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Mediatization of Social Reality and Media Experience of Seniors

Abstract. The demographic changes taking place in the most developed countries in Europe show a dynamic process of aging societies. Seniors (i.e. according to WHO, people over 65 years of age) are sometimes affected due to the limiting conditions of constantly progressing social changes. One of the most significant transformations is the presence of media in the everyday life of individuals. Development of technology and media communication lead to the spread of the mediatization of social reality. Many media recipients build their idea of the world based on what they learn from the mass media. It then influences their understanding of themselves and their role in the world. The purpose of this article is to analyse mediatization as a social process and to explain how it affects older people's experience of the media.

Keywords: mediatization; mediatization of society; media experience; the elderly; seniors

Introduction

Demographic changes taking place in most developed countries in Europe indicate dynamic aging of societies. This is due to the decline in the birth rate in relation to an extended lifespan. This causes a growing interest in the issue of old age at different stages of life. Seniors (i.e. people aged 65+, according to WHO) are sometimes disadvantaged due to the reduced ability to coexist with the constantly progressing social changes (Szarota, 2004, p. 5). One of the most important transformations is the presence of media in the daily life of individuals. The context of seniors functioning in a technologically marked society is considered by representatives of many disciplines. These include gerontology, andragogy and sociology. Changes taking place together with demographics and technological progress allow us to see this issue also from the perspective of media science, and more specifically in the context of the mediatization process. We understand this concept as:

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> The process of media mediation in getting to know the world, the influence of the media on human perception of a reality inaccessible to direct experience along with consequences of such mediation: shaping the image of the whole social reality, or even complex social experiences under the influence of by media constructions. (Pisarek, 2006, p. 118)

The development of technology and means of mass communication led to a dissemination of the phenomenon of mediatization of social reality. Many media recipients build their own idea of the world, based on what they learn from the mass media. It then affects their understanding of themselves and their role in the world (Dobrołowicz, 2014, p. 137).

The following paper is a review article and its aim is to present the current state of knowledge and to analyze the process of mediatization in the context of media experience of seniors. The analysis of the literature on the subject is accompanied by the analysis of the existing statistical data. The concluding part is focussed on the selected functions of contemporary media which influence the lives of seniors.

I will also try to briefly present the development of the concept of mediatization and explain the way in which the media affect seniors. The indirect aim of the work is also to contribute to the dissemination of the concept of mediatization and an attempt to fill the research gap. The impact of the media on seniors in the context of mediatization may turn out to be an interesting and new direction for observation.

Mediatization – an Explanation of the Concept

The term "mediatization" was developed in the early 20th century in the field of mass communication research. One of the first examples of the use of this concept can be found in the dissertation of Ernest Manheim from 1933. The author mentions direct mediatization in human relations as changes in social relations in modern times. Nowadays, mediatization is treated as processes that result from changes in the media and simultaneous socio-cultural changes. Friedrich Krotz contributed to the popularization of this concept by using the phrase "mediatized communication". The terms "mediatization" or "medialization" became popular concepts in communication science. In Poland, they are used in the analysis of communication processes in social, political, economic, cultural and many other contexts. The following terms are most often used in the English language: "mediation", "mediating", "mediated". In German, *Mediatisierung* and *Medialisierung* are used interchangeably. In Polish, the most popular term is *mediatyzacja*. However, due to the abundance of the Polish language, many meanings are attributed to it (Hepp & Krotz, 2014, p. 4). In the literature on the subject we will come across terms such as "mediation", "remediation", "mediation return", "medialization", "mediatization", etc. It is worth paying attention to the fact that new terms are often created but it does not necessarily mean

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that they bring new ideas with them. One of the most general and comprehensive definitions of this concept can be found in the book *Media Making: Mass Media in Popular Culture* (Hepp & Krotz, 2014). The authors propose to analyse the discussed definition in terms of four aspects: 1. *Medium* (as something indirect), 2. *Mediation* (as an opposition between direct and indirect), 3. *Mediation* (as a concept that combines the previous two meanings in the internal and external context), 4. *Mediation* (as a relationship that connects previously unrelated activities (p. 18). According to Friedrich Krotz, an increasing number of media plays a significant role in everyday life. Interests, forms of spending time or communication take place through the media and they are anchored in the media which take over more and more functions. People live in communication networks – they use a telephone, smartphones and Internet networks. They communicate with the use of a string of letters. Through the development of the media, knowledge about the world, interpersonal relations and the identities of given societies change (Krotz, 2007, p. 4). The author identifies mediatization as one of the meta-processes that influenced the shape of modern times. The other examples include globalization, individualization and commercialization. Krotz explains mediatization as follows: "By mediatization we mean historical development that has taken place and is taking place as a result of changes in the (communication) media in consequences of these changes" (Krotz, 2008, p. 23). He further emphasizes, however, that it is a process created by humans and is not a result of technological determinism. Mediatization changes communication between people, however, it offers new forms of communication instead. Humans are beings who exist in interaction and are dependent on it and on communication and social relationships. On the other hand, Krotz suggests that human action changes communication, especially in the context of online activity. Stig Hjarvard presents mediatization in a different way:

