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INTRODUCTION

When I was invited to guest edit this special issue of *Studia Humanistyczne AGH: Contribution to Humanities*, Donald Trump had already been thrown off of Twitter, and the COVID-19 pandemic was already raging. Either topic and the challenges of freedom of expression and the damage of disinformation they raised would have been more than enough to serve as the focus of this special issue. By the time the articles for this issue began arriving, Russia had invaded Ukraine and Elon Musk was close to purchasing Twitter. They raise the same issues, through the lenses of truth and propaganda in social media in wartime and the role of big money in media evolution.

These issues are addressed head-on in my article, "The Explosive Growth of Social Media: Trump, COVID-19, the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, Elon Musk," and they are either explicitly addressed in or in the backdrop of every other article in this special issue. Building upon Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, and its thesis that electronic broadcast media engender a Huxleyian *Brave New World* addicted to entertainment, William Merrin's "*Bemusing Ourselves to Death*: Public Discourse in the Age of Social Media" argues that digital media usher in a Philip K. Dickian world in which individuals create and reside in their own informational realities. Harkening back to an Orwellian metaphor, Alexei Krivolap's "Glassman Identity: From Big-Brother to COVID-Passport" explores the way social media for a variety of motives are eradicating private space and secrets in all levels of society. The transparent human has skin that can metaphorically be seen through. Agnieszka Stecko-Żukowska's "The Poachers of Instagram – Tattoo Artists and Their Tactics in Social Media" looks at how makers of art that can actually be seen *on* the skin make use of social media, in a way that "prioritizes cooperation over competition between artists". Urszula Jarecka and Paweł Fortuna delve into the code that makes social media tick in "Social Media in the Future: Under the Sign of Unicorn". They report that AI is at present far from perfection and too "immature" to animate and effectively regulate social media, and they consider its prospects for the future. Monika Grzelka and Agnieszka Kula continue to examine the reality at hand and in "Quotation in Social Media: How Sharing Other People's Words Could Increase Misinformation" find that the ancient and continuing practice of trying to be truthful via quotation could have just the reverse effect and contribute to the plague of misinformation in social media that besets our world. Finally, returning more literally to the plague, Denis Renó, Xabier Martínez-Rolán,

Teresa Piñeiro-Otero, and Andrea Versuti in a preliminary study "COVID-19 and Instagram: An Analysis of the Ibero-American Infodemic" gauge the amount of fake news in the torrent of information about the pandemic in social media.

The common denominator in all of these studies and articles is the speed with which social media have moved into a central position in our lives. This exponential growth and its disruptions of the past and present will no doubt continue, which means that this special issue of *AGH* would best be regarded as a snapshot of the state of social media and the world at the beginning of 2022. The contribution of these articles in the future would be as a marker of where social media and the world resided at this crucial moment in our history.

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THE EXPLOSIVE GROWTH OF SOCIAL MEDIA: TRUMP, COVID-19, THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE, AND ELON MUSK

Social media have arisen to become the world's go-to mode of communication in an astonishing fifteen years. In the past few years, social media themselves have been shaken by Donald Trump's use of Twitter, and by deceptive reporting about many crucial aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. And now, in just the past few months, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has put social media to the test, with an informational war being fought alongside the physical war, and billionaire Elon Musk's attempt to buy Twitter perhaps ending any attempt to limit deceptive posts that jeopardize human lives. This essay examines what is happening.

Keywords: Donald Trump, Elon Musk, Twitter, social media, COVID-19, Russian invasion of Ukraine, media evolution

The pace of the evolution of media has accelerated exponentially. Thousands of years elapsed between the invention of the phonetic alphabet in the Ancient World and Gutenberg's invention of the press with interchangeable type in Europe in the mid-1400s. Hundreds of years then passed between that and the Age of Invention in the 1800s, which brought us the telegraph, photography, the telephone, the phonograph, and motion pictures. And it was just a matter of decades before radio, television, and personal computers appeared in the 20th century (see Levinson, 1998).

All of that happened before the advent of social media, which began with blogging at the end of the 20th century and Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in the very first years of our 21st century, amplified with the iPhone (which first appeared in 2008) and all manner of portable devices which have enabled us to work and play on the Internet outside of and away from our offices and homes. As I argued in my *New New Media* (2009; 2nd ed. 2012), the social media revolution enabled what were once only consumers of all media, including iTunes and Amazon, to become producers. I called these apps "new new media" to distinguish them

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from iTunes and Amazon, new media which at first operated like old media online, allowing their customers to consume but not produce content. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Amazon's Kindle had transformed that company, at least in part, into a "new new medium," by allowing and encouraging any reader to become an author (Levinson, 2014).

When I wrote *New New Media* in 2009, and revised it for a second edition in 2012, I saw social media as an undilutedly democratizing development, and cited the Arab Spring and its use of Twitter and Facebook as supporting evidence. I also cited Barack Obama's two successful campaigns for the Presidency of the United States, and their use of online media in his campaigns, as more evidence of social media as a new bulwark of democracy. Little did I expect that by 2016 the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President and his myriad Tweets would provide a destructive counterargument. (But see Vaccari and Valeriani, 2021, for research that nonetheless still supports a view of social media as a bulwark of democracy.)

Trump's election, and his four years as U.S. President, polluted the river of Twitter with a daily torrent of deceptions and blatant lies, and culminated with his being outrightly banned from Twitter (Twitter, 2021), after a Twitter review of his tweets concluded that he had knowingly stirred up the attack on the U.S. Capitol on 6 January 2021, an attempt to overturn his defeat by Joe Biden in the 2020 election deemed by many (including me) as an outright insurrection. Some people objected that this ban violated Trump's First Amendment rights as an American citizen. But since the First Amendment prohibits the U.S. government from interfering with communication, and Twitter was and is not part of any government, that objection did not apply. I reluctantly agreed with Twitter's banning of Trump, even though I do not like to see censorship in any arena (Levinson, 2021).

Meanwhile, media theorists, most especially Andrey Mir (2020), had begun to notice in Twitter and other social media a profound move away from the truth, long prized as sacred to traditional journalism. Mir observed that in social media instead of the truth of a statement or a report being what counted most, it was how often a statement or report was 'liked' and 'retweeted' (or shared on Facebook) which became the goal of posters.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the problem of disinformation and the damage it can engender. (By the way, I think it is important to distinguish between disinformation or a deliberate attempt to deceive, and misinformation, which is an honest mistake in reporting). Deliberately disseminating false information and conspiracy theories about highly effective vaccines and bogus cures that did not work, and about COVID-19 itself not being such a deadly threat, literally resulted in the loss of human lives (e.g., see Edelman & Sotomayor, 2020).

That was the state of affairs in the world and in social media when I agreed to guest edit this special issue of this journal and contribute an article about the future of social media, in 2021.

And then, two things happened: Russia invaded Ukraine, and Elon Musk announced his intention to buy Twitter. The stated nature of his ownership would be to make Twitter – or restore it to what he considers to be – a true "public square," by which he means, open to all opinions, and "legal" communications (Edelman, 2022). Would this permit disinformation (information that is deliberately deceptive) about COVID-19? Would it allow Trump and his disinforming and incendiary tweets to return to Twitter?

We will look at both issues – social media and the Russian attack on Ukraine, and Musk's intention to buy Twitter – in the remainder of this essay.

RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

Wars have always put pressure on media, going back well before Twitter and social media. During the Second World War, American journalists voluntarily withheld reporting information that would endanger military activities of the allies. In the Falklands War, the United Kingdom forbade the BBC from reporting certain developments (Levinson, 1998).

The publication of the Pentagon Papers, which revealed that the American launch of the Vietnam War entailed deliberately provoking the North Vietnamese to fire on an American vessel going in and out of North Vietnamese waters, was opposed by the then American President, Richard Nixon, because the war was still going on. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that such squelching of the press was a violation of the First Amendment.

More recently, Edward Snowden left America under threat of arrest after he leaked information to Wikileaks, even though Daniel Ellsberg, who made the Pentagon Papers public, said Snowden was doing the same thing (MacAskill et al., 2015).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, beginning in February 2022, has not resulted in anything like the above in America – no Americans have fled the United States under threat of arrest – but the Russian attack on Ukraine has had a chilling effect on Russian independent media and international social media in Russia (Ellingworth, 2020), as Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought to squelch any dissent while the war is also being fought out as an informational war on social media. If you type #IStandwith on Twitter, the resulting choices will include #IStandWithUkraine (which I sign many of my posts with) and #IStandwithRussia. This battle of hashtags is made even more complex and vexing by the fact that people who post on Twitter may be bots and not people, or people hiding behind pseudonyms. (I only post under @PaulLev, which connects to my real name, Paul Levinson).

Anonymous and pseudonymous posting has been an issue since the earliest days of social media (Levinson, 2009, 2012). Its defenders argue that shielding one's identity promotes free speech and the posting of honest opinions, since the shielded poster would be immune from criticism and worse actions by employers, friends, family members, political enemies, etc. On the other hand, opponents of such kinds of postings argue that they encourage all manner of disinformation and verbal attacks, precisely because that same shielding of the true identities of posters renders them largely immune from retribution for their misleading statements. Anonymous and pseudonymous accounts can easily be removed by the app for illegal and life-threatening posts, but it doesn't take much work to reinstate them from a different IP (Internet Protocol) address under a different phony name. I have always preferred real names – I don't like talking to unknown people with figurative bags over their heads, who could easily pretend to be someone they are not – but at the same time I harbor some sympathy for anonymous and pseudonymous posters. Nonetheless, should someone who posts lies about COVID-19 or presents an argument in favor of Russian aggression be afforded the protection of an anonymous or pseudonymous post? I would say not.

Whatever the identity of the poster, social media have the advantage of easily disseminating every kind of older medium, as texts, photographs, sound recordings, and videos are easily sent and received through social media. Back in the 1990s, before the advent of social media, I said that the Internet was "the medium of media," because it accommodated and distributed all prior means of communication (Levinson, 1999). Photography changed the public's perception of war from a grand and noble endeavor to a destructive and horrendous thing, with Matthew Brady's photographs of the American Civil War back in the 1860s (Levinson, 1998). The Russian atrocities in Ukraine, including the killing of women and children, are engraved in photographs and videos now made available to everyone in the world nearly instantly on Twitter, Facebook, Tik-Tok, and other social media. Such social media are readily available in the West, while Russia does its best to deny its people access to them. But the history of totalitarian countries shielding their people from information is uneven and their attempts are never completely successful. In Nazi Germany during World War II, The White Rose distributed printed leaflets in Germany about Nazi atrocities (Levinson, 1998). In the final years of the Soviet Union, *samizdat* video brought more truth to the Russian people than they were able to see on their televisions (Levinson, 1992).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the Ukrainian defense, was early on called "The First TikTok War" (Chayka, 2022), but that can best be understood by substituting "social media" for TikTok. All social media partake in the consumer becoming producer, the smartphone is available in everyone's hands, and the ease with which a snapshot can be taken or a video made and disseminated is probably the most significant advance in the public's access to and knowledge of the repulsive horrors of war since Brady's photographs taken in the 1860s.

It should now be apparent that I am, as author of this article, by no means neutral regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I think the Russians have been murderous, indiscriminate aggressors, and their invasion of Ukraine is a darkly gleaming example of what American journalist Edward R. Murrow once said about the Holocaust, the Nazi mass murder of Jews, during the Second World War: there are not two sides to every story; some stories have only one side. Murrow's best-known quote on that is "I simply cannot accept that there are, on every story, two equal and logical sides to an argument", and it comes up in George Clooney's 2005 biopic *Good Night, and Good Luck*, in which Clooney has Murrow saying just that about Murrow's reporting on Senator Joe McCarthy and his deceiving denunciation and persecution of anyone he deemed to be "red," i.e., a Communist or Communist sympathizer in America. Political columnist Nancy LeTourneau noted in 2019: "Even though that particular dialogue was dramatized for the film, it captures the story of how Murrow broke from the pack of journalism as it was practiced back in 1953 when he saw something happening in this country that was disturbing. There were no 'both sides' to what Senator McCarthy was doing. It was simply wrong." She concluded that we needed an Edward R. Murrow in the Trump era.

But Elon Musk, billionaire and apparently the wealthiest person in the world – who is revolutionizing automobiles with his Tesla, which runs completely on electrical power, and building Space X vehicles that go out into space, with the ultimate objective of going to Mars, two highly laudable initiatives, in my view – said, after making his Starlink international communication facilities available to Ukraine shortly after the Russian invasion, that he would not lock Russia out of the Starlink system, because he is "a free speech absolutist" (Malik, 2022). And on 25 April 2022, Musk's purchase of Twitter was announced (Duffy, 2022) – as

of this writing, the purchase has yet to be approved by shareholders (Keenan, 2022) – along with his intention is to make it a truer vehicle of free expression, or in his view, open to all views and sides.

ELON MUSK AND TWITTER

There is so much emphasis on what social media do – including by me, when I say that they turn all consumers into potential producers – that we tend to ignore the fundamental question of who owns them. But in the end, the owner of any social medium has far more power over that medium and what it does than do its millions of users and the texts, photographs, and videos they produce and disseminate. After all, an owner can choose to shut down a system, and not sell it to someone else, and that would stop that system cold. Or, an owner could change what a system does and how it does it.

Elon Musk is the richest person in the world, with a wealth estimated at $219 billion (Dolan and Peterson-Withorn, 2022). Unfortunately, his medical knowledge has not been up to par. He promoted the use of Chloroquine, a remedy for malaria, as an effective medication for COVID-19, which it is not. He wrongly claimed that children were "essentially immune" to the virus, and the devastating pandemic would be over by April 2020. He made all of these statements on Twitter (Walsh, 2021). If Musk was in charge of Twitter, would he allow such statements, which jeopardize human lives, to be posted on the system?

Musk began buying numerous shares of Twitter, a publicly owned company, at the end of January 2022. By 4 April 2022, he had amassed nearly ten percent of all shares of the company. He announced a bid to buy 100% of Twitter on 13 April 2022. On 21 April 2022, Musk announced that he had received enough to funding to buy enough shares to control Twitter (Weprin, 2022). So now Musk is apparently on his way to owning it, pending stock holder approval and a few other lesser potential obstacles (Keenan, 2022), and assuming he doesn't change his mind (Shead, 2022).

Throughout the history of media we have become accustomed to one or two people inventing a powerful new device, but not necessarily controlling it for years to come. Louis Daguerre's photographs were first unveiled in 1839; France presented the process as a gift "to the world". Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone in 1876, his father-in-law started the Bell Telephone Company a year later, and the company's operations were taken over by Theodore Vail in 1879. Jack Dorsey is the person most credited with the creation of Twitter (in 2006); he resigned as Twitter's CEO (Chief Operating Officer) at the end of November 2021 (Conger and Hirsch, 2021).

Elon Musk, who had nothing to do with Twitter's creation, now stands to have far more power over its operations than any CEO of a publicly traded company. It may seem strange, especially to those parts of the world without the commitment to capitalism of the United States, that any amount of money, however large, can in and of itself give its possessor complete control of a company as crucial to human communication in the 21st century as Twitter has been and continues to be.

Twitter's 330 million active users are far below Facebook's 2.9 billion or TikTok's 1 billion, but Twitter has played a uniquely important political role in the United States and

therefore the world, in part because it was Donald Trump's chosen means of expressing his views to the world, though Twitter was already taking on that role. FDR was a radio President, JFK through Ronald Reagan through Barack Obama were television Presidents, and Trump was the first Twitter President (Levinson, 2015–2021). Joe Biden has returned, to some extent, to television, but his use of Twitter is nonetheless more than any other prior President, other than Trump.

The whole world, our entire human species, increasingly relies upon social media, but in America and therefore the world, social media may be only as reliable as the largest amount of money that can be put up to buy them.

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BEMUSING OURSELVES TO DEATH: PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In 1985, Neil Postman published *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, a McLuhan-inspired critique of the transformation of public discourse from 19th-century print culture, with its depth of reading, thought and debate, to the contemporary era of television 'show business'. Developments since then, most notably the digital revolution, allow us to update Postman's thesis, to explore the digital age that succeeds the electric broadcast era and its contemporary transformation of culture and politics. This paper argues that digital personalisation has exploded the mass-media world, bursting its mainstream bubble into a foam of individual life-worlds, empowering everyone as the producer of their own realities. Arguing that the key thinker of this era is Philip K. Dick (with his exploration of fictive, split, and personal realities), the paper explores the cultural impact of this new post-truth era of 'me-dia' realities and the 'bemusement' it produces.

Keywords: Postman, McLuhan, Baudrillard, reality, hyporeality, social-media, Dick

> What about the world of a schizophrenic? Maybe it's as real as our world. Maybe we cannot say that we are in touch with reality and he is not, but should instead say, his reality is so different from ours that he can't explain his to us, and we can't explain ours to him. The problem, then, is that if subjective worlds are experienced too differently, there occurs a breakdown in communication […] and there is the real illness.
>
> *Philip K. Dick*

THE AGE OF AMUSEMENT

In 1985 media theorist Neil Postman published *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, a McLuhan-inspired critique of the transformation of 'public discourse', contrasting 19th-century print culture, with its depth of attention, reading

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and debate, with the 'show business' of the contemporary television era (Postman, 1987). Postman adopted here McLuhan's periodisation of media as moving from the Gutenbergian print era to the world of electricity and electronic media, but he added a clear critical position. Eschewing McLuhan's analytical nuance, Postman's work constitutes a polemical excoriation of the televisual age and its mode of discourse. Now, at several decades remove and with the subsequent digital transformation of the media ecology, it is worth returning to Postman's work, to reconsider its critique, to see how digital technologies have transformed media again and to ask: What is the state of public discourse in the Age of Social Media?

Following the McLuhanist dictum that 'the medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1994, p. 7), Postman's starting point is 'the forms of human communication' and how these have 'the strongest influence on what ideas we can conveniently express', and consequently on the content of our culture (1987, p. 6). As such, he says, the real impact of media is 'epistemological': in creating our knowledge of the world and 'definitions of truth' our mediations are constitutive of reality itself (1987, pp. 16–30). When, therefore, media change, so too do our ideas, expressions, culture, and reality. For Postman, the most important contemporary change was the mid-late 20th century's 'decline of the Age of Typography and the ascendency of the Age of Television' (1987, p. 8).

Postman's explanation begins with an exploration of the print epistemology of 19th-century America, tracing the rise of printing, the explosion of publications, an oral culture based on the printed word (1987, pp. 31–44) and the 'typographic mind' these produced (1987, pp. 45–64). His chapter opens with a remarkable discussion of political debates in the 1850s, and the example of one between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas in 1854 where, after Douglas had spoken for three hours, the crowd went home for dinner before voluntarily returning for Lincoln's three-hour response and Douglas's one-hour rebuttal. This was a time when political speech and 'extended oratorical performances' were common (1987, p. 46) – could you imagine an audience today enduring seven hours of talk, Postman asks (1987, p. 47). However, this was not just about attention span, as the listeners would have had 'an equally extraordinary capacity to comprehend lengthy and complex sentences aurally' as well as a grasp of the issues and a knowledge of historical events and political matters (1987, p. 47).

These were speeches with 'serious, logically-ordered content' requiring of all participants an understanding and use of critical reason (1987, pp. 51–53). As such they evidence the existence of a detached, analytical, logical, reasoning 'typographic man' (1987, pp. 58–59), whose reading was both a means of connection to the world and its 'model'. As Postman says: 'The printed page revealed the world, line by line, page by page, to be a serious coherent place, capable of management by reason and by improvement by logical and relevant criticism' (1987, p. 63). Hence his conclusion, that throughout 18th and 19th-century America one finds 'the resonances of the printed word' and 'its inextricable relationship to all forms of public expression' (1987, p. 63).

For Postman, the roots of later changes lay in the same era, with new developments in media. The electric telegraph brought instantaneity and a new, abbreviated, discontinuous, fragmented, and impersonal discourse (1987, pp. 66–72), whilst photography created a world of imagery that would become central to our experience of the real (1987, pp. 72–78). The result,

by the early 20th century, he says, is a new 'peek-a-boo world' where things appear briefly before vanishing; a world asking little of us, but which is 'endlessly entertaining' (1987, pp. 78–79). This world would be fully realized with the rise of television, 'the command centre of the new epistemology', which would completely remake our 'communications environment' (1987, pp. 79–81) such that today, Postman says, 'we have so thoroughly accepted its definitions of truth, knowledge and reality' (1987, p. 81).

The key impact of television on public discourse, Postman argues, is the transformation of culture into 'one vast arena for show business' (1987, p. 81). His argument is not that television is entertaining but 'that it has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience' (1987, p. 89). Whatever the topic, everything is presented as entertaining, with the presumption that 'it is there for our amusement and pleasure' (1987, p. 89). Its dominance now means that it rules all discourse and 'becomes the model for how the world is properly to be staged' (1987, pp. 94–95). This is a model of 'now [...] this…': a speeded-up world of communication designed purely to grab the attention, to distract and amuse, without order, meaning, reason, connection, context, or coherence, and without the need to carry any thought or feeling on from one moment to the next (1987, pp. 101–102). Complexity, nuance, and qualification are replaced by brevity, visual stimulation, and entertainment in a new form of 'anti-communication' (1987, p. 107). The result, Postman argues, is that 'Americans are the best entertained and likely the least well-informed people in the western world' (1987, p. 108). Or rather, they suffer from 'disinformation' – not false but misleading information: 'information that creates the illusion of knowing something but which in fact leads one away from knowing' (1987, p. 109).

Postman's primary example of how television 'pollutes public communication' (1987, p. 29) is the transformation of politics into a branch of 'show business'. Political communication, he argues, is modelled today on the form and logic of the 'television commercial', with politicians appearing as polished celebrities, presenting not arguments for rebuttal but simple imagery and 'instant therapy' and solutions (1987, pp. 133–134). With no coherence and presented at the speed of light, there is no ability to integrate information into a whole such that 'in the Age of Show Business and image politics, political discourse is emptied not only of ideological content, but of historical content as well' (1987, p. 140). George Orwell's *1984* is thus mistaken, as the past does not need to be erased by the state: Our 'seemingly benign technologies' can accomplish this 'without objection' (1987, p. 141). Instead of state-controlled information, we experience instead a 'television glut', but in a form that presents information as non-substantive, non-historical and non-contextual and as entertainment (1987, p. 144). We do not need Orwellian censorship, Postman concludes, 'when all political discourse takes the form of a jest' (1987, p. 145).

For Postman, the science-fiction dystopia that best describes this 'Age of Show Business' is not Orwell's but instead Aldous Huxley's 1932 *Brave New World*, in its prophecy that western democracies would 'dance and dream themselves into oblivion [...] narcotized by technological diversions' rather than march into it manacled (1987, p. 113). As Postman says, with the 'soma' of television, 'Big Brother does not watch us, by his choice. We watch him, by ours' (1987, p. 160). We reached 1984, Postman says, and discovered something more

dangerous than Orwell's state. Whilst we can at least see when a prison encloses us, no-one sees or takes arms against 'a sea of amusements' (1987, p. 161). We did not need Big Brother, Postman argues, as people came to love their oppression and 'to adore the technologies that undo their capacity to think' (1987, p. vii). The result of a public discourse dominated by the need for diversion, distraction, and entertainment, he concludes, is a public 'on the verge of amusing ourselves to death' (1987, p. 4).

THE DIGITAL POST-BROADCAST ERA

The Fordist world of mass-produced, narcotizing entertainment satirised by Huxley in 1932, and critiqued in practice in Adorno and Horkheimer's 1940s attack on 'the culture industry' (1997), was still recognisable for Postman in the 1980s. Though Neo-Liberal post-Fordism was beginning to create a more fragmented media ecology, the 1980s nevertheless represented the height of the 'broadcast model'. In the centuries after Gutenberg's invention of mechanical, movable-type printing, a model had developed of the mass-reproduction, mass-distribution and mass-consumption of information. By the early 20th century, this had evolved into huge structures of communication embedded in and producing messages for society: into large corporations and public organisations employing huge numbers in vast industries – print, radio, music, cinema, television – organised in a factory-style system, dedicated to crafting standardised, uniform content. This was a world of 'big media', still extant in 1985: of top-down, one-to-many production, pushing out a vast quantity of media products at receptive, consuming mass audiences (Merrin, 2014, p. 61–76).

This would all change in the decade and half after Postman's book, with the digital revolution. Lev Manovich explains this as the development of two traditions in the 19th century – computing and mass media – and their meeting and merger at the end of the 20th century (Manovich, 2001), but this underplays the key element. Because digital technology did not simply merge with the analogue, it violently *absorbed* it. Becoming a computational meta-medium, it *ate* every previously separate form, turning them into types of digital content. First, personal computing found a new life with the development of networking and the creation of the World Wide Web. Made available in 1991, the software, when combined with the rise of graphical browsers, led to the popular take off of the internet from the mid-1990s, with 'the web' becoming a key part of domestic and work life by the end of the century. The same decade saw the rapid commercial digitalization of cinema, newspapers and print, music, home-video, photography, video-camcorders, telephony, radio and television, such that, by the millennium, every broadcast medium had been transformed by digital technology in some or all aspects of its production, distribution and consumption.

Developments in the early years of the new century propelled this revolution. Cheap home broadband, more powerful and cheaper computers, and increased interoperability between devices helped create 'Web 2.0'. Coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2005 (O'Reilly, 2005), the term describes the rise of mostly free, web-based applications and platforms that left behind the read-only world of 'Web 1.0' in favour of new 'architectures of participation', 'rich user experiences', 'user-generated content' (UGC), information sharing and personal networks.

These Web 2.0 sites included social media such as Myspace (2003) and Facebook (2005), UGC hosting and sharing sites such as Flickr (2004) and YouTube (2005), Micro-blogging sites such as Twitter (2006), collaborative sites such as Wikipedia (2001), and aggregation sites such as Reddit (2005). Together with other UGC phenomena such as blogging, podcasting and easy-to-create websites, these developments would produce a cultural revolution that transformed the broadcast era of mass media. The final key to this revolution was the end of the 'desk-top' in favour of domestic and public wi-fi and smart-phones and tablets, a move aided by Apple with their transformative iPhones (2007), iPads (2010) and app store. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, therefore, the broadcast world described by Postman in 1985 had been definitively left behind.

