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WHAT POWER RESIDES IN THE MASS MEDIA? TYPOLOGY OF MEDIA'S POWER – A PROPOSAL

Tomasz Gackowski*

ABSTRACT

In this article author has taken into consideration the potential meanings of power which media seem to possess. Understanding the notion of the fourth estate (as media used to be named) has been connected with distinguished typology of media power (in a proposal form): power as a mediatisation; power as an impact; power as a function; and, last but not least, power as a control. First type of power (mediatisation) concerns the essence of media – process of getting to know surrounding world via media by mass audience. From this perspective, media become our window on the world and their power consists in creating frames of our perception. Second type of power (impact/influence) is based on an expected relation between media and their recipients. This relation assumes that media with their facts, opinions and entertainment can in some cases possibly change mass audience's definite point of view. However, we have to bear in mind that this type of media power depends on intentional, not accidental influence of mass media. Third type of power (function) seems to be the most obvious one. Every object – according to philosophical logic – which is attributed to a specific function acquires definite power as a part of this function. Finally, fourth type of power concerns the control idea of media, or the so-called: watchdog. This is a crucial aspect of media power, i.e. media as a great controller of governments. Media as a Fourth Estate ought to control political elite, judge them for their promises. That is a source of media's power.

Key words: Media, power, fourth estate, mediatisation, society

Introduction - problem

The power according to the definition from Encyclopaedia released by Polish Scientific Publishers (PWN) is: *“relation between two individuals or two social groups, which relies on that one of the sides is authorised to permanently force*

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the other side to the particular behaviour and has measures giving control of this behaviour (...) power may be based on voluntary acceptance derived from respecting its authority and legality (legalism) or social coercion” (PWN, 2005, 20, pp. 131-132).

From the definition written above it appears that there's a permanent relation based on compulsion or voluntary acceptance derived from authority and legitimisation (legal validity) of dominant subject (being in authority). Do the media have any authority from this perspective? If they do, who is this authority exercised over? Is the power permanent and entitled? Are the media capable of forcing specific subjects to desirable action? And the last question: Does the media's power rely on its voluntary acceptance by the subjects of this relation?

1 Context

1.1 Media's power over society members

Answer to the above-mentioned questions is not simple. If we assume that media means authority – according to the definition written above – we need to precisely point out who is in power and over whom. We could say intuitively that it is the authority over members of society, who are the media's audience. If so, this raises another question, how this form of power differs from political power wielded by the political elites selected during democratic elections? We will find an answer to this question enumerating arguments for differentiating the power of media from political power, which has particular and severe impact for society (Jastrzębski, 2007, p. 293), for example: creating and enforcing a law or organising society relations between different groups. It seems that media's power cannot reach these areas.

Who owns the media? Does only owners (if we are thinking about free and independent ones), but what about private? When it comes to public media – who is in charge there? Authorities? Independent experts? These questions show how fragile is an attempt to assign media any particular power over society, especially because there is no way to precisely point out media's authority decision-making centre. For the purposes of this argument, we can assume that media has power not over society, but over political elite – authorities chosen in democratic elections. In this situation media would become '*superpower*', which according to definition from our encyclopaedia – possesses instruments to force particular behaviour on authorities. If that would

be a fact, it is worth to ponder over origin of authorities' motivation to become overcome by this power. Where would their standing and legitimisation come from? Answer seems easy. It would come from society, which is using media in everyday life by watching TV, listening to the radio or buying press, thus making media's existence and actions more powerful. Simplifying, in this situation media would be extension of society structure in contact between political institutions.

1.2 Media's power over authorities

Certainly, we assume that media are free and independent from political influence. They are not politicised. This assumption is in some examples deceptive, particularly if we mention, for instance, the period of the People's Republic of Poland. During this period, Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) according to Marxist-Leninist ideology claimed that media was nothing else but propaganda organ. They helped to control authority over the Polish people. Media was extension of authorities, their emanation. Media's power has its beginning from political authority and professional broadcaster which was PUWP. However, they saw media's potential, which they wanted to use to control society. The belief that media has influence on people resulted in the fact that they had become an attractive institution of society life for authorities. It would mean, indeed, that media had same power or at least had such potential.

Contemporary media have kind of enchanting power charm, especially for political elites, who want to exercise effective influence on social attitudes and actions. Depending on perspectives, which was written above, we can assign to media specific and conditional power over society or political elites.

In democracies, media seem to be extension of society in its relation between political and national institutions (play a part of citizens' eyes and ears by reporting everyday political reality). In non-democratic countries media are on the other side. They are extension of authorities, which want to control society with their help. In both situations, media get their power from the crucial subjects of public space – from: society, citizens, and voters, or: politicians, authorities, functionaries and civil servants. From this perspective, media's power is derived from social authority, which according to electoral system for choosing political authorities has superior control over politicians. In countries as PRL, the one who was lending its authority to media and taking advantage of media's potential influence in relation to the society was party elite. In this view,

media's power is something secondary and borrowed, to some extent even hypothetical. It is based on subjects' (society or political elites, which have real power) belief about media's power. Society, by buying press, watching TV or listening to the radio, is legitimising media's mediation in contacts with authorities. Whereas political elites who are in press and on TV, believe in effective communication and having an impact on society provided by media.

1.3 Superpower which means mediocracy

At this point it is worth considering if media has autonomous power? Are there any premises, which would let us talk about *mediocracy*? What generally speaking *mediocracy* could be?

On July 1, 1993, The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed Resolution no. 1003 about journalistic ethics, which says: *"The public authorities must not consider that they own information. The representativeness of such authorities provides the legal basis for efforts to guarantee and extend pluralism in the media and to ensure that the necessary conditions are created for exercising freedom of expression and the right to information and precluding censorship.(...) This is essential if we are to respect the citizens' fundamental right to information.(...) it can't be claimed that the media actually always represent public opinion and they should not turn into the public authorities, institutions or opposition"*.

This is obviously very short way to so-called *mediocracy*, which means superior *media's power*. According to **Walery Pisarek** being in authority should result in particular sequence of events:

problem > decision > action > results > assessment

Meanwhile, media are usurping the exponent of the public opinion status and coming into decision-making process (Rivers & Mathews, 1988; Boventer, 1995, Pisarek, 2002). In this case the factor of creating power is power itself (Donsbach, 1994, p. 90; Gackowski, 2009, pp. 7-10; Meyer, 2001).

