protection of private life in laws regulating press activity. At the same time, the law recognises that this protection may be limited where private life intersects with an individual's public activities. In such cases, the permissibility of publishing facts related to private life is assessed *a casu ad casum*, based on the specific circumstances. This issue is particularly important when redefining privacy in the context of social changes driven by the development of new technologies and the imperative of cybersecurity. It seems there is a growing need to establish clear priorities and define areas in which public institutions should prevail over business corporations, especially those leveraging new technologies for profit at the expense of the privacy of cyberspace users and citizens (Lorenzi & Berrebi, 2019, pp. 236–237). The present condition of the individual-citizen calls for a revised approach, particularly in defining privacy in cyberspace, which is increasingly a virtual reflection of reality, including its negative dimensions.

Cyberspace may be defined as the synthesis of all physical and technical means that enable electronic communication, including interactions among users who have access to its resources. D.E. Denning defines cyberspace as “the information space consisting of the sum total of all computer networks” (Denning, 1999, p. 22). Similarly, G.T. Rattray describes cyberspace as “a physical domain resulting from the creation of information systems and networks that enable electronic interactions to take place” (Rattray, 2001, p. 17). These phenomena take place in a parallel space that is a new arena for human activity in which behaviours and solutions from the physical world are replicated. It is worth noting, however, that existing definitions of cyberspace have focused on its technological aspects, neglecting its social dimension, particularly the role of the human being as a user. Cyberspace, while open, also functions as a distinct form of the public sphere. Its features – anonymity, interconnectedness, and transboundary nature – pose challenges to the application of traditional privacy protections. The notion of ‘privacy’ in cyberspace can be defined as a condition in which the individual is left alone in all essential areas of physical and spiritual life

(unrelated to public activity), whenever the individual so chooses, and insofar as this does not conflict with important public interests or the rights and freedoms of others. This conception must also ensure the individual's ability to function normally in a digital environment shaped by ongoing changes in cyberspace driven by technological advancement.

Historical analysis of the term

The notion of the right to privacy as a personal right subject to legal protection originates from the American legal doctrine of the right of privacy. As a constitutional principle, the right to privacy is often classified as a third-generation right which entered the constitutional frameworks of states after the Second World War (Sarnecki, 2003, p. 1). However, within Polish legal doctrine, it is argued that the right to privacy should not be categorised as a third-generation right. Rather, it constitutes a fundamental right to which every individual is inherently entitled. Third-generation rights are typically understood as solidarity rights that are collectively enjoyed by entire communities.

In Poland, A. Kopff was the first to assert that the sphere of an individual's private life constitutes a personal right and is thus protected under the provisions of the Civil Code. According to Kopff, the private sphere of life is a personal right encompassing everything that "by virtue of an individual's justified withdrawal from society contributes to the development of their psychological identity and the preservation of their social standing" (Kopff, 1972, pp. 32–33).

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland, adopted on 2 April 1997, explicitly enshrines the right to privacy in Article 47. This provision states that "Everyone shall have the right to legal protection of his private and family life, of his honour and good reputation and to make decisions about his personal life" (Constitution of the Republic of Poland, 1997). Within the framework of the Polish Constitution, privacy is understood in two ways: in a broader sense – as freedom from interference in areas that are inaccessible to others and as freedom to decide about one's life, beliefs, and opinions; in a narrower sense – as the right to decide what personal information about oneself is shared with others (Sieńczyło-Chlabicz, Zawadzka, & Nowikowska, 2019, p. 239).

P. Sarnecki observes that Articles 48–51 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, which also address personal data, may be viewed as complementary to the regulations regarding the right to privacy and as expressions of this right. It should be noted that constitutional provisions establishing the principle of privacy protection are deliberately general in nature. This generality is justified, as any attempt to define the scope and content of the right to privacy too narrowly – particularly in relation to the legal status of the individual – could risk excluding important factual circumstances from protection. The continuous evolution of both threats to privacy and protective measures further supports the need for a flexible approach. The wording of Article 47 indicates that, in addition to guaranteeing the legal protection of private and family life, the constitutional legislator also provides for the right to make decisions regarding one’s personal life, which is an expression of privacy in its broader understanding (Mednis, 2006, pp. 113–115).

Privacy was first recognised as a protected personal right in a judgment of the Supreme Court of Poland on 18 January 1984 (Judgement of the Supreme Court). The Court held that the open-ended catalogue of personal rights includes those related to private, family, and intimate life. Civil law protection was thus extended to cases involving the collection and disclosure of facts from an individual’s personal or family life. The recognition of privacy as a distinct personal right is not precluded by the fact that its scope may overlap with other personal rights. It should be emphasised that the current status of privacy as a legal right has historically been guaranteed by both international legal norms and constitutional provisions. These sources provide the foundation for defining the legal status of privacy in cyberspace. In this context, it is also essential to consider the protection of fundamental rights as guaranteed by the legal framework of the European Union.

Discussion of the term

A crucial role in defining privacy in cyberspace is played by systemic frameworks concerning civil rights and liberties. Two key challenges arise in this context.

The first relates to surveillance and the various tools employed by public authorities to limit freedoms of an individual-citizen in the name of security and public order. This includes legal issues stemming from international conventions, such as those protecting bodily integrity and moral integrity. A central question is the permissibility of mass surveillance and the prohibition of invasive information systems, which, as cyberspace evolves, should become standard measures in safeguarding privacy. At the same time, these concerns must be balanced with the need to counter cyber threats and ensure cybersecurity.

The second issue involves the growing dominance of large technology corporations (Big Tech) that collect and utilise personal data globally, increasingly relying on artificial intelligence. Disengaging from these platforms often leads to social exclusion. Companies like Meta, Google, and Amazon base their business models on identifying users, gathering data on them and selling it. Practices such as profiling, targeting, and data monetisation are central to these operations. Recently, tech corporations have intensified their engagement with governments, offering advanced surveillance technologies. These technologies, however, may be discriminatory and biased, potentially resulting in serious abuses of the right to privacy. Public-private partnerships in AI-driven surveillance risk strengthening oversight mechanisms and creating vast watchlists. Emerging policies now address both surveillance and the processing of public and private data assets. A new generation of data processing strategies is being developed to support technological innovation and the growth of cyberspace.

An additional issue arises in digital communication and e-services where two privacy paradigms collide: the continental conception, where dignity is a central element of protection – giving rise to the safeguarding of emotional well-being and the need for personal intimacy – and the conception rooted in the American understanding of liberty, where privacy is valued as a right tied to the protection of space and the inviolability of domestic peace. This conceptual divergence has a direct impact on how privacy is regulated in cyberspace. In practice, the issue underscores the state's prioritisation of public functions over individual liberties, especially in areas related to cybersecurity (Chałubińska-Jentkiewicz, Nowikowska, & Taczowska-Olszewska, 2019, pp. 305–310).

Privacy in cyberspace also encompasses operational surveillance, such as the powers granted to intelligence agencies to monitor communications and correspondence. The confidentiality of correspondence is a core element of privacy, linked to the secrecy of certain personal matters. This issue becomes particularly acute in the opposition between personal data protection and data retention or the use of monitoring and filtering technologies to combat illegal content or other cyber threats. Ensuring cybersecurity has become a fundamental function of the state, and the protection of core values should receive the same level of safeguarding in cyberspace as in the physical world. Importantly, the effectiveness of cybersecurity measures depends heavily on the protection of fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, personal data protection, and privacy, as well as the coordination of differing global privacy doctrines. Operational surveillance remains a primary tool for intelligence services in ensuring national security. In Poland, the catalogue of measures permissible in operational oversight is exhaustive, yet cyber operations often push the boundaries of privacy law.

Ongoing legal discourse focuses on defining the permissible limits of privacy infringement and the citizen's right to effective protection from cyber threats. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that covert surveillance may be considered necessary in a democratic society for national security and public order, even when individuals are not notified of such surveillance, without breaching the European Convention on Human Rights. With rapid technological advancements, the potential for intrusion into emails, mobile communications, and internet services has intensified interest in the right to privacy. Surveillance techniques have advanced significantly in recent years, often beyond the comprehension of the average citizen. Automated and large-scale data collection has become the norm. Mass interception of communications – commonly referred to as 'mass surveillance' – is increasingly justified as a tool for cybersecurity, prompting a liberal shift in judicial standards. While some view this as "a win for privacy", others interpret it as "the grand normalisation of mass surveillance" (Klamberg, 2021).

One of the most significant changes in cyberspace development is the implementation of Big Data policies. The principle of reuse – repurposing information held by public sector bodies – and new EU regulations (such as the Data Act and the Data Governance Act) fall under

the broader framework of open data policy. These initiatives form the foundation for new data governance principles within the EU. This policy is essential to the expansion of data processing services, including AI-driven solutions, the growth of data centres, cloud-based services, and other data-driven services within the EU. However, promoting open access to digital resources without addressing personal data protection is impractical, not only due to binding international standards but also because of national regulations. These regulations encompass the broadly conceived right to privacy and informational autonomy (including the constitutional right to be informed about how public authorities process one's data), as well as the right to privacy and to the content possessed or generated by the individual (content that is also produced as a result of consumer behaviour and other activities in cyberspace). Areas not explicitly covered by the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are often addressed by domestic legal systems.

Contemporary data processing models generally treat data, including personal data, as commodities. This commodification fails to fully account for the challenges individuals face in making informed decisions about their data in interactions with systems that rapidly learn how to manipulate user preferences. Ideas such as informed consent to the use of one's privacy, or access to and control over personal data are now being fundamentally challenged by developments in cyberspace.

Individuals are often unaware of the volume and type of data they generate, process, or share via various devices and platforms. As smart, interconnected technologies permeate daily life – homes, workplaces, public spaces, and even the human body – the need for enforceable limitations on data usage becomes increasingly urgent.

Much of the current discourse on privacy and cyberspace fails to address the growing power asymmetry between data-gathering institutions and the individuals generating that data. Cyberspace is intrinsically reliant on the collection of massive data sets to train and test algorithms. While this supports AI development, it also directly contradicts the principle of data minimisation. Advances in IoT (the Internet of Things), smartphones, and web tracking mean that many people remain unaware of the volume of data being collected about them, which is then used to build digital services or fuel AI systems. A specific conflict arises here as limiting the collection of personal data or monitoring

data related to internet behaviour runs counter to the functional logic of cyberspace and the principles of online freedom. At the same time, the large-scale collection of information about individuals poses an inherent threat to their privacy.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

In a technologically advanced environment, maintaining privacy according to traditional standards has become increasingly challenging. Privacy now encompasses domains shaped by market mechanisms that depend on processing user data and manipulating that information in political contexts. The encroachment of information warfare into the private sphere may ultimately result in a crisis of an individual's identity. The growing tension between the imperative of cybersecurity and the individual-citizen's right to privacy must therefore be considered in light of emerging cyber threats. The trade-off between privacy and security seems to become ever more difficult to navigate, and even the most advanced systems of monitoring, surveillance, and control fail to resolve this fundamental conflict of values. Notably, the shift from an *ex post* framework of accountability toward a model of *ex ante* regulation and proactive intervention – including in the domain of privacy protection – is increasingly evident. The traditional 'notice and take down' model is being replaced by a 'notice and take action' approach. This evolution reflects growing concerns that digital conditions and technological advancements may outpace the capacity of public authorities to monitor and safeguard security – ranging from public safety to the individual interests encompassed within the broader notion of personal security. This transformation is further compounded by the globalisation of communication processes and the blurring of not only state but even identity boundaries. Ensuring cybersecurity today requires an approach grounded in the management of acceptable risk driven by innovation, treating cybersecurity as a multilayered process involving legal and organisational solutions. It is essential to recognise that the struggle to protect privacy in cyberspace not only involves technical and organisational measures, new models of online behaviour, and increasingly

stringent rules of cyber-responsibility, but also that it is equally a moral challenge requiring thoughtful responses, particularly in situations involving conflicts of values.

The fundamental attributes of cybersecurity related to communication processes include confidentiality (ensuring access only by authorised individuals) and the integrity of digital content (where data remains intact and unaltered). For these reasons, measures such as data retention or mandatory information obligations for pre-paid services – though they implicate online privacy – have become permissible when justified by cybersecurity concerns.

Two existing principles require broader implementation across all areas of privacy in cyberspace: the principle of privacy by design and the principle of privacy by default, as codified in Article 25(1) and (2) of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), respectively. These principles mandate that appropriate organisational and technical safeguards be embedded at the design stage and maintained throughout the implementation and operation of technological systems, applications, and infrastructures, with the goal of minimising the risk of personal data breaches.

Privacy by design entails the integration of privacy safeguards (especially with respect to personal data) into the very architecture of a project, from the development phase through to the operation of individual components and the management of information systems across the entire data lifecycle. This proactive approach, expressed in the principle of *privacy by design*, assumes that privacy protection should be embedded into every new project, meaning that privacy is not to be safeguarded through add-ons or overlays applied to existing systems but rather integrated into the system's architecture so that it becomes an inherent component of the project itself.

Privacy by default assumes that privacy protection is the default setting of any program or system. Any change to this setting should occur only at the explicit request of the user. Accordingly, *privacy by default* provides the broadest possible default protection of all users' privacy within a given system. Users who wish to waive certain aspects of their privacy must take deliberate action to do so rather than be subjected to privacy-intrusive decisions made by system designers. This obligation specifically concerns the amount of personal data collected,

the scope of its processing, the period for which it is retained, and its accessibility. In particular, these measures ensure that personal data is not, by default, disclosed to an indefinite number of natural persons without the data subject's intervention. GDPR requires, among other things, that information be provided about automated decision-making, including profiling as referred to in Article 22(1) and (4), and – at least in such cases – meaningful information about the logic involved, as well as the significance and the anticipated consequences of such processing for the individual (Articles 13 and 14 GDPR). These principles should apply across all domains of human privacy.

Amid the uncertainties of cyberspace development in the future, its growing use continues to exacerbate the asymmetry between the rights of individual citizens and those of digital media and platform owners. This asymmetry increasingly threatens personal security. At the same time, cyberspace offers profound benefits for human progress, positioning it as a central reference point in ongoing debates about the future of human rights and the evolving scope of privacy.

Cybersecurity, being a highly prominent and increasingly popular concept, is now regarded as one of the fundamental responsibilities of the state. It should be implemented through a horizontal framework, i.e., a chain of interconnections extending from the individual user to the state as a regulator, fostering the development of cyberspace in such a way that users become fully aware of the need for security. This is a process of lawmaking based on the observation of phenomena occurring within cyberspace, taking into account the evolution of digital technologies. Among the key regulatory objectives in the field of cybersecurity is the need to ensure privacy as a fundamental constitutional right and freedom that requires protection. It should be noted, however, that the creation of standards and the undertaking of regulatory actions in cyberspace are often perceived negatively. Users frequently interpret these efforts as infringements on freedom in cyberspace. Privacy is sometimes instrumentalised to justify certain forms of online behaviour, yet it paradoxically also tends to lose significance altogether, as advocates of digital innovation are often willing to relinquish it voluntarily.

Most current regulations focus on access to and protection of information, particularly personal data. While necessary, these measures are insufficient. Numerous other dimensions of cyberspace

development – technical, ethical, moral, and legal – demand simultaneous attention. In this context, privacy plays a vital role in shaping a normative framework for making ethical decisions about how emerging technologies are used.

Building on the guarantees provided by GDPR (particularly Article 22), it has become necessary to regulate accountability for automated decision-making, including decisions based on algorithmic processes. This requirement applies regardless of whether such decisions involve personal data or non-personal data used for profiling or for influencing decisions that still involve human intervention, with algorithms playing a supportive role. These regulatory measures are essential for safeguarding privacy in the context of automated data processing within cyberspace. With regard to online platform operators, it appears essential to introduce additional obligations concerning human oversight (including accountability and the right to human intervention), transparency, and due process. These measures should ensure fair procedures and safeguard the right to human involvement, particularly in cases where a platform operator employs algorithms to moderate or filter the content displayed to users. As a result of introducing such measures, the obligations of online platform operators will depend on the legal nature of the content they display or of the services designed for its exploitation. It is therefore advisable to establish a general recommendation for any system in which an algorithm supports or replaces human decision-making and whose operation may significantly affect the well-being of an individual or a specific social group (Chałubińska-Jentkiewicz, 2022, p. 18).

If resolving privacy issues in cyberspace is regarded primarily as a responsibility of EU individual member states, then it becomes essential to define clear regulatory priorities encompassing a range of cybersecurity instruments. This premise assumes that the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms continues to delineate the outer limits of all regulations. Nevertheless, these rights and freedoms may be subject to restrictions where justified by security concerns, given that security is recognised both as a general interest at the EU level and as a matter of public interest at the national level. It is equally important to acknowledge that the boundaries of the general interest at the European level are informed by national interpretations of public interest within member states.

In 1788, James Madison, a co-author of the U.S. Constitution, famously wrote: “If men were angels, no government would be necessary” (Madison, 2009, p. 120). This insight remains profoundly relevant in the context of future cyberspace regulations. The implementation of digital content recognition and filtering technologies inherently raises serious concerns regarding both privacy and freedom of expression (Chałubińska-Jentkiewicz, 2022, p. 271). Cybersecurity has become indispensable to establishing a trustworthy environment for the delivery of digital services. However, as regulations intensify, critical issues surrounding privacy and data protection are often pushed to the periphery. Perhaps the only viable solution will involve conceptualising cyberspace as divided into ‘two worlds’: one rooted in values and individual rights, offering reliable sources of knowledge within frameworks that fully respect privacy principles; the other resembling an ‘information hydrant’, governed solely by the proprietors of digital domains and driven primarily by freedom-based ideals, including the right to development and the right to economic freedom.