So, to return to Postman's question, what is the nature of 'public discourse' in this very different age of digital technology and social media? That appears easy to answer – we only have to look at the *content* of social media. The main problem is clearly the *toxic* nature of the contemporary internet and public sphere, due to the structural revolution in communication that has empowered everyone as a producer of information and opinions. Web 2.0 ushered in a new era where the voices of everyone were unleashed, and at first this was accompanied by an optimism in the new, pro-democratic ability of everyone to connect and share and to hold authorities to account, especially in authoritarian nations (see Benkler, 2006; Gillmor, 2004; Leadbetter, 2008; Shirky, 2008). This optimism declined after 2012 once it was realised that authoritarian countries could exert strong controls on their national internet, that social media 'revolutions' could fail, and once it became obvious in the west that the open and accessible nature of the net meant its real threat was to democracies, through the publication of politically extreme opinions, the spread of trolling, hate speech, abuse, deliberate disinformation and state-based information warfare, as well as the misuse of personal data (e.g., the Cambridge Analytica scandal) and the failure of platforms to moderate their content.

The key problem of public discourse today, according to this perspective, is the content of unleashed speech. Anger, abuse and the polarisation of opinions leads to an inability to conduct that rational-critical typographic, Enlightenment ideal of debate and agreement Postman had described. Of course, that Liberal 'public sphere' (Habermas, 1989) was only ever a performative simulacrum of communication amongst a bourgeois class that was always-already in agreement with itself and, as Postman (and indeed, Habermas) has shown, it was an ideal already superseded in the era of commercial television's 'show business'. Nevertheless, the contemporary moral panic around the unleashed, irrational voices of the masses has been useful for authorities, in pointing to simple solutions such as increased internet regulation and (especially in the UK and Europe) expanded legal punishment for individual speech (Merrin, 2021a).

But this explanation of public discourse today is too simple, with the focus on content blinding us to deeper issues relating to form. Now, we could perform here, like Postman, an extended analysis of the digital form of social media, as a hyper-extension of electronic technology, and we would find much of value to discuss. Here, however, I want to focus on just one aspect of form and its impact, one that is central to understanding where we are today. I want to explore the question of the real.

THE CAMBRIAN EXPLOSION OF REALITIES

What McLuhan and Postman teach us is that the broadcast era did not simply mass-produce entertainment. They teach us that media are *epistemological engines*: they create our experience, knowledge, concepts of truth and horizons of thought. Hence, we can see that what was mass produced in the broadcast era was reality itself. This was an idea also understood by thinkers such as Daniel Boorstin (1992) and Guy Debord (1994) and especially by the McLuhan-inspired, French media philosopher Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard's early work on the post-war semiotic consumer societies explored how electronic mass media transform 'the lived, eventual character of the world' into signs that are combined to produce the real (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 123). 'Over the whole span of daily life', he says, 'a vast process of simulation is taking place', with the semiotic media assuming 'the force of reality', obliterating the real in favour of its own model (1998, p. 126). The media modelled and presented an efficacious reality.

For Baudrillard, what increasingly characterized these simulacra was their 'hyperreality' – their excessive, close-up, high-definition, 'pornographic' technical semio-realisation of the real (1990a, pp. 11, 50). By the late 1970s-early 80s, Baudrillard had grown to see this *excess* as central to our system. This is a culture, he argues, devoted to 'production' – understood not as industrial manufacture, but in the original sense of 'to render visible, to cause to appear and be made to appear: *pro-ducere*' (1987, p. 21). Hence his furious description of our productive society – our 'orgy of realism', 'rage [...] to summon everything before the jurisdiction of signs', to make everything visible, legible, rendered, recorded and available, with everything passing over into 'the absolute evidence of the real' (1990b, pp. 29, 32). Ours, he says, 'is a pornographic culture par excellence' (1990b, p. 34).

Though Baudrillard died in March 2007, on the cusp of the release of the iPhone and the take-off of Web 2.0, and though much of his work described the world of electronic mass-media, there is one way in which he may be one of the key thinkers of the Age of Social Media, because the digital revolution represents the continuation of that *society of production* he describes. This theme continued throughout his work. His 2004 book *The Intelligence of Evil* returned to the western drive for 'integral reality', explained as 'the perpetuating on the world of an unlimited operational project whereby everything becomes real, everything becomes visible and transparent, everything is "liberated", everything comes to fruition and has a meaning' (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 17). The digital revolution, therefore, represents the extension of this process, achieving the final liberation – that of production itself.

We will, one day, find it remarkable that for centuries, during the Gutenbergian broadcast era, we limited and controlled the ability to produce the real. For so long you needed permission, licenses, skills, qualifications, employment, key positions within communicational hierarchies, expensive and complex equipment and more before you were able to create and share information. There were, of course, options for individual production, but the tools were limited, distribution was difficult and there was little cultural interest in the amateur; for centuries, it was an elite of professional creators that made our real. What the digital revolution accomplished was the liberation of the power of production and distribution. Now anyone with a smartphone has become an empowered producer of content, messages, and information.

As smartphone possession has increased – by April 2022 there were claimed to be 6.64 billion people (83.72% of the world's population) with a smartphone, with 10.57 billion mobile connections surpassing the world's population of 7.93 billion people (Bankmycell, 2022) – so too has the personal production of the real. Using an array of devices, technologies, apps, platforms, services and software we now devote ourselves daily to the recording of our lives, experiences, movements and thoughts, in a *self-paparizzization* for our friends, families and subscribed global followers. Looking back too, one day, we will be surprised how much of the real went unrecorded; how much we allowed to disappear. Today, in contrast, we have crowd-sourced the creation of the real to all the world's population such that, in theory, not a single moment, activity, relationship or experience escapes potential capture or being added to the pornographic hyper-visible, hyper-intimate personal collection of the museum of the real.

One of the key ideas Baudrillard takes from McLuhan is 'reversal' – the idea that at 'the peak of performance' technologies can reverse their effects (McLuhan, 1994, pp. 30, 33, 182), and the same can be seen with our production of the real. Following the economic law that over-production leads to devaluation, so our devotion to the over-production of the real leads to a crash in its stocks. We move from the excessive hyperreality of the broadcast era where huge organisations gathered and deployed vast stocks of media materiel to create the real, to a digital world of personally produced *hyporeality* where so little is now required either to craft and share the real (a phone, an angle, a filter, scenery) or to believe in it.

This argument chimes with the claimed contemporary crisis of 'truth'. In recent years, fears of online disinformation, 'fake news', state-trolling and conspiracy theorism have led some to argue we live in a 'post-truth' world (Ball, 2018; D'Ancona, 2017; Davis, 2017; Fuller, 2018; Kakutani, 2018; McIntyre, 2018). One explanation for this crisis is Pariser's idea that today we are locked into personalised, online 'filter bubbles', created by our own curation of our networks and information and by algorithms feeding us more of what we like in order to increase our engagement (Pariser, 2011). This idea has merit but it is worth expanding upon it and projecting the concept backwards. For then we can understand that the entire broadcast era comprised a similar 'bubble', albeit a singular one encompassing all within broadcast reach. This was a 'mainstream bubble', filtered for the entire population through the use of market demographics, editorial decisions, professional codes of conduct, government regulations and the need to retain the goodwill of advertisers and consumers. A careful control of production and distribution ensured nothing dangerous, extreme, offensive or too different ever appeared. There was no room here for Goatse, 'Two Girls One Cup', ISIS videos or white supremacist propaganda.

Our world of individual bubbles, therefore, is the direct result of the digital bursting of this mainstream bubble and its mass-filtered and mass-distributed, collectively shared *mass-consensual reality*. Digital technologies have exploded our informational sources into the fractal fragments of everything we can see or find – every friend, follower, message, DM, link, webpage, forum thread, post, comment, group-chat, gif, meme, photograph, video, 'like' or 'story' and into anything we can think, do, explore and enjoy, however far outside the mainstream. This is, therefore, about more than 'filter bubbles': The explosion of the single reality-bubble has created an infinite body of individual monadic bubbles. Except they are not

atomised and separable. They are always in motion, continually connecting and reforming as *foam*: They join and build with other bubbles, to form what Sloterdijk in other circumstances has called 'foam cities' – comprising millions of bubbles which are 'not simply an agglomeration of neighbouring (partition-sharing) inert and massive bodies, but rather multiplicities of loosely touching cells of life-worlds' (Sloterdijk, 2016, p. 565).

This is the primary effect of the digital revolution, and understanding it is the key to understanding public discourse today. In contrast to the 'Age of Typography' and the 'Age of Television', both of which connected and unified their audiences as a shared public, what characterises the 'Age of Social Media' is the radical disconnection from any shared public, except that chosen and created by the self. The foam of bubbles is a foam of personally created and connected life-worlds. What we are experiencing now, therefore, is a *Cambrian explosion of realities*. The problem is not that we are post-truth and lack truth today. The problem is the opposite: it is the exponential hyper-production of truths. There have never before been so many truths, so many realities. The hyper-equipped, hyper-empowered, hyper-productive hyper-distributed and shared digital self creates its own spin-off reality with every action.

Digital technologies, therefore, have radically decentred *the engines of reality-creation* to each of us and so we need to properly understand what the 'social' in 'social media' really means. This is not the 'social' of modernity – that 'social' theorised by Liberalism, or by Durkheim, Weber or Marx. It is not the contract that founds government, nor the nexus of norms, values and laws, nor the division of labour or the superstructure that arises from it, nor the shared, collective experience of cities and crowds, nor the individual's position within the organic whole, nor the interconnected economic, legal, political, cultural, aesthetic and religious relationship of 'total social facts' (Mauss, 1990, pp. 78–79). Instead, the individual bubble forms its own worlds, continually connecting with others and breaking and reforming these foams on every topic, making worlds out of their own thoughts, interests and networks, replacing the 'social' of modernity with a very different and opposing 'social': the social of *social life*. This a radically, personally centred network of friends and contacts within their individual life-worlds. With it, the social of modernity is reduced to the zero degree of heat – to the banality of *my social life*.

This has significant implications for our discussion of 'public discourse', for what does 'the public' mean? 'Public' comes to us from the Latin '*publicus*', meaning 'of the people; of the state; done for the state', being derived from the Old Latin '*poplicus*', 'pertaining to the people' (from '*populus*', meaning 'people'). By late-14th-century Europe, the word 'publike' was also being used to refer to that which was 'open to general observation' (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022). All these meanings point to the collective, the shared bond, the organising institutions and their openness and visibility. And it is these that *our social* threatens.

Because today we live not in the shared, broadcast-era world of top-down communication and authority but instead in personalised bubbles and chosen-foams: in radically individually curated and created realities. The minor differences in the mainstream broadcast bubble (which newspaper or channel you consumed) have exploded into fractal worlds of informational difference. The moment I wake up and engage with the world, what I open, what I see, what I read and what I share *is utterly unique to me*, as the product of my own choices and algorithmic curation. Little or nothing binds us all today, and, in taking place on

platforms and apps and messenger services, much of what we see, consume and share does not even count as openly, visibly 'publike'. Do we even have a 'public discourse', therefore, in the Age of Social Media?

We have barely begun to even recognize this problem, let alone think through its radical implications. It is a world that is already here, however, in our swipe-yes-or-swipe-no, friend-follow-like-and-comment informational ecology where Postman's mass media has given way to the digital cockpit of 'me-dia' (Merrin, 2014, pp. 77–92), where my personal control and curation of the real means entire worlds slide past me without my noticing. We might begin to understand it better, however, if we realise that what we think of as the online fringe – the world of extremists and conspiracy theorists – is now (at least at the level of form) our mainstream reality.

AND… *BREATHE*

It is easy to dismiss conspiracy theorists as cranks who have left reason behind, but we have more in common with them than we might think. Walter Lippmann's 1922 book *Public Opinion* explains how individuals have always tried to make sense of the world beyond their experience, forming pictures in their mind – 'mental images', 'symbols', 'fictions' and 'stereotypes' of the world to create a coherent reality to live within (Lippmann, 2007). Lippmann was critical of our ability to do this in a complex world; hence he suggested an elite 'manufacture' this worldview for us using the mass media. In effect, though without the explicit organisation, 20th-century mass media did, indeed, create that mass-consensual reality.

Within that reality, conspiracy theorism had a limited purchase. This was not through censorship – indeed, the paranormal, UFOs, cryptozoology, spiritualism, conspiracism, extremism, etc. remained a profitable niche publishing area – rather it was due to the unilateral, top-down nature of broadcasting that meant you consumed this material alone. The revolutionary impact of the internet was that it gave you friends: it allowed you to connect with others, to share, to build and grow and organise. Hence the far-right and conspiracism adopted the internet early on, recognizing its value for them, and through the 1980s-90s their worldviews began to meet and merge. Eventually, in October 2017, the 'QAnon' conspiracy would develop out of far-right ideas, Trumpism, and Chan-culture, metastasizing extremist and conspiracist ideas, absorbing existing conspiracies, and moving beyond its focus on Trump to become an international phenomenon (Merrin, 2018; 2021b).

COVID-19 and global governmental restrictions made conspiracism even more popular, with fears of government control, a global elite, 5-G technology and vaccine nanotechnology all feeding into right-wing and libertarian ideas and the QAnon story. QAnon and conspiracism soon degenerated into violence, from anti-lockdown protests confronting police to arson attacks on 5-G masts and arson and bomb attacks on governmental, pharmacist and vaccine centres. The 25th of December 2020 vehicle-bomb in Nashville was part of this new movement of conspiracist violence. Unlike earlier forms of religious and political terrorism that wanted to re-align the real with their values, this was a new form of *reality terrorism*, taking aim at the officially produced and sanctioned reality-principle, with the intention not of causing

terror, but of alleviating it for the imprisoned, reality-washed population. Unlike ordinary terrorism, its target was not the political elite and its order, but *the real itself* (Merrin, 2021c).

Many have watched these developments with concern, trying to separate themselves from the irrationality of the conspiracists, but we are closer to them than we think. Lippmann noted how we have always tried to make sense of our world, and broadcasting helped us do that well, albeit with a limited and tightly controlled range of sources. The internet changed this, allowing unchecked informational sources to proliferate, but the Web 2.0 world of platforms, services and personal technologies has super-charged this process. Freed from the mainstream bubble, with the fractalization of information sources and the Cambrian explosion of personally created and curated me-dia realities, we are now free to form foams with anyone and any source we like.

Just like the conspiracy theorist, therefore, with their exhortation to 'do your research!' we are all looking to make sense of our world, responding to each new calamitous event – climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine War – by trying to become instant self-experts on it. We are all, by necessity, *researchers of the real* and reality itself has become an individual ludic process, as we search for, discover, select, combine and play with ideas. *The world is a puzzle*, and we deploy whatever information we can, extracted from multiple sources and recombined, to form a coherent picture – a vision that we can then re-assert back onto the world and onto others. If the conspiracists choose (what we see as) irrational, unscientific and baseless sources, this is a difference in content, not form, where we are all playing the same game of 'self-investigation' and 'research'.

Whereas Baconian empiricism built the *weight* of evidence from the sensory weight of the world and the weight of repeated observation (Bacon, 2019), our reality is the product of our personal digital research, recording and posting. Lacking mass, weight, or anything to hold it down, this reality is a hyporeality. In this personally created reality, the hyperimaginary hyperinflates, floating free of the referential real of the terrestrial body-of-evidence, being given free rein in a hyperfalsity where the self can now assert anything as true and aggressively dare the world to escalate and deny it. This is why all attempts to combat 'fake news' with 'truth', 'verification' and 'fact-checking' fail. It is not just that a binary of 'truth' and 'falsity' does not fit the journalistic production of 'news', or that a public so suspicious of the mainstream would reject any organisation's claim to be an 'official' arbiter of truth (though both are the case), it is because the problem here is not a lack of truth but *its excess*. The problem is one of reality: of the epistemological proliferation caused by the digital revolution. This will not be solved with a 'rear-view mirror' nostalgia for a lost broadcast era when everyone respected their media betters.

Because we have shifted now to personal worlds and realities that cannot be reconciled with older visions of truth, the 'multiverse' – that popular science-fiction concept that supposes every action spins off a different time-line and universe, all existing parallel to each other – is realized today within our one universe which now holds within it an infinity of realities. Hence, Trump's inauguration crowd was or was not bigger than Obama's; Trump did or did not win the 2020 election; the January 2021 insurrection was or was not a legitimate response to 'the steal'; Covid was or was not created in a Chinese lab; masks are or are not effective; a global government is or is not attempting 'the great reset'. Choose your real.

We are not so different, therefore, from the conspiracists we jeer – they are just a hyper-parodic form of how we all live today. We all form our reality-bubbles and link with others that think the same, forming foam-realities that rise and fall as we breathe together. Because the word 'conspiracy' comes from the Latin 'conspirare' which means 'to breathe together' (hence its application to those who plot together, in breathing the same air). Today, therefore, *we all conspire: we all co-respire* and create our theories of the world. With the explosion of our own personalised realities and the connected foam of our bubble universes, we are all simultaneously co-respiracists.

THE AGE OF BEMUSEMENT

We are nearly a century now past Huxley's *Brave New World*, but his vision of a society dominated and controlled by entertainment is as close as ever. Far from changing this, the digital revolution has expanded its scale, scope and hold. Today, the distraction of the net and apps – of funny videos, gifs, memes, pranks, jokes, amusing cats, must see-Tweets, trolls and takedowns – is stronger than ever. What else is TikTok, other than an infinite-scrolling, variable-reinforcement ratio micro-engine of dopamine short-video 'hits'? But George Orwell's *1984* has also grown in relevance too. Given the scale of global, governmental mass-surveillance revealed by Edward Snowden and the emergence of an entire new model of 'surveillance capitalism' built upon the harvesting and use of personal data (Zuboff, 2019), there is a case for elevating him back to the position of dystopian prophet of the present. Except, there's a better case to be made for another author to have this position: Philip K. Dick.

Across dozens of novels Dick pursued the problem of the real and its subjectivity, uncertainty and proliferation. He describes the simulation of humans (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*), simulated presidents (*The Simulacra*), drug-induced realities (*Now Wait For Last Year*), personalised realities (*The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Ubik*), splintered realities (*Flow My Tears*, *Not Exist*), live-in virtual realities (*Ubik*, Mercer in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *A Maze of Death*, 'The Days of Perky Pat'), government-manufactured simulated realities (*Time Out of Joint*, *The Penultimate Truth*), alternate historical realities (*The Man in the High Castle*), altered realities (*The Cosmic Puppets*), alternate worlds (*The Crack in Space*), recreated childhood realities (*Now Wait for Last Year*), reversed realities (*Counter-Clock World*) and psychotic realities (*A Scanner Darkly*, *Radio Free Albemuth*, *Valis*). Dick's protagonists find themselves in splintered, incomprehensible worlds, left to themselves to reform the real, to make sense of what is and what is not and reach some coherent understanding. Today, in the Age of Social Media, we share their problem. The key issue we face today is how we – individually and in our foams – construct our realities and the danger that follows from this. That danger is no longer the danger of entertainment or amusement. Today, the danger we face is that of our confusion, our failure, our bewilderment, our puzzlement at the world and of our attempts to make it make sense. This is the new danger of *bemusing ourselves to death*.

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GLASS MAN IDENTITY: FROM BIG BROTHER TO COVID PASSPORT

This article will investigate the communication problems creating cultural identity and saving private space in the era of QR-codes and vaccination passports, in which every step offline and click online is recorded and stored in databases. The author proposes using the metaphor of the Glass Man to explain the status of the current cultural identification process. The term has come from medical terminology, where it means "imperfect osteogenesis", a condition when bones are weak and unable to provide the necessary level of support. The body lacks the stamina and resistance required to function properly. The identity of Glass Man means transparency by default on the one hand, but fragility on the other. The Glass Man is a person without the need to hide anything. Nothing to hide, nothing to be ashamed of – it is a new mode of communication, with no taboos or ethical limits applying to topics of conversation. The Glass Man identity also means transparency, not just for the individual but also for the corporation acting in the mediated public space. The Chinese social credit system can serve as a good example of how social control disciplines citizens and increases levels of social control. We can hide something about ourselves from other users, but not from service owners. The Glass Man identity means a new type of human, a new type of balance between control and power. Glass Man means a person who does not need to hide anything. It is a new mode of both communication and power. Big Brother is no longer merely a metaphor or a reality TV show. This is a "brave new world," and most likely our new reality.

Keywords: Glass Man identity, algorithms, social credit, extensions of man, new new media

Today's consumer-oriented society offers a comfortable life in a "gilded cage". People are unaware that their consumption world is slowly transforming into more and more of a panopticon prison. The process of increasing control is only accelerating, as some circumstances can lead to unexpected consequences. The COVID-19 pandemic can be interpreted as a catalyst for that transformation. This text is dedicated to looking at social and cultural transformations in societies and redistribution of power to socially control individuals as a consequence of the pandemic in the sphere of media consumption. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, waves of protests against various governmental restrictions have taken place around the globe. Policies of total lock-down and COVID-19 passports are widely utilised like medical insurance

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and healthcare policies in many countries. China has been proactive in its attempt to reach total collective immunity; Belarus, a well-known COVID-19 dissident country, rejects any rational reasons. Nevertheless, what they have in common is their willingness to increase the level of control over the society using COVID-19 as a plausible excuse.

The aim of this article is to discuss and present the concept of the Glass Man identity and to describe the process of appropriation of social communications through mobile applications and social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CREATION OF THE ALGORITHMIC IDENTITY

The metadata and algorithms of our online activities tell far more about us than we are ready to tell ourselves. According to algorithmic identity, "cybernetic categorisation provides an elastic relationship to power, one that uses the capacity of suggestion to softly persuade users towards models of normalised behaviour and identity through the constant redefinition of categories of identity" (Cheney-Lippold, 2011, p. 177). Metadata define our identity not only in the Metaverse, as they have become a general canon for all aspects of everyday life.

In this context, algorithmic identity can be regarded as a technology for creating social inequality. Depending on how users will be identified by algorithmic means, there will be various restrictions on access to certain information on the Internet, blocking certain information regarding the location of the user. "Within a digital ecosystem of continual data collection and algorithmic analysis of individuals, identity becomes a primary social currency" (Markham, 2016, p. 201). At the same time those social assets can be, by default, dependent on AI and algorithms. Nowadays, algorithms are becoming decisive stakeholders in cultural fields:

> Algorithmic culture is the privatisation of process: that is, the forms of decision-making and contestation that comprise the ongoing struggle to determine the values, practices and artefacts – the culture, as it were – of specific social groups (Striphas, 2015, p. 406).

In these pandemic times, algorithmic determinants of social behaviour mean predicting reactions, both online and offline, via QR-codes and applications that allow people to leave their homes for shopping. We are under a permanent process of user verification, facial recognition, and payment tracking. Practically everything can be verified, and people can lose control of their past, as all activities have been tracked and stored in databases based on blockchain algorithms.

CRYSTALLISATION OF THE GLASS MAN IDENTITY

G. Vattimo formulated this new condition as a "The transparent society" (Vattimo, 1992). The Glass Man identity means a new type of human. The Glass Man is a metaphor based on medical slang, where it refers to "imperfect osteogenesis". The body does not become as transparent as glass, but the bones are weak and are not strong enough to do their job. The Glass Man is an interpretation of identity trouble, when the moral "skeleton" is flexible and

bends under the pressure of mass culture. I propose using metaphor of the Glass Man identity to explain the situation of the current cultural identification process.

> Glass Man identity means transparency, not for all, but for corporation which acts in the mediated public space. We are able to hide something from other users, but not from service owners […] Glass Man means a person who does not need to hide something. Nothing to hide, nothing to shame – it is a new mode of communication that is the best practice for social network (Krivolap, 2018, p. 79).

There are no more taboos or ethical limits in communication, because all activities are visible and presented online. Glass Man identity is a life without the skeleton of a hidden past in the sense of "skeletons in the closet". We can no longer be flexible because our skeleton in the sense of the past and personal history looks like a piece of glass: stable and fixed in one hard form.

Our memory, our history, and our past do not, in a general sense, belong to us anymore. We use social media like an outsourced contractor to take care of our "dirty laundry" and bad memories. The main problem is that we helpless to change or modify this. In fact, we have lost control of the representation of ourselves.

Thanks to blockchain technologies, in an attempt to take control of our history and personal memories BigData pretends to replace the figure of the Other in the identification process. The Glass Man identity has made it impossible to forget unpleasant memories. We have lost the right to forget. We can forget the date when we got a vaccination, the name of the vaccine, or any other medical procedure. But the COVID digital passport cannot forget it. We have no possibility of controlling the number of people or AI-accounts who will have access to this, our, information. That means it is possible to affect the identity-construction process. We have the ability to hide things about ourselves from other users, but not from service owners. We need a medium to be presented in this new virtual public space. Nevertheless, the discussion is broader than the battle between state and transnational corporations for leadership in providing a policy and establishing rules for this state of affairs. The challenge is linked to every individual, to the way all of us will solve the problem concerning our own internal stigmatised sphere and social networks. The COVID-19 pandemic provides a productive example of these developments. Who has decided what medical information about me will be in the public domain? COVID-19 mobile applications do not ask such a naive question. Mobile applications, QR-codes and vaccination passports simply share this information with whomever may need it. In addition, there is one tricky question of whether all people really own and actively use smartphones to run the application and scan the QR-code, to use it like a digital passport. There is a new social expectation to being a smartphone owner: A person without smartphone can come across as strange. Social life without registration in social networks or owning a smartphone falls in the category of suspicious behaviour.

THE AGE-OLD CHOICE: SECURITY VS FREEDOM

There has always been the difficult choice between security and freedom – especially when security means a lack of freedom and freedom means a deficit in the stability of tomorrow.

We hear myriad warnings for personal security and the annihilation of the private sphere as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. There are many questions about personal data and privacy that can arise in the pursuit of public security: "Where and how long are data being stored and […] are they being shared with other government agencies, such as law enforcement or intelligence services?" (Momani, 2020). All questions of this sort can be referenced as an ethical issue, one presented by Jean-François Lyotard as among the most important questions in the postmodern world: "Who will know?" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 6). It is possible to rephrase this to suit the conditions of the pandemic condition: Who will know tomorrow what you wrote or 'liked' about vaccination and COVID-19 yesterday? Did you really get the vaccination, or did you buy a forged certificate?

At the same time, in this age-old choice between "security and freedom" (Balzacq, 2016) in the context of the pandemic conditions, a new dimension has arisen. There are many threats lurking online, and the so-called 'man in the middle' is one of them. What if they are not hackers trying to hack your data, but a state agency or impersonalised body doing so on a legal basis? Today, we have an apt name for that impersonalised body: artificial intelligence (AI). Sometimes this shift can be painful. "The technology that will transform medicine the most over the long run is artificial intelligence. In fact, it could well be the most profound shift we are undertaking as human beings" (Zakaria, 2020, p. 83).

Personal human experience and AI are connected via a virtual bridge that can be called social networks. The name of a selected social network does not matter. Inside the "culture of connectivity" (van Dijck, 2013), all of our accounts will be connected, and our virtual identity will be upgraded by adding new details. A user of social networks has lost the ability to hiding information once it is published online. Essential changes have occurred. People wrote diaries for many centuries, but a paper diary can be securely stored and hidden from the eyes of strangers. An online diary, a blog platform, or any social network account will provide no guarantee that your locked post will be visible to only you. AI will see and scan it too.