John Street, political scientist from University of East Anglia in one of his books rightly noted: *"The view, that 'authority' is a source of power and that media are unusually important to this power, relies on some evident reasoning, even if not everyone would agree. Power in this meaning ability: A to persuade B to something, which B would never do, knowledge itself allows achieving this goal. Having control over information flow about authorities' actions and keeping people in lack of knowledge is a good way to avoid protests. If people would*

know, that authorities are systemically torturing dissidents or poisoning rivers or food, it could result in riots and undermining authorities' legality" (Street, 2005).

Marcin Król writes in his afterword for Polish translation of **John's Condry** and **Karl's Popper** book about TV's threat to democracy: "*In the media field, the triumph of television may be one of the most characteristic present elements. Multimillion audiences, capability of creating and undermining people authorities, enormous influence on society, impact on many people lifestyle results in some scientists' opinions: (...) television creates fundamental problem in democracy times (...) television is exactly like all the other elements of our environment is shaping us, behaving, is having impact on our views, interests, moods and needs. TV (let me remind you an obvious fact) is also reaching people, who don't read anything at all or read anything really rare, which means that it is main information source(...)*" (Król, 1995, pp. 55-56).

Whereas, German media expert **Winfred Schulz** in his reflection about media's usefulness in relation between authority and society writes: "*What way something as temporary and elusive as public opinion may function as social force and control authorities? In what way public society may persuade individual to adapt to conformist attitude? If the definition of public opinion only stands for statistically aggregate of individual opinions, which is measurable by polls, that's unthinkable. Public opinion may unwind their political and social effectiveness only if individuals would perceive itself as 'social reality' and treat as indicator of their individual behavior*" (Schulz, 2005, p. 95).

According to the above quotations, it should be claimed, that *mediocracy* phenomenon – superior media's power really exists and as some scientists are convinced, it is happening before our very eyes. Media themselves are accumulating inside impressive source of knowledge, which base is information of which the biggest media companies may make use in double-sided relations between society and political elites. From this perspective, the answer to previous questions about media's power and legendary claim that they are the fourth estate seems to be settled. In democracies media has power over society and political elites (on citizens' behalf). The importance of citizens command of ruling politicians orders authorities to respect media, who have to perform specified mission¹.

¹ It raises important question on media market in Australia: SCHULTZ, J. 1998. *Reviving the fourth estate: democracy, accountability, and the media*, New York and Mexico: Cambridge University Press, 1998, ISBN 0-521-62042-2. LAWSON, Ch. H. 2002. *Building the fourth estate*:

2 Discussion

2.1 Neither fourth nor the first estate?

Above statement of '*media's power*' we came across some researchers' demands, who unambiguously negate the fact of calling media '*the fourth estate*' (Jastrzębski, 2007, pp. 288-294; Lewiński, 2007). They stress that authority has specific and severe dimension. Being in charge means not only having impact on subjects of social life, but determining space and range of activities, conditioning their functions by decisions to put national reality in order. The power is tightly connected with country (political system) and it is its substantial function (Aristoteles, 2008). From this point of view, '*the fourth estate*' concerns the power of '*influence*' on social life subjects, especially when it comes to the society. That '*power*' would be nothing else but derivative of strength of omnipresent and accumulated discourse (Jastrzębski, 2007, p. 293), which is derivative of many subjects public life activity, who are still negotiating the mentions of surrounding reality. Media are reduced to ancient's agora, common place of exchanging information and opinions. They are no actors, but passive stage organizers, creating space for reaching compromises or exacerbating political, social and economic divisions.

Taking into account above position on this matter it has to be admitted that media '*influence*' does not determine whether to call media '*the fourth estate*' or not. This viewpoint, however, underlines a popular tendency among many scientists to identify '*media's power*' with strength of influence. In a lot of Polish publications we may find the statement '*the fourth estate*' in context of media impact on opinions and attitudes of citizens. That perspective lets researchers make an attempt to comprehend eclectic and comprehensive media potential and their radical influence on the society and politicians in power. Depending on the success of these attempts, we may speak about superior or inferior media's power over society.

Discussed problem seems to be even more important if we take into consideration the long way made by future mass communication researchers in 20th Century (Walters, 1995; Schulz, 1995; Grzybczak, 1995). At the beginning it was believed that media superpower just like a magical injection given to

patients (media audience) results in intended effects (Defleur & Dennis, 1966; Goban-Klas, 2005, p. 244). Later, the theory of the limited influence of the media appeared, assuming that the high diversity of society makes the reception of media coverage by the public highly selective and diverse in interpretation, which limits the media impact (Klapper, 1960; Taylor & Willis, 2006, pp. 164-175). In the 1970s and 1980s strength of media coverage was rediscovered (Noelle-Neumann, 1973), which later lead to reveal the theory of negotiated influence of the media (Goban-Klas, 2005, pp. 243-257.)

It seems, however, that in our discourse on 'power' in political communication process we have to focus on its essence. The main question is, thus, what makes media being perceived as power centre in relations between society and political elites? It occurs that media mainly regulates a resources exchange between the rulers and the ruled (Scott, 2006). To a large extent, this seemingly obvious observation is based on the legitimacy of power on the part of society that agrees to it, and no other representation of their interests - through the chosen elite in democratic elections. Consequently, on one hand media accumulate society attention and politicians are clearly interested in it, but on the other hand they collect and receive information on their own; information in which their audience - society - is interested. Media has comfort of possessing an audience's attention and exposure of current affairs, problems and political elites' business. Exchange of the resources represents the foundation of legitimacy in the entire process of political communication. The perception of media as resources exchangers creates journalists' real power outlined in the system and the process of political communication. It cannot be forgotten that media also have their business by playing a role during the exchange. Here lies the aforementioned privileged position of media. The noticeable fact is that discussed resource sharing system applies not only in political communication, but also in social communication in general. On one side of the media there are always recipients, citizens, consumers - society, on the other - a political class as well as advertisers and non-governmental organisations.