In conclusion, it should be acknowledged that the future of regulatory solutions in cyberspace involves highly sensitive issues related to individual privacy. The challenge lies in resolving the tension between public and individual interests as well as in determining which values will remain fundamental to humans. Undoubtedly, developing regulatory mechanisms for cyberspace while preserving an open, free, and secure virtual environment represents a global challenge, shaped by differing legal traditions and interpretations of the right to privacy. It also seems likely that the very notion of privacy will undergo reevaluation and redefinition. Privacy in cyberspace will become an even more personal matter, whose complexity will shape the future norms governing the protection of the private sphere. This dilemma also raises questions about the responsibility of public authorities to maintain a balance between ensuring the safety of individuals and communities, protecting individual privacy and identity, and safeguarding national security grounded both in the particular values of a given society and in universal principles of fundamental rights and freedoms. One essential tool for preserving this balance will be the individual’s decision and right to human intervention.

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Algorithmisation of social communication in the digital age

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: The algorithmisation of social communication in the digital age refers to the transformation of social interactions driven by algorithms. These algorithms influence communication at multiple levels: the participants, the messages, and the digital platforms through which communication occurs. Algorithms are employed to optimise workflows and perform numerous repetitive tasks efficiently, often achieving results in far less time than humans.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: The widespread algorithmisation of social communication began in the second decade of the 21st century. Initially, artificial intelligence was used to generate content, such as sports and business news. In 2020, “The Guardian” published an entire feature article written by an algorithm, with GPT-3 credited as the author. The GPT model became publicly available in 2022.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: The algorithmisation of social communication can be broken down into several key areas: filtering, recommending, and personalising communication; institutional algorithmisation; and content creation by artificial intelligence. Content generation, in particular, demands the most advanced technological solutions, including the development of AI-driven chatbots. The value of AI-generated content hinges on the quality of the algorithms, the data they are trained on, and the precision of user queries.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Looking ahead, several challenges will arise with the widespread algorithmisation of social communication: ethical dilemmas, legal issues, and educational concerns related to algorithmic targeting of advertisements, content generation, transparency of algorithms, and algorithmic censorship.

Keywords: social communication, algorithms, big data, new media, personalisation of communication

Definition of the term

Algorithmisation is the process of creating a structured sequence of steps that leads to a specific action or solution to a problem, ultimately forming a complete algorithm. An algorithm consolidates multiple procedures into a single framework, which can be applied as needed. By utilising an algorithm, numerous tasks can be performed automatically within a short timeframe, relying on pre-entered statistical data without the need for continuous human involvement. Algorithmisation also extends to editorial offices, publishers, and media platform owners, who incorporate these features into their operations. This process is closely linked to machine learning, where algorithms are trained to perform tasks based on data. The quality and volume of the input data used to train the algorithm play a critical role in determining the effectiveness of the responses it generates. Some of the most significant and widely discussed applications of algorithms in social communication include content filtering, audience segmentation, communication personalisation, algorithmisation of decision-making in institutions, and AI-powered content creation.

Social communication refers to the exchange of information between individuals, groups, organisations, and institutions. It encompasses a wide range of information – not just knowledge, but also emotions and opinions. Social communication can occur through various channels and media and can be categorised according to the participants (interpersonal or mass communication), the medium (verbal, non-verbal, visual, direct, or mediated communication), and the context (intercultural, marketing, or political communication).

Digitalisation is a key aspect of the evolution of modern media. Along with interactivity, multimediality, and personalisation, it is one of the defining characteristics of what are commonly referred to as ‘new media’ (also frequently called digitally native media or digital-born media). Digitalisation profoundly impacts social communication, primarily due to the widespread adoption of computer-mediated communication.

The algorithmisation of social communication is a process in which algorithms reshape how individuals interact, impacting both the content they encounter and the platforms through which communication occurs. Leveraging statistical analysis and large-scale data sets, algorithms

play a crucial role in modern communication by predicting the behaviour of specific social groups, classifying and categorising participants in the communication process, and delivering more or less personalised content. Algorithms are employed to optimise workflows and perform numerous repetitive tasks efficiently, often achieving results significantly faster than humans. However, when left without human intervention or oversight, these mathematical models function only as automated decision-making processes driven by the instructions and statistical data provided by their designers, programmers, or managers. Rather than handling individual event, these models create vast databases (referred to as big data). The growing influence of algorithmisation on social communication has led to the development of algorithmic rhetoric – a concept where “an algorithm’s design [...] makes rhetorical choices that privilege the importance of some information or desired outcomes over others” (Ingraham, 2014, p. 62).

Historical analysis of the term

Algorithms, as structured sets of procedures, have been a part of media for a long time – long before the rise of digital technologies. Early examples include editorial projects that specified guidelines for content organisation, the sequence of thematic sections in an issue, and graphic design.

The turn of the second decade of the 21st century marks the advent of the use of algorithms in their contemporary form – in social communication. In 2010, a team of students from Northwestern University in Illinois, along with computer scientists and journalists, developed a prototype of a statistical model, StatsMonkey, designed to generate sports news for newspapers and their websites. In the following years, this type of information was widely published by major media outlets across the United States and Europe. Artificial intelligence was primarily utilised to write sports and economic news, where statistical data – such as names, dates, scores, exchange rates, prices, and statistics – were more important than people’s stories. These reports adhered to a structured format, enabling content to be automatically generated from industry sources and presented to readers as complete articles. Each

news item followed a consistent pattern, and the system enabled the rapid publication of multiple reports. For instance, the 4th Down Bot generated game summaries for the National Football League's games for "The New York Times", with each article credited to the bot and accompanied by a note explaining that the analysis was based on mathematical calculations. A frequently cited example is the coverage of an earthquake near Los Angeles that was published on "The Los Angeles Times" website just three minutes after the event. The text was written by Quakebot, a bot created by Ken Schwenke, a journalist and programmer in the newsroom. Quakebot autonomously detected the information of the earthquake and produced the material according to a pre-programmed template. However, the final decision to publish still required an editor's approval. Some experiments, however, faced unexpected challenges. For example, the Tay bot, deployed on Twitter, had to be shut down after just one day. As intended, the bot learned from interactions with users, but malicious individuals took advantage of this by feeding the algorithm offensive content, leading the bot to produce unacceptable responses.

One landmark event in the algorithmisation of social communication was the publication of an article in "The Guardian" on 8 September 2020, entitled *A robot wrote this entire article. Are you scared yet, human?* This text was ground-breaking for two reasons. First, it was an opinion article written entirely by artificial intelligence; second, the GPT-3 algorithm was credited as the author. Although the editors were responsible for initiating the article and compiling the final version from several machine-generated suggestions, they confirmed that the editing process was no different from that of a human-written piece. The GPT model was made publicly available in 2022 and continues to evolve. Since then, other models based on similar principles have emerged, employing different algorithms and trained on distinct datasets.

Discussion of the term

In the fields of social communication and social sciences, four types of algorithms are most commonly used: regression, clustering, classification, and content generation algorithms. Regression enables predicting

future events based on historical data. The most common application of regression is forecasting changes in economic or demographic trends. These systems are often employed by specialised editorial teams who, for example, assist readers in making purchasing decisions. Clustering involves grouping data based on specific criteria and a variety of features, with each cluster containing the most similar elements. This method can be used to categorise statements made by social communication participants (such as politicians, people associated with culture, or scientists), media publications (based on topics or the occurrence of specific terms), or media audiences (considering factors like age, gender, or political views). Classification algorithms function in a similar way: they assign data to predefined categories based on previously provided data, such as categorising comments as conservative, liberal, or neutral in tone. These algorithms must be trained using already classified data, enabling the system to make decisions and assign data to the correct group. In this sense, clustering can be seen as a method for sorting data, while classification involves assigning observations to predefined categories. The most complex and resource-intensive algorithms are those used for content creation. These algorithms, based on deep learning and neural networks, power applications that generate text, graphics, sound, and video content.

The process of algorithmisation of social communication in the digital age can be divided into several key areas: filtering, recommending and personalising communication; institutional algorithmisation; and content creation by artificial intelligence. The most visible forms of algorithmisation in social communication are content filtering and recommendations. This group also includes moderating algorithms that respond to inappropriate verbal or non-verbal user behaviour, as determined by the algorithm's design. This application is particularly controversial due to the lack of transparency regarding how such systems operate. This phenomenon is referred to as algorithmic or machine bias (Striphas, 2023, pp. 15–16), and the misuse of moderation systems can lead to paradoxical outcomes and accusations of algorithmic censorship.

Algorithmic censorship refers to the automatic influence exerted by algorithmic filtering systems on information broadcasters or the content published on digital platforms. It can manifest in various ways, such as scanning, filtering, hiding, or removing individual user comments;

demonetising publications, i.e., depriving creators of advertising revenue; shadow banning, which reduces the visibility of certain users' posts for other users without entirely removing them; or automatically blocking, suspending, or removing accounts or content, usually in more severe cases after prior warnings. Algorithmic censorship can be used intentionally to weaken a particular narrative, but it can also stem from imperfections and a lack of transparency in how the algorithm operates regarding, for example, legal regulations, hate speech, vulgarity, or the incitement to illegal activities. Additionally, algorithmic censorship impacts broadcasters, who may practice self-censorship to avoid automatic penalties.

Closely tied to content filtering and recommendation is personalisation in social communication. Algorithms select and deliver information to users based on previously gathered data. This process relies on guidelines provided during design and programming or on the user's prior behaviour, such as interactions with others or responses to previously viewed content. Common examples include algorithms that recommend video content on streaming platforms or filter information on social media sites. The latest social media applications analyse viewers' micro-behaviours, such as rewatching a video clip or briefly pausing it, to instantly adjust the content being displayed. However, personalisation – unlike simple recommendations – involves crafting a specific set of information tailored based on detailed user data. The personalisation of messages has especially become a significant topic of discussion since 2016, when it was suggested that highly targeted posts on Facebook may have influenced the outcomes of the U.S. presidential election and the Brexit referendum. Data from millions of users, including not just their reactions but also information about their friends, was reportedly harvested. This information was used to create precisely tailored political ads, reinforcing users' beliefs and, thus, proving more effective than general media publications.

Personalisation is not limited to open social media platforms. Social communication is moving towards personalisation, privatisation, and individualisation. This trend is reflected in the popularity of applications designed for non-mass communication, such as messaging apps or email, where pre-written responses based on the conversation's content are suggested for users. We also see the rise of chatbots powered

by artificial intelligence and machine learning. These chatbots respond to user inputs and queries, simulating dialogues between two people:

many operate based on a system of rule-based responses. These 'basic' chatbots are automated but not autonomous: they are only capable of conversing with users in a manner that has been pre-programmed by human input (if the user says X, the bot should respond with Y) (Young, 2022, p. 72).

More advanced chatbots are algorithms based on natural language processing (NLP) and trained on vast datasets.

Excessive moderation and personalisation of communication can lead to the creation of filter bubbles, which contribute to the formation of 'digital ghettos' (Szpunar, 2019, p. 65), where users only interact with people who share similar views. This can affect interpersonal communication and the filtering of 'friends', as social media algorithms tend to promote content that is more engaging rather than valuable. This issue is also connected to the topic of fake news, discussed in a separate article in this volume. At this point, it is important to mention deepfakes, i.e., realistic audio and video content generated by AI that is indistinguishable to an untrained viewer.

Contemporary digital platforms use algorithms that recommend content to users based on their previous interactions. These algorithms favour content that provokes strong emotional reactions, such as fear, outrage, or surprise. As a result, false but controversial and sensational information may reach a much wider audience than accurate reporting. This effect, where fake news spreads faster and more effectively than reliable information due to its higher engagement, is referred to as the virality of misinformation.

The automation of disinformation is a separate issue related to the algorithmisation of social communication on digital platforms. AI-based algorithms can generate massive amounts of biased information using appropriate language, following narrative guidelines set by those managing the algorithm, and incorporating graphic materials. These materials are automatically published on accounts known as bots. These fake accounts share each other's posts, thus increasing their reach. Collections of such bots are called bot farms or troll farms. The activities of troll farms aim to spread disinformation and amplify a given narrative until it begins to be shared and supported by real users of digital platforms.

Algorithmisation at the systemic level often influences social communication in subtle and indirect ways. This phenomenon can be categorised into two primary areas: the algorithmisation of media and the algorithmisation of institutions. Within mass media editorial work, algorithmisation occurs across various levels. It encompasses algorithmic assistance in journalism, machine-generated content, algorithmic and automated journalism, as well as aggregative and algorithmic editing. These processes differ in terms of the extent to which artificial intelligence is involved in journalistic and editorial workflows, as well as the level of intervention required from human editors. This ranges from utilising algorithms and big data for source discovery and information gathering, to fully or partially automating content creation, and even employing AI to edit and distribute the finished product (Flasiński, 2021, pp. 21–52). In extreme cases, content aggregators rely on algorithms to index, analyse, categorise, and group existing publications, creating websites that function entirely without human editorial involvement. As Jan Kreft (2016, p. 11) notes in *Koniec dziennikarstwa jakie znamy [The End of Journalism as We Know It]*, new players have emerged on the media landscape. Alongside journalists and editors, significant roles are now played by programmers and ‘non-humans’ – automated aggregators and search engine algorithms. The practice of journalists adjusting the language of articles to comply with SEO requirements is another manifestation of the algorithmisation of social communication and influences how search engines rank websites in their results.

The algorithmisation of institutions outside the media sector involves the integration of statistical models into decision-making processes that impact society and individuals. The influence of artificial intelligence can be seen across various contexts, including ethical and political ones (Filiciak & Piowar, 2025, p. 121), which frequently overlap. Cathy O’Neil (2016, p. 3) describes negative examples of such algorithms and calls them “weapons of math destruction”, explaining that “these mathematical models were opaque [...]. Their verdicts, even when wrong or harmful, were beyond dispute or appeal”. In this context, O’Neil also observes that the statistical models she investigated “tended to punish the poor and the oppressed”. The functioning of algorithms is often described as opaque, with their underlying principles resembling

mysterious mechanisms of metaphorical black boxes, associated with mythologised organisations possessing equally mythologised competencies, deeply embedded in the market and operating according to the new algorithmic logic of accumulation and the marketing logic (Kreft, 2019, p. 20).

Another aspect of the algorithmisation of social communication is content creation with the use of artificial intelligence, though the term 'creation' requires further clarification. Algorithms do not create fully original content that demands creative, inherently human input. Rather, they can be described as innovative and statistics-based, able to identify patterns and generate surprising conclusions. However, they do not create content using a unique human perspective or intuition. First, a mathematical model can compile existing data and produce similar outcomes based on that data. Second, the effectiveness and efficiency of an algorithm are directly tied to the quality of the data it is trained on. Third, the final result is largely influenced by the design and configuration of the parameters and instructions set by humans. This is particularly evident in the use of various types of assistants that may refuse to answer questions or perform tasks deemed by the algorithm's creators as inappropriate, controversial, or an invasion of privacy. For instance, in 2025, some artificial intelligence models, due to ethical concerns or internal policies of the organisation managing the algorithm, did not process or modify real images, particularly those involving individuals' likenesses.

Currently, text-based models are used ethically, such as by journalists and authors for stylistic revisions, but also unethically by website owners to generate complete content without attribution or verification of the accuracy of the information the algorithm produces. There are also tools available for generating graphics and videos. Research into biases, including racial biases, in algorithms that generate graphic files raises concerns (Górska & Jemielniak, 2025, p. 222). Additionally, artificial intelligence models exist that create audio materials and 'compose' and perform musical works. These algorithms are so advanced that they are used to produce and publish works falsely attributed to non-existent artists, and they can even replicate the style of famous creators, generating fake works in their name (Bonini & Magaouda, 2024, pp. 121–148).

Despite their effectiveness, communication conducted with the use of algorithms still has significant limitations. As Elena Esposito (2022, p. 45) notes, "[a]lgorithmic text processing is not in continuity

with human meaning-oriented reading. Computers do not read, they count. Machines do not understand meaning, they process data". In accordance with the principles of statistical data processing, algorithms tend to fill in missing data, populating gaps with information they determine to be most probable. This process, known as hallucination, leads to false information being presented as true facts, often in a way that seems validated. When questioned, the model may acknowledge an error, but the hallucination must first be identified by the user. The computer-based, programmatically coded nature of the model, along with its mathematical structure and statistical data, causes the information provided by the algorithm to be automatically accepted by users as neutral, objective, and thus – trustworthy.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

The idea that an algorithm does not function independently but instead performs tasks based on predetermined criteria and input data is reflected both above and in the relevant literature. Designers, programmers, and those responsible for managing the algorithm determine the sources and types of data to be collected, how this data will be analysed and processed, and the expected outcomes. All algorithmic applications require human involvement (Matzner, 2024, p. 150), and statistical models should be viewed more as tools rather than as true intelligence designed to replace humans. Nicholas Diakopoulos (2019, p. 240) stresses that

“[t]he future of algorithmic media must be human-centred. The main challenges are how to harness the power of algorithms to speed up, scale up, and personalise content [...], and how to steer toward outcomes that are beneficial to individuals, groups, and society

while accounting for business values and concerns. This utilitarian aspect of algorithms is seen by some as a potential threat. Magdalena Szpunar (2019, p. 34) acknowledges that

one of the most troubling aspects of an algorithm-driven world is that the algorithms do not aim to understand humans – they are not ‘interested’ in doing so. Instead, they focus on reducing complex realities into simple logical models that enable quick and complex calculations and correlations of data too vast for individuals to interpret.

This simplification of the world is evident in the operation of text-based models, which tend to provide generalised responses, avoiding definitive or extreme – though possibly objective – statements.

According to Jan Kreft (2019, p. 134),

the algorithmisation of the media introduces a new order into the entire research ‘universe’ of shaping the everyday order, where the principles are opaque, goals are assumed, and the scope of intervention is difficult to assess. New-media organisations thus gain an accepted but invisible algorithmic tool for establishing an order based on unknown rules.

This makes it all the more critical to move away from viewing algorithmic models as ‘black boxes’ that almost magically produce objective, complete, and reliable information. Ideally, statistical models involved in the algorithmisation of social communication, along with the procedures guiding their decision-making, should be transparent. Algorithmic targeting of content, including political ads, relies on users’ behavioural data, often including highly detailed personal information. Such systems raise significant ethical and legal concerns, especially regarding privacy rights.