CHINESE SOCIAL CREDIT RANK

The social credit system that was established in China in 2014 can perhaps be regarded as the best-known example of AI that scan human behaviour online and offline in real-time mode. This social credit system was strongly criticised by Western liberal democracies as intervention of state control into the private sphere. It runs, moreover, even deeper: The social credit system intents to establish a narrative control, as "discourse power allows a nation to shape and control its internal and external environments" (Hoffman, 2018, p. 7).

This experiment of social control has risen to a new level in the times of the pandemic. "In the long term, it is clear that social credit fits into the CCP's grand designs for 'data-driven governance' covering all spheres of society" (Reilly, 2021). According to human rights reports, the COVID-19 pandemic can be exploited to increase levels of control.

> The Chinese government has begun to track some of its citizens through software that analyses their personal data to sort individuals into colour-coded categories – red, yellow or green – corresponding to their health status and level of risk for COVID-19 (Dukakis, 2020).

This concerns not only healthcare but also social contacts. To prevent infection, it is necessary to estimate and to define one's circle of contacts: not only communication via gadgets but offline contacts, if you have your phone with you at a meeting. The AI sorts individuals into colour-coded categories – red, yellow or green. "While the code is visible to folks using the application, it also shares that data with the police" (Mehta, 2020). Thus, the mechanisms of social control are ascending to the next, more dangerous level, whereby deeply personal information is available to third parties. While it is possible to limit social contacts in accordance with medical advice in fact the goal is to isolate people at home under the pretext of quarantine measures.

DIGITAL VACCINE PASSPORT

The idea of controlling the freedom of citizens is not new, and China is not the only country well-known for that. Although the Chinese social credit system has been criticised, the electronically based vaccination certificate and its connection to personal data has been accepted in principle, as an idea, as something within in the realm of the possible. "A person who has a valid EU Digital COVID Certificate should in principle not be subject to additional restrictions, such as tests or quarantine, regardless of their place of departure in the EU" (EU Digital, 2022).

The Russian Federation has promoted its own application, "Travelling without COVID" (Travelling, 2022), which can be recognised in neighbouring countries. When one is ready to use it, they accept its terms of service, means that that person is ready to share their personal data with an enormous Russian databank.

In some cases, it amounts to a lack of trust and shows the danger of chronological theories. "Vaccine passports, digital identity & social credit systems are designed to manipulate human behaviour" (Hinchliffe, 2021).

The waves of protests against COVID restrictions underline a situation of redistribution of power in society, "As governments lose public trust, the private sector is building its trust capital. Google and Apple's collaboration on their exposure notification system positioned them as privacy guardians" (Scassa, 2020). Enough has been written about the panopticon, a new form of social control. I would instead like to draw attention to the question: Why do we need to use a smartphone and be ready to receive a call 24/7? The smartphone is key for the process of control. New media have created a new need – to be connected, to be online. Social networks propose a wide range of opportunities for the creation and manifestation of one's own identity by consumption of media in various forms (messengers, 'likes', sharing, etc.). Big Data and AI make it possible to predict a user's behaviour online via algorithms.

THE GLASS MAN'S OUTSOURCING OF SHAME

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, Marshall McLuhan put forth the idea of media as an extension of man. This notion of extension performs properly if we are talking about

traditional media as extensions of the external world for human bodily tools, "for media, as extensions of our physical and nervous systems, constitute a world of biochemical interactions that must ever seek new equilibrium as new extensions occur" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 202). It can, however, be a real challenge to define this new system. When media work "with our central nervous system strategically numbed, the tasks of conscious awareness and order are transferred to the physical life of man, so that for the first time he has become aware of technology as an extension of his physical body" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 47).

And the external approach of media can be broader and not limited to only our body; it can be presented by the idea:

> Since our new electric technology is not an extension of our bodies but of our central nervous systems, we now see all technology, including language, as a means of processing experience, a means of storing and speeding information (McLuhan, 1994, p. 353).

However, what happens if we also add facilities of new media and social media, based on the messengers of mobile technologies? It will be something different than an extension of our central nervous systems. If the central nervous system needs a body, then more complicated psychological processes can be created based on it. Conceivably the most important of them is consciousness as the highest form of mental activity, which actually allows us to be connected with other individuals:

> So the social aspect of new new media, though crucial, and in much greater evidence than the social aspect of older media, is not unique enough in new new media to warrant our use of the terms "social media" and "new new media" interchangeably (Levinson, 2014, p. 4).

This social aspect of new new media is deeply rooted in our human needs of communication, our necessity to speak and to be heard by the Other. According to that approach, the history of media development can be understood as the history of invention of new social needs and extensions in media that address them:

> [The] anthropotropic theory of media evolution – […] can be seen as an attempt, first, to fulfil the yearnings of imagination by inventing media that extend communication beyond the biological boundaries of hearing and seeing […], and, second, to recapture elements of the natural world lost in the initial extension (Levinson, 2001, p. 179).

But it is not a panacea to restore natural communication. Instead, we generate more complicated forms of communication and develop social media and cultural practice, the "remedial medium of remedial media" (Levinson, 2001, p. 179). New new media have offered the opportunity to provide outsourcing for our personal secrets. When it was just for my friends only, it was a game. Whilst in the case of the Glass Man identity, such an extension of man can work like outsourcing of shame or horrible memories. All of what once had to be hidden now can be visible and manipulated by others. When television reality shows became famous, Big Brother style, the audience took perverse pleasure in voyeurism, especially when participants spent time in the Big Brother room and confessed on camera. Nowadays, we confess about our private lives with a view to becoming popular and more recognised online.

Instagram, Twitter, or any other social (new new) medium is always ready to receive an upload of a user's private secret. Christian culture is based on the idea that we have something to hide, something to be ashamed of, something that is our personal secret and which we need to confess. There are no ordinary people without sins, only saints. The Glass Man identity allows people to be transparent and to bring to the public what we once used to keep hidden forever. The Glass Man is neither sinner nor saint.

Thus a new challenge is posed for the moral condition of society. Who can perform the function of external conscience in relation to a person? In that situation, how can our comprehension be changed: What is ethical, and what is not? As well, on what basis will the morality of the new Glass Man, who cannot have secrets, be founded? Thus, religious morals can be updated by including a new point on power. People change their behaviour in the sight of God, who was and is a moral regulator. Nobody, however, is able to believe in BigData, although morality and shame can be replaced by BigData, outsourcing our conscience there as extension.

While finishing up this article I came across the book *Machine Habitus: Toward a Sociology of Algorithms*. The sociological concept of habitus can be coded and converted into algorithms, as "Machine habitus can be defined as the set of cultural dispositions and propensities encoded in a machine learning system through data-driven socialisation processes" (Airoldi, 2022, p. 113). The concept of machine habitus does not repeat; it does not nevertheless contradict the metaphor of the Glass Man. Habitus has an individual dimension and even in algorithmic format it does not predict the future:

> Individual habitus is path-dependent for the very same reason: the sedimentation of past experiences as cultural schemas and dispositions, and their perceptual and classificatory influence on present and future practices (Airoldi, 2022, p. 125).

The Glass Man is practically living in a dystopia and is actually deprived of the opportunity to resist coercion and normalisation algorithms. Life under governance of the algorithms can be quite safe, but not necessarily free, not by default. "The prospect of severely curtailing the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals through ill-thought-out plans for 'immunity passports' or similar certificates […] is beyond dystopian" (Renieris, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The metaphor of the Glass Man has been applied to explain the status of the current cultural identification process. The body lacks the stamina and resistance needed to function properly. For the Glass Man identity, this means transparency by default. Now we can see the birth of a new type of human with the Glass Man identity, one who is not ashamed and/or has nothing to hide. This person is transparent like glass and is also hard but at the same time fragile. There will be absolute transparency for AI and algorithmisation of everyday processes and a total lack of privacy. Personal data and electronic traces of online activities do not belong to us in this new world; they are a profitable commodity. Glass Man identity

means transparency not for a person but for a corporation that acts in the mediated public space. In the era of QR-codes and vaccination passports, every move offline and online can be recorded and stored in databases. The Glass Man identity means a new type of human, a new type of balance between control and power. If Big Brother invades a closed and limited private space, then the Glass Man will simply be deprived of privacy by default and obliged to solve ethical dilemmas by outsourcing.

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THE POACHERS OF INSTAGRAM – TATTOO ARTISTS IN POLAND AND THEIR TACTICS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The rise of social media has had a huge impact on the body modification services market. This study aims to reflect on the transformation of the tattoo community, giving voice to tattoo artists themselves in order to reveal their practices within the digital spaces they operate in, and on this basis, to undertake a broader reflection on users' expectations towards social media in their current form and in the future. In order to achieve this premise, a grounded theory methodology was applied. The results of the study suggest that forms of resistance to platform hegemony, such as alternative social media, would not necessarily address the real needs of tattoo artists and their clients. Tattoo artists, by inventing various tactics of poaching in the polymedia environment, can reap unexpected benefits from the aspects of the platforms that are often perceived as limiting and potentially harmful – such as content selection algorithms.

Keywords: internet, social media, Instagram, grounded theory, affordances, Michel de Certeau

1. INTRODUCTION

On March 12, 2019, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the World Wide Web, as March 12, 1989 can be considered the symbolic beginning of the internet as we know it. The creator of the WWW, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, intended that the topology of the network based on hyperlinking would promote decentralization, support equal access to content and disrupt hegemonic relations of power. In the local context of Poland, the cultural scene of the phenomena described in this article, the beginning of the Internet coincides with the first free elections and the transformation of the social paradigm to democratic and participatory. The next step in the process of this (alleged) shift of power and authority towards users was the introduction of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s – the new paradigm of the active, creative

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produser (Bruns, 2008) was born. Concurrently, a techno-utopian myth of the internet as an egalitarian space of free expression of opinions and support for democratic processes was undermined by researchers who identified alarming trends, such as hyper-personalization and precise targeting of messages based on advanced behavioral and demographic data (Zuboff, 2019), dataism (Barlett, 2018), technological solutionism, and technological determinism (Morozov, 2013). Many scholars and public intellectuals point out that we are living through an unprecedented moment of a great leap in technological development where the profits and risks that derive from it are unequally distributed (Floridi, 2014; Lorenzi and Berrebi, 2019; Mason 2015; Mazzucato, 2013; Rushkoff, 2017). Despite the accusations leveled against social media for their negative impact on democracy and social life, they are a necessity for most in maintaining their professional and social activity, as corporate social media serve as a public infrastructure of communication. This was made even clearer during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the public sphere shrank almost exclusively to online. This article takes a closer look at the experience of users of digital platforms who must navigate or even "poach" in the conditions described above. Their practices and tactics for operating in these media as they are now may reveal their expectations and aspirations for the future of social media. The Polish tattoo community, thriving in recent years primarily on the Instagram platform, will serve as an example.

2. BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY AND DATA-COLLECTION PROCESS

The main purpose of this study was to investigate how those in the community of tattoo artists include Instagram in their professional activity. While this study has found many interesting new phenomena in the tattoo industry, the key observations are about tattoo artists' attitudes towards social media, their expectations of digital platforms, and their ideas about alternatives to them. In the Polish context, tattoos and the tattoo community have mainly been described from the perspective of subculture studies, the sociology of social groups (e.g., Zbyrad, 2015), or in the context of risk behaviors (e.g., Ostaszewski and Kocoń, 2007). Transformational impact of this social media platform in the area of art/body modification practices has been spotted both in popular circuits[1] as well as in academic reflection. In Western societies, social media platforms have forced a change in the existing practices of tattoo artists, such as the way their portfolios are built and presented to the public, but they have also introduced new paths of artistic career-building and have allowed specific styles of tattooing to emerge (Force, 2022; Walzer and Sanjurjo, 2016). This research, which stems from the tradition of ethnographic and cultural studies, also covers the topic of how Instagram has significantly transformed tattooing practices and the tattoo scene in Poland. However, I believe that the surplus value of this study consists of more advanced insights into the interrelationship between the social network and its users, as well as their ideas for

[1] For further discussion on this trend in popular culture magazines see for example: https://www.nylon.com/articles/instagram-influence-tattoo-culture [3.05.2022].

taming, domesticating and benefiting from this platform. The study will explore examples of bottom-up attempts of taking control of the data and the dynamics of a given medium, as well as grassroots ideas on how to capture and extract profits from a corporate platform.

The study includes five in-depth interviews with tattoo artists, conducted using a grounded theory approach, where theorizing follows empirical data. The choice of this research method was motivated by the belief that it is the participants themselves in a given social situation who can provide the right insight into it (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 2008). The interviews were conducted between December 2021 and February 2022. The group of interviewees consisted of one man, three women and one person identifying as non-binary; four of them were in their mid-20s, and the other was over 40. For all of them their professional career development coincided with the rise of social media and Instagram's gaining status as the medium of choice for tattoo artists, which dates back to around 4–5 years prior, according to their records. In-depth interviews were supplemented with observation of the research participants' Instagram patterns of use. After the data collection stage, the recorded interviews were written down and coded and organized using the thematic analysis method. Recurring topics, motifs and themes were identified to formulate relevant and more general remarks. As a result of the analysis of the collected material and coding, four levels of intertwinement between Instagram and tattoo practice emerged:

– Level 1: Patterns of use of Instagram tools and basic functionalization.
– Level 2: Negotiating positions within the medium and looking ahead.
– Level 3: The new culture of tattooing.
– Level 4: Instrumentalization and targeting: ultimate goals.

Various aspects of these four levels of Instagram use in the context of a tattoo artist's work are discussed in the following sections.

3. THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

3.1. PATTERNS OF USE OF INSTAGRAM TOOLS AND BASIC FUNCTIONALIZATION – LEVEL 1

The most basic finding from the interviews is that for all interviewees, Instagram is undoubtedly the main and the most important medium in the context of their tattoo work. The Instagram account is their main channel of contact with customers, although three out of five respondents have tried to set up booking systems via other digital or non-digital channels, mainly e-mail. Only one person is consistent in maintaining the e-mail booking system, while the rest have abandoned these attempts because most customers ignore e-mail requests and contact them via Instagram private messages. This may suggest that for customers as well Instagram is the default, most natural or even the anthropotropic (Levinson, 1997) form of contact, as they tend to consider Instagram as an end-to-end service platform, from consideration and selection of offers to after-sale customer service. For tattoo artists, however, this is not an optimal solution – they complain about an excess of messages in their

inboxes, leading to message clutter, difficulty finding conversations and the lack of an option to organize messages. This observation is supported by reoccurring Instastories published by one of the respondents in which they ask clients to re-contact them because they cannot find their conversation in the message box. One person has tried to by-pass the Instagram message box by keeping a parallel non-digital enrollment calendar. Despite these disadvantages, all respondents describe Instagram as a work tool and consider their time spent on using this app as being devoted to professional activity; as one of the respondents put it:

> But also I can… close this app and I don't get these notifications – when I go to Instagram, I know I'm in this 'work' mode and then the messages appear, and when I close the app my phone is private for me (INT1, 16–17).

Therefore, their use of Instagram features is subordinate to tattoo work: they follow other tattoo artists to become inspired and publish their projects, sketches and finished tattoos in a form of posts and Instastories, building their professional portfolio within this medium. Only one of the respondents admitted to having a profile on the platform for body-modification professionals. Conversely, none of the interviewees use Facebook any longer in their professional activity, as they consider its users out of their target group (the issue of reaching the right audience will be further addressed in section 3.4) and its visual features as unappealing and incompatible with their content:

> Well, and I've also noticed [on Facebook] that it's harder to add photos and to catalog them and they look… A little bit uglier? In the sense that when you open the Instagram app, you have this bio, information, highlights and then you see your feed, and on Facebook you just have this kind of wall and single photos, so you can't take a look at 10 photos, and often these photos together look much better [on Instagram] and more promising than a single photo like that (INT1, 55–59).

> So I've been using Facebook I think for two, three years, but more on the basis that I just automatically shared [content] from Instagram to Facebook, but I noticed that, well, so few people came to me from Facebook… that click "share to Facebook", if it gives me so little, then I don't even want to click that, so I just stick with Instagram, also because that I don't want to get distracted, because… I click it and do it in such a very automated way, it shows up on Facebook and somebody is going to, I don't know, maybe comment on it and so on. And I… I'd rather not put anything there than leave people with, you know, some unanswered questions for, I don't know, 13 weeks. So, with Facebook "friendship ended" (laughs) (INT4, 118–130).

Another platform that recurred in the interviews was TikTok. As the most rapidly growing social media platform[2], its phenomenon has not escaped the attention of tattoo artists. However, only one of the respondents is using it actively; INT1 treats it as a supplement to Instagram, which they use strictly for professional activity:

> I've kind of allocated my time from Instagram, which I associate with work, to TikTok, which is for me totally so… Pure entertainment (INT1, 653–655).

[2] https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/ [6.05.2022].

Other interviewees acknowledge importance of TikTok but are reluctant to use it, as they do not consider the specifics of this medium to be in line with their personal preference and personality; most of them do not even use the Instagram features that emulate TikTok functions, such as Reels. As can be seen, media convergence (Jenkins, 2008) is not always the desired direction of platform development from the perspective of specific user groups who view the medium primarily through the lens of the effectiveness of translating virtual contacts into real economic gain. The types of content, the specific display channels it is published in, reflections on the studied group of users in these practices, and their modes of operation will be discussed in the next section.

3.2. NEGOTIATING POSITIONS WITHIN THE MEDIUM AND LOOKING AHEAD – LEVEL 2

As indicated above, Instagram is an essential tool for building a professional and artistic position for all respondents of this research. Therefore, they use its features to establish a portfolio by creating a consistent gallery of posts; at the same time, however, some of them build their online personae with the use of Instagram functions such as Stories to present something more than flashes and healed tattoos. Four out of five interviewees publish content that is not limited to their direct work on tattoos, but also includes private-life information, their personal reflections of a social nature, artistic inspiration, simply entertainment, and educational content explaining a tattoo artist's work from behind the scenes (the importance and consequences of these practices will be further discussed in parts 3.3 and 3.4):

> And in terms of the things that I talk about… I very often touch on nonbinary topics, I've had a lot of questions about that, like, well, why do I have a husband, or how to address me, and I've touched on that in these Q&As as well. They can ask anything, but I don't have to answer every question. I wanted [my profile] to be a safe space, not like "oh god, how can you ask that?" No, sometimes I just won't answer, but I count myself lucky that someone will ask a question and that's ok for me because that's the aura I want to create. So I get a lot of questions about my mental health… Because that's how I try to put up with the taboo of going to a psychiatrist or a psychologist. [To show] that it's awesome, taking care of yourself, and when I recently posted a picture of what meds I take, noting that it's from a psychiatrist and all, that medicine is awesome, that this is what allows me to function and get up in the morning, about 20 people responded that they have the exact same prescriptions. And I feel like that makes it [visible to the public], that oh, there's a person who's doing cool things that they like, and they're also taking the medicine that I'm taking. It also makes me feel cool because I feel like I'm not so alienated, that I can see how many people are taking these medications… I would like to see a tattoo artist that I like, that shows that they also have anxiety, or they also have worse days, or they also sometimes get tired of their clients, not because they don't like them, but because they're already mentally exhausted and they want to cancel. Well, so that's cool. I mean, a positive thing (INT1, 475–491).

As shown in the excerpt from the interview above, it seems that exposing private aspects of their experience allows tattoo artists to get closer to their audience. It is also a way of naturalizing this platform by saturating it with vulnerability, vernacular manifestations of creativity, authentic, non-curated expressions of self. Sometimes the intimate content broadcasted on the

artists' profiles intersects with current social or political issues. One interviewee published an Instastory documenting their self-induced pharmacological abortion as a form of educational content, but also a manifesto, considering that access to abortion in Poland is limited to very specific cases. It is clear that tattoo artists use their profiles as a platform to publicize important topics and transform their reach into social action.

> Well, I use it a little bit to highlight some social issues, and I combine topics of politics with tattoos and pictures of my dog… So, it's just, you know, a subjective selection of topics, some more specific, I don't know, trends, and… Well, I often publish things that my friends, activists, are involved in, so those topics that affect me more are given priority. I also sometimes share some fundraisings that my clients or followers ask me to, but not all of them, unfortunately… (INT4, 51–55).

> I'm trying not to post any super personal stuff, but it's a matter of fact that I just don't like talking to the camera, I don't like talking about my life… but I like posting funny pictures, for example when I see something that makes me laugh, or when I see an anti-abortion van, I always have to submit it because it drives me crazy and I hope that someone will see it and react… (INT5, 283–288).

Two of the respondents have adopted a different strategy for operating on Instagram, professing the principle that what primarily shapes their personal brand and artistic standing is their artwork:

> I rather rely on such a system which simply consists of publishing works and showing my own person in the public space as little as possible. This means that I have always wanted the people who come to me and observe what I do to focus mainly on my work. So that there wouldn't be, as brutal as it sounds, this human factor that could somehow suggest or favor my person to some people… So that this work… would defend itself (INT2, 11–18).

> But I also like to do this [post artistic inspiration content], only when it's not very personal. I don't, for example, tell about what I do, who I am, I mean, I don't reveal my privacy, my emotionality, I admit that I like how others do it, but I can't afford it, no… Maybe it's a matter of being from the old school which taught me to think that my work says the most about me… (INT3, 254–259).

No matter to what degree the interviewees reveal their personal traits, they all share a common tactic of personalizing their experience of using Instagram in a way that is most convenient and valuable to them, in order to negotiate their position within this medium. One of the aspects of this approach is domesticating the medium and making it a safe space to enable comfortable, efficient operations, for example, by turning off the notifications or unfollowing or blocking users whose activity is troublesome. Another example of Instagram personalization is 'hacking' the default features to adapt them to the needs of the artists – the most evident example of this tactic is using Stories Highlights to sort and catalog their content into categories, such as 'sketches', 'flashes', 'healed works', 'FAQs' or 'bookings'. Two of the interviewees created separate profiles dedicated solely to the purpose of archiving finished tattoo works or presenting other forms of their artistic activity.

Being aware that they have to operate outside of their sphere, where they do not have a full grasp of the rules, tattoo artists demonstrate a strong awareness of Instagram policies

and algorithmic logic; in each of the five interviews the topic of algorithmic culture and the social and personal consequences of Instagram's business model emerged:

> It's widely known that Instagram is not made to support my joyful creativity, it's made to, well, to monetize me and my followers and clients… Instagram just, well, treats me like a hamster on a wheel: It's fine as long as I'm working my butt off, you know, I'm posting a lot of stories, some 'clickable' stuff and so on, but when I don't want to do that, I know that I'm going to be sent somewhere at the end of the line as punishment, and that these algorithms will put me somewhere far away (INT4, 148–153).

In order to strike a balance between the desire to comply with (implicit or even obscure) algorithmic regulations and the need to preserve one's own identity and to be able to express oneself freely, a tattoo artist has to adopt the attitude of a poacher condemned to seek cracks in the dominant structure and invent specific tactics to extract benefits out of a system that is primarily exploiting their affective work. The cultural practice of poaching, the term first introduced by Michel de Certeau (de Certeau, 1984) and later developed by, among others, Henry Jenkins (Jenkins, 2012), initially referred to the practice of reading as habituating literary texts, but it may also be used as a vehicle of understanding the attitudes that Instagram users take towards this medium. To illustrate it by referring to de Certeau's words, one could try replacing the word "reader" with "user", "author" with "platform", and "text" with "medium":

> A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient. Renters make comparable changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories; as do speakers, in the language into which they insert both the messages of their native tongue and, through their accent, through their own "turns of phrase," etc., their own history; as do pedestrians, in the streets they fill with the forests of their desires and goals (de Certeau, 1984, p. 29).

That is what tattoo artists do by consciously shaping their profiles and developing individual practices for operating within the medium. In some cases, it takes a form of contesting the mainstream, dominant aesthetics and choosing to resist the "best practices" promoted by the platform's creators for account maintenance; it is also backed up by their reflections on the overabundance of content on Instagram that they don't want to put their hand to:

> I feel like I'm shirking the algorithms a bit… I know how to pump it up, but I don't really have the energy for it. I also know that you need make these stories very often, so that they keep firing up, refreshing, but I have a problem with the fact that, for example, I have nothing to say or show, so I ask myself 'why the hell should I write this story?'. And this is also the issue of contribution to this Instagram junkyard and littering the interpersonal space, to this constant pushing at people and fighting for their attention. It's also problematic for me that there's this growth principle, that you have to grow to not disappear (INT3, 288–295).

> No, no, no, [I] never [used paid promotion], although I was criticized for that by my friends, also for that I didn't use even such simplest forms [of promoting content] as hashtags because what I cared about most was this pragmatic side (INT2, 525–527).

> No, I don't do anything like that [paid promotion] (laughs). Sometimes I don't even add captions to these photos, so in general it's… maybe I don't pay attention to it, maybe I don't need it much… as much as I have, it's enough for me, for me it's also fun, and it's great that I don't have to stress about it, that… I don't know, I think that when it comes to tattooing and the tattoo world, I think a lot of people want to have a tattoo and it's, like, one would have to really don't post anything on Instagram and just sit in their room and, like, don't post anything and turn Instagram off to make people stop requesting [about a tattoo]… So no, I don't do things like that, well, I was wondering if maybe I should do something like that, but I rather was wondering if there was maybe another way, maybe besides this paid promo and besides these hashtags… It seems to me that, I don't know, I know what I like and sometimes when I see that people are so 'over-' and they promote themselves too much, it turned me off them. I don't feel encouraged because I feel that it's some kind of advertisement and I hate advertisements because they are everywhere… (INT5, 199–220).

As seen in the example above, in the field of tattoo work, content that is over-curated and too polished may not comply with the aesthetic preferred both by tattoo artists and their clients. But the practices of Instagram poachers consist not only of acts of resistance against the hegemonic power of the platform; there are also acts of willing sacrifices and "rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's":

> I upload an Instastory every day… even when I was going on vacation, and I wanted to be offline. I uninstalled Instagram so I wouldn't be tempted, but once a day I uploaded an Instastory, just so I wouldn't have to revive my account later, and then I uninstalled it again. So Instastory is a must, it's a last resort, if you don't publish an Instastory within 24 hours, then you can see right away that you must put in a lot of work to get back to some decent level [of reach] (INT4, 225–231).

> So Instagram is also a psychological trap: it kind of gives me instant gratification when a post is liked and there are positive comments, but it also makes me sad or sorry if I post something that I think is great and it doesn't get any response. And for me it's emotional work to do with myself to separate these things, so that Instagram doesn't have such a drastic influence on my psychological life, and as I said, it gives me a lot but it also takes a lot. I mean, it [Instagram] wants a lot from me and it wants to get its hands on a lot of aspects of my life. So it's a give and take situation. It lets me work and reach out to people, but it also demands a lot for that (INT3, 373–381).

