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VALUES IN THE MEDIA AND THEIR IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

By their very nature, the media reach a wide audience. Value trends and preferences of either society or individuals may influence the cultural trends and the current political, economic or other living conditions of the country in which they live. Recently, we could observe differences in the values of the society. At present, however, it is the media which promote and offer a wide range of values on a daily basis and have a significant impact on children and adolescents. The speed of electronically mediated communication, the creation of new role models in the media environment and the adoption of role models and values from other cultures and nationalities significantly impact the formation of personality and value orientation of an individual. Children and adolescents are particularly sensitive to changes in values and value orientation under the influence of media.

Key words: *values, young people, media impact.*

Introduction

The fact that the media have an impact on society is nothing new. One of the people, who thought about the effects of the media themselves and their content on people, was for example Marshall McLuhan, who said that every new medium brings some changes and also has an impact on changes of a social nature, not just the technological one. Thus, McLuhan believed that it is the technology that has a significant impact on social life and that individuals unconsciously adapt to these changes (Determinismus...). In addition, the influence of the media has increased even more in recent years due to constant technological progress and their unlimited use. Such an influence of the media undoubtedly also impacts human values, because it changes one's life as such. Therefore, each new medium brings new challenges, but also facilitates the way of life to some extent, shows new forms of communication, entertainment, education and ways of gathering information.

1 Our everyday media

We can say that life without media would be considerably more difficult, and we can also say that life without media would be incomplete. However, their growing influence is most noticeable especially in children, but also in adolescents and they have a significant impact on the formation of values. Children and adolescents are able to react more quickly to the presented values, then master them and incorporate them into their value system. Their impact is indirect, but long-term. Moreover, the media accompany them since an early age and thus cast a kind of shadow over their life, which constantly follows them. Media, which constantly demand our attention, therefore undoubtedly have a significant impact on the quality of life and lifestyle of children and young people. Media also have a huge impact on the psychosocial development of children and adolescents. But do the

media promote quality content and the values it contains? According to Jamwal, media shape children and young people both in a positive and negative sense (Jamwal, http).

Today, we see that there is a lot of low-quality media content and even higher-quality content is often simplified so that it can reach larger audience. Iłowiecki and Zasępa also point to what Neil Postman was saying, that all aspects of today's world, such as politics, information, the economy and religion, have been changed by the media into entertainment sector (Postman, 2003). Serious topics are therefore often presented in a relaxed form with a humorous undertone. By doing so, they try to have a wider reach of their content. Besides this, what is presented in the media is often perceived as a real reality and something important by the recipients. They do not think that the media actually subordinate their content to what they expect to be successful with most recipients or that they could actually have some purpose. They are thus able to significantly deform and distort the recipients' awareness of the real reality and values.

Jamwal also talks about various factors in the media which threaten real values, such as materialism, selfishness, lack of ethics, and so on (Jamwal, http). Therefore, the self-reflection of individuals and society is very important. The more we know about the media, the less they will influence us, they will not persuade us easily, we will be able to know the media offer and choose content that may be beneficial for us and the acceptance of which will not endanger our mental condition and values, but the other way round, it will help us grow internally. We therefore agree with Burton and Jirák, who argue that it is important to know the media, because it is then possible to evaluate and check what relationships and values the media offer (Burton, Jirak, 2003). The time that individuals spend engaging with the media is also important and this time determines the effects the media will have on us.

Research shows that nowadays children spend up to 6 hours a day engaging with the media, while this number rises to 9 hours a day in adolescents (Valkenburg, Piotrowski, 2017). Within the context of the above, W. Austin also says that one also needs to spend time alone, in silence, so that we can immerse ourselves in the real world and have time for deeper thoughts. According to him, personal contacts and the time spent without using the media are also important (Austin, http). At present, however, we are witnessing almost unlimited media consumption. We do not distinguish between free time and time spent working or studying, as we also use the media for such purposes. Therefore, the time spent engaging with the media is not limited at all and we spend more time engaging with the media than with family members or anyone else. We absorb both the necessary and unnecessary information from the media and their content, we do not choose their sources, we let ourselves be influenced by what the media present. All of this clearly has an impact on our behaviour, attitudes, thoughts, values

and ways of thinking, because we are told that what is being said in the media environment must necessarily be true and we must adhere to it.

Jamwal also says that the world is changing at a dizzying pace at the moment and that our core values are also changing under the influence of the media. Globalization also contributes to this by lowering the "price" of social values and according to him moral values are fragmented. At the same time, the author says that if there is absence of quality and orderly values, society cannot develop (Jamwal, http). We dare to say that the commercialization of content also plays an important role. Similarly, Radošinská, Kvetanová and Višňovský also say that media content is highly commercialized and standardized, while their production is subject to a certain creative process (Radošinská, Kvetanová, Višňovský, 2020).