Legislative action is also needed to update copyright law in response to the evolving needs of algorithmic communication. Debates surrounding texts mass-produced by algorithms echo earlier discussions conducted by major platforms about news aggregation sourcing content from smaller websites. Content generated by artificial intelligence is based on the data the algorithm was trained on. This means that each graphic or melody produced is created using a vast array of real images and musical works, for which the original creators seek compensation or, at the very least, recognition of authorship.

New challenges, especially ethical concerns and privacy rights, emerge with the implantation of devices – powered by artificial intelligence – into the brain, designed to enhance cognitive functions and communication efficiency (Üçok-Sayrak, 2022, p. 18). In all the

aforementioned contexts, the importance of media literacy is increasing. Effectively navigating algorithmic social communication in the digital age will require specific media competencies. These competencies involve not only content creation but also content consumption, as highlighted by issues such as the microtargeting of political ads on social media, the presence of fake artists on streaming platforms, and algorithmic biases in graphic generation platforms.

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Information security

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Information security is defined as a state – and a sequence of states – in which the high quality of information is ensured, information is effectively protected against threats, and the freedom to produce, access, collect, process, and transmit this information is guaranteed. Information security involves implementing special protection and regulatory measures for specific categories of information, distinguished based on their significance for the security of the actors they concern.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: The widespread use of the term ‘information security’ in both academic discourse and broader social discourse at the turn of the 21st century was closely linked to the dynamic transformations of the infosphere. These transformations have been accelerated by advancements in modern technologies and information transmission channels, as well as the emergence of the internet.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: The significance of information and the advancement of methods for acquiring, collecting, transmitting, and utilising it are a direct consequence of civilisational progress. This evolution is accompanied by a steady increase in the importance of information security, which is inherently cross-sectoral, far-reaching, and affects every security actor.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Information security is a sphere of security that is shaped by a wide range of dynamically evolving opportunities, challenges, and

threats. This state of affairs not only necessitates the continuous refinement of practical security measures but also requires systematic research efforts. These efforts should focus on identifying, explaining, predicting, and improving the management of risks and trends within the field of information security.

Keywords: security, security classification system,
information security, information security policy

Definition of the term

Many definitions of information security inaccurately and narrowly limit its essence to the protection of classified information or the security of ICT systems. This perspective is exemplified by the claim that information security

consists of a set of actions, methods, and procedures undertaken by authorised actors to ensure the integrity of collected, stored, and processed information resources by protecting them from unauthorised disclosure, modification, or destruction (Potejko, 2009, p. 194).

In the same vein, similar views define information security primarily as safeguarding information against unauthorised access, destruction, or disclosure, or as protection against cyberattacks and physical threats that could disrupt the functioning of a state. The limitations of some definitions also stem from an erroneous emphasis on the tools and methods used to ensure information security rather than on its fundamental characteristics. However, some definitions capture the essence of information security more accurately than others. Marek Madej, for example, argues that information security encompasses

an actor (e.g., a state) that ensures the integrity, completeness, and reliability of its information resources in all forms, not just electronic. This includes both protecting existing information crucial to security (i.e., information that supports the efficient functioning of state structures and society) and efforts to gain an informational advantage. Such efforts may involve acquiring new or updated data as well as engaging in disinformation campaigns against potential adversaries, whether states or other actors (Madej, 2009, p. 18).

Similarly, according to Leszek F. Korzeniowski:

The information security of an actor (whether an individual or an organisation) is their ability to obtain high-quality information, process it, use it effectively, and protect it from loss (Korzeniowski, 2017, p. 184).

Within the broader context of national information security, the definition provided by Waldemar Kitler is particularly cognitively valuable and applicable to contemporary realities. He describes information security as

a cross-sectoral domain of national (or, more specifically, state) security and as a process aimed at ensuring the uninterrupted functioning and development of the state – including public authorities, society, market entities, and non-governmental organisations – within the information space. This encompasses free access to information while mitigating its negative consequences (both material and non-material), protecting information resources and systems from the hostile activities of other actors, natural disasters, and technical failures, and maintaining the ability to shape the behaviour and attitudes of both domestic and international actors through information (Kitler & Taczowska-Olszewska, 2017, p. 43).

An analysis of these and many other definitions found in the literature, combined with existing knowledge about the functioning of the information society, suggests that information security is defined as a state – and a sequence of states – in which the high quality of information is ensured, information is effectively protected against threats, and the freedom to produce, access, collect, process, and transmit this information is guaranteed. Information security involves implementing special protection and regulatory measures for specific categories of information, distinguished based on their significance for the security of the actors they concern (Fehler, 2021, p. 199). In contemporary conditions, information security is increasingly shaped by the ability to effectively manage surveillance, information overload, manipulation, and disinformation.

Given the complex and dynamic nature of information security, its definition must account for the key factors that enable its achievement and maintenance at the level desired by a given actor. These factors include:

- ensuring the high quality of information available to state authorities and society.
- facilitating efficient information flow, based on distribution systems and modern telecommunication infrastructure.
- safeguarding legally protected information.
- respecting individuals' rights to privacy and anonymity.
- guaranteeing the confidentiality of communication and access to public information.
- effectively counteracting threats, particularly unlawful surveillance, disinformation, and information manipulation.

Importantly, the need for precise reality-based definitions of information security – and their proper application – continues to grow. This trend

is driven by the rapidly increasing presence of information components in all areas of human activity. Properly defining this concept is essential not only for the quality of academic discourse but also for effectively managing the expanding role of the informational dimension of security and the broader security landscape as a whole.

Historical analysis of the term

The history of information security stretches far beyond the 20th century, though many researchers view that era as a pivotal turning point. While it is true that the development of tools for generating, collecting, transmitting, and processing information accelerated rapidly in that period – unlocking new possibilities for its application – efforts to control and protect information date back to the earliest days of organised human civilisation. Activities now classified as intelligence, counterintelligence, disinformation, propaganda, and information manipulation were practised by the first states and honed by political, military, economic, and law enforcement institutions. Over time, these practices expanded in both scope and complexity, gradually shaping the foundations of what we now call information security. Although the term itself was not used historically, its core elements became increasingly integrated into the operations of individuals, social groups, and states.

Early interest in the informational dimension of security can be traced back to the 6th century BC, when the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu emphasised the importance of knowing one's adversaries. A well-known historical example of information-based psychological warfare is the Greek deception during the Trojan War, as recounted in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Unable to breach Troy's defences, the Greeks infiltrated the city by hiding inside a wooden horse, which the Trojans mistakenly accepted as a gift. Napoleon Bonaparte skilfully exploited the strategic value of information, making extensive use of intelligence and various forms of reconnaissance in both military and political campaigns. Similarly, the renowned Prussian military theorist, General Carl Philipp Gottlieb von Clausewitz, stressed that success in warfare depends heavily on the ability to navigate the complex and often chaotic flow of information (Fehler, Topolewski, Janczewski, & Lasota-Kapczuk, 2024, p. 5).

The conceptualisation and strategic importance of information security were deeply influenced by the First and Second World Wars, and later by the Cold War. These periods witnessed the emergence of new methods for leveraging information to gain an advantage, especially through disinformation and propaganda. A major shift in thinking about information security occurred in the 1960s, when Japanese theorists introduced the idea of an emerging information society. This concept was later brought to Europe by French sociologists Alain Minc and Simon Nora in their 1978 report *The Computerisation of Society*, presented to President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. In Europe, Martin Bangemann played a central role in shaping information society policy. As European Commissioner for Industrial Affairs, Information Technologies, and Telecommunications, he led the preparation of the 1993 report *Europe and the Global Information Society: Recommendations to the European Council*. It was presented to the European Council in 1994 and since then has been commonly referred to as the Bangemann Report.

The concept of the information society was also gaining traction in the United States, where the 1965 launch of Intelsat – the first global communication satellite system – sparked heated discussions about the use of modern technology for societal benefit. As a result, efforts to promote the information society began in the U.S. in the 1970s. A key milestone came in 1979 with a report from the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, which described the emergence of a new information-based civilisation driven by digital technology. In 1993, during Bill Clinton's presidency, the "National Information Infrastructure" report outlined the American strategy for building a national information network. The main breakthrough, however, came in 1997 with the "Framework for Global Electronic Commerce" report, which defined the key directions and areas of action in this field. President Bill Clinton's approval of this report elevated it to the status of an official government document, and the concepts of the Global Information Infrastructure and Global Electronic Commerce became integral components of the U.S. development strategy. The transition from the concept of the information society to its practical implementation was rapid. One pivotal moment came with the creation of ARPANET by American researchers in the late 1960s for military purposes. The network later expanded to include civilian academic institutions, and the military and civilian components diverged in

the early 1980s, with the latter evolving into what is now known as the internet.

This process was accelerated by key technological developments, including the invention of the microprocessor in the 1970s and the emergence of the personal computer in the early 1980s. Together, these advances spurred rapid digitalisation. The continuous growth in computing power, the invention and widespread adoption of the internet, and ongoing progress in automation and robotics triggered a series of further developments. As a result, information and information security became key aspects of the development of the contemporary world. Technological and technical advancements have brought profound changes to the nature of information security. These include the globalisation of activity within the infosphere, the dismantling of barriers to the transmission, analysis, and storage of information, and an increase in the complexity of threats. A new domain of strategic competition over information security – cyberspace – has emerged, which was reflected in the unprecedented implementation of digital and information-centric solutions in security operations and in the formal recognition of cybersecurity as a distinct field of both theoretical inquiry and practical application.

Today, as cyberspace increasingly expands into new areas of the infosphere, some perspectives on information security now regard it as the primary domain of strategic concern. In this context, some researchers even foresee a possible division of the world by the ‘silicon curtain’ (Harari, 2024, p. 529). Interactions involving information between state and non-state actors are now marked by high dynamics and intensity. States use information not only to enhance their operational efficiency without engaging in open conflict with other states, but also to carry out destabilising and aggressive actions across various dimensions of international relations. Information has become a widely deployed weapon – used by both state and non-state actors – in information warfare, which is often tightly interwoven with military conflicts and armed confrontations. Cyberspace has become an increasingly central platform for conducting these operations, leveraging cutting-edge technologies and advanced techniques. Ongoing civilisational progress continues to reshape the infosphere, offering decision-makers an ever-expanding arsenal of informational tools and resources. The scale, quality, and strategic application of these resources are now among the most

pressing challenges in national security agendas – of which information security is a vital component.

Discussion of the term

Civilisational development has a direct impact, both on how information is perceived and on the methods used to acquire, store, transmit, and apply it. When examining both the historical and contemporary states of the infosphere, technological and technical progress clearly emerges as a driving force. This highlights the fundamental differences between the earliest forms of information transmission and those used today. Over time, systems based on natural materials and human capabilities have gradually given way to increasingly advanced technological solutions and devices. Historically, early long-distance communication relied on rudimentary methods such as smoke and light signals. Gutenberg's invention of the printing press was a major turning point, significantly accelerating the spread of information and catalysing further transformations. The arrival of radio and television brought about profound social and political shifts. Another major milestone was the invention of the computer, with its vast data storage capabilities, followed by the development of the global internet (Grabowski, 2018, p. 10). These advancements were accompanied by a steady – and at times exponential – increase in the significance of information. Simultaneously, new forms of information-related threats emerged and evolved in tandem with this progress. Given these developments, it is unsurprising that information security has become an increasingly vital dimension within security. Defining it, however, in a rapidly digitalising world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, remains a challenge, which is further amplified by the various definitions of information itself, as well as by the continuous qualitative and quantitative evolution of information-based threats. Nonetheless, "information security is transsectoral, has a broad subject scope, and concerns every security actor. Thus, it must be analysed through a systemic approach" (Aleksandrowicz, 2021, p. 87). Importantly, contemporary understandings of information security are deeply intertwined with broader concepts of security as a general and universal category. Security is one of humanity's fundamental

needs – pursued by individuals, communities, and states alike. In its broadest sense, it can be understood as a dynamic condition in which actors have access to the material and immaterial resources necessary to ensure their existence, continuity, development, and protection.

In the context of building and maintaining a high level of security – including information security – the state plays a central and irreplaceable role. From the earliest stages of their development, states have undertaken various internal and external measures as part of their general policy frameworks to address multiple aspects of security. Given their foundational importance to the functioning and survival of the state, these measures have rapidly evolved into the most critical components of state policy. The distinct nature and importance of the tools and strategies employed in safeguarding security have led to the formation of a specialised area within state policy: security policy (Fehler, Topolewski, Janczewski, & Lasota-Kapczuk, 2024, p. 22). One lexicographic interpretation defines security policy as:

1) internal state actions aimed at ensuring the proper functioning of institutions, stabilising social order, and protecting citizens' health and lives; 2) external state actions focused on identifying and neutralising threats posed by other states, international institutions, and private individuals (Opara, 2007, p. 120).

Stanisław Bieleń defines security policy as “the deliberate and organised activities of competent state bodies aimed at satisfying all values that constitute the essence of state security” (Bieleń, 2010, p. 67). Both theoretical models and political practices enable the formulation of a definition of a state's security policy as a deliberate, planned, and structured set of activities conducted under the leadership of state authorities. These efforts engage state, social, and private actors in a coordinated pursuit of the highest attainable level of security under given circumstances. This also includes the development of mechanisms to ensure effective and timely responses to emerging challenges and threats (Fehler, 2012, p. 342). Since information security was formally recognised and practically implemented as a dimension of state security, it has not only gained a distinct place within security classifications but has also continued to grow in prominence. Developing a national information security policy requires several key components:

- defining the concept of ‘information security’ and related terms.

- identifying and cataloguing current and emerging determinants of information security.
- establishing benchmarks for the level of information security the state aims to achieve.
- selecting tools and methodologies for assessing the current state of information security.
- determining means for monitoring and forecasting trends in information security.
- choosing instruments and mechanisms for implementing information security policy, and defining how they will be applied.
- outlining principles and procedures for overseeing the execution of information security policy (Fehler, 2021, pp. 213–214).

Information security policy is an increasingly significant element in building and maintaining state security at an appropriately high level. One of the key benefits of effectively implementing this policy is the shaping of a high-quality infosphere.

The primary objectives of information security policy include:

- establishing an information order that aligns with the needs of an actor (a state), ensuring, among others, high-quality information resources and the effective distribution of information.
- efficiently identifying threats to information security.
- developing the organisational, material, and human potential necessary to prevent and respond to both potential and existing threats.
- effectively addressing challenges in the field of information.
- creating conditions that promote the development of positive features and trends within the information society.

A well-formulated and effectively implemented state information security policy enables:

- the shaping of information security in a way that meets the needs of both individuals and collective actors.
- the implementation of forward-looking initiatives to achieve and maintain the desired level of information security.
- enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of specialised actors operating within the information security domain.

In a democratic state that is ruled by law, ensuring the information security of individuals is a fundamental component of information security

policy. The framework for such actions is grounded in international conventions and national constitutions, which hold the highest authority within domestic legal systems. Foremost among these is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted on 10 December 1948, which declares in Article 19 that “everyone has the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”. Similar provisions are found in the *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, adopted on 4 November 1950. Individual information security is also protected by the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, adopted on 16 December 1966, which guarantees everyone the right “to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice”. For European Union member states, the legal regulations of the EU – especially those enshrined in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, proclaimed in Strasbourg on 12 December 2007 – are of particular significance. The Charter guarantees the right to the protection of personal data and its fair, lawful processing. It also ensures rights such as access to personal data, the right to have it rectified, the freedom to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers, and the right of access to official documents.

The significance and scope of an individual’s information security are also affirmed in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, which specifies that:

- no one may be obliged, except on the basis of statute, to disclose information concerning his person.
- public authorities shall not acquire, collect nor make accessible information on citizens other than that which is necessary in a democratic state ruled by law.
- everyone shall have a right of access to official documents and data collections concerning himself.
- everyone shall have the right to demand the correction or deletion of untrue or incomplete information, or information acquired by means contrary to statute.
- the freedom to express opinions, to acquire and to disseminate information shall be ensured to everyone.

- preventive censorship of the means of social communication and the licensing of the press shall be prohibited.
- a citizen shall have the right to obtain information on the activities of organs of public authority as well as persons discharging public functions.
- the right to obtain information shall ensure access to documents and entry to sittings of collective organs of public authority formed by universal elections.
- everyone shall have the right to be informed of the quality of the environment and its protection.

Given the growing importance of information security across all dimensions of security, achieving the highest possible level of information protection has become a key objective of security policy in most countries today.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

One of the most significant consequences of the information revolution and the rise of the information society is the steadily growing importance of information itself. As a result, decisions and actions aimed at achieving and maintaining the highest possible level of information security are becoming increasingly prioritised. In this context, it could be argued that information security has become a fundamental issue. If information security is defined as a state – and a sequence of states – in which the high quality of information is ensured, threats are effectively mitigated, and the freedom to produce, access, collect, process, and transmit information is guaranteed. Furthermore, if it involves implementing special protection and regulatory measures for specific categories of information, distinguished by their significance to the security of relevant actors, then it must also be acknowledged that the process of building and maintaining information security is accompanied by complex phenomena and challenges. These, in turn, generate a wide spectrum of opportunities, risks, and threats. Identifying, analysing, and defining these factors is particularly difficult due to the nature of information itself, which is a phenomenon that resists rigid definitions and categorisations.

Moreover, it is essential to recognise that many of the key terms – such as ‘information security policy’ or ‘data security policy’ – are frequently misused or inaccurately defined. This blurs and distorts their meaning, which can lead to cognitive confusion and the development of imprecise or flawed solutions.