From the above interview excerpts the following picture emerges: Instagram as a field of continuous renegotiations of users' positions and the invention of tactics to strike a balance between submission and resistance. The interviewees consider their activity within the medium in transactional terms, where some investments or expenses (both in a literal and figurative sense) have to be made in order to achieve the intended effect; this effect, securing continuity of tattoo session appointments and thus financial security, will be further discussed in part 3.4.

Having presented some examples of how users attempt to tame Instagram's hegemonic ambitions and juggle between adapting to its rules and developing their own practices for operating within the medium, the final part of this section briefly discusses tattooists' reflections on alternatives to this platform, desired directions for change in its functioning, and contingency plans in the event of changes in the media platform landscape.

Even though the in-depth interviews were generally loosely structured, at some stage respondents were asked about alternative media to run their business, specifically whether

they had heard of an emerging Polish platform dedicated to tattoo artists.[3] Views on this idea vary, but opinions expressing doubt over creating such a platform prevail:

> I think there are already two apps, I know one app and it offered me an access to it for tests, and I also found another one. But I don't get it… I think that it probably wouldn't work. I don't like it that way. When I tried to use those two apps, it's like… Instagram encourages me to spend time there because I can see more than just tattoos there, I can see other things too, I can check out a person holistically, not just through tattoos. And if I saw a profile limited to tattoos only, I don't know whether I would dare to sign up for a tattoo with that person. Like, it doesn't give me that certainty that this person will be cool. What else, like, I don't know, I go to make an appointment for nails and I see that person has done so many nails, cool feedback, ok – I can go. However, this is a tattoo, something more intimate (INT1, 910–925).

> And I thought to myself that it might not be stupid to do something like that [a platform dedicated to tattoo artists], although on the other hand the fact that it's all connected to each other [on Instagram] is interesting, because, I don't know, it seems to me that nowadays every new application or website, like Facebook or Instagram and everything, every portal, everything is there, there must be more and more [features], this TikTok thing… If there's nothing happening on it, then people stop being interested in it at all, so I don't know if, when it comes to this tattoo world, if that wouldn't also be cutting yourself and other users off some space. Because there are people who draw and have just started tattooing and, for example, tattooing is for them just some kind of… it's not a job, they do it once every two weeks and it's cool for them… But… it should be available to people too. I like to browse through these accounts sometimes, look at the stuff, I actually rarely check on tattoo accounts, I follow painters, graphic designers or totally different things, but it's a matter of my interests, but it's interesting that there's access to different things, not just tattoo artists (INT5, 42–54).

As presented in the excerpts above, tattoo artists perceive Instagram's content diversity as an asset of Instagram which allows them to get inspiration from artistic creations other than tattoos, but also to place tattoo work in a broader context of artistic creation as such and present the background of the personality of the tattoo artist himself; the rise of this holistic approach to tattoo process, not limited to the tattoo itself, will be discussed in part 3.3. Going back to the examples above, again, an interviewee points out a characteristic feature of Instagram, namely convergence and progressive resemblance of their functionalities. Universalization of these functionalities, entailing an abundance of messages and content, becomes a standard for social media users, which may indicate that a social medium limited to a narrow group of people and topics (e.g., tattoo artists) may not gain much popularity. In terms of the future of social media, this insight suggests that alternative platforms, centered around specific topics, succumbing to the illusion of the apparent effectiveness of precise targeting, may not necessarily meet the needs of their designed users. The variety of topics, styles and aesthetics on Instagram allows tattoo artists to find their niche and gather an audience that shares the same values or artistic taste (more about targeting the right audience will be presented in part 3.4):

[3] The specific name of this platform was not introduced by the interviewer so as not to inhibit the spontaneous response of the interviewees; the abovementioned online service for tattoo artists is INKsearch.co. None of the respondents had any extensive knowledge about this tool.

> Oh, okay, I think I heard about this app, but I don't remember [the name]. Well, there are couple of these big accounts on Instagram that run tattoo portals or tattoo review sites… It could be useful tool for tattoo artists who, I don't know, do everything… there's a huge percentage of the clientele that doesn't have a certain style that they like, or doesn't have a tattoo artist that they like, and I think those portals will be dedicated to those people so they can figure out who to hit, or just to do research. But I have, I don't know, such a specific style and such a specific clientele that I would function on such a website as some kind of a freak or an account that nobody visits because I don't think there's a broader, general demand for the kind of tattoos that I do (INT5, 391–405).

Although tattoo artists appreciate Instagram as a place of opportunities for their business, they are also aware of its fragility and the risk of losing an account due to either privacy policy issues, technical breakdowns or some more general shifts of power on the social media market; some of them have prepared contingency plans for account or application problems:

> Well, it [operating exclusively on Instagram] is also kind of risky from the point of view that these accounts are rarely blocked, but they still are. Well, I'm aware that this can also happen to me in spite of the two-step verification process, so it would make my work a bit more difficult, but on the other hand, that's why I'm glad that I have these records on my e-mail, because if it happened, I'd have an archive of, I don't know, 1,000 or 3,000 people on my e-mail, to whom I would write an e-mail saying that, well, "I lost my account, I invite you to another one" and in this case I would have some contact with this lost 'community' and it's important to have some diversification of the ways of reaching clients, because it seems to me that if there are tattoo artists who have everything on Instagram, like a booking system and so on, well, they'd have a problem. And so, well it's just, this awareness of being dependent on a monopolist is a bit of a downside here, because these accounts are blocked sometimes for no reason at all (INT4, 413–413).

> Between employees, we have this app that worked for me when there was that shutdown, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook and everything, we use Signal… We started [using it] earlier than [the Facebook shutdown], but as the breakdown happened, I was already convinced and I was glad to have another communicator for company matters. If Instagram were to kind of fall apart now, I wouldn't have the ability to communicate with my clients, but I can communicate with the people I work with. So that's very important to me (INT1, 77–79, 583–586).

Considering the above examples, it seems that even though Instagram is the central activity terminal for their work, tattoo artists function in a wider polymedia environment (Madianou and Miller, 2012). These media offer various communicative opportunities and affordances (Gibson, 1979) from which users choose and shift between, depending on their objectives and needs. They also express their dissatisfaction with certain features that they would welcome Instagram's removal of, such as a visible number of followers that puts them under pressure or an overabundance of content that creates a feeling of being inundated, not allowing them to break through with their message and content.

Despite preparing 'B plans' and securing backups for possible shutdowns, interviewees see the possible demise of Instagram as a liberating vision; when INT1 asked about their feelings in reaction to the Facebook outage in October 2021, they admitted that they felt a huge sense of relief. One of the respondents made an interesting remark on what could be an effective

safety net in case of deletion of an Instagram account, seeing the most important backup plan in strong interpersonal ties and accumulated social and symbolic capital:

> Honestly, I don't do backups, because if you get along well with people, then in any case like, where the account is blocked or deleted, it wouldn't be a problem to get back into their consciousness. There will always be someone willing to help to promote you again, if you were already a proven person and you built something in terms of your achievements, your accomplishments (INT2, 384–388).

Therefore, it seems that this affordance and opportunity choice space is not limited to the functions and features offered by the technological tools of various media, but is also inextricably interwoven with the space of social interactions and traditional social bonds; the importance of networking with other tattoo artists and clients, strongly emphasized by all respondents, will be further discussed in section 3.4.

3.3. THE NEW CULTURE OF TATTOOING – LEVEL 3

The analysis of empirical data demonstrates that all interviewees share a common belief in being part of and co-creating a new tattoo culture that highly values the partnership and equality of the tattooed-tattooist relationship, prioritizes cooperation over competition between artists, promotes education and informed consent on the tattooing process, and removes the odium of exclusivity and inaccessibility from the practice of tattooing. They see themselves as the new wave in the tattoo community, replacing the old, closed culture of tattoo parlors, bringing a new quality of tattooing and filling a gap in the education and dissemination of knowledge about the practices of tattooing:

> I talk about myself a lot on Instagram. I often add Instastories and share some more intimate thoughts, and I do it to make people feel comfortable with me. For instance, I thought to myself: which tattoo artists do I like and why do I approach someone through Instagram? It's because, for example, someone has said that they have anxiety and sometimes they need to leave a session and then I feel like okay, I can go to this person because they will understand when I need a break, and I've noticed that people have started to resonate a little bit with that: "Oh, I came to you for my first tattoo because I saw, I felt through, these Instastories that you are some kind of an empathetic, nice person." And I try to stand for 'safe space' on my profile so that people can get to know me, because we'll spend some time together when someone comes to me and I'm poking into their skin, so [laughs]… And I also missed that… When I started tattooing, but I didn't work in the industry yet, I often encountered, both on Instagram and directly in the studios, [the tattoo artists] being angry with clients that they're so uninformed, that they ask stupid questions, or that they cancel last minute, and it's so shitty and everything, and I thought to myself – but nobody talks about that. I mean, they tell people off for something that they're not informing them about… People often don't know whether they have to shave before getting a tattoo or not, or how long it takes [getting a tattoo done], or if they can eat [during the session]… I haven't seen on any Polish account that I've been following a consistent Q&A that would answer such tattoo questions, even the stupidest ones. So I decided to create one (INT1, 93–112).

Combining an educational message about the tattooing process with lifestyle content and revealing one's private life (as mentioned and exemplified in section 3.2 above) is a distinctive

feature of the way in which the new generation of tattooists communicates. In this new culture of tattooing, a clear shift in the center of gravity may be observed, that moves from the tattoo as the final result to the tattooing process itself and the relationship that is established in the intimate process of penetrating the skin with a needle. Respondents link this transformation to the rise of social media, Instagram in particular. They all acknowledge that Instagram has opened up opportunities for them to reach people interested in their services and has given them a sense of independence:

> Social media has allowed me to reach out directly to people who are potentially interested in what I have to offer them. So if I'm going to be critical of Instagram later on, I have to point out at the beginning that it's something that's allowed me to reach my client group and kind of keep getting in touch with them and reaching out to them and kind of work on my own terms, because people who come to me expect a certain quality of service, which is completely obvious, although I'm not in a situation where someone would force something on me against my style, my aesthetic and my sense of what's right and good. I have my own designs and style to offer, and I have a chance to reach people who are interested in them (INT3, 13–21).

> I remember when I first started [4–5 years prior], to put it mildly, I was very much unwanted by older tattoo artists. I mean people 30 plus – I was 19 or 20 when I started. It was definitely a problem [for them] that I dared to do things that were not part of the old-school tattoo scheme, and at that time –it was only 4 years ago –the things that I wanted to do were so weird, but in a negative way –the 'old lions' perceived it in a negative way (INT2, 58–64).

Instagram has significantly expanded the space available to tattoo artists while lowering the barriers to entry into the industry. Two of the respondents work exclusively from their homes; the other three operate from studios they have established, but all of them have the experience of being an apprentice in a traditional tattoo parlor. As they admit, it was Instagram that allowed them to set up their businesses. They find that not only has Instagram enabled the spread of new aesthetic trends in tattooing, it has also lowered the barrier of entry into the industry by eliminating one erstwhile link in the tattoo practice chain, that of tattoo parlors. The 'social media turn' in the tattoo industry is associated with a significant increase in the number of tattoo artists on the market. An interesting observation gleaned from the interviews, in the perception of tattoo artists themselves, is that the growing number of tattoo artists does not imply an increase in competition. The factor of increased demand and interest in tattooing is obviously important here, but this phenomenon is accompanied by an increase in the professional solidarity of tattooists and a sense of a mission to popularize and normalize the practice of tattooing. The interviewees are directly involved in efforts to support young artists taking their first steps in the industry; for instance, every week INT1 gives their space on Instastory to a young artist, showcasing their work and encouraging people to sign up for their tattoos, and they offer courses and online manuals for aspiring tattooists, while another artist goes even further, encouraging clients to try their hand at tattooing:

> It seems to me that this is natural process of moving away from the idea that tattooing is something closed, that only a certain group of people can do it. For me it's great and I often tattoo someone and they tell me: 'oh, I have financial problems', and then I say: 'oh, I'll teach you how to tattoo'…

> I know that when someone draws and I know that he or she draws well and he or she does some brilliant drawings or even conceptual things, he or she doesn't have to draw great, he or she can do some well-drawn texts and that is a great option, and when people say that 'now there are so many tattoo artists, that everyone is a tattoo artist', but I think in my opinion it is great, because why limit it at all (INT5, 414–422).

Cooperation between representatives of a new generation of tattoo artists as one of the pillars of the business model will be discussed in the next paragraph; at this point, however, a critical remark should be made. While it is right, especially in grounded theory approach, to rely on empirical data and to give voice to the actors themselves in a given social situation, it is also worthwhile, in order to verify and triangulate the collected data, to weigh it against other accounts and sources. As respondents acknowledge, social media has certainly been a change agent in tattoo culture and, as a new channel for connecting tattoo artists and customers, it has established itself as an undeniable alternative to tattoo studios. However, it seems that traditional tattoo parlors also offered a wider variety of styles while remaining committed to traditional tattooing styles and techniques. As Lee Barron (Barron, 2017) argues, an important factor that has led to an increase in the visibility of the tattoo in the social space and the removal of its connotations associated with dangerous subcultures and risky behavior was the appearance of celebrities presenting their tattoos in public as a form of individual expression of the self. This has led to an explosion of interest in tattooing and, in response to increased demand, an expansion of what the tattoo studios offer to include individual designs or less classical aesthetics. Then comes the other change agent – social media. As the contemporary cycles in cultural production become very short and social media – with their infinite capacity and redundancy of stimuli and messages – produce a sense of constant novelty, it becomes difficult for users to consider certain phenomena as having a trajectory and history. Fredric Jameson calls this phenomenon 'cultural amnesia' (Jameson, 1979). The perception of a radical break with the old paradigm of tattooing, which grew out of tattoo studios that exuded an aura of exclusivity while offering a limited range of aesthetics, is shared by all respondents, but it may stem from of the specific timing of entering the industry and the lack of direct experience and knowledge of how tattoo parlors operated. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the market of body modification services has undergone significant changes in the last few years and the hegemonic structures of power represented by tattoo studios have lost their influence; the 'new new media' (Levinson, 2013) have become a major player in this social situation, while establishing and reproducing new power structures, this time of a market and economic nature. Further discussion of this transformation in the perspective of the categories developed by postcolonial theory will be made in the final concluding section of the study.

3.4. INSTRUMENTALIZATION AND TARGETING: ULTIMATE GOAL – LEVEL 4

Having discussed the modes of operation of tattoo artists on the Instagram platform, their specific tactics of domesticating and naturalizing this medium and their contributions to building a new tattoo culture, we can now move on to the final section of the analytical part of this article, which will concern the instrumentalization of the activities described

above undertaken by the respondents as part of their professional activity in this medium. All interviewees emphasized that the ultimate and most important goal of running their profiles on Instagram is to acquire customers:

> So yeah… the main goal is continuity of bookings. I don't need people to sign up for a long time in advance, so when I have a [calendar booked for the next] month or so, I can loosen up a bit with the content, and then, when things become urgent, suddenly I become very engaged and I upload a lot of flashes. I am very talkative about these tattoos and so on, so it [my activity on Instagram] comes in waves (INT4, 27–31).

> Oh, there's also this livestream format, I tried it once because there were all this talk about this engaged community and so on, so I said "oh, ok, I'll try it", I'll try to comply with these golden rules of an engaged community, so I just answered some questions for over an hour that I had asked people to ask me beforehand, and there were a few categories, about tattooing, about books, about my views and so on, and I actually answered these questions for about an hour, and it was so weird for me that it was watched by about 40 people, but it was awesome. 40 people, but the tattoo bookings went crazy after that. And it was weird for me, but I had… I don't know how these algorithms work and so on, but I actually got a lot of requests for tattoos over the next few days (INT4, 242–250).

As seen in the excerpts above, their activity on Instagram fluctuates and is determined by the need to fill a work schedule. Their grassroots tactics of naturalizing the environment of this medium, such as exposing private-life or behind-the-scenes content, organizing various activities for followers and keeping in touch with them, are instrumentalized to ensure a flow of new customers. Contrary to the remarks of Babecki and Żyliński, for respondents naturalization is not a process opposite to instrumentalization, understood as "an effort to create and implement ideas that make it a tool for of communication, which would guarantee the possibility of registering the so-called effects of truthfulness in the reality beyond the media" (Babecki and Żyliński, 2018, p. 13). In this case, naturalization itself is instrumentalized in order to achieve measurable goals of communicative effectiveness and, in effect, to influence material reality. Disclosing private matters, familiarizing the audience, making a feed a safe space is, after all, supposed to result in tattoo bookings. It also implicates that building a position within a medium based solely on internal metrics such as reach and number of followers is not relevant to them.

> TikTok is such an illusory medium… you can have a much larger reach in terms of numbers, but in my opinion, let's say, a thousand followers on Instagram versus 10,000 followers on TikTok, this thousand followers on Instagram is of better quality. In terms of the [tattoo] work itself. In the case of my tattoo practice, in pragmatic terms, what's in it for me when I have 10,000 people following me from, say, the Philippines, if I'm probably never going to meet them, nor will they ever come here to Europe? [...] I've noticed such a curious thing, that I've often encountered comments from people who have tried to use TikTok, that it did more… It's not about the harm, it's just that it gave them an endorphin rush, from the amount of people who appreciated their stuff, but what's in that for them when they're wasting their time writing with people who will never come to them to do something [get a tattoo] anyway? [...] I was always considering [Instagram] in terms of how many people come to me in a given month, not how many followers I have at

> the end of the month. I've always looked at the purely physical, pragmatic fabric of what I do, not how many people will follow it globally. Because like I said earlier – what is in it for me that I am recognized by the whole world, if potentially from all these countries, only people from my area will be able to visit me? [...] I've never been impressed by the sheer numbers and I've never depended on that in my entire approach to what I do. Of course, if there is some growth, it always makes you happy, but on the other hand it also brings this problem that now I will have to answer to more people [requests] and most of them will probably not want to do anything with me at the end of the day. They just like to chat (INT2, 355–371, 395–400, 426–431).

The pleasure of external gratification in the form of likes or comments is acknowledged by the respondents, but at the end of the day they are aware that what is important is the translation of these virtual interactions into real effects they have on their business:

> It [the number of followers] just stresses me out… and then I find myself thinking that it's so irrelevant. For me the most important thing is to have clients for next month. And that's my only goal, to be able to make a living off that, because what's in it for me when I have 20,000 followers but I don't have a job for another two weeks? For what? And I feel like my brain is sometimes, you know, it craves new followers, it feels like this dopamine starts to work, and it's making me so anxious. It's addictive… (INT1, 403–410).

Although the need to ensure continuity of bookings leads them to organize all of their activity within the service, that does not mean that tattoo artists want to acquire customers at any cost, by any means possible. The interviewees apply the tactic of rational investment of their resources (time, attention, engagement) in Instagram activity in order to achieve maximum results:

> I tried to run a Facebook profile, but the feedback from Facebook was really low, so I got discouraged with this medium. I don't know if I did the right thing or if I did it out of laziness, but I saw that it was more profitable for me to invest [my resources] in Instagram (INT3, 349–351).

> As long as I have that month of bookings ahead, I don't go into any extra stuff, my goal is satisfied. So I could spend a lot of time and have a lot of views on TikTok, but I doubt it will translate into more bookings, so I don't do it. There are various tattoo portals, but to be there for the sake of being there is just pointless. And when it comes to [tattoo] conventions, I've probably been to one or two… but I also don't think that it translates into anything when it comes to the bookings… I can catch a client without leaving my house, so it's better for everyone not to leave the house than to just spend a lot of money and get terribly tired at these conventions (INT4, 364–373).

> And I also know that Instagram rewards super-infantile things like quizzes, I mean, I'm not fucking doing the "guess my favorite color" quiz for grown-up people. That'd be crazy, right? Or, like, Instagram also really wants people to interact with me, so once in a while, when my account is dying, well, then I do these AMA [ask me anything] sessions, even though I don't really care about that. You have to post it from time to time so that the account goes, you know [gestures with hand rising], skyrocketing (INT4, 171–177).

From the examples above the following picture emerges: their approach to using Instagram tips, tricks and hacks to increase account visibility is akin to a relationship with a deity

to whom sacrifices must be made from time to time. However, being too proactive is also undesirable, and in fact can be potentially dangerous. Too much coverage and interest in their work can become a curse for the tattoo artist:

> I feel like a lot of people think that the reach is followed by the job. It definitely is, but the problem is that you can fail to live up to expectations because tattooing is a responsible job. It shouldn't be done halfway. I discovered this in myself that when there were better months, where I had a surplus of work, but I wasn't even aware that something could be a surplus for me, it never ended well for me. It's not even about the service per se that I was providing, it's about my attitude that I wasn't happy with, because I felt that I wasn't doing it to the extent that I should be doing it – what I expected of myself (INT2, 447–452).

Refraining from excessive activity or, in contrast, publishing content that has a specific tone or touches on particular topics, with the hope that it will be displayed to potentially interested users thanks to the operation of the algorithm, may also be considered as a vernacular, grassroots audience-targeting tool for tattoo artists. An even more important function of this tactic is that of calibrating the audience base, sifting out people whose values, aesthetic taste, or views might be incompatible with their own:

> It [revealing one's views and personality] is also important in a matter of eliminating some people this way, which is awesome, because I wouldn't want to spend too much time with someone I'm arguing with and neither would that person… Especially since there's such a plethora of tattoo artists that if someone has a problem with values that are important to me, I'd rather they not come to me and that's it. It's very much selection on that basis (INT4, 69–74).

> I'm a pretty sensitive person… I've been tattooing for four years now, and I've found that I give a lot of myself. When a person comes to me, it's hard for me to separate that kind of work from… okay, like, someone comes as a client, and that's it. And I do the tattoo, and that's it. I soak up both the emotions and the approach of these people who come to me. I've noticed that I've made such a nice niche for myself – using the style of tattooing, my thoughts, approach to life, the memes I share, and so on. In fact, I would rather have fewer clients, but only from that bubble of mine, than… Like, I don't use that kind of [paid] promotion on Instagram, or I'm just afraid to promote in places other than Instagram because I don't want people who don't know me, who don't follow my feed, to hit on me (INT1, 191–197).

This tactic serves both sides of the tattooing process: building a tattooist's online persona by publishing content of a specific nature also helps followers to better research services and choose a person whose style of tattooing is appealing to them, but more importantly, whose style of social interaction will be comfortable for them, since, as discussed in the previous section, a holistic view of the tattooing process as a relationship is characteristic for the contemporary participants in tattoo culture:

> And in terms of [publishing] private stuff, yes, clearly it does have an effect on bookings and on interest. There is something that, well, when you go for a tattoo, it's such an intimate thing, an intimate visit and… Well, now people have a huge choice of tattoo styles, there are thousands of tattoo artists in every city, so people can freely choose from these service providers, so when it

> comes to me showing my face or some moments from everyday life, it's not that I'm fighting for clients, it's just that I'm giving some kind of a signal that, well, you're going to some kind of, you know, normie, that you shouldn't expect that I'll drive up on a Harley and that I'll tattoo you in some basement or something… Well, [I want to show] that they're going to an ordinary person, and so that they won't be stressed because there isn't any controversy about me, you can always talk to me about doggos or something (INT4, 56–68).

> [On average] once a week a person comes in and says they came in for their first tattoo because they couldn't imagine going to another person because they felt so comfortable on my Instagram. And it's super motivating to me that I'm doing cool stuff and that person then comes back, it's also the most important thing to me that that person really felt so comfortable that they came back to me for another tattoo (INT1, 325–329).

As mentioned above, respondents hardly ever use professional Instagram advertising tools as they seem too obscure and advanced, so they are thus not worth investing in. Meanwhile, their own alternative ways of reaching their desired customer base appear to be far more effective. These tactics can also include networking between members of the new generation of tattoo artists. This takes the form of, for example, tagging each other in their Instastories or posts, but also going beyond the digital world by inviting each other to guest spots. The customers themselves also act as ambassadors for the artists, for example by tagging them in photos of their healed tattoos. Moreover, the tattoos themselves, functioning in the social space of the visual, act as memes in Dawkins' original conception – as units of cultural information that spread through society like a virus (Dawkins, 1989):

> The best networking tool is going to guest spots, and it really translates [into bookings]. I go to, let's say, Wroclaw. And like here in Warsaw the word-of-mouth works, someone sees my tattoo and asks "who did it?" and someone will redirect him or her to me, then in Warsaw we have, so to say, spread this virus, but it is good to go to other cities and sow the seeds there, so that few people with my tattoos would walk around these cities, so that these people, not only on Instagram, could see it live, verify how it looks like in person, and then one may feel more motivated to come to Warsaw from Wroclaw, Cracow, or Poznan. So it works, too (INT4, 373–382).

Going back to the digital environment, apparently, as some respondents reported, the operations of algorithms, while not always understandable from the users' perspective, sometimes yields unexpected, positive results, opening up new opportunities:

> There was this girl from a studio in Poznan… she uploaded it [an Instastory] (she also does awesome tattoos), and I literally gave her just a reaction to the story and then she followed me, invited me to the convention, and the studio started following me. All it took was one reaction [to the story], my clueless reaction, and that one reaction triggered it and a bunch of other things happened (INT5, 127–134).

The experience of complexity, of being lost in the implicit logic of social media algorithms, policies and procedures, as several times brought up by some respondents, is therefore counterbalanced by the experience of encounters with the unexpected by allowing emergent processes to work. The question of Instagram as a complex system, whose normative characteristics

are uncertainty and unpredictability, connectedness and networkedness, emergence, openness and variability, is addressed in the last part of the text.