3 Objective

Recapping different opinions and standpoints the author leans towards a position that media hold specific sway indeed, though completely different from the one of the governing elites but not as impaired - using **Aristotle's**

terminology – as it may seem. It permits us to state that media's power in some cases (which is about to be shown in this work later) may be severe and real just like law established and represented by those who govern. Especially when one fully realises the power of information and the knowledge of which – from the citizens' perspective – the only informant and interpreter is media for most of the time. This assumption dares to classify media's power, defining different aspects of media's authority. This context has encouraged the author to propose a specific typology of media power

4 Results – conclusions

4.1 Typology of the power of media

Denis McQuail (2008, p. 445) defined *media's power* as a *communicative power* or a *symbolic power* which is about “using immaterial factors (trust, rationality, respect, emotions etc.)”. He has also pointed four ways of using a symbolic power: “*informing, encouraging action, selective focusing, persuasion, as well as defining the situation and setting reality frames*”. Further in his opus magnum the British researcher distinguishes levels and types of media's affection according to the intentionality and temporariness of the phenomenon. **McQuail** has no doubt that *media's power* is simply *the whole potential of the media in affection, especially in a planned way*.

In his own classification of media's affection, leaning on **Peter Golding's** findings (Golding, 1981), he realises that media's affection in the intended and short informative messages can be defined as *bias* while the long-lasting and intended ones are *policy* of that media. On the other hand, unintended and short ones are *involuntary bias*, unintended and long-lasting are *ideology*. At some point this division is similar to **John Street's** findings, who took into consideration sender's intention and specific time perspective (Street, 2005, pp. 134-142) while differentiating types of bias (unquestionable, propagandist, involuntary and ideological). It is impossible to mention and describe all the types enumerated by **McQuail** as there are 21 of them in total.

Worth mentioning is that this typology is more of enumerating registry of all the possible ways of media affecting its receivers. A disadvantage of that typology is its ambiguity and heterogeneity understood as a mixture of the types of media's affection: those with an affective subject which is mass media and those with the receiver as an agent (if they take some action). Moreover, on the

list of a planned and short affection one can find *propaganda* (which may be or rather, by all means, is a type of long-lasting affection) next to *individual answer* which is explained by the researcher as: “a process where individuals give in or resist the change under the influence of transfers aiming to modify attitude, knowledge or behavior” (McQuail, 2005, p. 445).

As long as *propaganda* is driven by sender-propagandist, the *individual answer* seems to be driven by the receiver who tries to fight those propagandist messages which are about to modify his attitude, knowledge or behaviour or he resists them, being manipulated. In some parts of **McQuail's** types it is difficult to see their distinctiveness which may cause that typology of media's influence to arouse dismay.

Getting on to the media's power suggested typology it is worth mentioning that during the times before Montesquieu's theory of separation of powers, the fact of perceiving someone as a ruler by people or the army had its realistic scale. Practically, that perception decided upon the reality of the power of the individual, even if it was only potency because there was someone else governing. It made that individual a ruler *in se* who took the reign during the times of anxiety. As a result, defining media as '*the fourth power*', no matter how one may define the term *power*, makes it a real power. Even only perceiving media as the subject of power makes it *the fourth power*.

The typology of power suggested below is in form of an inverted pyramid – from the entirety to the detail. The open structure of the typology presented assumes that the highlighted aspect of media's power understood as controlling anybody or anything is connected with media's power of influence – the power as influence in order to possibility to influence and shape senders and receivers. This type of power is due to the functioning of media so it is a power based on given function – the purpose of action. All those types mentioned before start from the phenomenon of mediatisation of the reality surrounding us which was raised in this work to the level of the main type of media's power shaping the world described to its receivers through its convention, content and form.

4.2 Power as mediatisation

Mediatisation is a process of mediating the cognition of the world by their receivers (Compare to Kołodziej, 2006, pp. 118-119). Media are not a window on the world which shows the reality accurately. They do not have such possibility due to their specificity and the limitations connected to them. Media

are a convention where they present the surrounding world. One may say that media receivers agree to that convention by their daily choices (watching television broadcasts, surfing the internet or buying newspapers) and locate their expectations of media inside its border. That would mean that by using the media the receivers agree to the limitations in presenting the world. The convention imposes their brief character, simplifications, sometimes even stereotypes – flattening different phenomena, events or problems. Second key element of media specificity is a model and working rhythm of media personnel – journalists, publishers, editors, photographers etc. Journalists' routine originates in conventionalisation of media which got the receivers used to particular genres and narration styles. Media staff works according to some conventional procedures which allow them to produce certain broadcasts or articles. That is the reason why researchers write not about media's organisation but about medial enterprise: *“production enterprise working in a competitive media market which aims to gain financial profit (except non-commercial media) and to maintain on the market. Its activity is based on producing media contents (medial product) and their distribution in mass communication process”* (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2007, p. 187; See also: Mrozowski, 2001, pp. 52-53, 264-267)

In this process of media content production a crucial thing is quantity of the staff employed in such medial enterprise and the model of medial organisation functioning inside – *workshop* model, *manufacture* model or *news industry* model.

Due to the media's convention and journalists' routine the world shown by media (mediatised world) is always distorted, overdrawn, simplified and biased at some point (Street, 2005, pp. 2-22). Deformation of the presented world depends on the role we father on media. The metaphors of mediation known from the literature present that problem very well. (Goban-Klas, 2005, pp. 116-117)

Therefore, we may perceive media as a window through which the receivers perceive the reality surrounding them (inside the conventional window frames); media as a mirror of phenomena, events and troubles trying to show their accurate reflection which is diverted and the gradient of the mirror is defined by the holders of that particular medium; media as a filter which shows and explains the subjects through their selective choice (gate-keeping); media as a road-sign which interprets the reality shown in the name of the receivers like a guide, forcing them to accept the only logical resulting from the material of

persuading punch line (incapacitation of the receiver). We may understand media also as a forum or a stage where different points of view and ideas clash with diverse opinions and preclusive argumentation. The receiver is a judge who – as in Coliseum – decides which opinion he wants to believe. And the last metaphor – media understood as a screen or a barrier which separates the receivers from the reality through entertainment or propaganda convincing them towards the false view of the world.

The metaphors enumerated show how underspecified potential resides in media which in an imperceptible way may become (and, effectively, becomes) a source of manipulation. This happens especially when the receivers are not aware of a delusive view of the world presented in media. All the more the credibility of media, their true skill of presenting the reality in the most honest way possible and as it really is, seems to be a result of five factors – convention of that medium, media personnel routine, market rules where the medium functions, technology used by the medium and a culture understood as a model of fulfilling receivers needs. If the receivers are aware of the determinants of mediating the world shown by media (according to the logic of medial organisation), they can realise their real power (some authors mention – *theory of mediation* – Altheide & Snow, 1988; Gumpert & Cathcart, 1990; Meyer, 1988).