We can also say that children and adolescents use the media in a different way than adults. They watch more programs online and have an unlimited amount of content on streaming platforms available to them at any time (Valkenburg, Piotrowski, 2017). All of these aspects have led to the emergence of a new interdisciplinary science called media psychology, which deals with the use of the media and their effects on individuals. It is based on the studies of Albert Bandura on the effects of television violence on the real world (Valkenburg, Piotrowski, 2017).

2 The values that today's young people believe in

As we have already mentioned, the higher values and attitudes of today's young people are greatly influenced by the media. They literally grow together and accompany them every step of the way. Values are an integral part of us. From an early age, we have certain values and there is more of them as we gradually grow older. However, their quality is also important. If an individual has in their life few such values that bring him joy and well-being, they may start to experience disappointment, hopelessness and depression (Klčovanská, http). At the same time, it is important what meanings a person associates with a given value, because each individual may have a different understanding of a particular value. He gives the example of the value of love, which one can interpret as pleasure, while others can interpret it as effort for the well-being of another person (Klčovanská, http). For the purposes of this paper, we will try to analyse the research that was conducted in Slovakia and related to the issue of values in children and young people.

In the research called *Kvalitatívny výskum hodnôt na Slovensku* (*Qualitative Research of Values in Slovakia),* the authors found that the value of the good life is important for young people. A good quality of life is for young people associated with good financial security, which is related to the possibility to buy better-quality food, have good housing or the opportunity to spend time on their hobbies, relax and enjoy more. They also associate better financial security with better health care, elderly and child care. The research has also shown that young people consider values such as

self-fulfilment, independence and self-expression to be important (Kvalitativny..., http). However, trust is also valuable for them in the sense of not being afraid to tell someone confidential things. They often associate a sense of trust with the family environment. Trust is also related to the willingness to tell someone confidential things or tell secrets without feeling worried of them being revealed. At the same time, trust is associated with selfless help, self-confidence or perception of trust as a kind of agreement. Research participants also stated that they associate trust with naivety, because according to them, trusting each other does not pay. The research participants believe, that they can really trust only to family members. The high level of distrust is also reflected in the trust in government institutions. The research participants observe and have even encountered corruption in health care, the police, or the judiciary. However, we should point out that although the research participants expressed distrust in healthcare, they trust doctors because they try to do their best for their patients. Significant mistrust is also present in the judiciary. The research participants said that "double standards are used for everyone," and that the judges make subjective decisions. In the case of the police, respondents expressed the belief that they abuse their power (Kvalitativny..., http). However, there is also considerable mistrust between people themselves. The research participants attribute this phenomenon to egoism, consumerism, individualism and a low level of empathy. Everyone is primarily focused on their own goals and is ruthless (Kvalitativny..., http). The value of safety is the highest valued value for Slovaks and was chosen by up to 40% of participants. For them, this value means, above all, life without the occurrence of unexpected situations. They linked the feeling of safety to the protection of their own health, especially safe movement around the city, but they also perceive safety in terms of financial security. The research participants were also asked to say what, according to them, weakens their feeling of safety. They mentioned the police and judiciary again, but also the army and political authorities. However, according to the research participants, the feeling of safety is also threatened by ignorance, indifference, inattention of people, which is related to the fact that everyone only cares for their own safety. Young people perceive migration, crime and terrorism as threats, which are constantly mentioned in the media (Kvalitativny..., http). The research also focused on traditions. It found that the research participants associate traditions with folklore and folk culture. The participants did not mention any big names from culture, scientists and they did not even mention literature or theatre. When it comes to traditions, the research participants associate it with holidays such as Christmas or Easter. Nowadays people are trying to overcome the fast-paced lifestyle and individualism that is so typical of our time. They appreciate family reunions during the holidays. What is worthy of attention is the fact that only 2 respondents mentioned religion as a tradition. The religious aspect was not

even mentioned in relation to Christian holidays. On the contrary, when talking about traditions, they often mentioned nature and environmental protection in relation to folklore and holidays, because the quality of life also depends on natural wealth and unpolluted environment. The family was also a highly valued value among the research participants. They also associated it with quality of life in terms of providing safety and trust, and emphasized the importance of family completeness (Kvalitativny..., http).