4. SUMMARY AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this study argues that the growth of social media has had a huge impact on the body modification services market. This shift of power and trajectory of transformation brings to mind the dynamics of the decolonization process.[4] The model of social dynamics of the time of empire (Hardt and Negri, 2006), in which power (in this case, of technological nature) is dis-centered, networked, and difficult to grasp and oppose, seems interesting and fruitful to apply on the development of tattoo culture in the digital environment, and it deserves separate research. From the perspective of tattoo artists, the emergence of social media as a major player has opened up new opportunities to run their own businesses, independent of tattoo studios, which previously provided the infrastructure of work and the space for the production of tattoo culture. Apparently, in the new social situation where traditional tattoo parlors have become irrelevant, social media has taken their place as the new structures of power, this time of economic and technological nature. A young generation of home-based, self-proclaimed tattoo artists has struck out on its own, gaining a new space for action, namely Instagram, in which they must operate in accordance with the procedures, rules and policies required by the technological intermediary. This limits vertical movements aimed at systemic change – which is why actors in the social situation, in this case tattoo artists, are looking for their own vernacular, grassroots ways to tame the medium and adapt it to their needs as best they can. This means that in the new infrastructure that produces a new cultural situation, there are also new movements of a horizontal nature; the tools of poaching in the foreign land of the medium used by tattoo artists range from trying to discover and hack the logic of algorithms and harness them for their own purposes, through producing their own visual and communication codes that allow them to effectively attract customers, to instrumentalizing practices of naturalization of the medium, such as their content saturated with personal traits. They treat social media not as once-consolidated structures, but rather as spaces of affordances (Gibson, 1979) from which they choose the appropriate ways to use them, making the experience of functioning in them as personal, tamed and imbued with a personal character as possible. Although Instagram is their main channel of communication, tattoo artists do not rely solely on it. Functioning in a polymedia environment (Madianou and Miller, 2012), they diversify risk and support themselves in their work with other technological tools and secure their work by building personal ties within the industry and investing in social and symbolic

[4] However far-reaching the comparison of the transformation of tattoo culture to decolonization processes may seem, I use it with appreciation for the achievements of postcolonial studies and with the awareness that the model of the dynamics of social change drawn from postcolonial theory has already been applied to other phenomena of social life; for example, Randy Martin (Martin, 2015) uses decolonization process as a tool for reflecting on the contemporary logic of derivatives and other financial products that have broken free from the power of banks and financial institutions.

capital. These social networks of a new type, when analyzed through the example of the tattoo community, appear to be more extensive and yet of a looser weave – it is possible to function on their periphery, on one's own terms, while remaining in the orbit of social support offered by it. The practices and tactics of tattoo artists described above indicate that they are comfortable with the dynamic complex systems in which they operate (Batorski et al., 2003; Mitchell, 2009), trying to deal in their own ways with the experience of emergence as a fundamental force shaping social processes (Krajewski, 2013), partly accepting it, partly trying to negotiate their agency, while remaining open to chance events, which may sometimes lead to unexpected, positive occurrences. Their flexibility and willingness to adapt is perhaps the reason why tattoo artists don't fear power shifts on the technological market or even the demise of Instagram as such; they are aware of the historicity of this medium and anticipate that the future of social media is happening now and want to remain open to it.

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SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE FUTURE: UNDER THE SIGN OF UNICORN…

In this essay case studies pointing to problems related to the use of AI in shaping the virtual world are discussed. AI algorithms helps to shape and control the conventional web behaviour and speech of today's media users, mostly teenagers and adults. Considering the development of software, social media may constitute a separate virtual world in the future. AI also shapes the image of this world and human relationships. The essay begins with an analysis of the future of social media against the background of truth; later, case studies show problems caused by AI to media users and the community. The authors attempt to answer questions such as: What kind of attitudes and abilities will be shaped in social media? What network ethics does AI dictate? What kind of attitudes and thinking will be promoted in the social media of the future?

Keywords: emotions, social media, Artificial Intelligence, virtual world, algorithms, network ethics, utopian media

Social media uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) support. Systems based on AI learn the human world and influence its shape, confirming the thesis of Stanisław Lem (1988) that technology is a variable independent of civilization. Given the development of software, social media may come to constitute a separate virtual world in the future. AI also shapes the image of this world and interpersonal relationships in a specific way[1]. As in the mythical

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[1] ∞Meta company assures that. "However, through self-supervised learning, machines are able to learn about the world just by observing it and then figuring out the structure of images, speech or text. This is a more scalable and efficient approach for machines to tackle new complex tasks, such as understanding text for more spoken languages. Self-supervised learning algorithms for images, speech, text or other modalities function in very different ways, which has limited researchers in applying them more broadly", https://about.fb.com/news/2022/01/first-self-supervised-algorithm-for-speech-vision-text/ [4.02.2022].

world of unicorns, whose horns held magical properties (as antidotes to poison) AI in social media tracks "poisoned" words and false information. There is no falsehood in the world of unicorns, no aggression nor violence; those who are able to see them have pure hearts. In a reality shaped that way, one can assume there will be space for joy and happiness to be experienced and not only expressed in the form of emojis, photos, and comments. This discrepancy between experience and its expression is reflected in the saying: "We are a sad generation with happy pictures" (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Meme from the net

In various ways, AI has become a part of our lives for good. However, there is still a need for improvement and rethinking of the role of AI in our future social lives. Young people brought up in times of widespread digitalization, common usage of smartphones, and not fully understood consequences of their constant use, will live in the Internet of Things, in a reality at least partly designed and controlled by AI. What kinds of attitudes and abilities will be shaped by that fact, and which ones will be needed in the future? Conventional web behavior and speech currently shaped by AI algorithms affect today's media users, who are mostly teenagers and adults.

In this essay, we will consider case studies pointing to problems related to the use of AI in shaping the virtual world. We will start by considering the future of social media and the truth in order to show, through case studies, what problems AI is facing, and which media users and communities it affects. What does the truth of emotions, shaped on the web, look like? Finally, we will consider what network ethics are dictated by AI and what kind of attitudes and thinking will be promoted in the social media of the future.

THE FUTURE AND THE TRUTH: NOT ONLY THE METAVERSE[2]

The agony of portals such as MySpace (and other platforms shaped locally in various countries, in Poland e.g., grono.net, Naszaklasa.pl) was a natural phenomenon with the appearance of Facebook, a website that better senses the demand for varied and globalized contacts on the web[3]. Instagram completed image-related tasks, focusing primarily on the visual aspect of communication. Additional possibilities offered by audio calls, video calls, and text chats on both websites ensured the possibility of multi-level contacts. On the other hand, it seems that social media do not develop along with human social development (see Hjorth and Hinton, 2019, 36–52; Lovink, 2016), but functions instead as an independent technical communication structure to which the unfortunate name has stuck. At times social media is even called "anti-social" (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). One can also wonder if the fabric of reactions and interpersonal relationships shaped by AI has anything to do with the real world[4].

More and more "fossilized," a predictable and expanded Facebook, along with a visually overloaded Instagram, belongs to pioneering media, that is, media of the breakthrough. On the other hand, other entities are also developing among social media outlets such as SnapChat and TikTok, assuming the role of a kind of safety valve for the "classic" and more structured Facebook and Instagram[5]. As with other messengers, using TikTok does not encourage community building, although such a goal is written in its mission. It mainly serves as an entertainment wizard[6]; at times, it fulfills this task at a very poor level. Well, to be friendly and to satisfy everyone is a tricky task and one needs need to be truly Machiavellian to do that. To "bring joy" is also a very general assumption, in some circles it is treated as a joke because joy can be understood in various ways. When it is applied in a sarcastic way, it can serve to explain vulgar words or violations of political correctness and the dignity of people belonging to various groups, e.g., women (brutal behavior, mockery of women's skills, dissemination of stereotypical roles and activities). One can always say, "it's just a joke", although in such situations the joke always has a victim.

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[2] https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/28/opinions/zuckerberg-facebook-meta-rushkoff/index.html; https://www.npr.org/2021/10/28/1050280500/what-metaverse-is-and-how-it-will-work?t=1643920950933 [6.02.2022].

[3] On MySpace and media changes (Levinson, 2013, pp. 126–131).

[4] The dichotomy between "social media" and the "real world" in this paper is used technically, as it is rhetorically useful. The meaning of social media for users is unquestionable. However, it's good to remember that globally as well as locally the percentage of people who do not use the Internet, including social media, is still quite big. On the scale of digital exclusion, for Internet non-users (offline population), social media can't build their reality, as one can read in these reports: https://www.capgemini.com/pl-pl/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/05/Infographic-%E2%80%93-Digital-Divide-10.pdf; https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/digital-inclusion-exclusion-and-participation; in Poland the problem was noticed during the POLPAN research results: https://www.computerworld.pl/news/Blisko-1-3-Polakow-nadal-cyfrowo-wykluczona,434287.html; all sites accessed [4.04.2022].

[5] New generations of users reach for various messaging services, not related to the metaverse. Nota bene, if the development of the media was sinusoidal, children born in the '20s of the 21st century would return to ∞Meta.

[6] "TikTok's mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy. We are building a global community where people can create and share, discover the world around them, and connect with others across the globe. As we grow, we are committed to maintaining a supportive environment for our community. Our Community Guidelines define a set of norms and common code of conduct for TikTok; they provide guidance on what is and is not allowed to make a welcoming space for everyone", https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines?lang=en [4.02.2022].

In contemporary social media, focused on advertisers, the user seems to be only a tenant of a place that stores their content. Social media do not shape the community in order to help young people to mature. As Manfred Spitzer reminds us:

> "… social behavior [we learn] – in mutual relations with other people. For that to happen, you need to be in the company of other people. This is exactly where digital media hits social competences: they crowd out real virtual contacts" (Spitzer, 2016, p. 315).

Young people do not learn to build communities on social media. For many users, social media is a one-person broadcasting station, with a counter of viewers and likes as a measure of social "success." Social media has evolved into a system of one-way messaging. It has become a source of isolation or–to a point–even "anti-social"[7].

The first problem that we want to draw attention to is the immaturity of AI in assessing the statements of network users, especially when it comes to content composed of images and text. The algorithm is not prepared for non-standard reasoning. The algorithm that keeps order and cares about the "truth" often extinguishes individuality and does not allow for "leaning out." The algorithm cares about the truth[8] in terms of understanding political correctness, which is not a set of good manners, but an ideological version of language, with the assumption that there are minority groups that can be easily discriminated against with the use of language. Political correctness as a set of limitations and censorship prejudices, however, does not result from the actual state of the social order; from the current state of language, instead, it is a demand for change where problems may arise (see Duingnan and Gann, 1995). Political correctness is also a temporary phenomenon: in a few years from now, neutral words may be considered offensive or insensitive and other groups may be considered minorities. One may wonder whether political correctness prevents exclusion or reminds us of that exclusion. The cultural aspirations of AI creators may raise concerns because the world cannot be developed according to a project, even if it is the most sublime one, which should be remembered by Plato's famous experiment in Syracuse.

THE ALGORITHM KNOWS BETTER

Algorithms are a part of a "package" of new technologies known as STARA (Brougham and Haar, 2018). We use the term algorithm to denote any automated formula, rule, or set of instructions that are used to process data or perform a specific task (Germann, 2018). The development of these formulas is a key element in the improvement of AI that was intended by the creators of this concept to model the cognitive functions of a human being. Although the hopes of scientists to discover the mysteries of the mind as a result of such activities have

[7] On loneliness and depression among social media users writes Manfred Spitzer (2016). "Anti-social" face of social media was discussed in the book by Siva Vaidhyanathan (2018).

[8] Facebook also assumes that we publish "real" data about ourselves like our place of work, residence, age, etc. One may wonder what the reason for it may be and whether it is for commercial purposes, a targeted identification of potential customers for advertisers.

been disappointing (Schank, 2020), the tasks they perform stimulate their anthropomorphization, which is not always justified. Research comparing the understanding of AI by laymen and experts show that algorithms are a key dimension of the AI category for the latter (Fortuna and Gorbaniuk, 2022). Laymen identify AI primarily as embodied algorithmic forms in the shape of humanoid robots. Experts' opinions also differ from common beliefs about artificial systems, consistent with pop culture narratives[9]. For example, Marta Kwiatkowska from the Department of Information Science at the University of Oxford and a member of the Royal Society bluntly stated in an interview that artificial intelligence,

> is still very stupid. It can hardly be called intelligence; it is more of an idea created by the media. This supposed intelligence is in no way equal to that of a human. It can only classify human input and make decisions based on it. It cannot cope with the context in which the system operates.[10]

Despite the limitations of AI, it ought to be indicated that the tasks it carries out are impressive. For example, Youyou et al. (2015) compared the accuracy of personality assessments made by people and by the artificial systems. They found that the assessments made by a rational agent who analyzed the respondents' reactions in the form of liking Facebook posts were more accurate than those made by their friends using a personality questionnaire. The algorithm's ratings also had a higher agreement with the judges' ratings and better accuracy in predicting such aspects as drug use, political attitudes, and physical health.

Research on AI acceptance and adoption emphasizes the need to distinguish between two types of tasks performed by artificial entities (Inbar et al., 2010). The implementation of objective tasks requires the use of rules and logic, such as making calculations or sorting data. However, in order to perform subjective tasks it is necessary to be guided by emotions and intuition. The research results clearly indicate that the level of trust towards algorithms significantly decreases when they are intended to perform subjective tasks. When ranking the tasks, Castelo et al. (2019) stated that the most trusted algorithms were the ones used for navigation, data analysis, event planning, and weather forecasting, while the least trusted ones were used for predicting funny jokes, hiring and firing employees, recommending a partner, and writing press articles. A negative attitude towards artificial systems, the so-called algorithm aversion (Dietvorst et al., 2015), is observed where artificial systems perform tasks that are usually performed by people. It is strongly noticeable in the domains of art, marketing (Davenport et al., 2020), and medicine. In the last, respondents prefer a medical provider that offers a diagnostic or treatment service (Longoni et al., 2019).

Based on the results of research on the adoption of digital technologies, Fortuna (2021) distinguished the following conditions that, in the opinion of the respondents, should be met for the level of acceptance towards algorithms to increase:

- considering events that are extremely rare;
- elimination of irregularities by learning from mistakes and taking responsibility for them;
- the ability to see a mistake before making a final decision;

[9] A clear example is the widespread attribution of artistic abilities to the Ai-Da robot in the media.

[10] *Sztuczna inteligencja jest jeszcze bardzo głupia*, https://tygodnik.tvp.pl/46340221/sztuczna-inteligencja-jest-jeszcze-bardzo-glupia [5.02.2022].

- having knowledge of what information should be taken into account in the decision-making process;
- using procedural, overt, and tacit knowledge (similar to experts);
- cognitive flexibility enabling the transfer of knowledge from one field to another;
- the ability to "read between the lines";
- relying on evidence in making conclusions;
- proper "reading" and understanding of emotional expressions (e.g., patients);
- respecting the uniqueness of people and the ability to conduct in-depth psychological analyses;
- considering qualitative data, not just parameters (e.g., test results);
- compliance with ethical principles.

Improper delegation of tasks (techno-empowerment) to artificial systems (due to their lack of competence) may lead to human machine trans role conflict (HMTRC), which in the consumer's perception affects the negative assessment of managers, lowers the sense of security, and arouses the intention to boycott the institution. Such results have been obtained in research conducted in Poland in museum studies. Consumers revealed more negative attitudes when they learned that robots (a strong HMTRC) would act as guides and animators at the museum. Attitudes were more positive when participants were informed that artificial systems would deal with statistical data analysis and ticket sales (weak HMTRC). Of course, the accurate use of algorithms can be very beneficial for humans. Examples include social and police robots or systems adapted to be worn by humans (wearable robots), for example in the form of a suit (e.g., Mollii Suit[11]) that allow people suffering from Parkinson's disease to move more freely.

Algorithmic systems are developed every day. In Germany 78 000 patents that included the use of AI were registered in 2018, which means that over the course of a decade their number has more than tripled (in 2008 there were about 23 000)[12]. Google for Startups data from 2020 shows that the number of startups in Poland has doubled over the past five years and about 60 percent of them are companies from the IT industry. In turn, the market of social robots is growing seven times faster than the market of industrial robots. At the end of 2017 it reached US$5.4 billion and is expected to increase to US$14.9 billion in 2023 (Business Wire 2017). Significant changes will be related to the introduction of augmented reality systems. Lenses with a built-in screen and camera lenses are already available on the market. Overcoming the technical difficulties related to powering these artifacts will allow each consumer to see advertisements in which the product or service is offered to them by a character bearing their face. The option of eliminating advertisements is also possible because the algorithms that have access to data about us can independently compose an offer. They can also use a courier to send us products that we did not order but that potentially may suit our tastes

[11] https://www.hobbsrehabilitation.co.uk/mollii-suit.htm [14.02.2022].

[12] Data from the German research company IPlytics (Bettman and Oksanowicz, 2021).

(Diamandis and Kotler, 2020). Huge changes are also associated with the digitization of workplaces. In the post-humanist perspective, the functioning of organizations that not only delegate various types of tasks to algorithms but also assign them the role of a supervisor or even of a CEO has been considered for years (Gladden, 2016).

IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF AI

Is AI really an imitation of human intelligence? Algorithms prepared by teams of engineers cannot be as malleable as the human mind because we do not know everything about it. There is no consensus or certainty about how the mind works, what consciousness and the unconscious are. We use intuition that has been neglected by research in psychology and philosophy.[13] The mere introduction of deep learning in the development of AI[14] has nothing to do with the maturation of the mind and human functioning, where apart from rational operations other crucial elements are developed, e.g., understanding of other aspects of reality, social world, habits, sympathies, etc. People are not perfectly rational, they are able to hold contradictory views, change their minds under the influence of emotions, etc. The languages we use are also far from being universal and they are also changeable creations.[15] Also, the symbols we use are not culturally universal. As shown by Richard E. Nisbett in "The Geography of Thought" (2003), people differ in their approach to the world: They construct different systems of values and intellectual interpretations of the world, of nature, and social reality. Moreover, symbols used by people change throughout history, sometimes their meanings are complex or self-contradictory.[16] How does an algorithm deal with such irrational or ambiguous thinking? Can we say that AI is shaped like human intelligence? If so, which human being would be its model?

As humans, not only are we task-oriented, but we are also sentient beings. However, problems still arise with designing the whole area of understanding emotions. It is worth mentioning that Marvin Minsky, guru of the cyber-construction world, attempted to reduce various human states and reactions to intellectual operations. Minsky stated:

> Although this book is called *The Emotion Machine*, it will argue that emotional states are not especially different from the processes that we call "thinking;" instead, emotions are certain ways

[13] In some publications, intuition is presented as being typical of mythical-magical or "pre-theoretical" thinking (Copp, 2018; Svedholm and Lindeman, 2013). "Intuition is a type of mental activity that unconsciously communicates perceptions – it is the perception of possibilities. The contents of intuition are given, they are not spoken, they suddenly present themselves as a ready whole. […] Intuition is an irrational (in the sense - non-rational) function. The rationalization of the content of intuition is possible ex post" (Motycka, 2005, 221).

[14] See (Ho, 2019; LeCun et al., 2015; Liang et al., 2021).

[15] "Language has its own history. Each of us has our own language. Two people who share their lives have their own language. There is no problem with one language common to all, there is only a wonder of the fact that although each of us has a different language, we can understand each other across the borders of individuals, nations and times" (Gadamer, 2000, pp. 50–51).

[16] This was the case, for example, "in medieval symbolism one thing could have two opposite meanings depending on the context in which it was seen" (Eco, 2004, p. 121).

> to think that we use to increase our resourcefulness—that is, when our passions don't grow till they handicap us—and this variety of ways to think must be such a substantial part of what we call "intelligence" that perhaps we should call it "resourcefulness." And this applies not only to emotional states but also to all of our mental activities" (Minsky, 2006).[17]

Algorithms that control social media content are not always able to understand context; they block content that is either ironic or historical, such as quotes from old literary works, and they sometimes block angry reactions resulting from suffering. This is because before AI was fully prepared to understand the world of human emotions, it was used for contextual reading of private and public statements as a guardian of the ethical order in the virtual world (see Martin, 2019). The unfinished machine has been harnessed to control such delicate matters as interpersonal relationships and contexts of expression. Let us look at some examples.

CASE I.
A REMINDER ABOUT MANIPULATION AND EMOTIONS. EMOTIONS AND TRUTH. MANIPULATIONS OF EMOTIONS OR EXPRESSION ON FACEBOOK?

We will cite an example of the infamous manipulation perpetrated by researchers associated with Facebook (now ∞Meta). Over the course of a week in 2012, almost 700 000 users were presented with the manipulated entries of the friends they followed (Kramer et al. 2014):

> The experiment manipulated the extent to which people (N = 689,003) were exposed to emotional expressions in their News Feed. This tested whether exposure to emotions led people to change their own posting behaviors, in particular whether exposure to emotional content led people to post content that was consistent with the exposure—thereby testing whether exposure to verbal affective expressions leads to similar verbal expressions, a form of emotional contagion. People who viewed Facebook in English were qualified for selection into the experiment. Two parallel experiments were conducted for positive and negative emotion: one in which exposure to friends' positive emotional content in their News Feed was reduced, and one in which exposure to negative emotional content in their News Feed was reduced.

Criticisms were focused on the ethical aspect of the research: tracked Facebook users were unaware of the experiment; they did not agree to participate. The size of the manipulated cohort was also shocking. The authors of the study wrote about "emotional contagion:" "results indicate that emotions expressed by others on Facebook influence our own emotions, constituting experimental evidence for massive-scale contagion via social networks."[18] Adam Kramer et al. (2014), who published the study, following media critique, also published the relevant explanations.[19] The question of why Kramer's team decided to undertake such an experiment may be a good starting point for new sociological research and philosophical considerations.

[17] https://web.media.mit.edu/~minsky/Introduction.html [4.02.2022].
[18] https://www.pnas.org/content/111/24/8788 [4.02.2022].
[19] The first criticism was done by the editor (Verma, 2014).

However, one can have not only ethical but also methodological doubts. Words, however, do not reflect all emotions, and the icons or comments posted on Facebook do not necessarily reflect the feelings of Internet users. After all, the expression of emotions, rather than the emotions experienced, was studied. In order to conclude that emotions on Facebook are "emotionally contagious," a much more complex study than a study of posted content would be needed. Apart from individual blocks in expressing emotions in the real world, in the virtual world, people may not react because they do not want to leave a trace. It is also not known what the motivation for using a particular icon or comment was. In addition, the response spectrum offered by Facebook is very narrow, not to mention the available reactions on Instagram or TikTok, which only include likes and hearts, when it comes to icons; it is possible to add a verbal-iconic comment, those also have to be chosen from a limited number of options. The spectrum of our emotions is much richer than that.

The future of the web and the future of social media are shaped with the participation of AI. The features of this actor/factor, in creating Internet reality, are sometimes forgotten. The algorithm has no feelings but people have a whole range of them. The truth of feelings is not welcome online. Both anger and violence appear in human experience, but it is happy and smiling content that works well in the case of social media. Let us remind ourselves that "we are a very sad generation with very smiling photos." Content deemed "offensive" is not shown, based on political correctness and a code of courtesy in Western culture. Users may report a profile as ignoble, indecent, full of offensive content, etc. (various possible reasons for reporting can be presented).

AI censors certain words and phrases in social media, although this does not constitute the entire context. As Hans-Georg Gadamer noted:

> There is no statement that can be captured solely for the content it contains if one wants to capture it in its truth. Each statement is motivated. Each utterance has assumptions that it does not utter [...] each utterance has its own situational horizon and is directed to someone (Gadamer, 2000, pp. 46, 49).

CASE II.
INSTAGRAM, A COMBINATION OF VISUAL AND VERBAL CONTENT

On Instagram, AI prevents scandalous and discriminatory content by tracking down unwanted content through hashtags assigned to the posts. The unaccepted content is blocked. The question therefore arises: is the poison of anarchy averted? Some Instagram hashtags (indicated by ###) are blacklisted, and posts using them are immediately censored. This blacklist remains flexible. During training, social media specialists pay attention to check ### in special search engines that can sometimes be surprising. One can expect that the content with hashtags such as #porn or #pedofile should be blocked by AI, but the same fate may be met by posts with quite innocent hashtags, such as #exotic. While #exotic is "banned" (see Fig. 2b) and its content cannot be viewed at all, #exoticdance is allowed by the algorithm, although the content there can be erotically provocative (see Fig. 2c). Using this ### with a photo showing exotic landscapes (n.b., exotic from the point of view of Europeans, e.g., palm trees, atolls, and lagoons) may result in not showing this post even to people who follow the account. However,

at times, some Instagrammers try to get around these restrictions, e.g., the neutral #newyork generates photos of naked ladies offering their company either directly or more discreetly;[20] they pose in only their underwear and in a provocative manner, sometimes even NYC does not appear in the background as the photos are taken in the kitchen or in their own bedrooms. The algorithm will catch this content only when other users report it. AI sees no relationship between images and ###. It does not understand the sense that the images create in combination with the caption and the link. Users, either out of ignorance, or on purpose, apply frequently viewed ###, such as #nature, to present themselves, their products and services, etc. One can understand that a naked person may be understood as part of nature, although it is not as easy to consider a car that takes up 70% of a photo a piece of nature (see Fig. 2a).

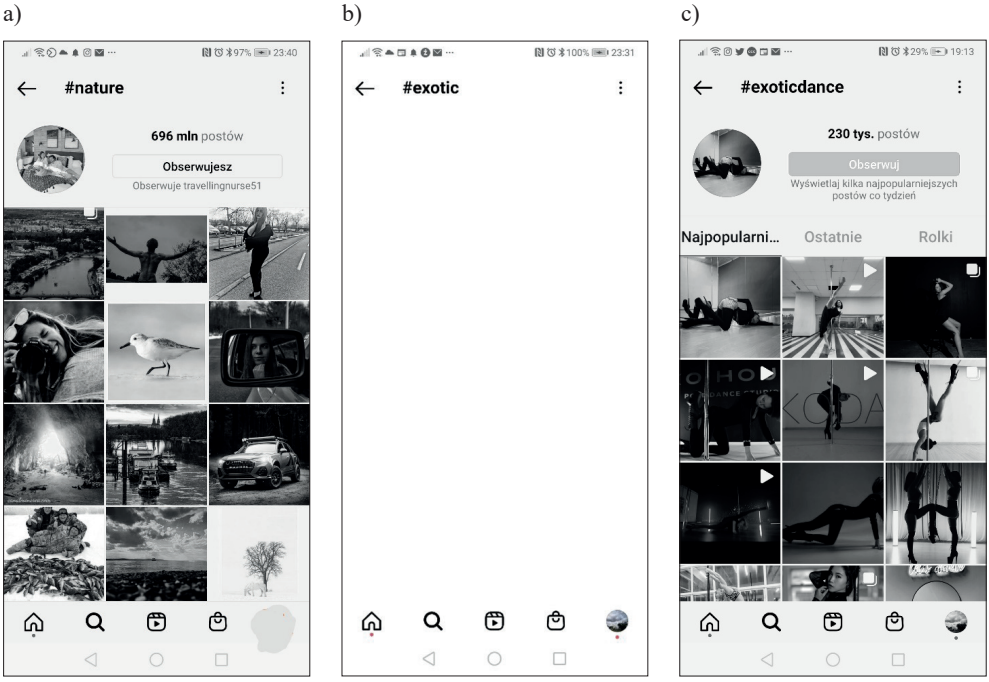

Figure 2. Screenshots showing some of the content of the selected ###:
a) #nature; b) #exotic; c) #exoticdance

THE NETWORK ETHICS. UNDER THE SIGN OF UNICORN?