> (…) in the earlier societies social institutions such as family, school and church dominated as important information providers, tradition and moral orientation for an individual member of society. Today, these institutions have lost some authority, and the media, to some extent, took over as suppliers of information and moral orientation, and at the same time the media became the most popular in society. (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 13)

Mediatization is also closely related to political life. Political institutions are dependent on and often shaped by the mass media. They can, however, control the processes and political functions of them (Marcinkiewicz, 2019, p. 41).

The mediatization process takes place in everyday life. However, it seems that researchers often ignore this aspect, focusing primarily on political mediatization. We can comment on the above issues as follows: the media expand the boundaries of communicative abilities of individuals and, in a way, replace the activities of social institutions. What is more, the media are combined with non-media activities.

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Nowadays representatives of all age groups, including people aged over 65, adapt to media logic.

Sonia Livingstone divides her research on mediatization into three categories. In the first one, the researcher defines and focuses on the theoretical framework and the history of the development of the concept (as a bridge to the previously separated research on mass communication and hybrid recognition forms of mediated communication); in the second case, less mediation is used intensely, emphasizing that the media overcome physical and symbolic distances as well as time and space. In this way, it is possible to combine parties separated from each other, e.g., people separated by continents, politicians separated from the public, or the young separated from the elderly. The third category is associated with the tradition of critical theory, which explains the power relationship between the media and the reality that is being reflected by them (Livingstone, 2009, p. 10).

Mediatization of Social Reality

Nowadays mediatization is considered an influential concept which explains social, political and cultural changes driven by the media (Nowak-Teter, 2018, p. 515). Researchers emphasize that the mediatization process should be compared with modernization, individualization and globalization. Mediatization is a process that affects all parts of society, points out the growing influence of media on all spheres of people's life. One should also remember that the degree of mediatization depends on modernization, individualization and globalization. It can vary between different societies. However, it affects many fundamental factors. The media are the most important source of information regarding all topics, even those that go for beyond people's everyday experiences.

Broadly understood and progressive digitization modifies the media and influences its further development. In combination with the new media, it leads to the creation of a new media network. This affects the process of constantly progressing mediatization. In the literature on the subject, we can find three popular approaches serving to analyse the mediatization process (Sasińska-Klas, 2014, p. 164).

The first is the paradigm of everyday life. It means that all activities taken up by individuals (e.g. families, networks, organizations) in everyday life develop the media in terms of technology. On the other hand, the mentioned activities depend on the mediatized personal communication. Nowadays it is difficult to imagine interpersonal contact without the World Wide Web, mobile phones, social media and e-mails. Media sources provide us with access to many platforms that can make everyday life easier. These are, for example, access to banking system, buying airline tickets or access to education and entertainment. In the day of the pandemic, many elements of everyday life are reflected in virtual reality. For example, artists present

