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Emergence of a new discipline: media and social communication studies

Media and social communication studies have become one of the fastest growing fields of study in social sciences in Poland. They are continually sprouting new ‘shoots’ and ‘branches’ in the area of humanistic social studies. The tree and branches metaphor illustrates the fact that knowledge does not progress according to stiff regulations of classification but in accordance with its own vital strength. It takes from previous achievements and the cultural-natural-technological output. The changes taking place are an impulse for new directions in analysis and research, terminology, theories and forms of academic education which are illustrated in new projects, publications and fields of study.

All over the world established are institutes and departments of media studies, initially with a focus on mass media (press, radio, television) and presently also including studies on the Internet and mobile media. There is no doubt that academic analysis of traditional media needs to be supplemented by analysis of modern media as well. Difficulties with the academic status of research in this area were largely due to apprehensions regarding mass culture and political propaganda as part of academic studies. However, modern media today do not propagate mass culture *per se* but rather popular culture (neo-folk) and are less so of a political tool and more so a tool that controls politics. Their autonomous force and influence on the socio-political and economic system as well as their constantly growing complexity and differentiation result in the dynamic growth of media studies.

The present issue of the “*Studia Medioznawcze*” quarterly includes the opinions of media scholars, heads of various university departments regarding the astonishing growth dynamics of research and higher education in this area.

Professor Marek Jabłonowski states that, “media studies regard a part of social life which particularly brightly reflects the processes that are taking place in various spheres of life and are predominantly conditioned by these spheres. Delineating these conditions gives us an opportunity to define the ‘sphere of modern media’”¹. It should be pointed out that this sphere is constantly expanding. The term “mediamorphosis” seems proper in this case although it may not capture its extraordinary dynamic. In the first part of the XX century, it was “press studies” because it was press and journalism which were the main media. In the

¹ M. Jabłonowski, *Okiem historyka*, “*Studia Medioznawcze*” 2009, No. 4, p. 34.

second part of the XX century, introduced was the term “mass media” with television playing the dominant social and cultural role. Today, the Internet in its latest Web 2.0 format with new social media forms (interactive websites, instant messengers, search engines and newsreaders), has become an omni-medium; an information-communication environment of the modern world, in its new ‘Second Life’(also a service available) format. The Internet is described as a “new medium” or sometimes even as a “new, new medium”².

To illustrate the extent of activity in this field of study in Poland, some statistics are in order. Taking place are dozens of academic conferences, organized by media and academic institutes showing the permeation and influence of media into all spheres of life. This discipline, although closely tied to various humanistic and social academic fields of study, possesses its own academic publications. Between 1996–2001, published were nearly 7 000 media studies works, written by nearly 5000 people. This includes publications in dailies, weeklies, academic periodicals and in book form³. Between 2000–2009, the “*Studia Medioznawcze*” quarterly published 498 texts, of which over a half (55.6%) are academic and thesis papers (277).

Established have been field periodicals including: “*Zeszyty Prasoznawcze*” (since 1956), “*Studia Medioznawcze*” (since 2000), earlier “*Przekazy i Opinie*” (1976–1989), “*Media i Kultura*” (since 2006), “*Rocznik Historii Prasy Polskiej*” (since 1998), “*Rocznik Prasoznawczy*” (since 2007) and “*Global Media Journal*” (since 2005). There are university academic series: Jagiellonian University Presses, Wrocław University Presses, *Edukacja Medialna Wydawnictw Akademickich i Profesjonalnych*, *Nowe Media Wydawnictw Akademickich i Profesjonalnych*, *Media Wydawnictwa Adam Marszałek*.

What is important, media and social communication disciplines have their own theoretical and methodological achievements. Among the theoretical, there is the increasingly growing terminology base (from original terms such as “media” and “communication” to “remediation” and “social media”), own general theories (“media society”), medium range theories (ie. “cultivation theory”, “establishment of agenda setting”), general research issues such as media competences and more specific ones such as media usage. They possess their own research methods – analysis of broadcasted media content, tele- and radiometry and Internet monitoring.

It is the media themselves which order empirical research on them since without knowledge about how they are perceived, they would not be able to function efficiently. They

² P. Levinson, *The New New Media*, Boston 2009.

³ W.M. Kolasa, J. Jarowiecki, *Polska bibliografia prasoznawcza 1996–2001*, Kraków 2005, p. 21–22.

mainly stimulate practical and pragmatic research, such as research on their recipients and advertising consumers. More comprehensive and, therefore, valuable is theoretically oriented research, under the aegis and funded by KBN (Committee of Scientific Research), although under the ensign of sociology or political science.