Therefore, establishing a clear and coherent definitional and terminological framework in the field of information security is essential. The conditions outlined above fully justify the need for in-depth, systematic research in this domain. Such research is primarily driven by the need to meet the informational demands of various actors at both qualitative and quantitative levels. Fulfilling this need requires a solid understanding of the information security environment and a precise grasp of the nature of information security itself. Given the rapidly evolving determinants that shape this domain – especially those stemming from technological advances in information production, transmission, analysis, and storage – addressing these challenges is no simple task. The relationship between information, digital tools, and computer systems used for its production and processing – and their collective impact on knowledge creation, politics, the economy, and society – remains a subject of ongoing debate among both theorists and practitioners. Particular emphasis is placed on how information technologies facilitate the transmission of signals, messages, texts, and multimedia content, as well as on how they enable digitisation, processing, and storage and provide rapid access to data. These capabilities foster knowledge development, expand societies’ cognitive capacities, and ultimately accelerate the pace of civilisational progress.

However, such optimistic assessments must be tempered with reservations. It is evident that many of the opportunities created by technological advancement are quickly exploited for illegal, harmful, or unethical purposes. This has led to the implementation of various protective measures intended to curb such misuse. Yet, these countermeasures often introduce new risks – such as mass surveillance or excessive interference with individuals’ informational rights and freedoms.

Moreover, numerous informational barriers persist that hinder, distort, or even prevent the proper understanding of the essence and significance of certain information. These barriers ultimately reduce the level of information security. In parallel, a range of information-related

threats – such as information overload, the spread of low-quality (e.g., outdated or incomplete) data, manipulation, disinformation, and information warfare tactics – impair decision-making and undermine the ability to make rational choices. Such threats compromise the flow of accurate and essential information, which is critical to ensuring a safe, stable, and informed society. Given this landscape, it is clear that beyond continually improving practical information security measures, there is a pressing need for systematic research efforts.

These efforts should aim to identify, explain, anticipate, and manage developments within the information security domain in ways that maximise opportunities, minimise risks, and effectively address emerging challenges. Such research is already underway and encompasses a broad spectrum of topics. In addition to addressing criminal activity involving information, scholars and practitioners are also examining the broader dynamics of the information society, the rise and application of artificial intelligence, the proliferation of information threats and barriers, and the protection of an individual's informational rights. Nonetheless, the negative phenomena accompanying the evolution of the infosphere continue to present a significant challenge – not only for researchers and theorists, but also for all producers, owners, and users of information. In this context, cyberspace has become particularly critical. The rapid advancement of information systems not only drives economic growth but also exerts a growing influence on social relationships. In particular, internet services have emerged as powerful tools for shaping the behaviour of large social groups, including their political attitudes and decisions. Consequently, significant disruptions in cyberspace operations – as well as abuses and manipulations conducted within it – can directly affect individuals' sense of security, the efficiency of public administration, the continuity of production and service processes, and, ultimately, holistically understood security.

In light of these developments, the following actions can be reasonably recommended as essential for establishing an adequate level of information security:

- systematically verifying foundational concepts related to information security to reflect evolving technological and societal realities.
- ensuring broad, unrestricted access to timely and reliable information while actively combating disinformation and misinformation.

- building a modern, resilient, and secure national information infrastructure.
- effectively protecting sensitive information that requires heightened security measures.
- regularly developing and adapting national information security strategies in response to changes in the broader security environment.
- enhancing information security management by establishing a dedicated subsystem within the national security framework.
- strengthening capabilities to combat cybercrime.
- intensifying efforts in the field of cybersecurity.
- conducting continuous public awareness campaigns about cyber threats and promoting digital literacy, including citizens' rights and freedoms in the digital space.
- participating in international agreements and treaties focused on improving global information security cooperation.

In conclusion, based on current analyses, it is clear that the primary architect of information security – both now and in the foreseeable future – is the state. Only the state has the capacity to implement a set of measures and instruments that, while considering the needs of both public and private sectors, can ensure the most critical aspects of information security: access to high-quality and sufficient information, its unrestricted flow, appropriate protection of data that requires security measures, effective prevention and counteraction of threats to information security, and the elimination of informational barriers. However, the state's dominant role does not imply the marginalisation of non-state actors. On the contrary, they should play an active role in implementing information security policy in accordance with its guiding principles.

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Disinformation

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Disinformation constitutes a non-military threat involving the use of fabricated or genuine information to induce or prevent specific actions on the part of the targeted entity, in line with the intentions of the disinformation actor.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: Although disinformation is relatively new in its typological sense, the phenomenon itself has been known for thousands of years. Strategies of deception and the deliberate use of falsehoods to achieve particular objectives were practised in ancient China, as evidenced by the principles outlined in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. The foundations for the modern interpretation of deceit and manipulation were laid in the 15th century by Niccolò Machiavelli. Contemporary disinformation, however, largely stems from the activities of the Tsarist Okhrana and its successors – the operatives of the Soviet Cheka.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Disinformation poses a particularly grave threat not only to state actors but, above all, to societies. Well-orchestrated disinformation campaigns undermine fundamental forms of trust, both in interpersonal relations among citizens, and in the relationship between the state and society.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: To enhance the effectiveness of countering disinformation and building societal resilience against it, actors in international relations should develop both domestic and international capabilities for

defending against and responding to potential disinformation campaigns. Democratic states, in particular, should establish a comprehensive security architecture to combat disinformation based on the involvement of specialised institutions and security services, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, and, most importantly, the active participation of society as a whole.

Keywords: disinformation, deception, manipulation, fake news, disinformation actor

Definition of the term

The concept of disinformation is arguably one of the most frequently used in public discourse, political rhetoric, and academic research when referring to the broad notion of the dissemination of false information. Other coexisting terms and definitions are also employed – such as propaganda, information warfare, manipulation, influence operations, active measures, social engineering, and fake news – yet none of them has achieved such rapid and global prominence as ‘disinformation’. Originally associated with political and military activities, the term ‘disinformation’ has, in contemporary usage, expanded to encompass virtually all areas of human activity. Although the concept itself is relatively new – dating back nearly a century – the roots of the phenomenon can be traced to the distant past of history.

According to one of the most common definitions found in the academic literature, disinformation is defined as:

false, incomplete, or misleading information that is passed, fed, or confirmed to a targeted individual, group, or country. (...) Disinformation is comprised of news stories deliberately designed to weaken opponents, which are often planted in newspapers by secret agents of a foreign country masquerading as journalists (...) in order to foster a high degree of credibility for both the message that is being planted and the apparent source that is giving it credence (Cull, Culbert, & Welch, 2003, p. 104).

Tomasz Aleksandrowicz proposes defining disinformation as:

a mode of conveying information – whether true or false – in such a way as to mislead an adversary or competitor and prompt them to act in accordance with our expectations and in ways advantageous to us. Disinformation is not simply a lie, that is, the transmission of false information; it is a ruse (...) (Aleksandrowicz, 2016, p. 83).

According to the entry in the *Historical Dictionary of American Propaganda*, disinformation is:

false information targeted to an individual, group or country, created by governments in wartime for military purposes and by totalitarian governments at other times for political purposes. (...) The KGB coined the Russian word *dezinformatsiya*; it came into the English language as disinformation (Manning & Romerstein, 2004, pp. 82–83).

In the KGB manual (as cited in the CIA's *Soviet Covert Action and Propaganda*, presented to the Oversight Subcommittee of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, House of Representatives, February 6, 1980), Soviet theorists distinguished between strategic and tactical disinformation. Strategic disinformation involved misleading adversaries regarding fundamental political issues, military and economic status, and the scientific and technological achievements of the Soviet Union, as well as its policies toward certain imperialist states and other countries, with the aim of fulfilling the counterintelligence objectives of state security organs. Tactical disinformation focused on the execution of immediate tasks arising from strategic disinformation operations and constituted the primary model of offensive activities undertaken by Soviet state security services. A similar interpretation of Soviet disinformation practices was presented by Anatoliy Golitsyn, a former intelligence officer and defector, who defined disinformation as a systematic effort intended to "confuse, deceive, and influence the noncommunist world, to jeopardise its policies, and to induce Western adversaries to contribute unwittingly to the achievement of communist objectives" (Golitsyn, 1984, p. 5).

The Russians, both in theoretical discourse and practical application, introduced operational and apagogical disinformation into intelligence and counterintelligence activities. Operational disinformation involved the dissemination of predominantly false data designed to persuade a foreign intelligence service (and, in certain cases, counterintelligence) to undertake specific actions beneficial to Soviet state security organs (Никитченко et al., 1972, p. 80). Apagogical disinformation entailed providing a foreign service – the potential target of disinformation – with credible (detailed and accurate) data which, due to its nature, was expected to be perceived as disinformation. The disinformed entity, upon analysis, would conclude that the material contained such detailed information that the agent supplying it must be unreliable (incapable of obtaining it), thus the message itself must have been fabricated by a foreign intelligence service (Krzak, 2022, p. 244).

A contemporary definition of Russian disinformation practices has been proposed by Jolanta Darczewska:

Disinformation is generally understood in its narrow sense as fabricated, misleading testimony. (...) In fact, it is an umbrella term encompassing various methods employed in both physical and informational domains. It is a synthesis

of techniques – political, military, intelligence, business, diplomatic, media, and cyber – that are far more sophisticated than simple deception, all serving the long-term strategic objectives of the Kremlin. (...) It constitutes a continuous process, based on systematic, integrated state activity across multiple fronts, conducted through diverse channels (diplomatic, political, economic, military, social, and media) in line with the objectives and principles of strategic planning (...) (Darczewska, 2021).

The French security and intelligence expert Vladimir Volkoff, who has studied disinformation operations, argues that disinformation “represents a synthesis of intelligence activities (gathering information about the enemy) and counterintelligence operations (infiltrating the enemy’s intelligence services)”, as it allows for “remote control” of the target using pre-prepared materials. This is not achieved through covert, ambiguous operations aimed at specialised agencies, but rather through overt influence on ordinary citizens, who in turn affect authorities and experts. This is because experts depend on those in power, while political authorities depend on public opinion (Volkoff, 1991, p. 8).

In Anglo-Saxon disinformation theory, the concept combines deception with the denial of actual objectives and activities, referred to as Denial and Deception (D&D).

Roy Godson and James J. Wirtz, prominent American scholars of intelligence studies, offer the following definition of disinformation based on these two subcategories:

Denial and deception (D&D) is a term often used to describe a combination of information operations that a nation undertakes to achieve its objectives. *Denial* refers to the attempt to block information that could be used by an opponent to learn some truth. *Deception*, by contrast, refers to a nation’s effort to cause an adversary to believe something that is not true (Godson & Wirtz, 2017, p. 2).

According to Ladislav Bittman, a Czech defector, disinformation is:

that branch of special operations that aims to deceive the enemy or victim by feeding him false information, the assumption being that he will then use it as a basis for reaching conclusions the initiator wishes him to reach (Bittman, 1972, p. 20).

In NATO terminology, disinformation is defined as:

the deliberate creation and dissemination of false and/or manipulated information with the intent to deceive and/or mislead. Disinformation seeks to deepen

divisions within and between Allied nations, and to undermine people's confidence in elected governments (NATO, 2020).

Experts often identify specialised subcategories of disinformation – such as international, intelligence, and military disinformation – thus:

International disinformation refers to the deliberate and purposeful use of disinformation techniques and tools by states or other actors in international relations as instruments of influence in foreign policy or other internationally oriented actions, both during war and in peacetime. Its core purpose is to improve the sender's position at the expense of manipulating the information recipient. The primary targets of such disinformation efforts are the societies of foreign states or their major social groups (Kupiecki, Bryjka, & Chłóń, 2012, p. 98).

Intelligence disinformation relates to a range of operational undertakings conducted as part of intelligence games and operational combinations, involving the transfer – via intelligence or counterintelligence channels – of true, fabricated, or entirely false information to the target, particularly information concerning the state's potential and its military, political, or economic capabilities. Its purpose is to create a distorted image of the overall security situation of the state (Liedel & Serafin, 2011, pp. 88–89).

According to Jan Larecki,

disinformation refers to covert actions planned according to a unified concept, involving the preparation, development, and ultimately the delivery or placement of partially or entirely false information, documents (letters, publications, manuscripts, etc.), photographs, or other fabricated data to an adversary (or their intelligence service), or their public dissemination with hidden objectives aimed at the society of the adversary's country. The purpose of such actions is to create an apparently credible image or narrative and to shape opinions about a person, event, or phenomenon in line with the operational interests of the intelligence service conducting the disinformation activities and/or the political interests of the state on whose behalf the service operates, typically with the aim of causing direct or indirect harm to the current or future interests of the adversary (Larecki, 2007, p. 158).

Another distinct category is military disinformation, defined by Marek Wrzosek as:

the intentional transmission of (...) prepared (false) information, rumours, specially crafted documents, and demonstrations of military activities aimed at misleading the adversary about the real intentions, plans, and military undertakings (Wrzosek, 2012, p. 23).

In summary, disinformation should be regarded as a phenomenon with harmful effects on both international relations *sensu largo* and the economic and social spheres. It can be defined as: planned overt (or covert) actions carried out by a disinformation actor (a disinformer) against a potential adversary (a disinformed actor), which may be a state, society, company, organisation (e.g., association, foundation, political or social organisation), or an individual. The aim is to manipulate, deceive, or mislead the target in order to gain maximum benefit or to compel specific actions (or inaction) as intended by the disinformer. The benefits of disinformation operations may be short-term or long-term, depending on the current international, political, military, economic, or social context.

Historical analysis of the term

The roots of disinformation can be traced deep into history. Both Volkoff and Golitsyn appear correct in suggesting that fragments of the renowned treatise *The Art of War* by the Chinese strategist and thinker Sun Tzu (Sun-Zi) form a kind of catechism for disinformation practices. Sun Tzu wrote: “Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting, (...) the highest form of generalship is to balk the enemy’s plans” (Sun Tzu, 2004, p. 37). Among his ‘thirteen golden rules’, Sun Tzu listed measures such as discrediting the targeted country, disrupting its governmental activities, fomenting social and ethnic conflicts, destroying the morale of the military and society, sabotage, diversion, and similar actions.

Modern disinformation has evolved from concepts such as deception (understood as deceit and denial), stratagem (especially in warfare), and inspiration. In general, deception – misleading a potential adversary and rendering them ineffective – was primarily associated with military operations. The objective of war has always been to defeat the enemy by compelling them to adopt a course of action advantageous to one side of the conflict or war. In this context, deception was a critical tool of warfare. A classic example of practical disinformation was convincing the inhabitants of mythical Troy that the Greek army had abandoned the siege, with the wooden horse symbolising the end of the war. A similar

tactic was employed by Gaius Julius Caesar during his campaign in Gaul in 52 BC against Vercingetorix. The combination of deception and disinformation was also discussed by the Roman military theorist Frontinus in his work *The Stratagems* (1st century AD).

The use of disinformation in statecraft and governance (i.e., the shaping of policy) was explored by both Niccolò Machiavelli and Ambroise Guillois. Machiavelli considered deception an effective political instrument – essential for maintaining power and survival. Guillois, in turn, acknowledged that deception could, under certain circumstances, serve as a higher objective for the disinformers.

Military deception continued to play a key role in subsequent centuries. Its importance was particularly emphasised by Frederick II of Prussia, known as Frederick the Great. This eminent ruler and commander wrote in his 1753 treatises that “a double agent should be used to convey false information to the enemy”, and he argued that “success can be achieved through deception where brute force would fail...” (*Inspiracja i aktywność...*, 1926, p. 2).

The French also made effective use of manipulation – most notably under Napoleon Bonaparte. This brilliant leader, statesman, and commander was also a master of disinformation. The French Emperor employed disinformation materials published in the Italian and French press (press or political manipulation) with the aim of concealing his own intentions and misleading opponents (*Inspiracja i aktywność...*, 1926, pp. 4–5). Napoleonic counterintelligence and police services carried out complex counterintelligence operations based on games and operational combinations. They assumed that, beyond classical intelligence efforts, more sophisticated actions were needed – including operations designed to manipulate foreign intelligence agencies. A notable example of such successful disinformation was the ‘Tukhachevsky Affair’.

Manipulation was also used as an operational tool by Polish intelligence services during the Second Polish Republic. Both intelligence and counterintelligence effectively employed intelligence and press (political) manipulation, directed primarily against Poland’s two hostile neighbours – Germany and the Soviet Union. During the interwar period, the Second Department of the General Staff of the Polish Army developed a doctrine of disinforming both foreign intelligence services directly, and political elites of states considered hostile to Poland indirectly. Political

disinformation operations (press manipulation) were also undertaken to influence both domestic and international public opinion.

It was the Russians who ultimately gave shape to the concept of disinformation, integrating it into both the theory and practice of political and intelligence operations. The first formal definition of disinformation emerged in the early stages of the Soviet state security system, with the establishment of the Disinformation Bureau at the end of 1922. During the 1920s, Soviet intelligence services developed a unique doctrine of disinformation in both political and intelligence contexts. They successfully employed disinformation tools in so-called 'legend-based' operational combinations targeting anti-Soviet opposition centres and leaders, as well as states considered hostile to the communist regime. One of the most notable operations of this kind was codenamed *Trust-Jaroslavec*, designed to discredit the centres of the white émigrés and the governments of Central and Western Europe that supported them. Furthermore, Soviet intelligence conducted a series of disinformation operations against the Ukrainian diaspora and the intelligence services of countries such as Japan, the United Kingdom, and Romania, including operations codenamed *Syndicate-2*, *Syndicate-4*, *Zamorskoe*, *Case 39*, *M-8*, *Maki-Mirage*, *Consul*, and *Tarantella* (Соцков, 2007, *passim*; Колпракиди, 2004, pp. 402–403; Krzak, 2020, pp. 315–316).