Artificial intelligence is a crucial factor in shaping Facebook content. How does technology detect violations?

[20] Directly – phone number provided in the post or in the comment; more discreetly – a person requests a private message, which Instagram allows ("DM").

> Our technology proactively detects and removes the vast majority of violating content before anyone reports it. We remove millions of violating posts and accounts every day on Facebook and Instagram. Most of this happens automatically, with technology working behind the scenes to remove violating content – often before anyone sees it. Other times, our technology will detect potentially violating content but send it to review teams to check and take action on it. This work is never finished. People will keep trying to evade our technology, so we need to keep improving.[21]

Social and political meaning is sometimes attributed by AI to content that does not contain such meaning. Sometimes it is impossible to send an advertisement, the meaning of which will be interpreted in its own way by the algorithm, which is the first and main decision maker. When looking for false or socially harmful information in private posts, sponsored, or other content, AI may act overzealously. Once again, there are also gaps in understanding the context of such statements, which results in blocking "innocent" content.

CASE III.
FACEBOOK. LITERATURE AND IMAGE. COMPLEX CONTENT

From October 18 to December 15, 2021, posts related to the project called "With Sienkiewicz by coffee (Letters)" were presented on the WSPAK Foundation's Facebook page. Their goal was popularizing audio recordings of Henryk Sienkiewicz's private letters on the Internet. Eight out of those posts served as advertisements, with a total reach of 106 729 users. The mere insertion of posts did not have any unpleasant repercussions, although problems started when trying to set a few of them as advertisements. We will mention two such cases here.

The first of the blocked posts informed about the writing workshop of Henryk Sienkiewicz, his understanding of historical literature and the Old Polish language. There was no contemporary content or veiled political message there. It was illustrated by postcards from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries showing stereotypical images of the nobility at that time. What did the algorithm not like? Could the automatic translation of the content of the post[22] into English cause this confusion, or did the images feel too aggressive or inappropriate (Fig. 3)?

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[21] https://transparency.fb.com/pl-pl/enforcement/detecting-violations/technology-detects-violations/ [4.02.2022].

[22] Letter from Henryk Sienkiewicz to Mścisław Godlewski 14 [September 1, 1880]
How Sienkiewicz prepared himself to write the Trilogy? 😊 We can assume that a good school for a writer was to prepare "Kroniki Szlacheckie" 👈 written for "Niwa". Later on they were published as the novel "Niewola tatarska" 📕 Here is what the writer's workshop looks like: "…I have read a lot of things from the 16th century and beyond. Therefore, I have mastered the language, and by the way, I try to avoid affectation and various various archaic filler-words like "wżdy" and "przedsię", which are used to patch up ignorance" 😮😮😮 According to Sienkiewicz: "Ancient language relies mostly on volubility, which has almost the seriousness of Latin 👌, not on scattering it with wild archaisms. If you want, I'll use so many of them that no one will understand what's going on […]. 😁 In order to write well, it is important to know not only the Polish authors from the 16th and 17th centuries, but also the Latin ones, and their translations made in the past 📚📚📚, because our ancestors were educated based on those texts and they were taken over by their spirit. You also need to be able to recreate the domain of concepts specific to those people, which is already a matter of intuition" 👏👏👏 How do you like the writer's approach to historical topics? 😉😊 Well, we are impressed! ❤️❤️❤️ (The post of November 8, 2021: https://www.facebook.com/fundacjaWSPAK/photos/pcb.3004874973110446/3004869436444333/ [4.02.2022].

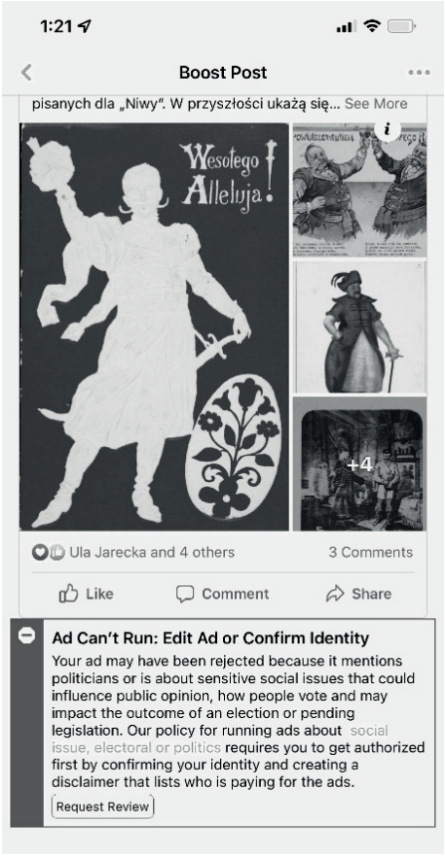

Figure 3. Screenshot from the website of the WSPAK Foundation in November 2021

Figure 4. A still frame from an advertising film for the project "With Sienkiewicz by coffee (Letters)"

Another post blocked by the algorithm was an advertising film based on one of Henryk Sienkiewicz's official correspondences[23]. This letter was also published in a form of English used in the nineteenth century. It contained a historical description of New York, which the future Polish Nobel Prize winner did not like at all.

The advertisement was not permitted in this case either and general information was sent to the Foundation informing that the post violated Facebook's rules. After much correspondence and explanations, both ads were permitted to be launched. However, the Foundation did not get an explanation as to what the algorithm did not like. One can only guess what violated political correctness in these cases. Could it have been a picture showing bags of rubbish lying on the street and rats running around them[24] or perhaps a joyful face of an African American person dancing and singing in Times Square (Fig. 4). The clip was recorded on a casual evening at a place where people are habitually entertained. It was not a social demonstration, there were no politically incorrect slogans in the background, and no subliminal information was used. Perhaps the text-based content of the post raised alarms but the content there was completely neutral[25]. The post contained the usual formula indicating the source financing the project, which was the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Could it convey a wrong social or political element? The reason for the algorithm's decision remains a mystery.

When the ads were unblocked, their audience reach was much smaller than in other cases. As for the film, it was nine times smaller than in the rest of the project's commercials[26]. This has not been explained, it can be guessed that an unlocked post is already considered suspicious and is being cautiously or reluctantly displayed by AI to network users. Facebook takes pride in its results of social control in the "Recent Trends" report: "In addition to new categories and ongoing improvements in reducing prevalence, we saw steady progress across many problem areas"[27]. More and more violations were detected.

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[23] https://fb.watch/b2MsOYm5dY/ [17.01.2022].

[24] A few months later, similar images were posted on Instagram: New York for tourists and New York as residents see it. It was a set of photos with garbage bags, corks, etc. https://www.instagram.com/reel/CZXK4CEoiwV/?utm_medium=copy_link&fbclid=IwAR2UY0rxia5D2CKYcgl8S [10.02.2022].

[25] "Henryk Sienkiewicz. A man – a riddle.😀 Rich personality, combining contrasting traits, paradoxical predilections!👌A traveler and homebody, a writer of serious novels and the author of humorous letters📚📜 A man sensitive to female charms, but also a slightly malicious observer of female weaknesses.👒🦋 Unsure of himself, though sometimes even a conceited writer. We can do this endlessly… And we write about it, because we will soon finish the presentation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's letters in the audio version🎧🎧🎧 And we have a movie surprise for you!😀 And a riddle😉 What city does our pen master describe here? Where these "stray" pigs wander among the omnibuses in the streets🐖🐖🐖 Where "the shop windows are admirably awesome and rich, but tastelessly decorated"… What is this city?😀 Does anyone already know?". https://fb.watch/b2MsOYm5dY/ [17.01.2022].

[26] Data referring to these materials is presented thanks to the courtesy of the Board President of WSPAK Foundation, Marcin Steczkowski.

[27] "On Facebook in Q2 we took action on: 6.2 million pieces of organized hate content […], 16.8 million pieces of suicide and self-injury content […], 34.1 million pieces of violent and graphic content […]. On Instagram in Q2 we took action on: 367,000 of organized hate content […], 3 million pieces of suicide and self-injury content […], 7.6 million pieces of violent and graphic content, compared to 5.5 million pieces in Q1 2021". The last example is the most "effective". https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/community-standards-enforcement-report-q2-2021/ [4.02.2022].

> However, company ∞Meta is aware that the context for any information put in the social media could cause some problems for AI in adequate interpretation. Some examples with pictures are presented on the information pages.[28]

This does not mean that actual violations of the rules have been detected and only inappropriate content has been blocked. The question remains: is social media dependent on AI control forever?

OPTIMUM: IN SEARCH OF A COMMON PATH

What might the social world be like if designed by computer scientists and political correctness, shaped and controlled by AI?[29] Could it be a world without envy and violent emotions, full of rationality? Would the layer of lack of truth disappear on the Internet and would emotions be limited to just a few icons? According to one of the designers of artificial intelligence, Marvin Minsky, emotions do not differ much from thinking processes, in fact emotions are a variation of cognition. Such variant-based processing that must also be included in the algorithm is, in Minsky's opinion, a good equivalent of emotions.[30] An algorithm is a very simplifying formula, rigid, and it behaves in restrictive and repetitive ways as well. It sticks to principles that it does not fully understand. Years ago, Andy Clark provocatively argued that we are affected by cyborgization, regardless of our physical state, which refers to our way of thinking, using tools, technologies and applying them in our activities. All of this is responsible for the cyborgization of humans (Clark, 2005, pp. 71–72). From a slightly different perspective, in his critique of capitalism, Erich Fromm also warned about a future in which humans may become slaves and robots (1955, pp. 96, 312–313).

Does AI create a utopian reality? A unicorn reality. The unicorn frequents the land of happiness. Wayward and elusive, only innocence can lure him. The unicorn's horn has magical properties: it is an antidote to poison. As a mythical creature, it appears in a world that meets its conditions. And this is what the web of the future is supposed to look like: it should include no poisoned words, no false information (fake news), and no verbal or visual violence. Some 20th century thinkers, such as Erich Fromm, dreamt about shaping reality, although it may be unattainable:

> Man can protect himself from the consequences of his own madness only by creating a sane society which conforms with the needs of man, needs which are rooted in very conditions of his existence. A society in which man relates to man lovingly, in which he is rooted in bonds of brotherliness and solidarity, rather than in the ties of blood and soil; a society which gives him the possibility

[28] Explanation of the AI problems in detection violations because of context: "Technology can find and remove the same content over and over. But it's a big challenge to get a machine to understand nuances in word choice or how small differences may change the context". https://transparency.fb.com/enforcement/detecting-violations/how-enforcement-technology-works/ [4.02.2022]. However, some efforts were undertaken to improve the platforms: https://about.fb.com/news/2021/03/more-control-and-context-in-news-feed/ [4.02.2022].

[29] On methods of controlling media content by AI, e.g. (Bratu, 2017; MacAvaney et al., 2019).

[30] https://web.media.mit.edu/~minsky/Introduction.html [9.02.2022].

> of transcending nature by creating rather than destroying, in which everyone gains a sense of self by experiencing himself as the subject of his powers rather than conformity, in which a system of orientation and devotion exists without man's needing to distort reality and to worship idols (Fromm, 1955, p. 314).

Is there a common path? When talking about the future of social media, it should be considered which age groups use which specific media (Head et al., 2019; Metzler and Scheithauer, 2015), and how those in these groups use social media in general, or more specifically, how they use applications and other smartphone capabilities. Dependence on media and devices may arise in many groups. According to Manfred Spitzer, it is possible to patiently change the alternative lifestyle:

> Without being available around the clock; (2) without a thousand friends we don't know whose messages reach us only when a computer wants it to; (3) And without being controlled by a device that can do many things, but also tell us what to do day and night and also spy on us better than intelligence agencies around the world have ever been able to do[31] (Spitzer, 2016, p. 358).

In turn, Howard Gardner wrote about 5 types of "minds of the future" that will be helpful in shaping it, so that society could develop dynamically and in interesting ways. It is not about the mind or style of thinking, but rather an attitude towards the world that is based on certain skills: "Rather than being distinct computational capabilities, they are better thought as a broad uses of the mind that can cultivate at school, in professions, or at the workplace." (Gardner, 2009, p. 4). It is also quite a utopian educational proposition to prepare future generations to cope with an increasingly technologically complex world.[32] The first way of thinking about action is "*the disciplined mind* has mastered at least one way of thinking" (Gardner, 2008, p. 3; more pp. 21–44, 154). "*The synthesizing mind* takes information from disparate sources, understands and evaluates that information objectively, and puts it together in ways that make sense to the synthesizer and also to other person" (Gardner, 2008, p. 3; more pp. 45–76, 155). The next attitude described by Gardner that would be desirable in the future is the creating mind: "Building on discipline and synthesis, *the creating mind* breaks new ground. It puts forth new ideas, poses unfamiliar questions, conjures up fresh ways of thinking, arrives at unexpected answers" (Gardner, 2008, p. 3; more pp. 77–101, 156).

Facebook and Instagram algorithms seem to follow the principle behind another attitude distinguished by Gardner:

> *The respectful mind* notes and welcomes differences between human individuals and between human groups, tries to understand these 'others', and seeks to work effectively with them. In a world where we are all interlinked, intolerance or disrespect is no longer a viable option (Gardner, 2008, p. 3; more pp. 103–125, 157).

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[31] English translation: https://www.dasmili.eu/art/cyberkrank-wie-das-digitalisierte-leben-unsere-gesundheit-ruiniert/ [10.02.2022].

[32] "…With these 'minds', as I refer to them, a person will be well equipped to deal with what is expected, as well as what cannot be anticipated; without these minds, a person will be at the mercy of forces that he or she can't understand, let alone control" (Gardner, 2008, p. 2).

Metaverse algorithms track violations of etiquette, including the socially harmful behavior already mentioned. Therefore, they can be helpful in shaping the above attitude. However, the last of the "minds" proposed by Gardner is, "the ethical mind ponders the nature of one's work and the needs and desires of society in which one lives" (Gardner, 2008, p. 3; more pp. 127–151, 158). This may turn out to be hard to achieve, not only on social media, but in the real world in general.

In conclusion, it is not known whether AI-shaped media will allow us to freely express opinions and feelings in the future. For now, the algorithm cannot read images and texts in context, which, for example, ∞Meta knows very well.[33] It is not just about knowing an extremely elaborate library; an algorithm may have huge amounts of content in its memory, yet it is not able to make comparisons on its own. It is also necessary to be able to ask a question related to this content. The human mind itself asks questions (Gadamer, 2000, pp. 46–48), and AI is not very good at it just yet.

One may wonder what the consequences will be of the two shortcomings that are important in the design of Artificial Intelligence. First, it is a simplified understanding of emotions, as seen by Minsky, who worked for many years in creating AI. According to Minsky, emotions are actually intellectual operations, which is a great simplification, and the consequences of such "emotional sterility" of AI are unknown. If we take into account that women are almost absent in the area of designing AI,[34] this excludes a large part of humanity from that process. Does this signify a new form of patriarchy? Well, at least in social media. Not only is gender imbalance written in the creation of AI, Joy Buolamwini, founder of the Algorythmic Justice League,[35] in her research, pointed to racial bias in the process of AI design.[36] Moreover, it's good to remember that the creation of AI is based in the English language. Human languages are always rooted in culture. In this case, in a part of Western culture. Therefore, one can ask about culture bias throughout the process.[37] Could the future wave of globalization, induced by the online activities of societies and the popularization of the Internet, be more harmful than beneficial to cultural diversity?

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[33] https://transparency.fb.com/enforcement/detecting-violations/how-enforcement-technology-works/ [4.02.2022].

[34] As Toby Walsh noted, only about 10% of AI designers are women (Walsh, 2018, p. 161): "Gender imbalance is detrimental to the process of AI development. For this reason, there are unasked questions and unanswered problems." (Walsh, 2018, p. 162).

[35] https://www.ajl.org/ [5.04.2022].

[36] Buolamwini's research on facial recognition technologies, and her activism for the development of unbiased technologies, lead to some serious decisions for AI design corporations such as IBM: "The Algorithmic Justice League commends this decision as a first move forward towards company-side responsibility to promote equitable and accountable AI. This is a welcome recognition that facial recognition technology, especially as deployed by police, has been used to undermine human rights, and to harm Black people specifically, as well as Indigenous people and other People of Color (BIPOC)" [5.04.2022].

[37] Analogue technologies, such as the steam engine or the sewing machine, seemed to be neutral, and easily applicable in any society. Digital technologies, especially used for designing AI, seem not to be neutral. The authors are far from seeing the process as a case of "cultural imperialism;" we would like to show some potential spheres of exclusion or serious changes. One can ask, what happens to complex native languages such as Thai or Chinese, when the online environment has a multilingual character? (on the Thai language: Troyer R. (2012). English in the Thai linguistic Netscape. *World Englishes*, 31, 1, 93–112).

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QUOTATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA: HOW SHARING OTHER PEOPLE'S WORDS COULD INCREASE MISINFORMATION

According to the report "We Are Social" (2021), one of the most important reasons why Internet users take to social media platforms are: "stay up-to-date with news and current events", "seeing what's being talked about", and "sharing and discussing opinions with others". They are all focused on quoting. Our research helped us to confirm the dominance of posts with quotations in social media (the institutional broadcasters' profiles). Quotation can take various forms to produce different results. Direct quotations include direct speech, text islets, and pseudo-quotations; indirect quotations include indirect speech and narrated speech. Direct quotations in the form of various direct references accounted for 73% of quotations on Twitter and 61% on Facebook. This confirms the tremendous popularity of quotations in direct speech – senders avoid allegations of being partial; after all they show the facts that speak for themselves. It is strategies of the senders which increase misinformation.

Keywords: social media, objectivity, quotation, direct speech, indirect speech, quotation marks

INTRODUCTION

Quoting is in fashion. This is not only because we have just learned to exuberantly share quotes with the online "share" option. As early as in ancient times, the rhetoricians recommended using quotations, both actual and fictional, to enliven a speech: authority argument, *sermocinatio, sententia, epea pteroenta*, *communis opinio*, anticipation, etc. They were meant

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to enrich the message, make it more attractive, bolster the author's credibility and undermine the adversary's prestige. In fact, even up to today, the principle of interlarding somebody else's words has been applied when constructing any utterance. Let us look at science, for example: the quotation index is one of the most important criteria of scientific excellence; the multiplicity of indices and formulas used to identify the number of references to various scientific studies lend a lot of weight to such surveys and demonstrate the success of the researcher. Another example? The positive term "opinion-forming media" has in for several years Poland meant "media that are quoted by other media" (IMM, 2022). Every media broadcaster would like to be an opinion-forming medium, because it is a term that indicates a strong position in the market, even if it only refers to the number of references, quotes and mentions[1]. By applying the criterion of quoting, tabloids or gossip portals for which the integrity of the message is not important are the opinion-forming media.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

TYPES OF QUOTATIONS

Quotation itself can take various forms to produce different results (Authier, 1978, pp. 1–87; Banfield, 1973, pp. 1–39; Grzelka and Kula, 2012). The most basic division is between **direct quotations** and **indirect quotations** (Tab. 1), which follows from the status of the sender of the quoted words. In the first case, we identify the person quoted as the direct sender: The words are not distorted by or subordinated to intermediaries. The sender strengthens this independence by additional means, including quotation marks, colons, italics, dashes, or different typefaces. On the other hand, indirect quotations are included in the work of the author's narration, and they are subordinated to it at the linguistic (stylistic) and pragmatic levels (the attitude towards the quotation, the person quoted, or the circumstances is revealed).

Direct quotations include **direct speech** (*oratio recta*, *oratio directa*), or a literal quotation, directly derived from somebody else's utterance, without distortion and without interference, embracing the meaning – usually one or more sentences; a **text islet**, which is an original snippet, a fragment of a quoted speech (less than a sentence) which the narrator marks as somebody else's but which fits into their own context; and **seemingly direct speech** (pseudo-quotations) – in structurally independent statements (quotes, italics, etc.) the prototype is distorted in a manner that the receivers are unaware of (e.g. translation of the original utterance, which makes Joe Biden speak Polish, while in the German media he speaks German and in the Swedish media, Swedish). This type of "introducing somebody else's words" basically does not change the content, but only the form (e.g., Polish instead of English).

Direct quotations are visible in the text without reading. They take a different font, quotation marks, dashes, or a preceding colon. They are treated as a signal of literalness and originality, and the receiver does not expect to see abuse or distortion in such statements. The most common designation, quotation marks, refers to the original, prior statement. The

[1] Although there is also a widespread qualitative rather than quantitative understanding of the term, the opinion-forming media are qualitative media, addressed to a demanding audience; these are elite media.

message is simple and clear: that was exactly what someone had said, it is an authentic text, we are not changing anything. Obviously, such interpretation is more probable in cases of media that the receivers trust, those which they consider close to their vision of the world and with which they share an ideology.

Indirect quotations are used by a narrator to introduce statements of others in a modified form. Most often they are made shorter, reformulated, simplified, summarised, further specified and/or explained. **Indirect speech** is primarily designed for that purpose, as it allows the narrator to use the statements of other people in the narrator's own text so that such statements could be functionalised and subordinated as much as possible – in terms of grammar, style, rhetoric, etc. (thus, the text becomes uniform since the narrator is writing about someone else's utterance using the narrator's own words). **Narrated speech** is incorporated entirely into the author's sending mode. The author points to the fact that a speaking situation took place – and so the narrator reduces, generalises, and says how, where and under what conditions someone said something, rather than focusing on the content itself. Cultural knowledge is inscribed in its use (e.g., "miners' protest", "deliver an address", "final speech")[2].

Table 1. Categorization of exemplary quotations

Direct quotations	Direct speech	"We had a six-year-old girl on a ventilator, who eventually returned home. Now we have an infant whose chances are unfortunately very slight", is what they say in the paediatric hospital in Niekłańska Street. "There are more and more children infected with coronavirus".
	Text islets	Minister for Education @CzarnekP announces "the beginning of end of the pandemic". Children return to schools one week earlier #wyborcza
	Seemingly indirect speech	The European Court of Human Rights: The Disciplinary Chamber is to cease action against Judge Wróbel #wyborcza
Indirect quotations	Indirect speech	One out of six Poles claims that #corononavirus is a myth. The same percentage of people are of the opinion that man did not land on the moon in 1969 #BIQdata #wyborcza
	Narrated speech	The European Commission sues Poland.-#wyborcza

Source: Twitter https://mobile.twitter.com/ga_wyborcza, 8–9.02.2022

Indirect quotations explicitly inform the receiver that the sender changed the original statement, so they are inaccurate, imprecise, and do not reflect faithfully what they refer to. They are the author's restatement of somebody else's words. And as such, the accounts are

[2] The third important type of indirect quotations is seemingly direct speech, which is the most difficult to identify, as it is not designated in any way. Somebody else's statement is grammatically aligned with the narrator's text, and the quotation signal comes out of the stylistic domain – the fragment of the text is proper for the specific person's way of speaking and it differs from the author's speaking style. This is a construct that requires effort from the receiver, so it is encountered in literature rather than in the media.

secondary, sieved through somebody else's awareness and sensitivity. They are simply less reliable, as the receiver cannot be sure what the original version looks like. It is difficult to determine what content comes from the narrator and what content comes from the person being cited, which is the reason behind various abuses, which can be minor and harmless, but also fundamental and far-reaching. Transformations within the quotation may include generalisations, distortion, generalising modifications or extensively detailed modifications, and finally manipulations. In short, they are conducive to disinformation.

QUOTATIONS AND OBJECTIVITY

"In an era of greater polarisation, silent majority strongly supports impartial and objective journalism", as the authors of "Digital News Report 2021" claim, and they indicate the results of qualitative studies. The receivers explicitly opt for neutrality and objectivity, and 74% of the respondents believe that "news outlets should reflect a range of different views and leave it up to people to decide" (Reuters Institute, 2021, p. 20). This clearly identified social need is even stronger in countries where we see a decline of confidence in public as well as local and regional media, such as Poland or Hungary. Once again, "classic" views of the communication theory on the standards of objectivity prove to be necessary (objectivity as a superior category is described not only in textbooks and studies for journalism enthusiasts – e.g. Allan, 2010; Harcup, 2021, in the codes of ethics for journalists, but also, as we have already pointed out, it is referred to by the receivers). It is understood and defined very widely, most often by the following characteristics: impartiality, truthfulness, evidence, precision, detail, and lack of expressiveness. In addition to the desired features of the messages, often abstract and difficult to apply in practice, recommendations are also made for the introduction of specific components into the message.

> The issue of what counts as impartiality in news seems relatively simple but can also be complex in practice, not least because there is little chance of achieving a value-free assessment of value freedom. Impartiality is appreciated mainly because many events involve conflict and are open to alternative interpretations and evaluations (this is most obviously true of political news, but much the same can be said of sports). Most generally, the normal standard of impartiality *calls for balance in the choice and use of sources, so as to reflect different points of view, and also the presentation of two (or more) sides where judgements or facts are contested* [italics added for emphasis] (McQuail, 2010, p. 356).

OTHER PEOPLE'S WORDS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

According to the report "We Are Social" (2022), one of the most important reasons why Internet users (aged 16 to 64) use social media platforms (right behind "keeping in touch with friends and family" 47.6% and "filling spare time" 36.3%) is **"reading news stories"** (31.6%). In the 2021 report, the response "**stay up-to-date with news and current events"** was provided by 36.5% of the social media users, and this was the most frequently indicated reason. Since the need to be informed is crucial, and social media are to satisfy this need at least partially, neither traditional media institutions nor media personalities/politicians can

ignore this fact. What is interesting and symptomatic (in the context of writing about other people's words) is that **"seeing what's being talked about"** (29.5%) and **"sharing and discussing opinions with others"** (24.5%) were highly ranked among the reasons for using social media. Sharing and discussing opinions with others and seeing what's being talked about (both in private and in public) are actually, in both cases, a focus on quoting: The key words here, such as "discussion", "opinion", "dialogue" and "conversation" indicate that we either quote, or we are being quoted. Most commonly, both are at play.

According to research by the Reuters Institute in 2021, social media are indicated as a source of information by 59% of the population in Poland (compared to 31% in Germany, 41% in the UK, 42% in the USA, and 63% in Hungary). What should also be taken into consideration are the motivations and habits of users (a large proportion of them are young people, under 25 years old, who represent the so-called Generation Z). Studies in the UK indicate that more than half of those who use Facebook for news and 25% of those who use Twitter for news declare incidental news consumption, answering: "I mostly see news while I'm there for other reasons" (Reuters Institute, 2021, p. 52). The above data suffice to let us assume that social media receivers will use a variety of sources: private, social, professional and public ones and that the multiplicity of shared, viewed and read words will not increase their reception vigilance in terms of the verification of the data at the source, informed prioritisation, and the ability to verify "fake news" (Boczkowski et al., 2018).