Mediatisation of politics – the author is the most interested in this perspective – accomplished a revolution in the world of political elites which began to realise that their *'to be or not to be'* in politics is connected to their presence in media, their image, their ability to communicate with the society through the media. That is the reason for politicians to start taking into consideration in their actions, decisions and behaviour not only the poetics of the media but also the logic of how they function, their attractiveness criteria, their *mediality (telegenity)*. That is why the politicians are firm that it is impossible to govern without proper communication with the citizens who once at times become the electorate and then their political fate depends on their decision. It appears that the politicians recognise media as main *setters* (from *agenda-setting*) of the subjects estimating their influence at expenses of their own position in the political communication process².

² For confirmation of this position see e.g. Belgium: WALGRAVE, P. 2008. Again, the Almighty Mass Media? The Media's Political Agenda-Setting Power According to Politicians and Journalists in Belgium. In *Political Communication*, vol. 25, ISSN 1058-4609, p. 445-459; WALGRAVE, P., SOROKA, P., NUYTEMANS, M. 2008. The mass media's political agenda-setting power: A longitudinal analysis of media, parliament and government in Belgium (1993-2000). In *Comparative*

German researcher **Hans Mathias Kepplinger** (2007, pp. 120-123) calls this politicians' realisation of inevitability of mediatisation in their activity space as the effect of mutual media influence (German *Reziproke Effekte*). Public figures (not only politicians but also artists, businessmen etc.) realise that they are "a subject of observation and assessment of millions of people that cannot undertake anything against their opinions and reactions, at least at that particular moment." (Kepplinger, 2007, p. 121)

That is why it is so important for politicians to know how to perform in media, how to talk to journalists, how to give them information. In such case, power of media relies not only on their possibility to influence the receivers but also on the fact that media show and assess political elite in front of millions of citizens-electors. Derivate problem is whether the electorate will remember particular press material and whether it will have influence on their political decisions. The scale and range of that influence cannot be unambiguously forejudged³. That is why politicians in almost all their actions and decisions have to take into consideration not only the presence of the media and the overwhelming sense

Political Studies, vol. 41, ISSN 0010-4140, p. 814-836; Sweden: STRÖMBÄCK, J., NORD, L.W., 2006. Do politicians lead the tango? A Study of the Relationship between Swedish Journalists and their Political Sources in the Context of Election Campaigns. In *European Journal for Communication*, vol. 21, ISSN 0267-3231, p. 147-164; Germany: PUHE, H., WÜRZBERG, G. H. 1989. *Lust & Frust, Das Informationsverhalten des deutschen Abgeordneten*, Informedia Verlag-GmbH, Köln, 1989. ISBN 3-921-34951-6; WITTKÄMPER, G. W., BELLERS, J., GRIMM, J., HEIKS, M., SONDERGELD, K., WEHMEIER, K. 1992. Pressewirkungen und außenpolitische Entscheidungsprozesse – Methodologische Probleme der Analyse. In *Medien und Politik*, WITTKÄMPER, G.H. (ed.), Darmstadt: Verlag Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992, ISBN 3-534-08362-8, p. 150-168; HARMGARTH, F. 1997. *Wirtschaft und Soziales in der politischen Kommunikation. Eine Studie zur Interaktion von Abgeordneten und Journalisten*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997, ISBN 3-531-12937-6. BYBEE, C. R., COMADEMA, M. 1984. Information sources and state legislators: Decision-making and dependency. In *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, vol. 28, ISSN 0883-8151, p. 333-340.

³ Some publications show results of experiments carried out in the United States of America, which confirm partial influence of media on media receivers-voters' political decisions, i.e. COOK, L. F., TYLER, T. R., GOETZ, E. G., GORDON, M. T., PROTESS, D., LEFF, D. R., MOLOTCH, H. L. 1983. Media and agenda setting: Effects on the public, interest group leaders, Policy makers, and Policy. In *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 47, ISSN 0033-362X, p. 16-51; PAGE, B. I., SHAPIRO, R. Y., DEMPSEY, G. R. 1987. What moves public opinion?, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 81, ISSN 0003-0554, p. 23-43; PROTESS, D., COOK, F. L., CURTIN T. R., GORDON, M. T., LEFF, D. R., MCCOMBS, M. E., MILLER, P. 1987. The impact of investigative reporting on public opinion and policy making: Targeting toxic waste, In *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 51, ISSN 0033-362X, p. 166-185.

of their presence but also their consequences and the actions' logic and the attractiveness criteria.

Kepplinger's, Donsbach's, Brosius', Stabb's, and Dahlem's findings (1986 and 1994) say that media coverage creates politicians' picture and sense of their competence in society. Moreover – quoting after **Shanto Iyagar** and **Donald R. Kinder** (1987) - it determines the impact of the different aspects of their image in the citizens' electoral decisions. The ex-journalist, who left the sphere of politics – **Wolfgang Clement** in one of his articles claims that politician need to have an ability to cope with media and to communicate desirable political content effectively through them. This honest **Clement's** observation highlights in an unusual way the phenomenon of mediatised politics (Clement, 1994, pp. 32-37). *“Politicians usually silently accept that parliamentary agenda is adjusted to journalists' working hours. Person who wants to be in the next day's headlines should organise its schedule according to that fact. Every politician knows it and learns how to handle the rules of 'the mass communication game’”* (Clement, 1994, p. 33).

There is an anecdote among Polish reporters, which says that relations between them and young unknown politicians look like relations between poker players seated at a round table and waiters running around when they also would like to sit down and take part in the game being played. The point is that these politicians are still 'working on' their fame and want to draw the attention of the media at all costs. They are willing to say almost anything, as long as what they say is to be broadcasted on television or printed in high-circulation newspaper with their names or, what is even more desirable, their face. This relationship varies in direct proportion to the increasing degree of specified politician's recognition, which usually begins to climb up the structure of his own party just then. As he or she begins to occupy increasingly important and prominent positions, things are starting to turn around. Media are beginning to seek his/her comments. If our politician additionally has ministerial position, then contact is getting more complicated and times of poker players and the waiters are falling into oblivion to same extent. At this point, the politician is no longer in the *grace* of the media, but may negotiate with them, exchange information, start making more complex relations. But all this is done all the time according to the *ars poetica* of mediatised politics.