The Germans also carried out disinformation campaigns, relying primarily on propaganda tools. This task was mainly the responsibility of the Ministry of Propaganda of the Third Reich, headed by Joseph Goebbels. However, this does not mean that German intelligence refrained from using disinformation methods on the covert front. The primary objective of German disinformation was to conceal (deny) the process of secret rearmament and the expansion of the German armed forces. One notable example of a masterpiece of offensive political intelligence operations with far-reaching consequences was the 'Tukhachevsky Affair'. This operation relied on fabricated information transmitted by German intelligence via the Czechoslovak government to Soviet security services, ultimately leading to purges in the Red Army and the elimination of the USSR's commanding officers (Kołakowski, 2007, pp. 428–429).

During World War II, Soviet intelligence continued its disinformation operations, conducting numerous radio intelligence games against

Germany that expanded the practice into a new operational domain. In total, 183 radio games were carried out during the war. The first of these, codenamed *Hawk*, was launched in April 1942. Among the best-known operations of this kind were *Berezino*, *Nakhodka*, *Monastyr*, and *Couriers* (Колпракиди, pp. 404–409).

Some of the most spectacular disinformation operations directly influencing the course of World War II were conducted from 1943 onward by British intelligence. By implementing a proven system to neutralise German intelligence threats, the British not only dismantled most enemy spy networks but also executed a series of remarkable disinformation operations through the use of 'double agents'. To coordinate these operations and related deception measures, the XX Committee (also known as the Double Cross Committee) was established. Its tasks included overseeing disinformation campaigns and executing other undertakings aimed at deceiving and misleading Britain's adversaries (Masterman, 1972, pp. 7–22; Godson & Wirtz, 2017, p. 107). The most notable British intelligence operations were *Mincemeat* and *Bodyguard*, along with complementary schemes such as *Zeppelin* (denial and manipulation activities designed to convince the Germans that the Allies would launch an invasion through the Balkans), *Fortitude*, and *Tricycle*. The latter two operations effectively misled German leadership about the actual location of the Allied landings in Europe and confused German command regarding the Allies' true strategic intentions (Masterman, 1972, pp. 134–138, 145–163; Holt, 2004, pp. 486–487, 556–557).

Building on earlier experiences, Soviet disinformation after World War II evolved into a new form of activity aimed at destabilising the global order, becoming one of the key instruments of non-military warfare waged for global supremacy. As part of what were termed active measures, the Soviets employed a full spectrum of tools: from classical disinformation to propaganda, sabotage, and subversion. The arena of operations extended beyond the active and defensive confrontation of intelligence services to encompass broader influence across political, social, cultural, and economic spheres. Soviet disinformation campaigns involved not only intelligence agents but also political activists, social leaders, journalists, and figures from the worlds of science and culture.

The Soviet (and later Russian) *modus operandi* in the realm of disinformation relied on manipulation and the strategic use of individual words

and phrases in press articles and media reports. The emphasis was on portraying the adversary (the targeted entity) as the aggressor. These operations also aimed at systematic intimidation, particularly through exploiting fears of nuclear war. These included strategies against pacifist movements, protests against research on nuclear weapons, the deployment of missile launchers and nuclear warheads in Europe (as well as in the Arctic and outer space), and the incitement of anarchist, destructive, and subversive attitudes – all while simultaneously promoting communist ideology. To achieve maximum effectiveness, Soviet intelligence combined established techniques with modern technological solutions and applied expertise from psychology, management, communication, and media. This gave rise to a new form of deceptive operations known as active measures, which are defined as:

influencing the opinion and perception of the authorities [of a given country] or [its] public opinion in order to elicit a specific reaction. The essence of 'active measures' is the strategic staging of appearances, disinformation, front organisations [i.e., organisations covertly controlled], media manipulation, and clandestine radio broadcasts (...) (Bulhak, 2017, p. 98).

The Committee for State Security (KGB) – the successor to the Cheka – conducted extensive disinformation campaigns, including one aimed at discrediting FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover by falsely accusing him of homosexuality. Similar efforts targeted Martin Luther King Jr., with the goal of stoking social tensions and destabilising internal relations in the United States. In the 1980s, the KGB launched a successful disinformation campaign designed to discredit the United States by circulating fabricated reports and articles alleging that the U.S. had created and distributed the AIDS/HIV virus. This operation, known as *Denver*, was codenamed *Infektion* (Kello, 2017, p. 215).

The Soviet authorities repeatedly accused the United States of developing and deploying biological weapons, claiming – through disinformation materials – that such weapons had been tested during armed conflicts, while publishing fabricated data in the media (Soviet Influence Activities, 1987, pp. 51–53). Such operations continued even after the Cold War. Media reports alleged that the United States had conducted experiments in Ukraine and Georgia that would have been prohibited in the West due to legal restrictions and ethical standards (Selvage, 2022).

Building on its experiences from the interwar period and World War II, the Soviet Union developed new models of disinformation tailored to its political objectives and technological progress. These were directed at both the West and the Soviet domestic audience. A notable example was *Operation Korovod*, launched in 1955, which successfully misled the West about the Soviet Union's nuclear capabilities while simultaneously concealing preparations for the launch of an artificial satellite. The repercussions of this operation – political, military, and reputational – were disastrous for the West (Доронин, 2002; Атаманенко, 2008).

During the Cold War, Soviet intelligence activities in the field of disinformation also encompassed operations aimed at inciting ideological, national, and ethnic conflicts, such as Operations *Neptune*, *Swastika*, and others (Soviet Influence Activities, 1987, *passim*, particularly pp. 53–55; Rid, 2020, pp. 125–130 *et passim*). Soviet press agencies and journalists collaborating with Moscow – including Pierre-Charles Pathé, William Schaap, Ellen Ray, Louis Wolf, and Vladimir Ivanov – played a crucial role in these undertakings, effectively serving as instruments in the hands of disinformation strategists. This model of activity continues to be successfully employed by Russian intelligence and Kremlin propaganda (e.g., the case of Pablo González, also known as Pavel Rubtsov).

Another area of disinformation operations focused on infiltrating opposition groups hostile to the USSR. These efforts largely relied on methods drawn from earlier 'legend-based' operational games. Their *modus operandi* typically involved seizing control of opposition groups or creating fictitious organisations fully controlled by Soviet intelligence. This was followed by establishing contact, conducting infiltration, and exploiting these groups in line with Russian state interests. As part of these operations, disinformation played a key role – through deception, disintegration, and discrediting of the targeted entities.

One distinct sphere of modern disinformation is competitive rivalry, where – similar to politics – disinformation tools are employed to mislead competitors, with the primary aim of protecting one's resources and market position. Offensive strategies are used less frequently. Specialised organisations, such as private military companies and business intelligence agencies, offer tailored disinformation and counter-disinformation services. Modern disinformation has become a high-value

commodity capable of influencing not only business decisions but also political events, including parliamentary and presidential elections (e.g., the U.S. and German elections).

Specialised entities – no longer limited to intelligence services – focused on communication and psychological analysis can, using publicly available data, devise action plans, some of which rely on soft disinformation. This approach stimulates desired behaviours that can lead, for example, to the removal of an incumbent government or, in extreme cases, to a coup, including armed uprisings.

Disinformation campaigns also have a profound impact on social life and are firmly embedded in the digital realm. The online space is inundated with fabricated and false content disseminated by individuals and groups, with recipients often unwilling or unable to verify the information, frequently amplifying the original message through their activity. As a result, disinformation is replicated many times and evolves independently of its originator once introduced. Both state and non-state actors use this model. Moreover, many players on the ‘disinformation chessboard’ (especially intelligence services) often rely on external entities, either operating in cyberspace or functioning as cover organisations (legend-based). Such ‘independent’ groups, including troll farms, frequently operate from Russia, directly supporting or executing tasks assigned by Russian intelligence and counterintelligence.

A defining feature of contemporary disinformation is the mass scale of attacks and the widespread availability of fabricated data, making disinformation operations no longer the sole domain of intelligence agencies but accessible to virtually any cyber user. To subjugate a state, it is no longer necessary to initiate a military conflict; conducting more or less sophisticated disinformation campaigns targeting its society can suffice.

Disinformation has also become a weapon for organised crime groups and terrorist organisations. The latter, in particular, exploit the internet to conduct global-scale operations that not only promote political agendas and incite hatred but also create support networks for terrorist activities, including recruitment and funding for armed operations. Their disinformation campaigns aim to shield their activities while using propaganda tools to attract new sympathisers and members (especially among terrorist organisations and radical movements).

The end of the Cold War did not fundamentally change the balance of power or the main actors in the realm of disinformation. The key players remain the same, although the range of tools and techniques employed in disinformation operations has evolved. The primary adversaries continue to be the United States, NATO member states, and Washington's allies – particularly those opposing the aggressive actions of Russia, China, Iran, and various non-state actors.

Discussion of the term

For centuries, complex disinformation operations carried out through spies, fabricated documents, and false or partially falsified information disseminated via state institutions have been employed not only by great military commanders but also by politicians. It was Machiavelli, after all, who advised rulers to employ deceit and trickery – that is, disinformation – whenever it served the interests of the state. In the 21st century, knowledge of the mechanisms of disinformation operations is far more detailed. However, this does not mean that we possess procedures or tools capable of effectively countering disinformation attacks. The phenomenon continues to evolve and is used by state actors, non-state entities in international relations, and even individual players.

Lies, deception, fraud, and manipulation remain inherent aspects of human behaviour, defying organisational and legal frameworks. Such actions are embedded in human history, representing a civilisational choice made by both societies collectively and individuals. For this reason, disinformation must be continuously monitored, studied, and analysed. An example of such an approach is the Russian view of disinformation, which is largely rooted in the historical tradition of the Russian state, its foreign policy, models of governance, and social structure. To understand Russian disinformation, one must first understand the mentality of the Russian people as this is key to grasping the nature of disinformation activities carried out by both the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia (similarly, Chinese disinformation practices are deeply rooted in the ancient art of strategy). Once developed, disinformation models are applied either fully or selectively, regardless of whether they are known or documented.

Creativity in this field knows virtually no limits. Undoubtedly, one of the most striking successes of modern Russian disinformation operations was convincing the West – including its political and economic elites, as well as public opinion – that contemporary Russia was a trustworthy partner that understood the global geopolitical order. Warnings from Central and Eastern European governments – arguing that this was simply a modern variant of Soviet *maskirovka* and, more broadly, disinformation – were largely ignored. To reinforce this narrative, the Kremlin deliberately projected its ‘openness’ to suggest to the West that it had nothing to hide. Simultaneously, while reforming its military, Russia strengthened its disinformation efforts. With this groundwork laid, it was free to employ force and conduct disinformation campaigns against its own society, other states (including neighbouring countries), and targeted ethnic groups or nations. The strategic objective of these actions was to reverse global processes, maintain Putin’s hold on power, and shape a new geopolitical order with Russia as a central and equal player.

Until the Cold War, disinformation was largely confined to the sphere of military and intelligence operations. However, technological advances, the information revolution, and the rise of mass media transformed disinformation into a powerful tool for influencing public opinion on a global scale. With the growing importance of media in social life, disinformation has come to affect virtually all of humanity. It has become a permanent feature of not only international relations but also competitive business environments and the shaping of social behaviour. The digital and technological revolutions have made disinformation a continuous process with a worldwide reach.

China is a particularly active player that has emerged on this stage over the past two decades, pursuing its own strategic political and economic objectives. Non-state actors have also entered the disinformation battlefield, including large corporations, organised crime groups, terrorist organisations, and ‘lone wolves’ (terrorists acting independently or in small, ad hoc groups). Many of these actors are not linked to any organisation – state or otherwise – and may engage in disinformation activities without fully realising their nature. However, the most serious threat comes from those who are trained, well-prepared, and act with deliberate intent. Some operate as subcontractors, executing assignments on

behalf of various entities. Considering the environment, expertise, and capabilities of these modern 'mercenaries of disinformation', detecting their activities, linking them to their sponsors, and effectively countering them is an almost impossible task.

It can therefore be concluded that disinformation has evolved from a relatively simple ruse or stratagem into a global threat with profound consequences. It affects not only individual states and national or ethnic groups but, above all, societies on a global scale. Today, disinformation represents a serious challenge to the contemporary architecture of global security at every level of its functioning.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

Disinformation entered official press and academic discourse only after World War II, although the first doctrines and operational tools were being developed and refined as early as the 1920s. Through extensive research, the international community has come to understand Soviet and Russian intelligence operations in which methods and techniques characteristic of disinformation were widely employed to advance the political objectives of the state, both internationally and domestically.

To strengthen efforts against disinformation and build societal resilience, actors in international relations – particularly the member states of the European Union – should develop both national and international capabilities for defence and response against potential disinformation actors. The implementation of effective legal and structural solutions by states would undoubtedly enhance information exchange, creating a universal security architecture that not only enables the effective repulsion of disinformation operations but also allows for pre-emptive action. A further step must involve a consistent and well-organised campaign to impose sanctions on individuals and entities engaged in disinformation activities, alongside strict enforcement of such sanctions. Another essential platform for countering disinformation is a large-scale public education program aimed at politicians, civil servants, state and non-state actors, and society as a whole. Undoubtedly, in building resilience to disinformation, a deliberate and systematic information policy

is crucial. Such a policy should include coordinated actions to inform the public not only about the state's counter-disinformation capabilities but also about all recorded disinformation incidents and the measures taken to repel attacks and minimise their effects. This comprehensive approach to disinformation, in the broad sense, would force disinformation actors to increase the cost of their operations, thereby reducing or partially neutralising the threat.

Given these considerations, states vulnerable to disinformation threats should establish a specialised unit or institution tasked with monitoring, detecting, analysing, and countering disinformation campaigns. To perform these tasks effectively, such an institution must have sufficient funding and a well-trained, experienced staff capable of responding in both traditional media and digital environments. It is also essential that this institution have access to classified data and be able to collaborate with other entities engaged in countering disinformation.

Ultimately, every democratic state should develop a comprehensive security architecture to combat disinformation. This architecture should rely not only on specialised institutions, security services, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector, but, above all, on the active engagement of society as a whole. Such a systemic approach would significantly reduce the burden on state security structures and facilitate the creation of a multi-layered platform capable of effectively countering disinformation threats.

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Sharp power

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Sharp power is a concept in political science and international relations that describes a form of influence exerted by authoritarian states over democratic ones through the aggressive and sophisticated use of informational tactics (such as disinformation, manipulation, propaganda, etc.). The goal of sharp power is to undermine the political system of the target state, mislead and divide its public opinion, and obscure or deflect attention from negative information about the authoritarian state itself.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: The term 'sharp power' was introduced in a 2017 publication by the National Endowment for Democracy in the United States. It contributes to contemporary debates on the nature of power in international relations and complements earlier conceptualisations such as hard power, soft power, smart power, and normative power.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Today, sharp power is especially effective and dangerous when deployed by large authoritarian states that adopt a confrontational stance toward the West, most notably Russia and China.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The aggressive use of information as a strategic weapon represents a serious and evolving threat that demands a twofold response from democratic states: preparation (through building societal resilience to informational attacks) and mitigation (via counter-narratives and the

restriction of particularly harmful content). This challenge also calls for deeper reflection on the internal condition of modern democracies, which have proven especially susceptible to informational attacks.

Keywords: sharp power, power, Russia, China, disinformation

Definition of the term

In the field of international relations, the English term *power* is a polysemous concept, the interpretation of which should be situated within the context of cognate terms such as *might*, *force*, *influence*, *energy*, and *authority*.

These meanings can be further clarified as follows:

1. 'Might' refers to a state's capacity and scope for exercising authority over its territory or the environment in which it operates.
2. 'Force' denotes the ability to actually and effectively employ might.
3. 'Influence' is the ability to achieve a desired effect, including control over other states.
4. 'Energy' indicates the capacity to activate or mobilise might.
5. 'Authority' pertains to the decision-making power of those directing a state's policy (Łoś, 2018).

In studies grounded in Robert Dahl's seminal 1957 article, three fundamental aspects of power are distinguished:

1. The ability to persuade others to do what they would not otherwise do – that is, to induce them to act against their initial preferences or strategies.
2. The ability to act in a way that renders the preferences of others irrelevant or illegitimate.
3. The ability to shape the initial preferences of others.

These three aspects of power can be exercised through 'hard' means, based on coercion and imposition, or 'soft' means, based on persuasion and attraction. A more concise definition is offered by John G. Stoessinger, who described power in international relations as "the capacity of a nation to use its tangible and intangible resources in such a way as to affect the behaviour of other nations" (Stoessinger, 1990, pp. 24–25).

One of the most influential contemporary contributions to the concept of power comes from Joseph S. Nye, who popularised the distinction between hard power and soft power. He defined power as "the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants" (Nye, 2004, p. 2). This can be achieved through coercion, inducement, or attraction (Nye, 2004).

Hard power is the ability to compel others to do what they otherwise would not through threats or rewards. It relies on coercion and inducement, with military and economic strength playing a central role. Soft power, by contrast, is the ability to attract others so that they want what the power-holder wants. It lies in the capacity to shape others' preferences. A country's soft power is based on three key resources: 1) national culture (both high and popular), which must be seen as attractive by others; 2) political values, which the state must uphold in both domestic and foreign policy; 3) foreign policy, which should be viewed as legitimate and supported by moral authority. The use of soft power is typical of democratic states operating in relatively friendly environments, where combining inducement and attraction is more feasible than in authoritarian states, which, by contrast, tend to rely primarily on coercion (Nye, 2004).

Nye consistently refined the concept of soft power from the outset, optimising it for effective use in shaping U.S. foreign policy. This effort led to the development of smart power, which involves the skilful combination of both hard and soft elements, using coercion, inducement, and attraction simultaneously by drawing on military strength and cultural and economic appeal (Nye, 2011).

Nye began developing the idea of soft power in 1990, publishing his seminal work on the topic in 2004. His most comprehensive discussion of smart power appeared in 2011. During this time, sweeping technological transformations reshaped social life, and significant and often violent geopolitical changes occurred. As a result, earlier concepts no longer fully captured the realities of international politics. As Andis Kudors (2024) observed, although the concept of soft power remains relevant, it is now insufficient on its own.