In addition,

> global concerns about false and misleading information have edged slightly higher this year, ranging from 82% in Brazil to just 37% in Germany. Those who use social media are more likely to say they have been exposed to misinformation about Coronavirus than non-users (Reuters Institute, 2021, p. 9).

A survey on a representative sample of Internet users in Poland (over 15 years of age) reveals that they consider the Internet to be the most useful channel of communication (with reference to national and international news), but, and this is interesting from the point of view of the nature of the medium, its credibility was assessed on an equal footing with private conversations. Only television was ranked lower in terms of credibility. In the same study, when asked about Internet circles where they encountered false information the most frequently, the Internet users indicated social media (58%) (IAB Polska, 2018, pp. 14–16).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE/QUESTIONS

Facing the crisis of accusations of spreading misinformation and the diminishing of trust, it is crucial to ask if and how quotation on social media has led to disinformation. To achieve this, we want to examine these four issues:

- ways of embedding quotations (direct speech, indirect speech, text islets, narrated speech);
- relations between these practices and degrees of misinformation;
- relations between the original text (source) and the quotation;
- who is speaking in quotes used in social media.

One of the key issues we would like to address is the correlation between the type of citation and the effects of its use in a text.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out a quantitative and qualitative analysis, two types of social media of a different nature and with differing recipient profiles were selected: Facebook and Twitter. We followed the media posts appearing from January 24 to February 9, 2022 of two newspapers, both significantly important among the Polish print media: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Sieci*. *Gazeta Wyborcza* is the largest Polish daily newspaper; it has been published since 1989 and is now considered an opposition medium to the Polish ruling party Law and Justice. *Sieci* (since 2012) is a conservative, right-wing weekly which supports the ruling party.

To achieve our goals we combine textological, rhetorical and pragmalinguistic tools – thus treating genres, strategic text positions, broad and narrow context, sender and receiver categories, as well as aspects of stylistic diversity used by senders, with equal importance.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

When in 2012 we finished work on a project about quotations in traditional media coverage (daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television), quotes were a fundamental building component in journalistic material. The information texts were literally "moulded" from quotes that helped the media build complete and reliable coverage (e.g., by strengthening polyphony and impartiality), but they were also used to simulate ethical activities (through e.g., allegations, modified quotes). In social media, this trend is predominant, as shown in the statistical data in Table 2.

Table 2. Quotations in Twitter and Facebook posts for two broadcasters: *Gazeta Wyborcza* (GW) and *Sieci* (the data relate to week 24–30.01.2022)

Social media platfom		**Twitter**		**Facebook**	
		GW	***Sieci***	**GW**	***Sieci***
Total number of posts		289	111	336	159
Number of posts including quotations		129	94	203	112
Direct quotations	Direct speech	93	74	118	31
	Seemingly direct speech	3	9	14	23
	Text islets	17	4	17	9
Indirect quotations	Indirect speech	8	16	20	38
	Narrated speech	35	16	42	43

In total, 400 Twitter posts and 495 Facebook posts were studied. Over 50% of the Twitter posts (223) contained quotations, while on Facebook the share of quotations reached over 60% (315). The quotations in direct speech are predominant (167 times on Twitter and 149 on Facebook). Among the examples of indirect citations, narrated speech appears most often (51 times on Twitter, 85 on Facebook).

When analysing the profiles (Facebook, Twitter) of several major news portals and media (we have only selected two for this paper: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Sieci*), we saw a tremendous popularity of quotations in direct speech (see Tab. 2), which are most often combined with photos of people who made that statement.

Figure 1. Twitter, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 9.02.2022

Figure 2. Twitter, *Sieci*, 2.02.2022

The layout is usually similar: a heading (with the name of the speaker and with the quotation/paraphrase of what they said) + a photo of the speaker + a text (with the name of the exponent and the quotation). Such a layout of the message is dominated by the same components, usually repeated, so that it is undoubtedly possible to identify the quotation and its author, as shown on the two screens (Figs 1 and 2).

SOURCE AND CONTEXT

Since it is extremely difficult to reveal these mechanisms, as they require a wider context and longer fragments, we will only use two examples. Both apply to the case of the Turów Coal Mine, which caused a conflict between Poland and the Czech Republic and, more broadly, between Poland and the Member States of the European Union. The first example is a Twitter message posted by the weekly newspaper *Sieci*. It refers directly to a leader of one of the opposition parties, Szymon Hołownia, who is also presented in a photo (Fig. 3). Hołownia met entrepreneurs in a city in central Poland. The meeting took more than 40 minutes, during which Hołownia answered questions from the merchants and journalists gathered. One of them referred to the closure of the mine in Turów. Here is the question and the entire reply by Hołownia about Turów. Highlighted in bold is the part chosen by *Sieci*:

> Journalist: I have a question about the Turów mine. This is because the Polish Press Agency has informally indicated that an agreement will be reached between the Czech and Polish Prime Ministers, and initially you said that the CJEU's judgment must be obligatorily enforced and as a result the Turów mine should be closed down. So what do say about this agreement?
>
> Szymon Hołownia: I have also said many times to the representative of your station that judicial judgments have to be enforced. However, mining and technology specialists clearly explained also to me, and I am not an expert and know little about mining and technology myself, within the first hours after this statement, that it is simply impossible to stop the operation of such a complicated mining plant overnight, it is simply infeasible. Therefore, since that day I have claimed that we must do our best to reach an agreement with the Czech Republic and carry out restructuring in the region as soon as possible. The news today is, of course, good on the one hand, because it is better to reach an agreement with the Czech Republic, which could have been done a long time ago, than fail to reach an agreement. However, this does not change the fact that Poland will have to pay all those penalties that have been imposed so far before the Czechs withdraw their complaint from the Court. These are millions of PLN that could have stayed in our economy. The second thing is that this does not change the fact that there has been a violation of the law, as the European Court's Spokesperson has already said clearly today that there was an infringement of the law, that Poland had no right to act in this way towards the Czech Republic, planning to extract coal in the years to come. And thirdly, this is a question for the future, because everyone can see how things are. Will anything finally happen to the restructuring plan for Turów and the whole region in general, as regards the decarbonisation that must be implemented? Because **Turów must be closed down. Yet, it cannot be closed downed hurry-scurry**, but it must be closed down within 15 years, there is just no other way, otherwise we will be paying horrendous electricity bills, and those people who work there must be now retrained. I was in Turów, I was standing next to this power plant, and we proposed specific solutions on how to retrain the coal miners and the power engineers from brown coal to photovoltaic systems, to energy storage, to green energy, we suggested for those who

cannot be retrained to be offered some compensation in the form of a specific minimum guaranteed income, before reaching their retirement age. Because people are the priority. So just like the transformation programme was managed to be implemented in eastern Wielkopolska, which was also, after all, a brown coal district, and which will be co-financed by the EU funds, also today we should establish a specific plan for which the European Union has the money and will give them the money as soon as possible, and within 10–15 years we should have this problem solved, the people could be requalified and we would be on the right track ecologically, and we would have no problems with our neighbours which we would not be able to solve (https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1113620976061511).

Figure 3. Twitter, *Sieci*, 3.02.2022

Note: Text above the photo: *#Hołownia speaks outright: "Because Turów must be closed down. Yet, it cannot be closed downed hurry-scurry…". Text below the photo: Hołownia speaks outright: "Because Turów must be closed down. Yet…". "This is a mess, not the Polish Deal", said Holownia in an interview with an entrepreneur, presenting "high standards".*

We needed a broad context to show the scale of the problem. The whole statement delivered by Hołownia contains many factual arguments, proposals for solutions, and uses elements of specialised language to prove his competence ("decarbonisation", "photovoltaic systems"). It can also be noted that Hołownia – regarded by part of the society as a representative of the intellectual elite and thus out of touch with "real life" – often uses a common style to get closer to people and get the message through. This approach is applied by the weekly *Sieci*. It selects a piece to deprive the speaker of his credibility, because the receiver is supposed to think: "Apparently he is so cultured and well-educated and yet he jabbers and is vulgar; supposedly he supports the common people, and yet he wants to close down the mine." All the factual arguments regarding the mine closure stages and the reasons why this should be done disappear – to get to them, the receivers would have to find the source material (video)

and watch it up to minute 36 when the topic of Turów comes up. Although it seems obvious that a snippet is needed to quote in social media, the whole context reveals that this is an unrepresentative selection and therefore also unreliable.

The second example shows how one rather short statement can be used in very different ways depending on the political profile and the ideological medium. On 4 February, during a press conference, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki answered a question on an issue related to Turów:

> Journalist: And the second question on Turów, if I may. Have we already paid the Czech Republic and what is going on with the penalty?
>
> PM Mateusz Morawiecki: We transferred the adequate funds yesterday, that was 35 million, plus 10 from PGE. Let me remind you that it was originally even 55 million, so we reduced it significantly, but it is a process that fortunately is already closed, and so the Czech Republic withdrew its motion, its complaint to the European institutions, and that closes the matter completely. As for the possible penalties charged, we are going to make use of all possible remedies. Our lawyers in the Permanent Representation in Brussels to the European Commission are examining this in every respect. And there appear certain options, that is what is being presented to me, so we will certainly take advantage of all possible remedies in order not to have to pay at all this extremely unfair penalty, because, as I would like to remind you once again, it is a penalty that actually, if addressed in an appropriate manner, we would have to close our power plant and the mine in Turów. This would mean that several thousand Polish families would be deprived of work, would not have central heating, and several million people could have no electricity. It is absurd to deliver such a judgment in the first place.

Gazeta Wyborcza posted two messages on Facebook.

Figure 4. Facebook, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4.02.2022, 11:51

Note: Text above the photo: *The transfer of the funds to the Czech Republic by Poland was a condition for withdrawing the complaint from the CJEU*. Text below the photo: *Prime Minister Morawiecki: Complaint by the Czech Republic on the Turów Mine withdrawn from the CJEU.*

Figure 5. Facebook, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4.02.2022, 16:22

Note: Text above the photo: *The Czech Republic has not received the full amount so far and has not withdrawn the complaint. At least, this was the case when the Polish Prime Minister announced it.* Text below the photo: *Morawiecki: money for the Turów Mine sent, complaint withdrawn from the CJEU. Prague: Not at all.*

The words of the Prime Minister are thus used in both posts to highlight the message: the Prime Minister is lying (the Czech Republic did not receive the entire amount at the time of the announcement; they received it a few hours later – and only then was the complaint formally withdrawn). What should be also emphasized is the selection of a photo in the second post – it does not come from the day of the conference, but it is sufficiently discrediting.

On the other hand, *Sieci* placed the following post on Twitter (Fig. 6).

Figure 6. Twitter, *Sieci*, 4.02.2022

Note: Text above the photo: *The dispute on the Turów Mine is over! Prime Minister: We transferred the appropriate funds, and so the Czech Republic withdrew its complaint.* Text below the photo: *The dispute on the Turów Mine is over! Prime Minister: The Czech Republic withdrew the complaint. "As for the possible penalties charged, we are going to make use of all possible remedies," said Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki.*

PEOPLE QUOTED

Another notable issue is the choice of people whose statements are quoted. There are several types of reference sources in the media, and they fall into the following categories: participants in the events (involved, lack of distance, "first-hand" account), their witnesses (observers, who saw the event but are distanced), experts (practitioners equipped with experience and theoretical knowledge of the problem, who generalise and explain the problem), and average people (ordinary people). We regarded the authenticity of first-person speech as the basic value exposed in social media. When a specific, recognisable person speaks, the audience can easily add content to the message (for example, identify the world view of that person, or their party or national affiliation). However, easier identification leads to simplification and stereotyped interpretation of the message (personal views, judgement and emotions become involved).

The institutional broadcasters' profiles show yet another trend, namely the metonimisation of a message that contains a quotation. In place of a precisely defined person, a solution of known rhetorical theory appears: *totum pro parte*, when a collective term appears in place of a particular speaker, referring to a certain category: such as teachers, members of local governments (Fig. 8), fans, scientists, doctors (Fig. 7), Ukrainians, or policemen.

Figure 7. Twitter, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8.02.2022

Note: Text above the photo: *In the nephrology ward, a record number of children after drug overdose and in psychiatric wards a record number of children after suicidal attempts are observed. When will politicians finally deal with real problems?, doctors ask.*

Figure 8. Twitter, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8.02.2022

Note: Text below the photo: *Aid organisations: Without releasing the provisions, Afghanistan is in danger of a disaster.*

DISCUSSION

The multitude of sources filling up accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. causes polyphony to appear on the surface. The quotation has become a multi-level construct: one medium quotes the other, which quotes yet another, and we share the message of one person who cites another; we are the sources of that information ourselves, and so the term "share" is an unlimited incentive to multiply the content. The types of content are myriad, and they have very different statuses: intimate, private, local, regional, professional, fan-related, nationwide, global, political, culinary, economic, ordinary and festive. They constitute perceptions, plans, thoughts, associations, rumours, speculations, memories, news, conferences, documents, and findings. When we browse through social media, we constantly encounter quotations: statements of other people and other media, parts of many other fictional texts, true and reformulated texts, and even our own texts.

I QUOTE – I OBJECTIFY

The first edition of Denis McQuail's book *Mass Communication Theory* dates back to 1983, and in the new online context it continues to lead us to believe that impartiality is more likely to be heard in polyphony, in presenting multiple differing points of view, i.e. in quoting

and citing other people's words. However, at this point, it must be made clear that it will be more about the sender's strategy, about the game of objectivity and what Gaye Tuchman called "strategic ritual":

> The newsmen view quotations of other people's opinions as a form of supporting evidence. By interjecting someone else's opinion, they believe they are removing themselves from participation in the story, and they are **letting the "facts" speak** (Tuchman, 1972, p. 668).

Through the use of other people's words, the senders avoid the allegation of being partial; after all, they show facts that speak for themselves. The receivers, on the other hand, are convinced that they can judge the event on their own, as they do, after all, know who said it (although most probably they do not know why).

Many scenes in social media are based on conflicts, disputes, disagreements, and differences of opinion. They trigger emotions and lead the individual to support one side or another. However, a trap appears – a collection of other people's opinions over an event still needs to be hierarchically organised, arranged not so much chronologically but rather in cause-effect relationships, with the background being expanded. Then one can try to understand. John Fiske describes this trap as:

> Objectivity is authority in disguise: "objective" facts always support particular points of view and their "objectivity" can exist only as part of the play of power. But, more important, objective facts cannot be challenged: objectivity discourages audience activity and participation. Rather than being "objective", therefore, TV news should present multiple perspectives that, like those of soap opera, have as unclear a hierarchy as possible […]. Reporters should be less concerned about telling the final truth of what has happened, and should present, instead, different ways of understanding it and the different points of view inscribed in those different ways (Fiske, 1989, p. 194).

The context applies to TV news, but it seems still valid. Listening to what people say (as in the *We Are Social* report: "seeing what's being talked about") is appealing and social media are the ideal space for that. The great number of opinions, the unclear hierarchy of their importance and the multitude of themes are in fact perfect conditions for callousness to occur, for communication to generate emotions and serve phaticity much more than cognition.

THE POWER OF QUOTATION MARKS

Why do media like quotations? And it should be added: Why do media like direct quotations? The answer is obvious: They are authentic. In Polish, the term "*niezależna*" leads to an association with autonomy, separateness and freedom, while in English "direct speech" is associated with direct and sincere speaking, without filters. Direct quotations reflect expressiveness, actualise real events, and communicate knowledge, emotions, opinions, promises, and more. According to the receiver, they convey exactly what someone said. The forms popular in media coverage are those for which a quotation is a fundamental component: interviews, polemics, debates and discussions. In a conventional sense, they give one the opportunity to make direct contact with others or to get to know their opinions. It must be made clear that this directness is only apparent and results from the specific "invisibility" of the instance that

introduces the words of others. After all, it goes without saying that both direct and indirect quotations are intended to achieve the narrator's goals. It is the narrator that includes them in the text, makes decisions and plans the content. Quotations are thus conducive to dialogicality, and they maintain interest in the message.

In this context, the popularity of social media is also justified. They have reduced the distance, everyone is available, and everyone can be liked and included in a group of followers and friends. Then, what is posted in other people's profiles (websites, accounts of a politician, cook, singer, scientist, coach, celebrity, actress, web developer, activist, neighbour, a work colleague or an uncle from the other side of the world), clearly appears to be first-person, private, actual, unbroken, real, and honest. Even in this case, however, we are sure that many posts are not written by the tagged author, and we do not mean only false information that has been made up, but also information that is commissioned to others. Sometimes an effect of authenticity is achieved by fixing the account holder's idiolect, such as by making minor mistakes, using consistently characteristic expressions or slogans, using expressive elements, applying appropriate metaphors and other linguistic and graphic means (comparisons, block letters). The question of how sharing the words of others can increase levels of misinformation mainly applies to institutional broadcasters: What ways of message construction can be used in order to make such messages sound reliable and credible so that the scrolling receivers notice them, "like" them, comment on them and share.

A few elements can be mentioned intuitively – shortening the message, getting the clearest content to the forefront, using clickbait standards within the glossary and images, and quoting other people's words. All these elements are interconnected and mutually supportive. If someone's words appear, they are instantly direct – because the quotation marks tell the receiver: "He said that!/ She said that! Read it because it is important/ controversial/ shocking/ strange/ funny/ interesting/ bizarre" Therefore, a quotation implies an announcement of a longer text, so its primary role is all to convince the eyes to stop and click, if possible (thus it is persuasion), and only later does its informative value come[3].

WHERE IS THE SOURCE? TAKING OUT OF CONTEXT

It seems obvious that every quote requires an earlier source statement, and that a quotation requires a choice to be made, thus taking what is needed out of the uttered or written text. However, the emphasis is put on features of messages and speakers which reinforce certain values, ideologies and statements, such as the antagonist is speaking nonsense while the protagonist is providing important information. Again, the receiver would have to do the work and check whether the words cited were actually uttered and in what context they were spoken. The original context (relevant to the actual statement made outside the medium) is often overlooked or concealed. One reason behind this is, of course, brevity and the tendency to economise the message, but often these are intentional solutions – in the theory of text these are "taken out of context". This way of using other people's words

[3] Attention attraction is also subject to oculographic and neurological studies (e.g. the study of Donald Trump's tweets – Gackowski et al., 2018) which check the reception reactions under the influence of visual stimuli (e.g. brain activity).

means concealing them, and this omission limits or modifies the sense. Words have different and/or more radical, controversial, and ambiguous meanings when their original context is considered invalid.

The tone of these statements responds to the users' needs – because the operation of the social media (their algorithms) is based on information bubbles, filters and echo chambers (Flaxman et al., 2016; Pariser, 2011; Sindermann et al., 2020; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016), which results in selecting opinions that are close to the receivers and correspond to their preferences, strengthening them and making them easy to accept. At the same time, there are no other opinions within reach, which are distinct, questionable, from different visions of the world, with which one would have to confront, check, consider, and think over.

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

Using metonimisation (instead of a precisely defined person) creates uncertainty about the actual author of the quoted words, thereby blurring not only the identity of the speaker, but above all the responsibility for the content that the quote contains. This simplification or generalisation is a very practical tool that allows specific opinions to be assigned to a group that is large and diverse, and its diversity prevents a clear position from being established; the group has no media representative or leader. The views expressed in such a form are easily polarised, displayed in the desired way, so that the receiver can easily reject them (by a clear diagnosis what someone says is shocking, ridiculous, absurd, and/or terrifying) or accept them (because I think so, too). This means that quotations constitute a specific policy of the medium and become its very handy tool.

CONCLUSION

Using social media has become habitual and highly "automated". It suffices to look at people on the subway, tram or bus in the morning – most of them are looking at their smartphones and scrolling through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. We fix our eyes on pictures and we only scan the content. We rarely get into the message, preferring superficial viewing of the content. Analysing the selected sources (Facebook and Twitter) for the two institutional media broadcasters (*Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Sieci*), we have noticed that:

1. Our thesis on the dominance of posts with quotations in social media is confirmed – on average it was: 56% on Twitter (45% – *Gazeta Wyborcza*; 85% – *Sieci*) and 64% on Facebook (60% – *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 70% – *Sieci*). Hence, a quotation is a very frequently used structural element in posts, although the nature of the medium requires brevity and the use of few words.
2. Direct quotations in the form of various direct references (among the total quotations[4]) on Twitter accounted for 73% (72% – *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 73% – *Sieci*) and on Facebook,

[4] The total number of quotations may exceed the number of posts containing quotations, because sometimes it happened that there were several types of quotations in a single post.

61% (71% – *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 47% – *Sieci*). An important criterion for the use of quotations (quotation marks, colon) is their authenticity, truthfulness and reliability (understood as an effect, real or apparent) with a graphic presentation.

3. Indirect quotations influenced by editors are less commonly used: on Twitter, 27% of the quotations are indirect, while on Facebook the percentage is 39%. The high percentage of indirect quotations on Facebook applied to *Sieci*, at 53% (this applies to both indirect speech and narrated speech). It should be noted that this type of quotation is more difficult to observe at first glance only, and the reader should be able to recognize it. Broadcasters thereby include the wording of the quotation in their way of thinking, and it is where a clear and structural area for possible abuses and distortions appear. In particular, the use of narrated speech makes it possible to convey that someone has said something and how they said it, and the broadcaster judges their statement, without revealing what has been said.
4. It is also interesting to look at the people most often quoted – this is linked to the (political?) nature of the outlets, serious, quality media with specific world views and way of perceiving the world. Within the time frame of our interest (January 24–30, 2022), those most frequently quoted were participants in events (usually public figures: politicians, officials and collective entities: institutions, parliament members, doctors), with experts less frequently quoted, and only rarely ordinary people. It should be noted that other media or information agencies also appeared as original sources of quotations. We intend to devote a separate paper to this research area.

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COVID-19 AND INSTAGRAM: AN ANALYSIS OF AN IBERO-AMERICAN INFODEMIC[1]

Understanding the role of communication promoted by Ibero-American society during the Coronavirus pandemic is fundamental for building knowledge about the disease. In this scenario, Instagram occupies a privileged place, as it carries a diversity of possible languages. Furthermore, Instagram's relevance in the social media landscape is growing. This article presents, from a study developed through big data analysis procedures, the first result of several that make up an international investigation on the subject. In the project stage, the quantitative volume of publications, the average publication per user and the participation of the different languages used in this analysis group were verified. It is hoped that further investigations can be developed based on the results presented here, especially due to the urgency of knowing the role of communication in the pandemic scenario in which we live.

Keywords: communication, photography, Instagram, big data, COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society has been experiencing significant transformations in various sectors, especially with the advent of digital technologies. Citizens, immersed in liquid behaviors (Bauman, 2001) and connected by networks of relationships (Castells, 2000), make up an increasingly imagistic scenario, as McLuhan (1964) expected when analyzing television at the time. However, with the emergence of the internet and mobile devices, the use of the image as a communication language between people (P2P) has been enhanced, and social networks have begun to value this type of resource even more. In this aspect, the imagery narrative experiences expressive changing processes since the advent of digital technology, becoming an important protagonist in communication processes in participatory spaces such as Instagram as "new new media" (Levinson, 2012).

Under the COVID-19 pandemic, Instagram has been experiencing a growing role among social media networks. According to *Digital 2021 global overview* in January 2021 it ranked as the fifth most popular social platform, with a global community of 1.221 million people (WeAreSocial and Hootsuite, 2021).

Through Instagram, users have played a prominent role in expressing their feelings, desires, opinions and afflictions about the pandemic. Its visual component has facilitated its role in the construction of pandemic narratives, enabling the contact and connection of users, in addition to its emotional (Cho et al., 2018) and motivational effects (Chung et al., 2017; Kamel et al., 2016). From a social perspective, Instagram makes it possible to use resources for the:

> […] access to official information at the time of entertainment; the comparison of information conveyed in different profiles; the validation of information from the mass media; sharing collective feelings through images and videos; and the semi-intimate bond with health professional influencers (Pinto et al., 2020, p. 45).

Although Igartua, Ortega Mohedano and Arcila Calderón (2020) place Instagram among the social networks with a greater visual component, with an orientation towards capturing likes rather than information, the combination of entertainment with informative and even pedagogical content creates a favorable space for health communication almost on the same plane as other networks (Garcia and Eiró-Gomes, 2020). Thus, there have been several studies analyzing the role of Instagram in health communication (Fung et al., 2020; Kamel Boulous et al., 2016) in the framework of public health crises (Fung et al., 2017; Guidy et al., 2017; 2019; Setlzer et al., 2015; 2017).

However, in the same scenario in which the image gains prominence, we find disinformation disseminated by the same relationship networks, something that in times of a pandemic becomes even less desirable. Together with the health crisis, public institutions and health organizations have been faced with an infodemic in efforts to contain the virus (Aleixandre-Benavent et al., 2020).

This investigation will present the quantitative results observed in Ibero-American fake news publications on Instagram registered at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. For this purpose, publications in Portuguese and Spanish between March 13 and May 20, 2020 that contained the hashtags #covid19 and #coronavirus were collected, totaling 103,775 publications

made by 13,051 users. The selection of labels as a studio object places us in the line of works such as Wagner, Marcon and Caulfiel (2020) on the hashtag #immunebooster. This was a trend in this social network (Nikmam et al., 2020), who analyzed the social conversation articulated around #COVID-19.

Based on data visualization features provided by the Graphext platform, we quantitatively and qualitatively observe these publications and present the results so that we can, from this first moment of observation, understand the role of existing social media networks in Instagram in the first months of the pandemic in Ibero-American countries. It is expected, with the conclusion of this article, to offer subsidies for new studies related to the theme, as well as the contemplation of conditions for finding solutions to misinformation.

METHODOLOGICAL PARAMETERS

The article was guided by a general objective to be contemplated: to discover the role of image content in the construction of public discourse about COVID-19 in Ibero-American countries. To this end, the following list of specific objectives was defined:

- develop a sufficiently representative dataset to safely achieve the general objective,
- quantitatively verify publications on COVID-19 during the given period,
- conduct a comparative quantitative analysis between publications in Portuguese and Spanish registered in the period.

At the time of the development of this research, we did not have a hypothesis regarding the following research question: What will be the nature of the behavior of users on Instagram when talking about COVID-19? This has happened because, in addition to this being a new topic in communication terms, we also did not know the dimensions of the pandemic, especially considering the timing of the research, at the onset of the pandemic.

For this, CrowdTangle software was adopted, which found, between March 13 and May 20, 2020, some 103,775 publications tagged with the hashtags #covid19 and #coronavirus, in combination with a series of keywords in Spanish and Portuguese that allowed delimiting the conversation within the Ibero-American sphere, as issued by a total of 13,051 users.

Of this set of posts, 51,893 were published in Spanish and 48,691 in Portuguese (the sixth and eleventh most popular languages used on the network, covering a wide community of users).