Another research called MILLENNIALS, examined the values, attitudes and opinions that young people follow in their lives. It was done by the NTN agency in 2014. The research sample consisted of 1,500 young people aged 12 to 26 years. The findings showed that 85% of young people are aware of the importance of education. However, when it comes to their future steps, they discuss them with their parents, especially with their mother. This was stated by up to 54% of respondents. At the same time, up to 66% of young people agree that, when knowing several foreign languages, one has more opportunities to enter the labour market and have a better chance of becoming successful and earning more. At the same time, up to 48% of the research participants believe that it is not easy to be successful in life without sufficient education (Millennials..., http). These results show that young people associate education primarily with success, wealth and better job opportunities. They therefore perceive education as a path to a carefree and comfortable life. Young people also strive for social interactions, making friendships, they also like to watch movies/listen to music and spend time doing their hobbies. Smartphones are popular with as many as 85% of the research participants, online shopping is popular with 80% of young people and social networks are popular with 81% of young people. Regarding social topics, they are most interested in culture, theatre, music and art. This was stated by 23% of the research participants and 18% of young people are interested in sports. Young people pay particular attention to their appearance and having a healthy lifestyle. As many as 62% of young people try to have a healthy diet and up to 78% of young people are interested in physical exercise. However, up to 26% of young people would not want to undergo plastic surgery calling it "out." 23% of young people are not interested in weight loss diets, and according to 31% of the research participants, vegetarianism is no longer cool. In contrast, 45% of young people are interested in the environment and as many as 27% of those surveyed are concerned about global warming. However, they are not interested in politics and only a quarter of the research participants perceive religion as an essential part of their lives (Millennials..., http). The need for social closeness with other individuals is typical especially for adolescents. It is therefore not surprising that they care for their appearance, physical beauty and making new friendships, for example through common interests or social networks. In today's young people, we can see the effort to express themselves or to fight for something and in this case, it means that they are

expressing their views on the environment and on worsening climate change. Within the social field, only 64% of respondents believe in equality between men and women. They perceive homosexuality as full of contradictions and it is still a taboo topic for them. 27% of the research participants stated that they perceive homosexuality as something bad and 25% have a positive attitude towards it and think there is nothing wrong even in same-sex marriages. As for the racial tolerance, their attitudes are more positive, as only 21% of research participants said they would not want to have a relationship with a person of another race (Millennials..., http). These results suggest an increasingly tolerant tendency of young people to pluralism. Young people believe in a better future and as many as 29% of the research participants believe that they are still doing well and 34% of respondents are not worried about their future and 35% of respondents are planning their future (Millennials..., http). These results suggest the ability of young people to adapt more quickly to the changes that come with life, respectively, some of them are aware of the responsibility for their own decisions and life direction.

The last analysed research is older, it is called *Hodnoty mladých Čechov a Slovákov (The Values of Young Czechs and Slovaks)* and was done by Ilgová and Ritomský in 2009. The authors focused on the values of young people from Slovakia and the Czech Republic. They focused on examining values, value systems in order to find out their structure and possible differences. The results of the research show that respect for the habits that result from the traditional culture is essential for young Slovaks. On the contrary, hedonism, indulgence, and enjoyment of life dominate in young Czechs. They are also more open to changes, unlike Slovaks, who adjust to the current trends in the society. However, the authors did not observe a difference in values such as conformity, stimulation, benevolence and self-determination. Czechs and Slovaks are same when it comes to self-discipline, decency, harmony in relationships, creativity. However, the research showed differences in success, power and universalism. Slovaks are more dominant in proving their competence, intelligence and abilities to meet their goals. They also consider tolerance, nature conservation and the protection of society to be important. On the contrary, prestige, control of resources and power are important for Czechs (Ilgova, Ritomsky, 2009).

To summarize the results of the previous research, we could say that financial security, quality education, image, attractive leisure time, real friendships are valuable for adolescents. On the contrary, only a few research participants stated that they were interested in politics or religion. All these research results are clearly influenced also by the media they follow.

Conclusion

The period of childhood and adolescence is the time of intensive development of patterns of behaviour, values, attitudes, a large part of which they also carry over into adulthood. We dare to say that there must be a

balance in everything and it is not right for children and adolescents to use the media without any limits, but strict prohibitions also do not bring the desired effect. We need to realize that we need to teach children and adolescents to know the media offer and also that the media cannot replace important social relationships, the educational influence of the family or joint family activities.

We can say that there is a link between the values that society believes in and the values that the media present. However, we should keep in mind that each media content is constructed as a media product or as a commodity that is sold to the recipient. Therefore, in order for companies to make an economic profit from such content, they must also use creativity in the content creation and incorporate elements that will be attractive. It is therefore appropriate to think whether it is possible to combine economic values with social values.

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