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their work online. In the past, traditional forms of communication were more limited. The second paradigm is related to the symbolic world and takes place under the influence of mediatization. It refers to the symbolic theory. In this case, communication should be treated as a symbolic practice of society. Symbols are the basis of social interaction. The third approach concerns the symbolic world, i.e. the changes that take place under the influence of mediatization processes. Writing, sounds, images are the carriers of symbols and content. Exploring reality is possible thanks to the knowledge of symbols. They are also the cornerstone of social interaction. Teresa Sasińska-Klas also presents the third paradigm: media and social change. In this case, there is emphasised the dynamics of development which results in the introduction of mediatization process: modernization of media progress (Sasińska-Klas, 2014, p. 165). How does the media influence the present and everyday life? First, let us turn our attention to how strongly they affect specific behaviour patterns and the modern value system. It became the cause of a completely new quality of social life. Seniors understand the word "media" as a mean of payments for housing, gas and electricity. In the current understanding, the media are just an information carrier. They influence the rituals of everyday life and provide the necessary symbols, which shape human identity. They are also a source of value and determine patterns proceedings. For media recipients, the reality is identical to media messages. However, they are not always a natural, objective vision of the existing state, though it may seem so to the inexperienced users (Dobrołowicz, 2014, pp. 141–142). This saturation causes the shaping of the social spectacle. The phenomena shown in the media are considered socially important. According to Jacek H. Kołodziej, there are some phenomena that capture the essence of mediatization of social reality. These include wide access to media messages, identification of social communication as a source of knowledge and behavioural patterns, evolution communication, the convergence of many connections of social institutions with various groups of recipients. Furthermore, the contemporary media are subject to the same laws as other civilization meta processes such as globalization or commercialization and present their own social version of rationality (Kołodziej, 2011, pp. 201–202). All the above-mentioned factors influence on how seniors find themselves in a world where the media takes the lead. Nowadays societies use the development of technical media more and more. For this reason, we can define them as the media societies that are characterized by immediacy and omnipresence. Tomasz Goban-Klas presents additional characteristic, while complementing the phenomena presented by Kołodziej. These are environments in which interpersonal contacts are mediated by the media, and what is media is natural and human at the same time. The media create a virtual reality that exists simultaneously to the real world. There is a media and telecommunications infrastructure at the base of activities at all levels of life. Almost all steps taken by humans are supported by media and information technology. Workers fulfil their responsibilities based on the access to and transfer of information, and the media

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industries are important part of overall employment. This information becomes a productive factor and social evolution is based on the use of ICT (Goban-Klas, 2005, pp. 41–44).

Mediatization of Society and Media Experience of the Elderly

The youth and adolescence of modern seniors coincided with a time that was dominated by the analogue media. Life of adults, who live in times dominated by modern digital technologies, requires the acquisition of new knowledge or the verification of existing competences. Contemporary world, in a way, requires older people to be able to adapt to activities that they previously did not have to take on. The lack of appropriate competences related to free movement in the media space can cause the so-called digital exclusion among seniors. Multiplicity of media messages reaching a person can cause communication noise. The older media are reinforced with messages and offers from new media. According to the Central Statistical Office in Poland (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny*), the percentage of people aged over 65 who use a computer with Internet access is constantly growing, but it is still at the lowest rate among all age groups. In 2014 and 2015, it was 20.1% of the total population of this group. In 2019, the percentage was already 30.6. This means that it increased by 10.5 percentage points (52.23%) (see Table 1).

Table 1. People in the 65–74 age group regularly using a computer

Group age	2014 and 2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
	% of the group				
65–74 years	20.1	23.5	25.6	27.9	30.6

Source: GUS. (2020). *Społeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce. Wyniki badań statystycznych z lat 2015–2019*. Szczecin, p. 166. Retrieved from https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/nauka-i-technika-spoleczenstwo-informacyjne/spoleczenstwo-informacyjne/spoleczenstwo-informacyjne-w-polsce-wyniki-badan-statystycznych-z-lat-2015-2019,1,13.html

On the one hand, it shows the real need to experience the media, while on the other, the younger generations, more familiar with the media, are entering the retirement age. These statistics do not include the oldest seniors (aged over 74). Seniors have different motivations for using or experiencing communication and information technologies. Sometimes it is a willingness to keep up to date, to maintain contact with friends or to make everyday life easier (online shopping or online banking line). Unfortunately, the elderly often underestimate the benefits and overestimate the negative effects of the Internet. Sometimes it is not digital exclusion that causes the lack of desire to experience the media but the choice a senior makes, usually dictated by fear of the novelty. The modern media respond to different needs of recipients and

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fulfil specific roles. Denis McQuail distinguishes the following functions: information, entertainment, mobilization, continuation, and communication (McQuail, 2007, pp. 111–113). For the purposes of the research, I will focus on selected functions of social media, i.e. information, communication and entertainment. I will also present how these functions affect the elderly (Table 2).

Table 2. Selected functions of the media and the type of influence on the life of seniors

No.	Functions of contemporary media	Impact on social life – benefits	Impact on social life – threats
1	Informative function – providing information about events in the country and worldwide	Satisfying curiosity; adapting to new realities, gaining knowledge, setting priorities.	Information transfer; difficulties with selection and the distinction between real news and fake news.
2	Communicative function – maintaining interpersonal contacts through media	Socialization and integration, sense of belonging (being part of a group); supporting common values.	Lack of device operating competences or lack of access to devices can cause a collapse in communication which influences digital exclusion.
3	Entertainment function – delivering pleasure	A chance to relax and detach from reality; reduction of social tensions. Media enable low budget entertainment (e.g. access to movies, music, games, seeking culinary inspiration, mental exercises).	The risks associated with addiction to the Internet and the risk of unauthorised transactions (e.g. micro payments).