The choice of hashtags is related to their role in the visibility of communication themes, a role that can also promote debate perspectives and drive common narratives (Rambukkana, 2015).

The data collection period is justified as follows:

- on March 13th the Government of Spain declared a “State of Alarm”, which would last for two months;
- on March 20, the Federal Senate of Brazil approved a Decree of Public Calamity.

Although Spain and Brazil represent only two of the countries in the Ibero-American sphere, they acquired particular relevance in the crisis. In fact, following Rovetta and Bhagavathula (2020), Brazil and Spain are the second- and third-most-cited nations, in relation to

COVID-19, by the global Instagram user community (with 551,000 and 376,000 hashtags, respectively), which leads to thought about the true polarization of social conversation.

As this is an exploratory research article, which has a broader methodological complex, the data presented here are limited to quantitative perspectives. Therefore, an investigation of ethnographic content is developed, commonly adopted to understand and explain contemporary social and cultural phenomena. The ethnographic method, according to Agrosino (2009, p. 31), "[...] is based on field research (conducted in the place where people live and not in laboratories where the researcher controls the elements of behavior to be measured or observed)". In the article in question, the use of the multifactorial method was adopted, which has as its essence the use of two or more data collection techniques. For this purpose, netnography is considered, which consists of collecting data from ethnographic research on the internet.

The research has been built on two pillars: theoretical conceptualization and data analysis. The two are directly related, since it is essential to know the theories to interpret the data results. Otherwise, we will have an almost empirical reading, at least when it comes to understanding what has happened. For this, in addition to classic authors such as Manuel Castells, we have adopted recent research, such as that developed by the authors of this research, as well as that of Pamela Pinto, Felipe Brasileiro, Margarida Almeida and Maria João Antunes, who have published articles on similar topics.

SOCIAL NETWORKS IN DIGITAL SPACES

In contemporary society cultural and technological changes have become increasingly present and incisive in the daily lives of subjects. The different forms of communication are enormously impacted by the changes resulting from the numerous digital communication and information technologies available.

The space in which this happens is called cyberspace, a space for new media that emerges from the internet. The term cyberspace includes not only the infrastructure of technological materials, but also the contents and subjects that are transmitted and are immersed in it, respectively. Faced with this digital context, new ways of being, feeling, relating and knowing become accessible to subjects, thus giving rise to cyberculture (or digital culture) in which subjects relate and share content through different media, instantly, participatorily and collaboratively. According to Levy (2010, p. 17), cyberculture is "the set of techniques (material and intellectual), practices, attitudes, ways of thinking and values that develop along with the growth of cyberspace".

In cyberspace we do everything that people do when they meet, but we do it with words, images, videos and on the screens of computer interfaces. From it, we can think that the signs of a medium create, generate, build other signs in different ways, thus demonstrating the possibility of an unlimited semiosis. Worldwide, billions of people belong to digital social networks in which our identities mix and interact electronically, regardless of time and place (Santaella, 2013, p. 123). It is also important to mention that in this context, the social markers of difference – socio-economic and cultural conditions, race, gender, and generations – are present and effectively manifested in the context of the relationships established by the subjects.

Digital culture contemplates the creation/production of content in media supports and the intensification of the interconnection that may exist between these contents. Different media allow people to connect through different platforms that are grouped in a single device, which allows us to talk about convergence. This convergence is not only built on the evolution of the media, nor on what they are called to present as an unprecedented use, but above all it brings a significant change in the paradigms of social, cultural and consumption relations, establishing an expanded way of integrating and interacting with the different content and information available.

Convergence is characterized as a cultural transformation that occurs as the need to search for information and connectivity to content arises.

For Jenkins (2009, p. 27), convergence is:

> content flow through multiple media supports, cooperation between multiple media markets and the migratory behavior of media audiences, who go almost anywhere in search of the entertainment experiences they want.

The interactions present in the digital context do not happen only through the technological apparatus, but mainly through the ways in which subjects appropriate technologies to produce culture. In digital culture, the subject is at the center of the process, because it makes content converge on different media platforms while it also makes itself present in these different spaces. The media are important, as they are the support that contributes to the changes in the actions of the subjects immersed in it, but without a change in the subject's perception, it would not be possible to develop interactions in cyberspace.

The most relevant thing is, therefore, to understand how the relationship between cultural subjects and these media is constructed and translated. One of these most evident processes is the virtualization of personal identity. With it come the virtual profiles that free the entity from the bonds of space-time:

> Virtualization is not a derealization (the transformation of an entity into a set of possibles), but a mutation of identity, a shift in the ontological center of gravity of the object under consideration: instead of being defined mainly by its actuality (a 'solution'), the entity starts to find its essential consistency in a problematic field (Levy, 2011, pp. 17–18).

Thus, we understand that convergence is a process that allows for fluidity between media and languages, enabling access to different information and content that can contribute to the structuring of knowledge that breaks through the barriers defined for each medium.

According to Santaella (2005), with digital convergence, content transmutations occur in countless virtual versions that emerge as the receiver places themself in the position of co-author. Thus, there is also a qualitative sum of the matrices of language and thought, whether sound, visual and/or verbal, which give new meanings to the productions.

> Every new language brings with it new ways of thinking, acting, feeling. Coming from the phenomenological convergence of all languages, hypermedia means an unprecedented synthesis of the matrices of sound, visual and verbal language and thought with all its possible developments and mixtures (Santaella, 2005, p. 392).

From this context, we understand that with the intensification of connectivity between subjects made possible by digital convergence, new ways arise for the construction of knowledge to take effect. These new modes started to be guided by the exponential increase of some substantive characteristics of the information available in digital media, including the multiplicity of languages in which they are constituted; the diversity of sources; the volume, quantity, reach, scope and scale; the plurality of opinions; and the worldwide phenomenon of political/ideological polarization, in addition to the constant confrontation of misinformation.

This very complex scenario incisively affects some social spheres, such as the world of work, political management, investment in science and technology, the environmental agenda, consumption, communication, progressive agendas in defense of fundamental social rights, interpersonal relationships, and education as well. Finally, our entire culture is in a constant process of change (qualitative and quantitative), with the increasingly intensive and extensive participation of digital media in social reality.

The digital convergence movement enhances the actions that can be carried out in a network, and something that for nearly two decades has deserved close attention in mediatized environments is the connections between people, popularly known as the network. Previously defined as a meeting or social mobilization around a common theme, the concept of the network began to receive new interpretations with the advent of the Internet. The Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells was a pioneer in the interpretation of this new social configuration that started to rely on mediated environments and, above all, the importance of the citizen in the processes of building networks.

In his work *The Network Society*, Castells (2000) proposes the importance of being in the information society and the communication processes based on the identity of networks. According to Castells (2000, pp. 57–58), "by identity, I understand the process by which a social actor recognizes and builds meaning mainly based on a certain cultural attribute or set of attributes, to the point of excluding a broader reference to other social structures".

It is important to emphasize that Castells does not consider the concept of "network" in the same way as technology scholars consider the term. Although the philosophy is the same – computer networks or social networks are interconnected by various nodes, whether neural, process or physical connection – the network proposed by Manuel Castells goes beyond this simplification, as a social network is supported by other characteristics, including immaterial ones such as mutual interests and goals. This social network drives collective changes, voluntarily or involuntarily.

In a more current work, Castells (2013) presents the concept of social network with specific purposes of mobilization and collective change, writing how "in fact, social change involves an individual and/or collective action that is, in its essence, emotionally motivated, in the same way as all human behavior" (Castells, 2013, p. 126).

On this topic, the author also demystifies the need for technology for the formation and existence of networks. For Castells, technology collaborates and empowers, but the key is the sharing of interests, needs and solutions.

> They are networked in multiple ways. The use of internet communication networks and cell phones is essential, but the way to connect to the network is multimodal. It includes online and offline social networks, as well as preexisting networks and others formed during the movement's actions.

> Networks are formed within the movement, with other movements from around the world, with the internet blogosphere, with the media and with society in general. The technologies that enable the constitution of networks are significant for providing the platform for this continued practice, which tends to expand, evolving with the change in the format of the movement (Castells, 2013, p. 128).

When debating the formation of networks, Castells values the language used to share collective ideas. Among the most prominent, the image occupies a privileged status in the process. According to Castells (2013, p. 130), "the power of images is sovereign. YouTube was probably one of the most powerful mobilization tools in the early stages of the movement". Effectively, for the author the image is the protagonist of greater power to mobilize and form networks, which can be observed from the quantitative results presented by this investigation.

However, when thinking about networks in the context of this investigation, we must consider the territorial scope. As proposed by Marc Augé (1994), in digital environments we rely on non-place, and based on this idea, he develops an anthropological reading of contemporary society as a network of people who inhabit the non-place, as this does not depend on physical conditions to connect. For the author, "The non-place is the space of others without the presence of others, the space constituted in a spectacle" (Augé, 1994, p. 167). He considers in a different text that non-place is the common space of what he defines as supermodernity. He explains:

> But, insofar as non-place is the negative of place, it is indeed necessary to admit that the development of spaces for circulation, communication and consumption is a pertinent empirical feature of our contemporaneity, that these spaces are less symbolic than encoded, ensuring in them all signs and a whole set of specific messages (through monitors, synthetic voices) in the circulation of passersby and passengers (Augé, 2006, p. 115).

However, Augé's idea is not uncontested. From another perspective, the Portuguese Boaventura Sousa Santos (2005) defends an intermediate position between geographic and virtual territory, stating:

> The present time appears to us as dominated by a dialectical movement in which globalization processes occur alongside localization processes. […] social relations in general seem to be increasingly deterritorialized […]. But on the other hand, and in apparent contradiction to this trend, new regional, national and local identities are emerging, built around a new prominence of root rights. Such localisms refer to real or imagined territories, as well as to ways of life and sociability based on face-to-face relationships, proximity and interactivity (Santos, 2005, p. 54).

These concepts lead to a fundamental understanding to sustain the value of the publications found by this investigation. It is noticed that there is spatial coherence that reflects, in a way, the pandemic situation in Portuguese-speaking and Hispanic countries.

DATA INTERPRETATION

The first graphical analysis of the publications was carried out with the support of Graphext software, a platform that allows the creation of graphs and graphs from big data on social networks. Figure 1 is an initial representation of the data collection and crossing

process, composed of contents in Spanish and Portuguese. It is important to point out that the segmentation in different languages generated two macro-clusters of publications that are disconnected from each other. This is because the interests of the Hispanic and Lusophone communities differ.

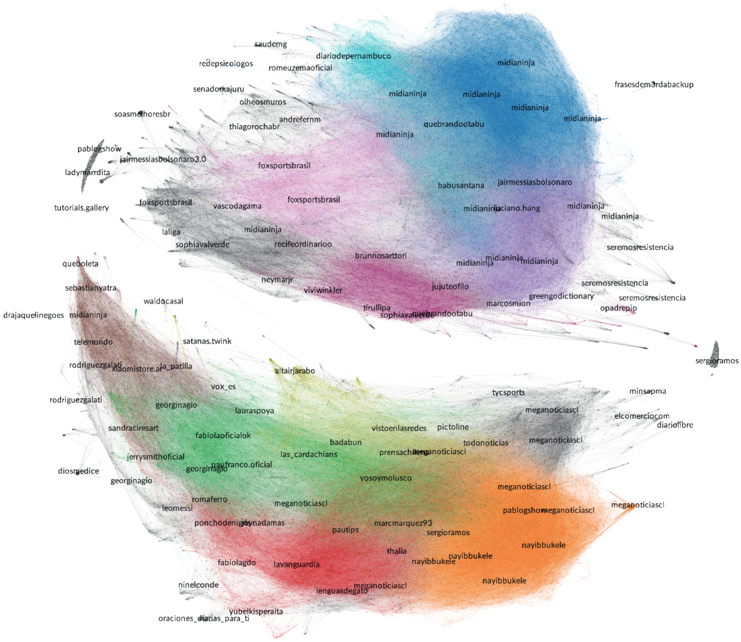

Figure 1. Map of publications in Portuguese (above) and Spanish (below)

The *cluster* of publications in Spanish comprises 51,893 posts on Instagram, while the Portuguese-speaking community is represented by 48,691 posts. It is essential to clarify that the collection also identified 2% of cases of publications in English or in languages not defined by the system.

TEMPORAL EVOLUTION

As well as the relevance of publications on media scandals (Thompson, 2002), publications with hashtags #covid19 and #coronavirus went through a cycle, as clearly interpreted in Figure 2. At the beginning of the analyzed period, we observed a strong growth of publications tagged by hashtags coinciding with the decree of the State of Alarm in Spain and in much of Europe, although with time these publications taper off. This was not because the coronavirus disappeared, but because less and less talk about the topic occurred on Instagram. This phenomenon that was found by other studies on the use of social networks in the first phase of the

pandemic, (e.g., Hung et al., 2020), and it could be considered as among the first symptoms of "pandemic fatigue". In addition, there is a peak in publications after the decree of public calamity declared by the Government of Brazil, with the same concerns in Spanish and Portuguese. It is noteworthy that the virus arrived in Latin America at the same time that it manifested itself in Brazil. The same goes for Portugal and Spain, which had similar situations in time.

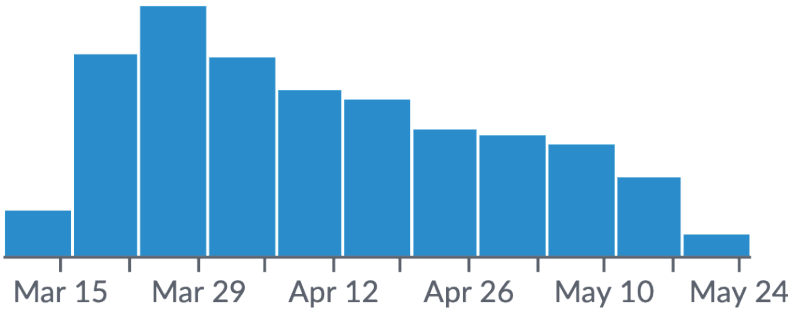

Figure 2. Evolution of publications. Graphext font

Figure 3, however, represents something curious. Unlike what was analyzed in other investigations on the behavior of users of social networks (Martínez-Rolán et al., 2019), if we look at daily publications, we notice a drop in posts with the hashtags #coronavirus and #covid19 on weekends, when the use of social networks tends to be more intense. This reality deserves detailed qualitative observations. One possible explanation is the lower informative pressure of the media about the coronavirus on weekends, when there is a lack of data and official information, which leads people to develop more habitual attitudes on Instagram, as the publication and interaction form around leisure themes which are less worrying and/or depressing.

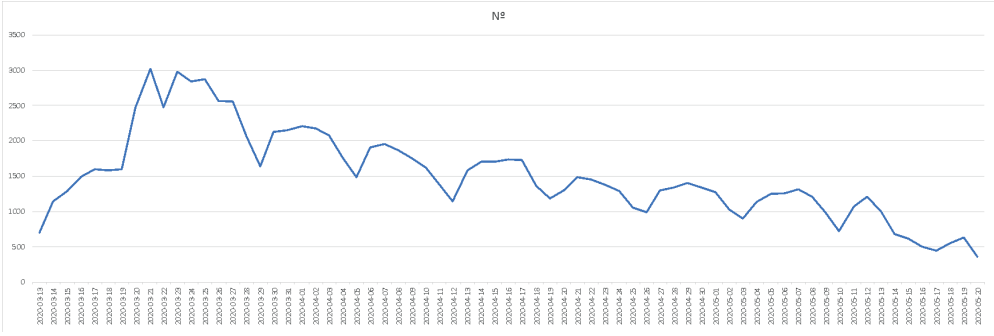

Figure 3. Daily evolution of publications

Confinement and attrition happened a week earlier in Spain than in Brazil, which projected itself into the social conversation on Instagram around the hashtags #covid19 and #coronavirus. As we can see in Figures 4 and 5, the shape of the publication curves between the two languages takes place with a week's difference. In Spain (Fig. 4), in particular, the confinement ended in May. For this reason, the publication curve declined at that time. Brazil (Fig. 5), in turn, has continued in disorderly confinement since then, although, curiously, the curve has also decreased, probably due to social exhaustion.

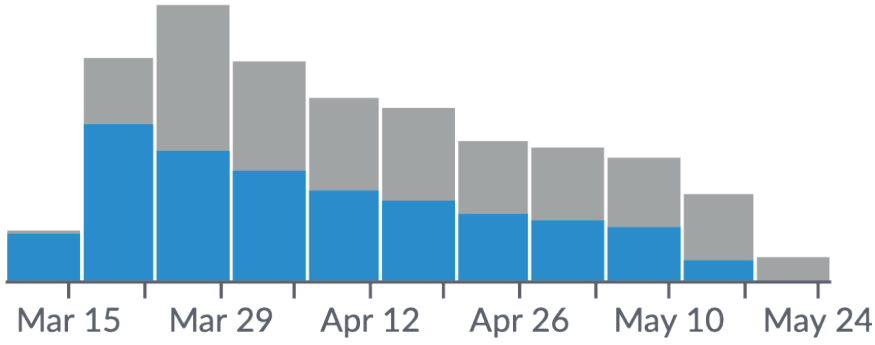

Figure 4. Evolution of publications in Spanish

Source: Graphext

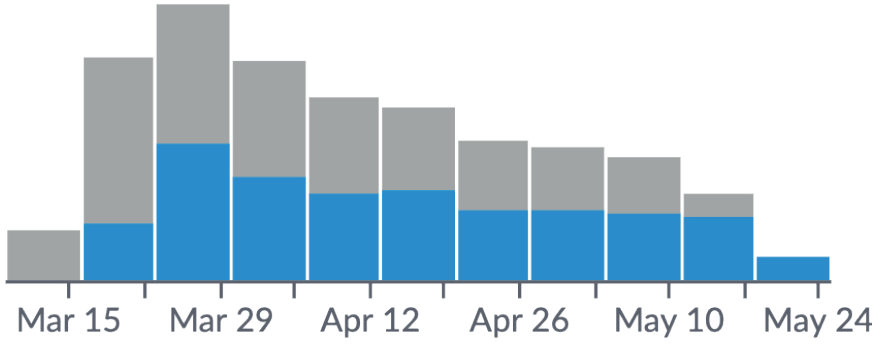

Figure 5. Evolution of publications in Portuguese

Source: Graphext

Another interesting quantitative survey obtained in this investigation refers to the type of content in the publication, as Instagram allows for a variety of formats ranging from photography to audiovisual, through iconography, texts and audio. In addition, it is possible to publish an album of up to ten photos and still carry out live video transmissions. In collecting data with the hashtags #covid19 and #coronavirus, we obtained four types of publications depending on their language-form with the following classifications (Fig. 6):

- photographs: a single photograph, optionally accompanied by a text (caption);
- album: a set of two or more photographs optionally accompanied by a text (caption);
- video: a video fragment optionally accompanied by a text (caption);
- instagram TV: a live video stream, optionally accompanied by a text (caption).

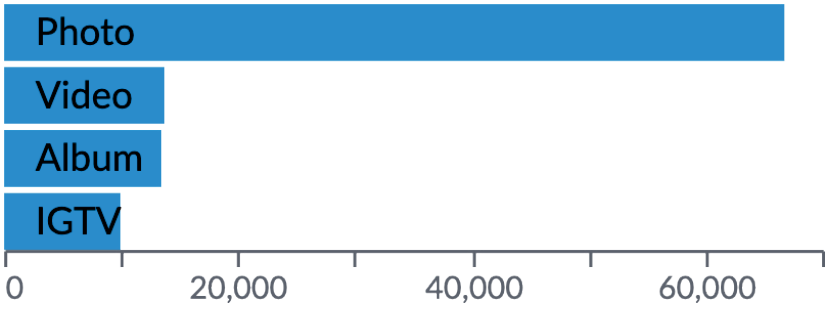

Figure 6. Varieties of publications obtained by the research

In the scope of this collection, Figure 7, with the specific figures for each type of language-form adopted, catches our attention. In the selection, there is a predominance of photographs that with 66,642 publications (64% of posts are single images). This figure lives up to the origins of the social network. Photographs are the simplest way to communicate on Instagram and are the favorite of users who share ideas, thoughts, and anxieties condensed in a single image that, accompanied by text, creates a multimodal discourse about what interactions are established.

The remaining 36% of the publications (a total of 37,133 posts) are distributed more evenly among Instagram's other types of language-form. Thus, with 13% of the sample, we can highlight the practical balance between publications with photo albums (an expansion of photographs present in 13,387 publications) and those that use videos to contribute their perspective to the collective narrative of the pandemic on Instagram (13,706 publications).

In this sense, a positive evolution of publications that use the audiovisual format on Instagram can be noted. Although static images – photos and albums – continue prevail among the publications developed on these platforms, the growing presence of videos and the rapid evolution of video transmissions on IGTV (10,040 publications that already account for 10%

of the analyzed sample) allow us to observe an evolution in the conception and appropriation of this platform by the user community.

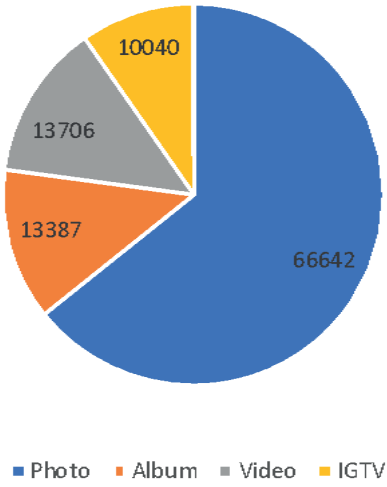

Figure 7. Percentage of publications obtained

This mix of languages allows us to support the idea that Instagram is a post-photographic social media space, considering the concept presented by Joan Fontcuberta (2011). For the author, the contemporary mediation environment is characterized by the association of various image languages such as photography, audiovisuals, infographics and iconography.

TYPES OF INTERACTION, MEAN AND MEDIAN

The research sample is represented by 103,775 publications, a number which provides high mean and median figures. Authors such as Sheldon and Bryant (2016) define Instagram as a network centered more on people than on relational identity. In the daily life of the platform and the interactions established on it, certain personalities (from different offline entities) have been defined as carrying greater weight and influence in social conversation. These influencers – including in the field of health – have become true opinion leaders (Fregber et al., 2011), to the point that several health authorities have requested they collaborate in the fight against the virus (Público, 2020), and their acting in the social conversation of Instagram has been the object of study (Torres Romay and García Mirón, 2020).

Thus, the publication with the highest volume of sample interaction, that authored by the Argentine soccer player Leo Messi, has, at the time of analysis, 2,656,944 shares divided into likes and comments. On the other hand, the one making the least impact was that of Brazilian Member of the Chamber Deputy Arnaldo Jardim, who had amassed 17 likes.

As can be seen in Table 1, when considering the total number of publications and interactions received, an average of 18,947 interactions is obtained, with a median of 3,232 interactions. The data are relatively high, as the number of video reproductions is always expressive. In this case, an average of 55,831 reproductions should be considered (the median is significantly lower, with 24,165 reproductions).

On the other hand, the traditional forms of interaction (likes and comments) reached more modest figures. The average number of likes per publication is 4,982, accompanied by 59 comments. Although the number that is repeated the most – median – refers to the publication that contains 2,024 likes and 59 comments, this represents one comment for every 34 likes (median) or every 28 likes on average.

Table 1. Mean and median of types of interaction

	Likes	**Comments**	**Views**	**Total interactions**
Mean	4,982	177	55,831	18,947
Median	2,024	59	24,165	3,232

TOTAL USERS AND VOLUME OF PARTICIPATION

With a total of 103,775 Instagram postings or publications, 13,051 different users were counted. Of these, approximately half of users appear with a single publication: 6,326. On the other hand, the remaining 6,587 users who were selected by the show are responsible for the remaining 97,449 publications. It is worth noting that the distribution of this participation is irregular and does not respect the average (14.7 publications per user).

First, it should be noted that a small number of users (only 13) are responsible for more than 500 publications. In addition, there are 159 users who have published between 100 and 500 posts and 1,230 users are authors of a range between ten and 100 posts. The largest share of users falls in the range of two to ten publications, representing a total of 5,185.

Table 2. Volume of publications per user

Post range	**Number of publications**
Users with 1 post	6,326
Users between 1–10 posts	5,185
Users between 10–100 posts	1,230
Users between 100–500 posts	159
Users +500 posts	13
Total users	13,051

CONCLUSIONS

The data obtained from the methodology used in this netnographic study demonstrate a relevance in the observation of Instagram as a space for understanding the media ecosystem during the first two months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries. In addition to expressive figures, there is a similar evolutionary design in both regions (Lusophone and Hispanic), namely Spain and Brazil. Likewise, there is a surge in publications right after the declaration of State of Alarm by the Government of Spain and the Decree of Public Calamity by the Federal Senate of Brazil.

It is important to consider that the Hispanic community numbers 577 million people worldwide, while the Lusophone (Portuguese speaking) community is represented by practically half that, with 260 million speakers (48%). In addition, Brazil has 210 million inhabitants, which represents almost the entire Portuguese-speaking sample.

Through the study presented here, it is observed that photography continues to be the main language of Instagram, with approximately 60% of the collected content. Adding up the photo album publications, we reach almost 75% of the publications. Still, it is important to remember that an album can contain both photography and video in a single album, which can change that figure.

The results presented strengthen the idea of the growth of imagery narrative as a contemporary language. This confirms, in addition to the hypothesis of this investigation, evidence presented by Joan Fontcuberta (2011), or even Marshall McLuhan (1964) in his investigations of society influenced by television at the time.

Another observation found in this investigation refers to the volume of publications. Considering the total number of publications with the hashtags #covid19 and #coronavirus – 103,775 – 13,051 of them seem to have been published multiple times. However, approximately half of these authors (6,587 people) are responsible for 97,449 posts, which demonstrates an inequality in the intensity of participation. This difference can be observed between the post that received the most participation (from the soccer player Lionel Messi, with 2,656,944 interactions) and the post that received the least participation (from the Brazilian federal deputy Arnaldo Jardim, with 17 interactions). This demonstrates that the identity of the author of a post is still fundamental, as the high visibility of celebrities garners them more interaction, which makes them influencers also in the non-place proposed by Augé (1994). A medium that allowed the creation of a common narrative about the pandemic of a multimodal nature, in which information from public institutions and bodies – such as the one analyzed by Pinto et al. (2020) – interspersed, at different levels, with personal experiences and experiences that, in times of solitude, became public and collective.

However, the present study is within a field which requires further work. This article proposes an analysis based on the social conversation about the coronavirus pandemic developed by the Ibero-American community on Instagram from the perspective of big data. Questions about who were the main nodes of this conversation and why will be further investigated in future articles. Given the various urgencies caused by the pandemic, communication occupies a fundamental position and requires the partial sharing of the results obtained in the investigation.

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