In this context, the concept of sharp power emerged, referring to a form of influence that is penetrative, manipulative, or subversive in nature. Coined by the National Endowment for Democracy, the term first appeared in a 2017 report (Walker et al., 2017) in which the authors observed the growing authoritarian influence of countries such as Russia and China. They noted that illiberal regimes are increasingly seeking to penetrate democratic societies by exploiting globalisation-era tools: manipulating information, pressuring political and economic actors, and conducting cyberattacks. Here are several quotations from the publication:

This authoritarian influence is not principally about attraction or even persuasion; instead, it centres on distraction and manipulation. These ambitious authoritarian regimes, which systematically suppress political pluralism and free expression at home, are increasingly seeking to apply similar principles internationally to secure their interests (Walker et al., 2017, p. 6).

Some of the most visible authoritarian influence techniques used by countries such as China and Russia, while not “hard” in the openly coercive sense, are not really “soft” either (Walker et al., 2017, p. 6).

We are in need of a new vocabulary for this phenomenon. What we have to date understood as authoritarian “soft power” is better categorised as “sharp power” that pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries. In the new competition that is under way between autocratic and democratic states, the repressive regimes’ “sharp power” techniques should be seen as the tip of their dagger – or indeed as their syringe (Walker et al., 2017, p. 6)

The concept of sharp power refers to a form of influence exerted by authoritarian states over democratic ones through the aggressive and sophisticated use of informational tactics (such as disinformation, manipulation, propaganda, etc.). The goal of sharp power is to undermine the political system of the target state, mislead and divide public opinion, and obscure or deflect attention from negative information about the authoritarian state itself.

Łukasz Skoneczny and Bogusław Cacko defined sharp power as:

aggressive actions of the state carried out with the use of methods imitating soft power elements in order to manipulate the image of a given country (or other entities of international relations), or to destabilise its socio-political system, or to force certain actions by its authorities (Skoneczny & Cacko, 2021, p. 329).

Alternatively, sharp power may be seen as a form of failed soft power employed by authoritarian states (Kudors, 2024), or as an ineffectual attempt to combine hard power and soft power (Tabarintseva-Romanova, 2021).

What primarily distinguishes sharp power from soft power is intent. Unlike soft power, which seeks to attract and inspire cooperation by projecting cultural and political appeal, sharp power is designed to cause

harm and degrade the social fabric of the targeted state. It represents a manipulative and malign inversion of soft power. Authoritarian states lack the institutional and societal foundations to authentically project soft power, which depends not only on state institutions but also on a free civil society and market economy. Consequently, such regimes rely on state-sponsored cultural and academic institutions as well as government-controlled media outlets to carry out destabilising actions.

The concept of sharp power is normative in nature. It goes beyond diagnosing the current state of affairs to articulating how things ought to be. It is grounded in the belief that democracy is superior to authoritarianism and that the rule of law is preferable to legal nihilism (Kudors, 2024).

In response to the emergence of this concept, Joseph S. Nye (2018) argued that sharp power, understood as “the deceptive use of information for hostile purposes, is a type of hard power” as it relies more on coercion than attraction. While this form of influence can be situated within the broader hard power–soft power dichotomy, it is crucial to emphasise that sharp power bears little resemblance to the military or economic instruments typically associated with hard power. It operates within the realm of ideas, not material force (Kudors, 2024), and its primary resource is information (see Table 1).

Table 1. Types of power and their characteristics

Type of power	Hard power	Soft power	Smart power	Sharp power	Normative power
Primary actor (power holder)	The state	Any actor actively engaged in foreign policy	The state + any actor involved in foreign policy <i>Particularly important role of expert institutions and innovation centres</i>	The state + any actor involved in foreign policy <i>Particularly important role of the media, including social media</i>	Supranational structures
Core resources used	Military and economic capabilities	Economy, culture, sports, science, education	Economy, culture, sports, science, education + military capabilities + international agreements	Information	Norms, values (including human rights and the UN Sustainable Development Goals), ideas, climate
Examples of implementation	Power-based diplomacy, 'gunboat diplomacy'	Cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy, science diplomacy, brand diplomacy	Smart diplomacy (traditional diplomacy supported by new technologies, public-private partnerships, and diaspora networks), feminist diplomacy, energy sources diplomacy	Hybrid diplomacy, digital diplomacy, 'ping-pong diplomacy'	Climate (water) diplomacy, human rights diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, vaccine diplomacy

Source: Tabarintseva-Romanova, 2021.

Sharp power has developed under specific geopolitical conditions. As Christopher Walker (2016) notes, for a quarter of a century the democratic West pursued a strategy of integrating non-democratic regimes such as Russia and China into the liberal international order. The aim was to draw these regimes into mechanisms of interdependence, with the expectation that this would yield mutual benefits and at least foster the hope that authoritarian states would gradually reform along the lines of Western democracies. However, the opposite occurred. According to Walker, most of these repressive regimes have deepened their authoritarianism and turned it outward. By leveraging globalisation and their integration with the West, these states have set out to undermine the very international institutions and democratic countries that had once opened up to them in good faith. As Walker wrote:

Today, authoritarian regimes are projecting power beyond their borders. They are targeting crucial democratic institutions, including elections and the media. They use deep economic and business ties to export corrupt practices and insinuate themselves into the politics of democracies, both new and established (Walker, 2016, pp. 49–50).

Authoritarian states like Russia and China have taken advantage of globalisation and the mimicry of democratic forms to develop a set of tools, methods, and techniques that represent a distorted reflection of democratic soft power. Their arsenal includes, for instance, government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) that mimic authentic civil society groups; pseudo-election observation missions (so-called zombie election monitoring) that serve to legitimise fraudulent electoral processes; foreign aid, investment, and expansive activity in both traditional and digital media (Walker, 2016).

The primary aim of sharp power is to erode democracy. As Andis Kudors (2024) observed, its most destructive effects target the core elements of democratic systems: freedom of the press, freedom of speech, the rule of law, human rights, free and fair elections, and the separation of powers. By fostering and exacerbating divisions within target societies, sharp power undermines democracy, weakens national security, and creates new threats.

A defining feature of sharp power is the asymmetry between the authoritarian actor deploying it and the democratic target. Authoritarian

states exploit the openness of liberal democracies to spread their disruptive narratives while simultaneously shielding themselves from external informational influence. Furthermore, they employ both overt and covert tactics to intimidate or restrict journalists working in democratic countries who attempt to report critically on authoritarian regimes. This asymmetry is often also a matter of unequal resources: smaller democratic states typically lack the financial capacity to engage in international media outreach robust enough to counterbalance the ambitions and aggressiveness of well-funded authoritarian regimes (Kudors, 2024).

Historical analysis of the term

As Joseph S. Nye observed:

The manipulation of ideas, political perceptions, and electoral processes has a long history. Both the United States and the Soviet Union resorted to such methods during the Cold War. [...] What's new is not the basic model; it's the speed with which such disinformation can spread and the low cost of spreading it (Nye, 2018).

As he vividly remarked: “Electrons are cheaper, faster, safer, and more deniable than spies” (Nye, 2018).

Attempts to identify historical examples of sharp power are by definition somewhat anachronistic as the concept emerged in a distinctly modern geopolitical and technological context. Nevertheless, certain historical cases of what Nye calls “the deceptive use of information for hostile purposes” remain strikingly relevant. They support Nye’s claim that the fundamental pattern of what we now label ‘sharp power’ has long existed. One such example comes from the 19th century, another from the 20th. This is not a historical analysis of the concept itself but rather of phenomena that resemble what we now understand as sharp power.

The anti-Polish propaganda campaign following the January Uprising of 1863 occurred during the early development of what we now call ‘mass media’, when the written word remained the principal tool of influence. At that time, the immense power of journalism as a political weapon became evident. Russian press coverage of the

Polish independence movement was marked by brutality, chauvinism, and fanaticism. The campaign enjoyed full support from the Tsarist regime and the approval of Russian society. The most prominent voice in this press offensive was Mikhail Katkov (1818–1887), who published in “Moskovskie Vedomosti” and “Russkii Vestnik”. Polish historian Jan Kucharzewski described Katkov’s writings as follows:

Katkov sounds the alarm about the Polish threat, presenting the Polish movement as a demonic force from which all evils afflicting Russia originate. At the same time, he belittles and ridicules the Polish cause as fictitious, artificially inflated, and essentially non-existent. He calls for a fight to the death and urges that the enemy be treated with contempt and derision by the entire world. He wounds the enemy, insults him, tramples on him, and strikes again. He proclaims that the enemy is already a corpse but insists he must be beaten endlessly” (as quoted in: Piątkowski, 1999, p. 58).

Katkov attacked a vision of Poland that he had himself constructed to justify an aggressive political campaign. He created the image of a collective enemy threatening the Russian Empire. As he wrote:

Poland is dead, but its ghost, like a vampire, returns to suck the blood of the living – and this Polish vampire is the greatest plague upon the Poles themselves. Their enemy is not the one who drives the vampire away but the one who summons it” (as quoted in: Piątkowski, 1999, p. 61).

Katkov portrayed the suppression of Polish independence efforts as a historical necessity:

Polish patriotism is a spectre risen from the grave, having nothing to do with real life, ready to drink the blood of the living. The entire strength of the current Polish uprising lies in sentimentality and nostalgia. Women will weep, youth will perish, clergy will incite both, but no matter how many times this tragic phenomenon is repeated, history will not change its course (as quoted in: Piątkowski, 1999, p. 61).

Katkov also struck at the social fabric of the Polish population. He claimed the January Uprising was not a national movement but the work of the nobility and clergy:

Intrigue, everywhere intrigue, perverse Jesuitical intrigue, Jesuitical both in origin and character [...]. There is not the slightest indication of any internal vitality of a resurrecting nation in this uprising; it is merely the profanation of a corpse.

The entire uprising is a monstrous bluff, an intrigue, nothing more. It began as intrigue, feeds on intrigue, produces intrigue, and exploits every intrigue it encounters (as quoted in: Piątkowski, 1999, pp. 61–62).

Katkov's journalism is a vivid example of the political discrediting of an adversary and of deliberate manipulation of the audience's understanding of the events described. It also served to obscure and distract from uncomfortable truths about the Russian Empire – its repressive and backward nature. Like the January Uprising itself, the campaign played a significant role in 19th-century Russian history and symbolised the Empire's turn toward reactionary nationalism.

Operation Denver (also known as Operation Infektion) is a prime example of aggressive, adversary-discrediting information operations conducted during the Cold War. Orchestrated by the KGB, it aimed to spread the narrative that the United States was responsible for the emergence of the HIV virus, which causes AIDS. It was preceded by two suggestive disinformation 'leaks' in 1985 concerning an alleged American programme to develop 'ethnic-biological weapons'. The first claim alleged that the U.S., in collaboration with the South African government, had developed a bomb designed to kill Black individuals while sparing white people. The second claimed that the U.S. and Israel had co-developed a weapon targeting Arabs while leaving Jews unharmed (Leitenberg, 2020). These fabrications gained traction due to lingering public anxieties over the U.S.'s prior experimentation with biological weapons during the Vietnam War (Stoner, 2021).

Historians of intelligence services regard Operation Denver as one of the most effective disinformation campaigns of the Cold War, skillfully combining overt propaganda with covert KGB operations. The first public mention of the alleged American origin of HIV appeared in the Indian newspaper "The Patriot", which was established by the KGB in 1962 for the specific purpose of disseminating disinformation. The operation gained significant momentum in October 1985 when the Soviet newspaper "Literaturnaya Gazeta" published an article titled *Panic in the West, or what lies behind the sensationalism surrounding AIDS*. This marked the beginning of a coordinated media campaign across Soviet outlets. According to the narrative, HIV had been engineered at Fort Detrick, a U.S. Army research facility, using genetic engineering as part of a classified biological weapons programme. The campaign

further claimed that the U.S. had deliberately released the virus in Africa to cause mass fatalities among the local population. Historians note the extensive international reach of this disinformation campaign: the false narrative appeared in 13 countries in 1985, 49 countries in 1986, and 67 countries in the first half of 1987. U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz raised the issue directly with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, demanding an end to the fabrications. Gorbachev reportedly replied, “We are telling the truth, only the truth”, and expressed frustration, stating that the American accusations contradicted the spirit of *glasnost*.

It was not until 1992 that Yevgeny Primakov, then head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, publicly admitted that the story about the Pentagon’s deliberate creation of HIV had been fabricated by the KGB (Leitenberg, 2020).

Discussion of the term

Methods of sharp power

Andis Kudors, author of an in-depth analysis of Russian policy toward Latvia, identifies nine key methods and techniques of sharp power, based on his observations of Russian activities:

1. Control of narratives. A narrative refers to a spoken or written story that conveys the author’s particular viewpoint on a thing, person, or process. Narratives help audiences interpret situations and assess events through the lens of specific values and myths. Those employed in sharp power strategies typically emphasise a stark division between friends and enemies, advancing ideas and concepts favourable to the propagating actor. These narratives are directed at the social fabric of the targeted society, are often long-lasting, and are saturated with mythic content and emotional intensity, all features that hinder their verification and neutralisation.
2. News ‘voices’. The use of propagandists, politicians, and political scientists with close ties to the regime as influential opinion leaders. They often hold prominent positions in the media ecosystem (e.g., hosting prime-time television programmes)

and focus on foreign policy issues. Their messages, and those of their guests, are frequently aimed at both domestic and international audiences.

3. Synchronicity. This refers to the simultaneous dissemination of identical explanations for a given event across a wide range of state-controlled media outlets (television, online platforms, news agencies, etc.). This strategy fosters the impression that a given interpretation is credible simply because it is echoed by numerous sources. Such uniformity is possible only in authoritarian environments, where access to competing ideologically diverse media is absent.
4. Spin doctoring. This involves turning the message of any news into its opposite. The technique relies heavily on commentary and interpretation, which replace factual reporting.
5. Visual manipulation techniques. This includes staged scenes, selective editing, the use of amateur video recordings, and the deployment of illustrative images or graphics that are unrelated to the events being described but support a particular agenda.
6. Disinformation. Defined as the intentional dissemination of false (or selectively accurate) information designed to prompt a specific audience's reaction that aligns with the goals of the disseminator.
7. Propaganda. Propaganda is one-sided information designed to elicit an emotional response while suppressing rational, critical thought. Unlike accurate reporting or education, which aim to broaden the audience's perspective, propaganda narrows it by offering predetermined answers to complex questions. Through concealed and often sophisticated (e.g., artistic) persuasive techniques, the propagandist guides the audience through a narrowing cognitive tunnel toward an allegedly self-evident 'truth'.
8. Cultivating hatred and fear. Fear may trigger aggression or lead to paralysis, rendering the target unable to respond. Authoritarian states seek to intimidate neighbouring populations as a means of control. They also promote hatred and hostility, which in turn intensify fear.
9. Conspiracy theories. Such theories refer to the belief that an event is the result of a secret plan orchestrated by a hidden

actor. They are harmful to democracy because they hinder the development of civil society. In a world where everything is perceived as controlled by malevolent elites and shadowy groups, grassroots initiatives and civic engagement lose their meaning. Conspiracy theories serve to cultivate fear and hatred as their simplified worldview makes it easy to draw a sharp line between friends and enemies, attributing all negative traits to the latter. They also distort the assessment of facts and blur the line between truth and falsehood, creating ideal conditions for actors seeking to project their own sharp power (Kudors, 2024).

Russian sharp power

In their valuable study, Serhiy Orlov and Olha Ivasechko (2024) identified five core domains through which Russia projects sharp power: media, culture and entertainment, academia, the economy, and technology.

In the media sphere, the leading outlets are RT, Sputnik, and Channel One (Pervyj). The content disseminated through these channels is often characterised by manipulation and disinformation. Since 2022, new media platforms, especially YouTube, TikTok, and Telegram, have played an increasingly central role in spreading disinformation. TikTok, a Chinese social media platform, has proven particularly effective due to its interface and algorithms, which easily keep users inside 'filter bubbles' and allow for the efficient spread of one-sided narratives about the war. Hashtags such as #RussianLivesMatter and #SvoichNieBrosaiem are widely used to reinforce these messages (Orlov & Ivasechko, 2024).

One frequently used technique is the creation of information noise. The term 'infonoise' refers to an overwhelming stream of low-value or meaningless news, often generated by politicians or officials. As a result, audiences become fatigued and lose trust in media as a source of reliable information. Another technique is 'pink slime journalism', which refers to the deliberate creation of news distribution networks that promote disinformation. The term originates from the food industry, where 'pink slime' denotes a cheap filler added to meat products. Analogously, pink slime journalism produces a low-cost, low-quality substitute for credible reporting. These networks

often take the form of supposedly local, independent news outlets that are in fact managed by low-paid freelancers or bots. They publish politically biased propagandistic content and blend credible sources with material from Russian agencies to lend a veneer of legitimacy.

Similar practices are found on content aggregator platforms, such as Digg, Reddit, and Wykop in Poland. These platforms allow users to share links and engage in discussions that can artificially elevate certain narratives. While aggregators can facilitate the sharing of valuable information, they also enable the spread of unverified or false content, especially when it is mixed with credible reporting. The broader goal of pink slime journalism is to undermine trust in legitimate media, spread disinformation, and manipulate public opinion (Orlov & Ivasechko, 2024).

One example of such manipulation through aggregators is the 'Pizzagate' conspiracy, which was fuelled by Russian trolls in the United States in 2016. The fabricated story claimed that Hillary Clinton operated a child trafficking ring in the basement of Comet Ping Pong Pizza, a restaurant popular among Democrats. Posts about the story appeared on Reddit, 4chan, and Twitter. At the height of the hysteria, a 28-year-old man from North Carolina travelled to Washington, D.C., armed with an AR-15 rifle, intending to 'rescue' children he believed were being held captive (Stoner, 2021).

Another sharp power technique is framing. This involves selecting a stereotypical, simplified 'frame' through which to depict an individual, group, demographic community, institution, or state. A prime example is the constructed and carefully maintained image of Vladimir Putin as a charismatic leader (Orlov & Ivasechko, 2024).