Source: Author's own study.

The functions listed above correlate with the impact of media messages on recipients and the conscious or unconscious shaping of content and values. The media create authorities and shape attitudes. However, media messages may disturb the perception of reality when the media image is mixed with the way an individual (or the whole group) perceives the world (Kucio, 2018, p. 62). While mentioning the functions of the media in society, Goban-Klas emphasizes that they should fulfil two important conditions: 1) act for the benefit of the recipient they serve; 2) play an educational role and express the best of the cultural heritage (Goban-Klas, 2009, p. 158). Seniors as social actors are a part of a general audience. They adapt to the media which affect them. Media are environmental in nature, and they are present in people's everyday lives. Let us also note that when we consider media education and future activity of seniors, we think about it in superlatives (seniors will gain new skills, maintain contacts with other people, make their everyday life easier). However, when we take a closer look at children using the Internet, we only see the dangers: addictions or the possibility of contact with dangerous people.

All media recipients are influenced by the broadcasters who are responsible for creating and imposing media discourse. Mastering skills linked to computer, cell

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and apps can be stressful and bring up the fear of novelty. Changes taking place in the psycho-physical spheres can also negatively affect the process of adaptation and learning. The cultural patterns promoted in the media do not seem to accept the real face of the old age. This may be one of the reasons explaining why seniors are cautious about media. Information oversaturation and the ambiguous role of the media in older people's lives can make them feel insecure in virtual space. It is also worth paying attention, especially in the era of a pandemic, to the role that the media play in one's free time and to the time devoted to them. Seniors who are retired have unlimited access to the media (which is also one of the cheaper forms of entertainment). It allows them to explore and experience the media. The conditions that must be met are basic knowledge of technology, that will allow one to move freely in the virtual world, and a desire for experience.

Media education also plays an important role in the life of seniors. It enables the activity of elderly people in a mediatized world. We understand this interdisciplinary field of education as:

> The process of shaping and disseminating the skills of conscious and critical use of social media in all social and age groups. The process of media education is an activity that should last a lifetime, because the forms and technologies of communication are changing, and moreover, the society is also constantly transforming. (Stunża, 2012, p. 2)

Such education can be provided to seniors through Universities of the Third Age, in non-governmental organizations, senior clubs, community centers or online training. Media education helps seniors acquire appropriate media competences. They make it possible to consciously use technological tools. Acquiring such knowledge affects the ability to critically perceive and understand media mechanisms. It is also possible to select information from media hype. This type of education contributes to a fuller media experience for older people and allows them to fully use and enjoy the positive functions of new technologies. At the same time, the acquired media education warns of the dangers of participation in the virtual world (cf. Kukier, 2018, p. 41).

Conclusions

Mediatization refers to the long-term transformations of socio-cultural practices that manifest increased diffusion of information and communication technologies. Traditional media, which include the radio, newspapers, television, are natural means of obtaining information about the world. A personal computer with Internet access, or a mobile phone are used by individuals who are aware of possible amenities. The development of civilization determined by technologies attracts a growing number of seniors to experience the global network (Tomczyk, 2010, p. 60). Man, recognized

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as a social being, uses a whole range of different forms of communication available to him, or required by the environment, naturally. Mediatization of the society is important in the context of interpersonal relations and other forms of activity created by the media. It enables the transformative communication abilities of the media and social reality. The transformative power of the media reaches every area of the social world. Communication is based on ubiquitous digitization and is becoming an indispensable part of human life (Nowak-Teter, 2018, p. 4). This also applies to seniors who use the new technologies. The excluded part of this group of society needs to acquire new competences. This is facilitated by media education and the support of people who introduce seniors to the world of new media in an accessible manner. Older people who use media daily should constantly work on expanding their skills and be careful about the risks associated with Internet usage. Contrary to the modern young people, for the older people, the new technologies are not a necessary element for fulfilling their needs. Even if digital services are more attractive, one can still access them in a stationary way (e.g. banking services). What man adapts and produces affects his existence. Technology directly affects people and their existence. If one technology is accepted by the masses, the individuals must adapt (Kicior, 2018, p. 55). Experiencing the media has its consequences – it affects a person's identity, methods of communication and forms of mutual coexistence and cooperation. Seniors are a valuable social group, which thanks to the lifelong experience has been a direct witness of media development and change. Therefore, the younger generation has a social responsibility to introduce older people to the complicated digital world.

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