To sum up, when talking about media's power thought as public space mediatisation (with particular reference to politics), it is worth noting that media should be perceived as a subject which only engages in information exchange, but

also wields power to create (to promote politician, to force concrete political solutions etc.). This justifies *'the fourth estate'* term in relation to the institutional media.

Thinking of mediatised politics, we cannot pass over the fact of fast Internet expansion. What the network can (and already does) would significantly redefine the meaning of the concept of mediatisation as the power of the media. German political scientist **Winfried Schulz** (2004) in his reflection on widely-described mediatisation theory provides several scenarios, in which the Internet will change the processes of social and political communication.

German scientist claims that new technologies provides a high level of users' independence when it comes to broadcasted content selection, while the institutional media distribute standardised media content to anonymous users. This prevents expected by customers individualised needs and personalisation of interest that are certainly possible in the Internet (*allocution pattern vs. consultation pattern*) (van Dijk, 2010, p. 13). The phenomenon of wide-spreading the content to everyone turns into dedicating specific information and advice for those people, who are interested in it. (*Broadcasting transforms into narrowcasting*) (Schulz, 2004, p. 94) Typical mass audience falls apart into specific groups which are being gradually built; they create their own structures of virtual communities via the Internet. This, in turn, results in the fact that the natural recipients become natural communicators (*conversation pattern*) (van Dijk, 2010, p. 13). Our society, which gradually is turning into the social network, seems to become fascinated by the technological capabilities of the Internet. It creates a need to take into consideration our theory of mediatisation perceived as a media's power, which (so-called old, institutional) media has in their relation with society, because they play main roles in political process.

Schulz proposes three theses. The first assumes a limitation or even abolition of real media impact on traditional communication processes in society, in this case the social network (Castells, 2007). In this new media environment receivers will have huge selection of diverse content that will be free to juggle at any time and place. Instead of buying formats of media messages standardised and prepared by institutional media, they will produce and share them to their friends from the Internet in order to interact. Network recipients (such term is not used by Schultz, although it seems to be adequate to distinguish people not using (or, in a minor way) traditional media) in **Schulz's** opinion will not be limited by any filters or guardians (*gate-keepers*). Finally, political actors will not have to adapt to the media logic, because they

may simply omit that media in their communication process with receivers (selected groups), because of using their own communication channels such as: Twitter, Facebook or blog. This vision is being promoted and regarded as an inevitable by **Eryk Mistewicz** in his dispute with **Michał Karmowski**, who strongly represents to current position of institutional media (Karmowski & Mistewicz, 2010). These arguments could destroy the phenomenon of mediatisation perceived as old media's power over politicians and citizens. However, there is also the second and more sceptical thesis proposed by a German political scientist.

He maintains that using new media needs hardware such as: transmission networks and equipment (computers, switches, hubs, transmitters, decoders etc.). Building and developing the global network is limited either economically (in poor African countries), politically (for instance China censoring Google Search), or socially (aversion to computers, defence against virtual reality). That is why not all nations and citizens would have an ability and willingness to use network benefits. For this reason, these social networks will be incomplete or even in minority.

The second thing to mention is that network resources and access is conditioned by numerous devices and support companies (we may call them the guards, the same as institutional media personnel), for instance suppliers of databases, servers, signals, cables and finally content producers associated with organisations (such as: Wikipedia, WikiLeaks etc.) and companies (for example: Google, MySpace, Facebook) and webmasters and moderators of blogs, groups and discussion forums.

And at this time, new media cause a creation of newly standardised and specified interaction way using shortened and eclectic Internet language. Thanks to various applications users develop their own language of emoticons, shortcuts, ambiguous forms, which let them express more effectively. It is obviously nothing else, but standardisation of media coverage, which we previously had in case of institutional media, who expect from their journalists articles and materials in a specified format and content.

Aforementioned observations prove that we should look at media in a perspective of the new mediatisation variant as media's power (in this case new media – the Internet), not as the end of mediatisation phenomenon as such.

The third thesis in **Schulz's** opinion is moderate (in comparison with the first, which was optimistic, and the second, which was sceptical) (Schulz, 2003, p. 96). The division into the old and new media is not that obvious and correct as it seems

to be. That is because institutional media, sometimes called old media, are going to integrate their conventional face with new multimedia technologies; they are increasingly digitalising their activity in order not to move their business to the Internet, but to colonise it. This convergence illustrates that so-called old media are only slightly different from the new ones (Szpunar, 2008; especially: Lasota, 2010). From this perspective it occurs that new media are not that new. That novelty is created by technological innovations, which result in the new media (blogs, discussion forums, social networks etc.) **Schulz** invoking **Rice's** (1999) and **Morris'** and **Ogan's** (1996) statements, reckons that new media is nothing else but hybrid version or rather reconfiguration of conventional media. Moreover, he reminds the old truth that in the past *new* medium never completely replaced the *old* one. Print defended against radio, just like radio against cinema and cinema against television.

German political scientist points out that the Internet decentralised and democratised information, and thanks to it everyone is able today to find out specific information on the Internet. The main change observed by **Schulz** is the way of entertainment distribution via the Internet. It becomes diverse, exciting and vivid. However, we have to know that new habits of media users to enjoy entertainment from the network, does not challenge the still dominant influence of television (Schulz, 2004, p. 97).

Finally, news and content created by Internet users are still just a little part of all information and opinions published on the Web by institutional media and their personnel (journalists, reporters, operators etc.) in form of standardised articles. It means that new media are becoming a new platform for old information and opinions – quoting metaphor after German political scientists – new media distribute the old wine in a new bottles.