Spin doctoring, i.e., the deliberate inversion of meaning in news content, is illustrated by Andis Kudors in his analysis of the Poland–Belarus border crisis. This crisis was deliberately provoked by Alexander Lukashenko, who facilitated the arrival of migrants from Iraq and pushed them toward the fortified Polish border. However, Belarusian and Russian media reversed the narrative: they blamed the European Union for the crisis, accused Poland of lacking humanitarian concern, and went so far as to claim that Ukraine was supplying weapons to the Iraqi migrants to incite conflict at the border (Kudors, 2024).

In the realm of culture and entertainment, Russian sharp power relies heavily on narrativisation, i.e., the strategic use of storytelling as a tool

of influence. Narratives function as persuasive mechanisms, providing simplified explanatory frameworks and drawing attention. The human mind reacts far more strongly to stories than to abstract facts, which makes the narrative – a story-based, simplified explanation of reality – easier to absorb with minimal resistance or scepticism. Contemporary Russian information space is saturated with recurring slogan-narratives such as: “Russia is an innocent victim”. “The collapse of Western civilisation is inevitable”, and “Grassroots social movements are U.S.-sponsored colour revolutions” (Orlov & Ivasechko, 2024). Narratives require historical context as they rely on the past as a foundation. This is why the politics of memory plays such a central role in Russia’s strategy of narrativisation. According to Ukrainian researchers, Russia uses the politics of memory not only to promote a positive image of the state but also to strengthen a shared group identity and discredit other nations through historical analogies – the most striking example being the frequent labelling of Ukrainians as ‘Kiev neo-Nazis’ (Orlov & Ivasechko, 2024, p. 272).

The dissemination of such narratives is led by so-called ‘opinion leaders’ – in practice, state-aligned propagandists who are caricatures of credible journalists in countries with press freedom. One notable figure is Vladimir Solovyov, who hosts politically charged programmes on Russian state television filled with inflammatory rhetoric targeting the United States, the Baltic states, Ukraine, and Poland (Kudors, 2024).

Another significant conception is that of the ‘russkiy mir’ (the Russian world), which carries geopolitical, axiological, and cultural dimensions (Orzechowski, 2024). Russia effectively uses the notion of compatriots, referring not only to Russian citizens but also to individuals abroad who, according to Moscow, express interest in Russia, care about its present and future, and remain within the orbit of the ‘russkiy mir’. This conception exerts strong influence across the post-Soviet space. At the institutional level, these efforts are led by organisations such as Rossotrudnichestvo and the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Orlov & Ivasechko, 2024).

Russian sharp power also extends into the academic sphere. It includes partnerships between research institutions, the organisation of conferences and debates on controversial topics, and efforts to reinforce pro-Russian narratives, including a series of ‘anti-Russophobia’ conferences held in various countries. Particularly important are Russkiy

Mir centres and their smaller counterparts, Russkiy Mir cabinets. Modelled after China's Confucius Institutes or Germany's Goethe-Instituts, they formally operate as centres promoting Russian language and culture. In practice, however, their activities often go beyond education and include intelligence gathering and manipulation of academic knowledge (Orlov & Ivasechko, 2024).

In his study of Russian academic activity in the UK, Andrew Foxall noted that Russkiy Mir promotes ideas and values that challenge Western traditions and that its operations are closely coordinated by actors working in the Kremlin's interest. Such influence has been facilitated through agreements signed with universities in Edinburgh, Oxford, and Durham. For instance, in February 2014, just before the annexation of Crimea, a joint event organised by Russkiy Mir and St. Antony's College at Oxford hosted a discussion titled "Cultural Memory in Sevastopol: The Ukrainian City of Russian Glory" (Foxall, 2019).

Concerns about Russian intelligence-gathering operations also emerged at the University of Cambridge, where it was revealed that Veruscript – a sponsor of the Cambridge Intelligence Seminar – had close ties to the upper echelons of Russian business and politics. This raised fears that Veruscript was steering academic debate in a direction favourable to Kremlin interests. As a result, several leading seminar organisers, including a former head of MI6 and the official historian of MI5, withdrew from the project. Another case involved a professor at the University of Bath who, during a previous academic appointment at the University of Copenhagen, acted as a 'talent spotter' for Russian intelligence services (for which he was later convicted in Denmark) (Foxall, 2019).

Yet another manifestation of Russian influence in academia involves the suppression of publications and appearances by scholars critical of Russian authorities. In 2017, a planned academic event at Sciences Po in Paris featuring David Satter, the author of *The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship under Yeltsin and Putin*, was cancelled. Unofficial reports suggested that the university feared losing joint programmes with three Moscow-based institutions. Earlier, in 2014, American scholar Karen Dawisha was denied publication by Cambridge University Press for her book on the ties between business, organised crime, and intelligence agencies in 1990s

St. Petersburg – networks that helped bring Vladimir Putin to power. Both Dawisha and the publisher cited the UK's strict defamation laws as the main obstacle. The book was eventually published by Simon & Schuster under the title *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?*

Chinese sharp power

Although it shares certain features with Russian influence strategies, Chinese sharp power possesses its own distinct characteristics. China seeks to shape narratives in target countries and influence political discourse to align with its strategic interests. Through media control and information manipulation, it attempts to silence criticism and present its policies in a favourable light. By shaping public opinion, China aims to safeguard its economic position and minimise resistance to international initiatives such as its Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese sharp power is exerted by a diverse array of actors, including Chinese intelligence services, diplomatic missions, the People's Liberation Army, business entities, chambers of commerce, the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), cultural institutions, media outlets, students, academics, netizens, and even organised criminal groups (Chazisa & Lutmar, 2025).

One of the most noteworthy dimensions of Chinese sharp power is its broad and innovative use of emerging cutting-edge technologies. Samantha Hoffman characterises China as an example of “tech-enhanced authoritarianism” (Hoffman, 2023). These technological tools are deployed not only domestically to consolidate CCP control but also externally. For example, ‘smart city’ projects that rely on the Internet of Things (IoT) may offer public service benefits but also serve as powerful instruments of population surveillance. China has supported such technologies in countries such as Zimbabwe and Uganda (Hoffman, 2023), where they have been repurposed for political control by those in power. A further concern involves Chinese tools and platforms that facilitate illegal data mining. As Hoffman noted:

Emerging technologies, particularly those that utilise big data, are a critical component of the CCP's efforts to know and manipulate its international audiences. Large datasets can reveal patterns and trends in human behaviour, enabling the

party to better understand public sentiment, which could, among other things, help the party-state to disseminate propaganda more effectively (Hoffman, 2023, p. 88).

The technological dimension of sharp power clearly warrants serious attention. Countering this creeping form of aggression presents a particularly urgent challenge for democratic societies.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

Sharp power is a concept with a distinctly normative character. It arises from a fundamental comparison between democracies and non-democracies, grounded in the premise that the former are superior. This assumption also provides a framework for assessing truth in public life: in free and open societies, where freedom of expression, a free press, and pluralism of ideas are protected, it is easier to verify information, challenge opposing viewpoints, disprove erroneous claims, and expose disinformation. In authoritarian and closed societies, by contrast, freedom of speech is curtailed, media are state-controlled, public narratives are shaped by rigid ideological assumptions, and systemic mechanisms for elevating truth in public discourse are lacking. The external behaviour of democracies and authoritarian regimes is similarly determined. In the realm of ideas, the former attract others through their inherent appeal rooted in freedom, while the latter rely on the sophisticated, cynical, and manipulative use of information to exert influence in pursuit of their own interests.

Sharp power is a deeply politicised concept. It emerged during a period of intensified competition between the liberal West and authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China. This is not only a clash of norms and values but also a geopolitical contest rooted in tangible material interests.

Societies that value freedom and truth must draw strength from those very values. In responding to the deceptive influence of authoritarian regimes, democracies must avoid replicating their methods, such as suppressing free speech, censoring politically inconvenient media, imposing official narratives, or stigmatising dissent.

Authoritarian regimes exploit the current vulnerabilities of democratic societies: declining public trust in government, driven by the detachment of political elites from ordinary citizens; growing social polarisation; the erosion of open debate caused by ideological conformity; the rise of populism; and a failure to address mounting global challenges such as migration and social inequality. Thus, any reflection on the nature of sharp power must also consider the internal condition of the democratic states which are the primary targets of its influence.

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Social communication from the perspective of Catholic social teaching

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: While Catholic social teaching does not offer a binding definition of communication, the Church has long been engaged with this issue, recognising that human beings are inherently communicative and that their participation in communication processes is integral to their humanity.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: Reflections on this subject began in the 19th century. Initially, the Church viewed mass media with reluctance, but discussions on these matters deepened during the pontificate of Pius XII. The Vatican II decree *Inter Mirifica*, along with documents issued by subsequent popes and instructions from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, has played a crucial role in shaping the Church's approach.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: While the Church initially regarded social communication and the media with suspicion, fearing their potential to challenge its position, attitudes began to shift in the 19th century. In the mid-20th century, the Church started to see the media not as a threat but as a neutral tool that could be used in various ways.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: In recent years, the Church has increasingly focused on the rise of new media. As early as 1990, John Paul II acknowledged that technological progress was “transforming the face of the earth” and

that the growing presence of computers had given rise to an information-driven culture. The Church's engagement with this topic is evident on two levels. Internally, it recognises that effective communication through mass media is essential. Externally, it acknowledges the media's expanding influence on the life of contemporary individuals.

Keywords: Church and communication, media, Catholic social teaching, World Communications Day, Pontifical Council for Social Communications

Definition of the term

Social communication is the process through which individuals, groups, and organisations create, exchange, or transmit information in various social contexts. It is inherently interactive as it establishes specific relationships between participants. These relationships can be symmetrical, based on partnership, or asymmetrical, based on dominance and subordination. While interacting, people convey information through signs and symbols – whether verbal, non-verbal, textual, visual, or otherwise – for various purposes, such as informing, influencing, or fostering better cooperation. For effective communication, a semiotic community is necessary, meaning that participants share the same signs and symbols. Therefore, the communication process relies on encoding through clear and comprehensible signals.

In the teachings of the Church, special attention is given to communication processes occurring within and through the mass media. The relationship between the transmission of information and the community – which is a natural environment for human existence – is based on a mutual two-way dependence and sets the direction for any research into the reality of communication. The human community is not only the prerequisite for communication but also its result and purpose. Communication moves towards and originates from communion. The perfect model of communication is God's model of perfect communication – communion (Chrapek, 1990, p. 231).

According to the Christian faith, “the unity and brotherhood of man are the chief aims of all communication and these find their source and model in the central mystery of the eternal communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who live a single divine life (*Communio et Progressio*, point 8). In the context of the Church's teachings, communication goes beyond merely informing, conveying ideas, or expressing feelings. It is primarily about the giving of self in love, with Christ's own “communication” serving as the reference point. As outlined in *Communio et Progressio*, Christ's institution of the Eucharist provides the greatest example of “communication”, which is a communion between God and man, representing the deepest possible model of unity between people (*Communio et Progressio*, point 11).

It is also important to note that the Church's teachings generally do not offer a precise definition of social communication or a clear distinction

between media and communication. Media, as the name suggests, are merely means. While they possess their own language, structure, reach, and audience, they also contribute to creating a culture within which social communication is realised. However, the forms and purposes of major types of communication – such as informing, evaluating, referencing, and producing various programmes – cannot be reduced solely to the media through which they are produced and transmitted. Media are merely one of many tools used in communication (Dumont, 1995, p. 20).

Historical analysis of the term

The Church's initial statements regarding mass media focused on the press and were largely negative. This stance is particularly evident in Pope Gregory XVI's encyclical *Mirari Vos* (MV), issued on 15 August 1832, where the Pope condemned the "harmful and never sufficiently denounced" freedom of the press, criticising "the teaching of those who reject the censure of books as too heavy and onerous a burden" (MV, points 15 – 16).

Gregory XVI's successor, Pius IX, in his first encyclical, *Qui Pluribus* (QP), issued on 9 September 1846, denounced "the unbridled license to think, speak and write", which he argued led to the deterioration of morals (QP, point 18). This perspective was reinforced in the famous *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) and the letter *Quo Graviora* (8 July 1862), where Pius IX wrote:

Let Us be filled, I pray, with the Power of the Spirit of the Lord, with discernment and with virtue, lest just as dumb dogs not having the power to bark, We suffer Our flocks to be as pillage and Our sheep forage for the beasts of the field. And let not anything detain Us from giving ourselves up to all battles for the Glory of God and the salvation of souls (QV).

A relatively new aspect of this stance was the call for the development of newspapers that could counterbalance publications attacking the Church. In the encyclical *Respicientes Ea* (1 November 1870), Pius IX warned against newspapers that corrupt the minds and lives of honest people. However, he also acknowledged that the press had become an

integral part of social life and could serve as a powerful tool for evangelisation, provided it was a 'good press'. The Pope identified "La Civiltà Cattolica" (published since 1850) and "L'Osservatore Romano" (established on 1 July 1861 as the official Vatican newspaper) as prime examples of this. He further elaborated on the role of the 'good press' in the encyclical *Nostris et Nobiscum* (NEN) of 8 December 1849, stressing that it should "check the contagion of bad books" by publishing "short works to build up the faith [and] to instruct the people" written by authors "who are renowned for sound doctrine" (NEN, point 15).

The pontificate of Leo XIII marked a period of deeper and more mature reflection on the role of the press. He significantly contributed to the development of the Catholic press and encouraged vigilance in selecting publications. In his 1882 encyclical *Etsi Nos* (EN), he emphasised that "writings must be opposed by writings" and thus urged that "at any rate in every province, some method of publicly demonstrating what and how great are the duties of all Christians towards the Church should be established by frequent and, as far as possible, daily publications with this object" (EN, 17). In his encyclical *Dall'Alto* (DA) (1890), Leo XIII further reinforced this idea, stating that "it is important that Catholics should oppose the evil press by a press that is good, for the defence of truth, out of love for religion, and to uphold the rights of the Church" (DA, point 9). Notably, Leo XIII was also the first pope to grant an audience to journalists, using these meetings to instruct them on the respect they should show to their readers.

The pontificate of Pius X was defined by his struggle against modernism, leading him to warn against the spread of such errors in the press. In his 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, he underscored the necessity of a bishop's imprimatur. His concerns extended beyond the press to other forms of media. In 1909, the decree *Una Della Principali* forbade Roman clergy from attending cinemas, and three years later the Sacred Consistorial Congregation issued the decree *Circa Actiones Scenicas in Ecclesiis*, which categorically prohibited the screening of films in Catholic churches worldwide due to potential risks and inconveniences (*Decretum Circa Actiones Scenicas in Ecclesiis*, 1912, p. 724). However, this restrictive approach began to shift under his successor. Recognising the growing popularity of films, Benedict XV instructed cardinals to explore how the Vatican could use them as a tool for evangelisation.

Pope Pius XI was the first pope to utilise radio as a means of global communication, broadcasting a message in 1931, which started with the words: “Hear this all nations. Pay attention all who live on Earth”. In 1936, he issued the encyclical *Vigilanti Cura* on motion pictures, in which he emphasised that film production should be guided by Christian moral principles or, at the very least, by natural law, as true art should strive to ennoble and elevate individuals (VC, point I). He acknowledged that no other medium had wielded such a profound influence on the masses as film. While it held the potential for harm,

good motion pictures are capable of exercising a profoundly moral influence upon those who see them. In addition to affording recreation, they are able to arouse noble ideals of life, to communicate valuable conceptions, to impart a better knowledge of the history and the beauties of the Fatherland and of other countries, to present truth and virtue under attractive forms, to create, or at least to favour understanding among nations, social classes, and races, to champion the cause of justice, to give new life to the claims of virtue, and to contribute positively to the genesis of a just social order in the world (VC, point II).

The pontificate of Pius XII marked a deepening of Catholic reflection on the media. He addressed a wide range of specific topics related to the subject but, most significantly, began to view media as an interconnected social phenomenon. Arguably, he laid the foundation for a coherent and systematic Catholic social teaching on mass media. A strong advocate of radio, he actively embraced it as a means of outreach, regularly using the airwaves to deliver speeches and messages. Just one day after his election, he broadcast a radio address to Catholics worldwide. During World War II and its aftermath, he issued a series of messages on key aspects of the Church’s social teaching, including the Radio Message on Whit Sunday marking the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (1 June 1941), the Christmas Address (24 December 1942), and the Radio Message delivered on 1 September 1944. He viewed radio as a powerful tool for overcoming hatred between nations that fosters unity and lays the foundations for lasting peace (Pokorna – Ignatowicz, 2002, p. 45). On 8 September 1957, he published the encyclical *Miranda Prorsus* (MP), which synthesised pre-conciliar Church teachings on mass media, focusing on film, television, and radio. He stated that the Church had welcomed these inventions “not only with great joy, but also with a motherly care and watchfulness, having in mind to protect Her children from every

danger”, as “these new forms of art exercise very great influence on the manner of thinking and acting of individuals and of every group of men” (MP, Introduction). He also explored the subject of Christian communication, the limits of media freedom, and the role of public authorities in media oversight. The encyclical affirmed that state authorities had a duty to supervise the media, emphasising that such regulation should not be perceived as an infringement on personal freedom as it concerned not private life but the public good (MP, Part I). The media must not become an instrument for spreading evil and immorality but should instead contribute to the spiritual and moral development of those who use them. Left unchecked, the media could lead to the lowering of the cultural and moral standards of the masses. The Pope believed that film, radio, and television should not only provide entertainment and leisure but also serve as mediums for expressing thoughts and emotions. They should enrich culture within contemporary society as well as uphold truth and virtue, thus fostering global cooperation and the exchange of spiritual values (MP, Part I). To bring this vision to life, he called for the creation of dedicated offices for film, radio, and television. Staffed by experts and led by a priest, these offices would oversee the implementation of key guidelines for the responsible use of media (MP, Part I).