All in all, many groups, organisations and companies use new media as additional supplement for old channels and as a platform of internal and external communication. Political parties also adjusted the Web to their own use without resigning from traditional media, which is visible in latest campaigns and increasingly growing scientific literature on this topic⁴. **Winfried Schulz** notes

⁴ I.e.: BIMBER, B. 1999. The Internet and Citizen Communication with Government: Does the Medium Matter?. In *Political Communication*, vol. 16, ISSN 1058-4609, p. 409-428; KLOTZ, R. 2001. Internet Politics: A survey of Practices, In HART, R. P., SHAW, D. R. (eds.) *Communication in US Elections: New Agendas*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, p. 185-201. ISBN 0-742-50069-1; BENOIT, P. J., BENOIT, W. L. 2005. Criteria for evaluating political campaign webpages. In *Southern Communication Journal*, vol. 70, no. 3, ISSN 1041-794X, p. 230-247; COLEMAN, P.,

that until the new media do not displace old media the occurrence and effects of mediatisation will also move to the new media environment (Schulz, 2004, p. 98).

All things considered, it is worth to repeat after German scientist that mediatisation has four dimensions – first of all, it expands the range and possibilities of human communication; secondly, media are creating enticing virtual world (which imitates the reality to some extent) and replacing the real world of receivers (threat of escapism); the third thing is that media connect with different non-media social life activities (for example: they build a community of virtual experience, which individuals could not experience themselves (bungee jumping, scuba-diving etc.); and finally, the last and most important thing – actors and organisations of different social space sectors are adjusting to the new media logic.

4.3 Power as a functioning

In former deliberations on typology of media's power, we focused on how mass media changed the reality of the world we live in and how increasingly growing mediatisation expands media influence.

Previously described type of media's power presents how they can be used in a way which allows the political elites to communicate with the society in more effective, understandable and appropriate way. But media may be also used for expansion of political power just like in non-democratic countries. We get to the bottom of the second matter, and that is media's power meant as functioning. Media researchers, citizens and political elites convey specific functions to the media. Function means actions (or being designed to act) of specific element in the system to which it belongs (Pisarek, 2008, pp. 162:177). In this definition there is a crux of above-discussed type of media's power. Functionality of mass media is based on acting or being designed to act - the media's potential, which was mentioned in this publication several times before. The fact that main subjects of public system may expect (and they do) from media to fulfil specific functions presents the legitimisation of media's power as part of the system.

Function may be only assigned to that subject, which can fulfil it. In order to drive a car, our tires cannot be flat, they must fulfil mobility function. The same

occurs when it comes to the media. Assigning a function to some subject is about giving a power specified in limit of that function. Every time we want to start the car, its tires must work if we expect realisation of its mobility function. Its power lies in the fact that this car can move through it. Otherwise it would be impossible to drive a car. The same applies to the media. Giving them a specific function on one hand is the authorisation of their existence and actions that they take, and on the other hand, it makes them work in a desired manner. To stay with the example of properly working tire, we can also assign to it an entertainment function if children would like to play with it. It is additional, alternative and potential function, which was previously hidden. The same applies to the media, i.e. their functionality (for example social media and Web 2.0 and 3.0 portals) has a much greater range in comparison with that what researchers claimed a few decades ago.

But going back to typology of media's power, it has to be mentioned that we live in a social system, which has imperious character. Media are designed to fulfil their certain functions, and if they do not, we may talk about dysfunction of that particular medium or the whole media system. This typically occurs when for some reason the functional power of the media is limited by, for instance, authorities who ignore media or, what is even worse, effectively put pressure on them for instance by not allowing to criticize particular political party because of economic situation, which excludes the possibility of producing multi-million shows, that gather millions of delighted viewers in front of TV screens etc.

According to **Walery Pisarek**, the most convincing function list proving the effect of international research provides UNESCO report *Many Voices, One World* written in 1980.

There are the following functions⁵:

- to inform (facts, pictures, opinions, to exist, to get to know);
- to socialise (to be a group member);
- to motivate (promotion of aims, stimulation of choices and aspirations, to act);
- to debate (to decide and explain);
- to educate (to give a knowledge, to shape character and develop skills);

⁵ *Many Voices. One World, Report by the International Commission of the Study of Communication Problems*, (On-line) Paris-London-New York, 1981, p. 14-15 [cit. 26.2.2014]. Access: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000400/040066eb.pdf>

- to promote a culture (to spread cultural legacy, to stimulate imagination and aesthetic needs);
- to entertain (recreation, to make fun);
- to integrate (to give an access and prevent marginalisation).

Functions listed above on one hand show the great responsibility of media, but on the other hand illustrate the enormous functional mass media power (assumed by the authors). Expectations from media make their legitimisation something what even democratically elected political parties may be envious of.

Looking at these functions we may come to conclusion that tire's mobility dysfunction takes away the power to start the car. It must be replaced. In the case of media, the situation is different, because social or integration dysfunction of particular medium does not cause loss of functional power. Simply put, the medium in question uses it in a completely different (opposite) way. Just like kitchen knife that can turn into murder weapon. In this case, our medium does not socialise and integrate its receivers. It divides them, antagonises them and intensifies marginalisation. Taking away dysfunctional power from particular medium will lead to its closure and complete abandonment by users, which would end the existence of that newspaper or channel. But that scenarios are rare, that is why that medium should be simply marginalised (without breaking the pluralism rules) by social system in the name of the greater aims such as social structures integrity.

4.4 Power as an impact

The impact – according to previously written descriptions – may be conditioned type of power. When we can reckon that subject A has an intended impact on subject B, then constitutive feature of their relation (between A and B) is logically to allow subject A by subject B to influence subject B. It occurs, that subject A has power over subject B based on its agreement. How does this relation look in practice? Media's audience let the media to affect on themselves by using that media. If citizen would not turn on TV or look into newspapers, he would have not become their recipient and would not allow them to have impact on him. He will not accept media's power perceived as an impact. However, as we mentioned before in the part about mediatiation, in contemporary era the media rejection may lead to real risk of being pushed over the margin of society and its communication community, which oils the whole social system. We can imagine that some citizen not using media gets news from his neighbour, who is

media consumer under media influence. In this case, the citizen agrees to media's impact, which in this case is in borrowed form. He also agrees to a direct power, because his neighbour decides what and how he will say to him. This situation is doubly worse (additional gate-keeper – the neighbour). The above argument shows that the precondition for the existence of media's power as the impact will be fulfilled every time when using media. What is more, it turns out that in the information society it is not actually possible to reject the media with the existence in community-based social structure. It means that condition written before is hypothetical and media's power as an impacting subject is real. The only problem in this type of media power perceived as an impact is their appropriateness. Media are aware of their power and impact and they intentionally take advantage of it. Is that really true? What can we do with unplanned results of broadcaster actions (with hidden functions)?