The period of the Second Vatican Council brought increased attention to issues related to the media and social communication. This concern was formally addressed in the *Inter Mirifica* (IM) decree. The Council Fathers called on all men of good will to support media initiatives that serve the apostolate and promote a truly Christian culture. At the same time, they acknowledged the potential evil that could seep through media messages. The Introduction of the decree states that “the Church recognises that these media, if properly utilised, can be of great service to mankind”. (...) The Church recognises, too, that men can employ these media contrary to the plan of the Creator and to their own loss” (IM, point 2). The responsibility for this misuse lies primarily with those who produce media content – creators and journalists – but also with audiences

who, of their own free choice, make use of these media of communications as readers, viewers or listeners (...). For a proper choice demands that they fully favour those presentations that are outstanding for their moral goodness, their knowledge and their artistic or technical merit. They ought, however, to avoid those that may be a cause or occasion of spiritual harm to themselves (IM, 9).

The decree also highlighted the role of secular, public authorities who have

the duty of protecting and safeguarding true and just freedom of information (...). It ought also to encourage spiritual values, culture and the fine arts and guarantee the rights of those who wish to use the media (IM, 12).

However, *Inter Mirifica* faced criticism for being too superficial and lacking in-depth reflection on the nature and influence of the media. In response to these concerns, the Church published the Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication, *Communio et Progressio* in 1971. This document outlined doctrinal guidelines for social communication from a Christian perspective, highlighting that their purpose is to seek truth and promote human progress. However, the realisation of this goal ultimately depends on the good will of individuals, hence “the importance and ultimate significance of the media of communication depend upon the working of man’s free choice in their use” (*Communio et Progressio*, point 13). The next section of the *Communio et Progressio* instruction highlights the role of media as a driving force behind human progress. By facilitating the exchange of ideas, media can bring people closer together, enhance education at all levels, combat illiteracy, and provide opportunities for continued learning. They promote greater equality by ensuring that all members of society have access to both spiritual enrichment and entertainment; they also enrich human minds (*Communio et Progressio*, point 20). Additionally, the document addressed the issue of moral evaluation and the presence of ‘evil’ in mass media. The approach taken here differs from earlier documents, offering a more nuanced and in-depth perspective. It states that mass media reflect a gradual decline of moral standards across various areas of life. However, according to the authors of the document, the extent to which these media should be blamed for the decline is debatable as they are, in essence, a mirror of social norms or may simply reinforce the existing decline in moral standards (*Communio et Progressio*, point 22). Thus, the media cannot be blamed for all ills and moral decay; instead, they are seen as a *sui generis* mirror reflecting society, with all its flaws. While mass media may contribute to the erosion of moral values in modern life, they are not its sole cause, nor are they a panacea capable of halting this process.

Communio et Progressio also reaffirmed the fundamental freedom to express thoughts and judgments while underscoring the necessity of adhering strictly to the truth in shaping public opinion and disseminating information. It acknowledged that the circulation of information cannot be entirely unrestricted as certain ethical and social considerations – such as the good name of individuals and society, the right to privacy, family and group intimacy, and the right to confidentiality – place necessary limits on this freedom. The document also highlighted the media’s role in the upbringing process, education, and the promotion of culture. Significant attention was given to advertising, recognising both its informative and cognitive benefits while also warning of its potential dangers, including the manipulation of consumers through misleading claims about products and the creation of artificial needs. Additionally, “the vast sums of money spent in advertising threaten the very foundations of the mass media. People can get the impression that the instruments of communication exist solely to stimulate men’s appetites so that these can be satisfied later by the acquisition of the things that have been advertised. Moreover, because of economic demands and pressures, the essential freedom of the media is at stake” (*Communio et Progressio*, point 62).

Another key aspect of the document addressed the media’s responsibility in fostering the progress of mankind and leading people to unity. Achieving this goal requires the proper formation of both audiences and broadcasters, as well as appropriate state involvement. The authorities must prevent freedom of communication and access to information being affected by violence or economic, political, and ideological pressures. Additionally, the need for cooperation between highly developed and developing countries in shaping social communication was emphasised. Such assistance should be provided in a way that preserves traditional customs, folk culture, and artistic expression. Furthermore, this aid should not be mere charity but rather “an exchange that is mutually advantageous” (*Communio et Progressio*, point 94).

The third section of the Instruction examined the role of Catholics in the mass media, emphasising that it influences them in three key ways. First, the media help the Church engage with the contemporary world; second, they facilitate internal dialogue within the Church itself; finally, they “make contemporary opinions and attitudes clear to the Church” (*Communio et Progressio*, point 125).

Pope Paul VI also addressed these issues in his teachings, though his contributions largely reaffirmed the conclusions of the 1971 Instruction without significantly expanding on them. His documents, such as the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, touched on themes related to social communication but did not substantially advance the Church's reflection on the subject.

John Paul II dedicated significant attention to social communication and the mass media, addressing these issues in numerous documents, including encyclicals, annual messages for World Communications Day, and various speeches and letters. He viewed the media as a bridge between faith and culture, recognising them as a product of the creativity of man, who continues God's creative and redemptive work, as "gifts of God" and as "wonderful instruments at man's disposal, under God's Providence", serving the Church's mission in the world. As instruments at the service of individuals and society, the mass media uphold the fundamental right to information, which is an essential prerequisite for social communication to contribute to the common good and social progress. However, this right must be accompanied by the right to the truth, i.e., objective information. Another fundamental value associated with this right is the good. In social communication, mere fidelity to the truth is not enough as the good of the recipient, both an individual and a community, must also be considered. Furthermore, social communication should maintain 'internal freedom', remaining independent of power structures, personal or self-serving interests, and ideological or economic pressures that can distort its message. Social communication not only fosters communion but also originates from it. In his 1987 message, *Social Communications at the Service of Justice and Peace*, he underscored that the mass media have a

duty to denounce all causes of violence and conflict: generalised armaments, commerce of arms, oppression and torture, terrorism of every kind, over-militarisation and an exaggerated concern for national security, North-South tension, and all forms of domination, occupation, repression, exploitation and discrimination (*Message for the 21st World Communications Day: Social Communications at the Service of Justice and Peace*, 1987).

In his Message for the 22nd World Communications Day (1988), John Paul II emphasised that the greatest contribution of social communication

lies in its ability to foster bonds between peoples and cultures. Effective communication, however, demands more than message delivery; it requires senders to be fully attuned to recipients, conveying content that serves the latter's good while also being open to listening to them. The perfect embodiment of this unity between a sender and a recipient is Jesus Christ. The dialogue between a sender and a recipient naturally evolves from getting to know one another and mutual understanding to co-responsibility and co-participation. Through this process, social communication partners shift from a strategy of terror to one of trust. The latter entails breaking down barriers of mistrust – something the Pope asserts is best achieved through the means of social communication, which transcend racial, social, and cultural divides. Mistrust stems from social, political, or religious intolerance and is fuelled by doubt, whereas “trust is the fruit of a more rigorous ethical attitude at all levels of daily life” (*Message for the 22nd World Communications Day: Social Communications and the Promotion of Solidarity and Fraternity Between Peoples and Nations*, 1988).

John Paul II frequently underscored the crucial role of the recipient in social communication, emphasising their values, worldview, and, in particular, their level of dependence on the sender. The reciprocity of communication, especially feedback, largely hinges on the recipient's intellectual capacity, knowledge, independent thinking, and steadfastness of beliefs. The less mature a recipient is, the greater the risk that communication may devolve into manipulation. Therefore, recipients must be adequately prepared to engage with the content they receive, adopting a critical and active approach. During his pontificate, the Pastoral instruction *Aetatis Novae* (1992) was issued as a complement to *Communio et Progressio*. Its authors observed that mass media wield immense power, shaping not only how people think but also what they think about. For many, reality “is what the media recognise as real; what media do not acknowledge seems of little importance” (*Aetatis Novae*, point 4). The Instruction further pointed out that it is harmful when the media become tools of ideological and political manipulation, and when the pursuit of profit and advertising overtakes the substance of communication; in such cases, popularity becomes more important than quality. A more in-depth reflection on the ethical dimensions of media was provided in the 2000 document *Ethics in Communications*, issued by the Pontifical Council for Social

Communications. It highlighted the positive impact of media across various sectors, including the economy, politics, culture, education, and religion, exemplified by the media's role in supporting business and trade, driving economic growth, improving product quality, fostering responsible competition, strengthening authentic political communities, and granting access to literature, drama, music, and art (*Ethics in Communications*).

Benedict XVI also placed significant emphasis on social communication in his teachings, addressing many of the same concerns as his predecessors while offering new insights. He underscored the responsibility of media professionals, stating that their role lies in “both seeking and transmitting what is the ultimate foundation and meaning of human, personal and social existence”. He cautioned that “the media must avoid becoming spokesmen for economic materialism and ethical relativism” (*Message for the 42nd World Communications Day: The Media: At the Crossroads between Self – Promotion and Service. Searching for the Truth in order to Share it with Others*, 2008, point 5). Regarding new technologies, Benedict XVI recognised their potential to foster dialogue among people of different nations, cultures, and religions. He noted that cyberspace offers opportunities for individuals to encounter and learn about one another's traditions and values. However,

[s]uch encounters, if they are to be fruitful, require honest and appropriate forms of expression together with attentive and respectful listening. The dialogue must be rooted in a genuine and mutual searching for truth if it is to realise its potential to promote growth in understanding and tolerance (*Message for the 43rd World Communications Day: New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship*, 2009).

In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (CV), Benedict XVI emphasised that social communication media do not by themselves inherently promote freedom or globalise development and democracy for all, merely by expanding the potential for mutual connection and the exchange of ideas. To achieve these objectives, communication must be centred on fostering the dignity of persons and peoples and “clearly inspired by charity and placed at the service of truth, of the good, and of natural and supernatural fraternity (CV, point 73).

A similar perspective can be found in the teachings of Pope Francis. In his first message for the 48th World Communications Day, entitled

Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter, he promoted “a culture of encounter” and “drawing closer to one another”. This approach emphasises openness to others, the acceptance of differences, and a willingness to listen and engage in meaningful dialogue, and their core is constituted by language inspired by mercy, which is expressed not only in words but also in attitudes and gestures. Communication must embody these qualities if it is to effectively combat the glaring inequalities and various forms of exclusion. For Francis, the communication of the Gospel means being close to the wounded, the wronged, and the excluded (Nęcek, 2016, p. 96). It is not enough to simply ‘listen to others’: what they have to share must be genuinely ‘heard’. The Pope also advocated for extending the communication style found within the family to all other forms of communication, including the media. The family, after all, is the first place where we learn how to communicate and coexist in diversity, as it brings together individuals of different genders, personalities, views, ages, and life experiences (Pokorna – Ignatowicz, 2022, p. 133). In this context, it is essential to break the vicious cycle of anxiety and the spiral of fear that arise from focusing on negative news (wars, terrorism, and scandals), which are often sensationalised or turned into spectacles. According to Francis, the interpretative framework used to describe reality should not strip recipients of hope and trust, which he calls “storylines that are, at heart, ‘good news’” (Pokorna – Ignatowicz, 2022, pp. 134–135).

Discussion of the term

Initially, the Church regarded social communication and its means, i.e., the mass media, with deep suspicion. This apprehension stemmed from the media’s growing influence on society and the fear that they might undermine the Church’s authority and the values it upholds. However, this perspective changed significantly in the middle of the 20th century, when the Church began to view the media not as a threat but as a neutral tool which can be used in various ways. In his encyclical *Miranda Prorsus*, Pius XII likened the media to humanity’s fulfillment of God’s command to subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28). Similarly, *Communio et Progressio* describes the media as a “gift of God” that fosters friendship

among people. Because of their vast influence on society, the media should be guided by the same ethical and moral principles that govern Christian social life (*Communio et Progressio*, point 6).

From the Church's perspective, social communication is a process of mutual understanding that unfolds within the human community, fostering relationships and collaboration. Both parties involved take on the roles of senders and receivers, whether as individuals or social groups. This distinguishes social communication from the simple one-way transmission of information. True social communication only occurs when it is based on a reciprocal relationship. A crucial aspect of this process is feedback – the response from the receiver, which requires the sender to listen attentively in order to understand how their message has been received.

The Church not only has the right but also the duty to engage with these matters and ensure that social communication, especially through mass media, serves the right purposes and fulfils its intended goals. While mass media are morally neutral (*adialora*), their use can vary greatly. In the *Aetatis Novae* Instruction, it is noted that, in today's world, mass media serve as the "first Areopagus", which unifies humanity and transforms it into a 'global village'.

The means of social communications have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large (*Aetatis Novae*, point 1).

The Church acknowledges the importance of engaging with mass media and the content they convey as part of its mission. When misused, social communication tools can lead to a range of negative phenomena or attitudes. However, they should fulfil their fundamental purpose: fostering cooperation, increasing solidarity, and promoting authentic community. The rise of mass media has made them the primary vehicle and agent of education, effectively taking on roles once held by the family and school. As John Paul II highlighted in his Message for the 19th World Communications Day (1985), traditional education – especially that provided by parents within the family, "which permitted the two-way flow of dialogue" – is increasingly being

replaced by a one-way education. In place of a culture laid down upon a value-content framework, on the quality of the information, there thus enters a culture of the temporary which favours the rejection of long term commitments, with a culture so overpowering that it induces a flight from the making of free personal choices. For a training directed towards encouraging the growth of a sense of responsibility, individual and collective, there is substituted an attitude of passive acceptance towards the fashions and the needs imposed by a materialism which while stimulating consumption of goods, empties the conscience (*Message for the 19th World Communications Day: Social Communications for a Christian Promotion of Youth*, 1985).

Recognising its responsibility in the realm of education, the Church cannot overlook the changes occurring in this area. For this reason, significant emphasis is placed on the issue, particularly with regard to the younger generation, which is most vulnerable to the influence of the contemporary media. The Church cannot ignore the reality of the media; deeply embedded in the worldly context, it must engage with and discern the “signs of the times”. Therefore, it is the Church’s duty to understand the nature of social communication and its tools – the various media – that increasingly shape and influence contemporary individuals. Given its mission, the Church must grasp the principles that govern these media in order to actively participate in the processes of social communication, guiding them in the spirit of Christian values and serving as a *sui generis* ‘spiritual guide’ in the world of media.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

In recent years, the Church has been paying increasing attention to the development of new media. As early as 1990, in his message for the 24th World Communications Day, John Paul II noted that technological progress was “transforming the face of the earth” and that the soaring number of computers gave rise to a “computer culture” (*Message for the 24th World Communications Day: The Christian Message in a Computer Culture*, 1990). In his 2002 message for the 36th World Communications Day, the Pope described the internet as a modern forum akin to those in ancient Rome – a space open to the public where political decisions are made, interests are pursued, and religious duties are fulfilled. For

the Pope, cyberspace represents a new horizon filled with both dangers and opportunities. "For the Church the new world of cyberspace is a summons to the great adventure of using its potential to proclaim the Gospel message" (*Message for the 36th World Communications Day: Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel*, 2002, point 2). While the internet provides vast amounts of knowledge, it does not inherently teach values. When individuals cease to reference values, they risk losing sight of their transcendent dignity. Furthermore, the internet reshapes our psychological relationship with time and space. As users focus on what is immediate, useful, and easily accessible, they may lack the motivation for deeper contemplation. Moreover, because the internet is a forum where everything is permissible and nothing is permanent, it encourages relativistic thinking and can undermine personal responsibility and commitment. Therefore, while the internet holds immense potential for good, it is also frequently exploited for harmful and destructive purposes. For this reason, civil authorities bear the responsibility of ensuring that this tool serves the common good and does not cause harm (*Message for the 36th World Communications Day: Internet: A New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel*, 2002, point 4). Nevertheless, in his 2005 Apostolic Letter to those responsible for communications, the Pope urged that we should not be afraid of new technologies, as they are "among the marvellous things" (...) which God has placed at our disposal to discover, to use and to make known the truth (John Paul II). Thus, within Catholic social teaching, there is not only an acceptance of mass media but also an optimistic view of its potential role in the future.

Advancing globalisation, which fosters mutual connections, has transformed the world into a 'global village' – an open public space where people share ideas, information, and opinions, and where new bonds and forms of community can arise. This creates opportunities for broader dialogue between individuals from diverse countries, cultures, and religions. As Benedict XVI noted, we should rejoice in the emergence of new digital networks "that seek to promote human solidarity, peace and justice, human rights and respect for human life and the good of creation" (*New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship*). These networks have the potential to facilitate cooperation between people from various geographical and cultural contexts, allowing

them to deepen their shared responsibility for the common good, provided that the digital world remains accessible to all. Francis firmly believes that it would be completely incomprehensible for the Church to cut itself off from social media and condemn itself to media exclusion (Nęcek, 2016, p. 119). In fact, popes themselves have actively engaged with these tools – during Benedict XVI's papacy, the official papal YouTube channel was launched, and Francis has become one of the most popular users of Twitter (as of 2023, now called X).

The Church's involvement in this issue is significant and evident on two key levels. Internally, it is clear that the Church cannot function without communication through mass media, which serve as a vital link to the outside world. Externally, it acknowledges the media's expanding influence on the life of contemporary individuals (Pokorna – Ignatowicz, 2002, p. 155). Over the years, the Church has tried to influence media content through administrative means, but this approach has proven ineffective. Today, instead of calling for censorship or restricting freedom of expression, the Church focuses on the importance of proper formation and the individual responsibility of participants in social communication. Senders have specific obligations toward recipients regarding the content they transmit: they must adhere to certain principles and values and take moral responsibility for their work. Catholic senders, in particular, are required to align their actions with the Church's teachings. Similarly, Catholic recipients bear responsibility for the choices they make when engaging with media. They are also called upon to hold senders accountable if they believe that the content being broadcast is inappropriate or contrary to Catholic doctrine. While the Church emphasises the creation and development of its own media, its primary focus today is on influencing secular non-Church media to convey the Gospel message through these channels.

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