Thoughts of doyen of Polish media studies will help us to answer that question, he claims that: *“integrative function of mass communication are closely linked to theories relating to the impact on media awareness, attitudes and viewers' behaviour and partially to the whole society, where these media exist. These theories include theories that explain the advantageous media assessment mechanisms, as well as theories about undesirable role of media curbing the social integration.”* (Pisarek, 2008, p. 177)

He mentioned **George Gerbner's** cultural indicators concept (Gerbner et al., 1978), also called the cultivation theory, which assumes that receivers do absorb distorted reality created by the media and believe in it even much more than to their own observations. It has impact on their social behaviours. The second explaining theory in **Pisarek's** opinion is **Maxwell McComb's** and **Donald Shaw's** (1972 and 2008) agenda-setting effect, which assumes that media attract society attention and direct it to important issues. Third concept is based on *the spiral of silence effect (Schweigespirale)*, which was object of **Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann** studies (Noelle-Neumann, 1980 and 1984). When some opinion or statement distinctively dominates the media, then receivers easier adapt their own opinions to the others, which are around them.

When it comes to the theory of media influence and society disintegrated by individualisation, fragmentation and diversification, researcher from Cracow points to **Basil Bernstein's** *code limitation concept* (Bernstein, 1966), which assumes that receivers who do not use specified language code are excluded from the debate space of the surrounding world. The second theory that illustrates undesirable media's role in curbing social integration is *knowledge-*

gap theory by **Phillip J. Tichenor** (Tichenor et al., 1970). It is based on the fact that structurally unequal distribution of knowledge in the mass media increases the intellectual stratification of society, which disintegrates it.

The foregoing overview of theories which are a strong foundation for the type of media's power described lets us to answer the question given in an affirmative way. Media are mostly aware of their power and they are able to use it in order to persuade the receivers to certain opinions and attitudes, which is visible in the subject literature devoted to the verification of the mentioned theories and media studies hypotheses.

A convincing proof that media are aware of their power of influencing their receivers is represented by unilateral, although very necessary, investigative documentary film of **Robert Greenwald** entitled *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism*. This documentary presents different techniques of manipulating the receivers through a choice of subjects which were daily imposed by the leadership of Fox News Channel, the way of presenting them, the choice of experts and publicists or giving unconfirmed information in crucial matters for American society such as Presidential elections. Film authors presented the results of a research of **Rupert Murdoch's** information channel's receivers from 2003, measuring the knowledge about the facts of Iraq war. The results of comparing the answers of FNC receivers and the answers of the other channels receivers were dazzling. It appeared that the answers to the question *'Have the USA found mass destruction weapon in Iraq?'* in 33% of Fox's viewers were affirmative while among the viewers of other public channels – PBS-NPR – only 11% were affirmative. The answers to the question *'Does world's public opinion approve of Iraq war?'* of FNC viewers were affirmative in 35% while among PBS-NPR viewers only 5%. The next question was *'Have Americans discovered any connections between Iraq and Al-Qaeda?'* 67% of Fox viewers answered positively (only 16% of PBS-NPR viewers answered positively). The conclusion of experts taking part in the film is that Fox News Channel viewers' view of the world is definitely distorted, especially when it comes to the Middle East and US foreign policy. The longer they watch **Murdoch's** information channel, the fewer facts they know and the more they approve of George W. Bush Administration's policy. It is worth mentioning that film creators accuse FNC of constant mixing facts with opinions and adding an interpretation appropriate for the program line to all information. That is the reason why Fox viewers do not receive facts and, having only the opinions given, they are not able to make rational decisions. They also cannot assess which is true and

which is false because this criterion is not appropriate for opinions assessment. Only facts can be true or false but they are not autonomous information on FNC, they are simply the elements of greater interpretation.

Summing up the media's power as the impact on the receivers, it is important to remember that it is the most shameful for media type of power, especially if they may be caught on manipulation (casus Fox News Channel). The fact of media influencing the society is not a power itself. It is only its potential. We can speak of media's power as an influence only when media influence the receivers in an intentional way in order to achieve certain effects. Those aims may have a short-term dimension (e.g. persuading not to participate in a referendum or approving of a particular presidential candidate in elections) or a long-term dimension - media program line (e.g. liberalisation of state - Church relations, approving of State Treasury institutions' privatisation or approving of left-wing or right-wing policies in different disputes). If we add to this a skilful use of techniques aiming to show a point of view which media consider just because of various reasons (politicisation, owner's requests), it may appear that media's power as the influence on receivers is in many situations connected to another type of power - manipulatory power. It seems that one may admit again that the media's name as 'fourth estate' is not exaggerated.

Conclusion - Power as control

The last type of specific media power is control. It seems that the term 'fourth estate' intuitively resembles all the control functions which media are supposed to exercise on a society - authority line. However, it is necessary to define what media's power as control is really about.

In democracy, in order to govern, politicians need legitimisation - the approval of the governed (society). The moment of society's power transfer into politicians' hands is elections which are held in a specific time. In this particular time the politicians become governors and the citizens, who were electorate during elections, become governed. In that democratic relationship between governors and governed trust has a key role. Citizens' belief that their representatives - politicians will perform for common good based on what was the subject of political campaign. As during elections politicians aspiring to become governors have in their minds only the electorate expectations, after the elections there is a danger that the governors will perceive citizens not as

electorate but only as governed.

An inevitable link in relations between politicians and citizens are media, and, most importantly, not only during elections, but also in a period between elections. It is media (according to the normative media theory (McQuail, 2008, pp. 174-198) which are about to explain to the electorate the political parties, their program, major political figures (and of course it is media which define who is that major politician). Based on their relations, journalists' materials and comments the electorate have been deciding who they want to entrust their fate, well-being and future for ages. Media are about to enable an effortless dialogue between political elites and society. The understanding of governors by the governed and governed by the governors depends on media. That is the media's 'power.' Creating a discourse shaping the knowledge and the notion of the reality of governed but also governors whose position beside the political campaign period is definitely privileged (Mrozowski, 2010, p. 266).

Democratic societies postulate towards free independent media: breathe down governors' neck, account for their promises, and check how they govern. Media are a metaphoric watchdog which is supposed to guard the three branches of power and alert society of governors' malpractices just like an anti-theft alarm.

Systematic proposition of Scandinavian researcher **Kent Asp** (2007) shows media's role in the democracy the best (Figure 1). Media should be a free market of ideas exchange in democracy. They should deliver information in a way which allows the citizens to create their own opinions without constraint and autonomously. It is fulfilling one of the key democracy values – the right to free opinion. At the same time media are responsible for controlling the governors in the name of society.

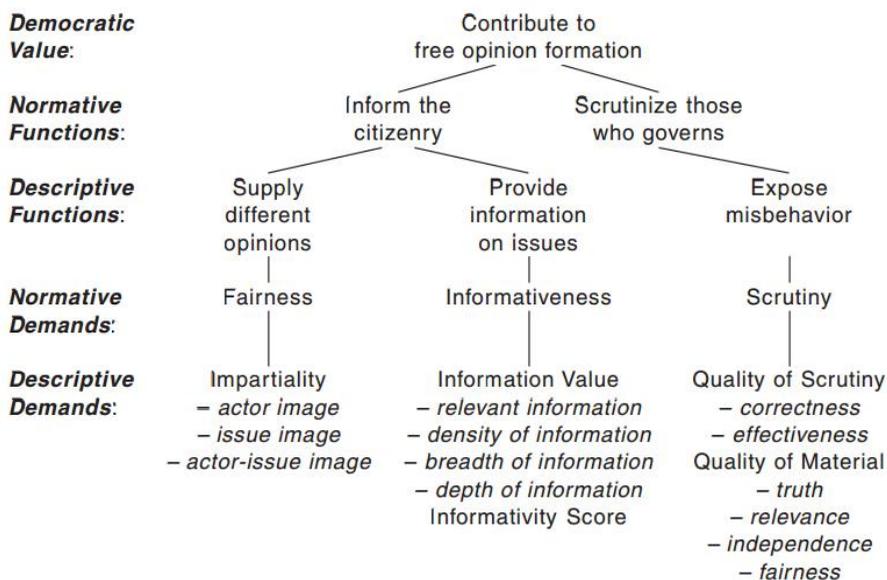


Figure 1: Source: *Theoretical roles of media in democracy* – ASP. K. 2007, Fairness, Informativeness, Scrutiny. The Role of the News Media in Democracy, In *Nordicom Review*, ISSN 1403-1108, s. 33.

Media have two independent normative functions to be fulfilled in a democratic system: ensuring information to the citizens and the control of the governors. While giving information to the citizens, media should patronise different opinions (agora metaphor, free market of ideas and opinion) as well as presenting facts required for decision making and adopting certain attitudes and opinions. At the same time, media control the governors through exposing improper politicians' behaviour – transgressing their competences or failing to complete their tasks.

Another level distinguished by **Asp** concerns the expectations of normative character which is assigned to specified media functions in a democratic system. From them – honesty, informativity and control – the descriptive expectations ensue.

In terms of information value, the most important for society seems to be a relevance of the information given by the media concerning crucial matters. Apart from importance of the news given, their contents and form are important. Their adequacy is the most important condition for understanding the

information presented. Another aspect of the news presented by media is their breadth and depth as a skilful presentation of a certain part of reality with its context and all the ambiguities. Thanks to such information the receiver-citizen is the subject drawing conclusions and interpreting facts.

Proceeding to impartiality, one has to realise that the media are obliged to report various opinions on the same matter honestly – in the name of that independence of media, and of keeping the distance from those matters – in order to accomplish the citizens' normative expectations of free market of ideas and opinion exchange (Asp, 2007, p. 35).

The sense of impartiality is expressed in favouring none of political parties, none of the sides of dispute. From that perspective, media are obliged to promote neither the images of the issue actors nor the image of that issue desired by any of the sides of the dispute.

The last element according to **Asp** is controlling the governors. The Swedish researcher has no doubt that media are *the fourth estate*. He assumes that in order to fulfil that function the media have to be fully independent in the relationship with the subject which they are about to control – it is the governed (the rule: *Nemo iudex idoneus in propria causa.*). **Asp** assigns two criteria to that task – accuracy and effectiveness. From the perspective of the whole democratic system the task for media set by citizens is crucial. And they cannot allow themselves any groundless accusations – any false anti-theft alarm. However, if, while controlling the governors, media discern any transgressions, insubordination, overstepping competences or failure to fulfil the task set by the society or by the politicians themselves (e.g. realisation of electoral promises), the journalists' materials unveiling the governors should be true, important and independent (not manipulated) and honest so the right motivation to serve the society and the country should stand behind them. It seems that the proposed scheme of the media's functions in democracy by the Swedish researcher presents key media's functions, which examined separately denote the real media's estate as controllers. This perspective is important in particular. It is worth adding to it, useful from the research operationalisation point of view, certain criteria.

Namely, media's power as control has two faces. First – extraordinary – is about tending the governors and informing society about breaking the law, overstepping competences and defrauding the citizens. It is about detecting scandals among the governors with the simultaneous discipline precluding the overly escalation of events' scandalisation for particular interests (Kepplinger,

2006; Thompson, 2010). The second one – customary – is about media accounting governors for their declarations and promises given during elections and in a period between elections (whether they fulfil them or not and how they do it).

The customary governors' control is a key element for functioning of the entire socio-political system. Upholding society interests, media should control the governors in a continuous and systematic manner, predictable for both the political elites and the society. The expression of the justness of that belief is a custom of organising 100 days celebration and other government's anniversaries during which governors boast about their successes while media account for their abandonments in front of millions of media's receivers – citizens who sometimes (by becoming electorate) judge the governing elite on their own. Media ensure, or at least should ensure constant governors' accountability also, or even especially, during the period between elections which has completely different rules than the time of political campaigns.

Thanks to such performance of media which rules in terms of controlling the governing elite in the name of citizens, the society can decide whether political elites fulfil their tasks or not. Whether politicians implement their promises and plans made during political campaign or they put aside the implementation of these plans *ad Calendas Graecas* being busy with current issues. From this perspective the last mentioned type of media power in our typology seems to be critical for proper functioning of the whole democratic system in which media have a very important and responsible function – a customary controller. This is the dimension which should be taken into consideration while calling the media *the fourth estate*. And from that perspective it is not an exaggerated expression, especially nowadays – in the times of social media.

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