Professor Adamowski notes, “in the official index of academic disciplines in Poland there is a field which could be (in a way) considered close to the postulated in this next science of communication and public media. This would be *science of cognition and communication*”⁴. This is an remark. This field of study was introduced in 1992 when the Central Committee on Scientific Degrees and Titles, based on the power vested in it, announced a list of fields of study based on which conferred could be academic degrees and titles⁵. The discipline “science of cognition and communication” the Committee changed, in 2005, introducing in “Monitor Polski” the term “science of cognition and social communication”⁶. This new discipline has not been very popular; it has predominantly been used by philosophy and culture studies students for the doctoral and post-graduate theses. No wonder, the combination of science of cognition (either epistemology or cognition studies) with social communication is technically possible but such studies are possible as part of philosophy or psychology⁷. Therefore, the discipline in question definitely deserves its own status and one which will classify its various branches. Social communication *per se* is considered to be communication between people, predominantly direct or face to face and therefore traditionally par of psychology or linguistic studies. However, all forms of indirect communication (via mass, digital and web media) possess a technological, institutional and economic element, create new forms of public life and, hence, require their own analytical, theoretical, methodological and practical perspectives. That is they require their own academic and didactic specialization.

It is necessary to educate in the field of media and supplementary disciplines (public relations, social communication, public diplomacy, etc). In 1995, the Higher Education Council delineated this field of study as “Journalism and Social Communication”. Professor Wiktor Pepliński states, “according to the National Accreditation Committee, journalism and media studies are offered in over 40 higher education schools in Poland, both public and private. In over 28 schools (mainly public) available are bachelor level studies and in 12

⁴ J. W. Adamowski, *O pilnej potrzebie formalnego powołania w Polsce nauki o komunikowaniu i mediach społecznych jako dyscypliny naukowej*, “Studia Medioznawcze” 2009, No. 4, p. 24.

⁵ MP 1992, No. 16, pos. 123 (February 25th).

⁶ MP 2005, No. 70, pos. 1019–1020 (October 24th).

⁷ Students of psychology are establishing “science of cognition and communication” groups (i.e. in Poznań) discussing issues such as time in processes of information processing, etc.

(public) – both, bachelor and master level”⁸. “There is great interest in the field of journalism and social communication because of its versatility. This discipline prepares people not only to be press, radio, TV or new media journalists but also (depending on the specialization) for other professions such as press secretaries, media managers, public relations, media, advertising and promotion specialists, local media organizers, information policy specialists, photography designers, media and advertising photographers, political marketing specialists, etc.”⁹.

The question is, who educates in these fields. According to PKA specifications, minimum number of staff for the schools is 455 people, including didactic staff only. Who makes up this minimum? Professor Janusz Adamowski states, “The only existent qualifier seems to be the National Accreditation Committee which has a basis for qualifying academic “journalism and social communication” teachers based on the achievements and accreditation supplied by him (or an institution) in the field of the carried out research.”¹⁰.

On the other hand, Bologna process, expecting high quality of education, has introduced uniform three level academic education, including the doctoral level. The need is undeniable, writes professor Janusz Adamowski, the Dean of Department of Journalism at Warsaw University. And there are hundreds of other students in agreement as they often have unnecessary difficulties in defending their dissertation or habilitation theses as part of philology, political science or social studies, when their papers are on media studies.

Professor Jacek Dąbała provides the following arguments for the creation of the new discipline:

1. Long research tradition (in Poland – since 1917, abroad – since late 19th century)
2. Real interdisciplinarity
3. Possibility to acknowledge research work as media oriented
4. Possibility to acknowledge researchers as specialists in the field of media and social communication.
5. Bachelor and master theses in the field of journalism and social communication.
6. Similarity of new name (media and social communication) to ones in other languages ie. *media and communication studies*¹¹.

⁸ W. Pepliński, *Czy nauka o dziennikarstwie i komunikacji społecznej może wybić się na niezależność?*, “Studia Medioznawcze” 2009, No. 4, p. 36.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 38.

¹⁰ J. Adamowski, *O pilnej potrzebie...*, p. 23.

¹¹ J. Dąbała, *O sensowności uznania nowej dziedziny nauki*, “Studia Medioznawcze” 2009, No. 4, p. 52–54.

Appeal and conclusion

In 2005 and 2008, the **Central Commission for Scientific Titles and Degrees** made additions to the list of official academic disciplines and introduced changes to existing ones¹². We can, then, appeal for the introduction of a new field of study – science of media and social communication, or 1) to slightly change the name of an existing one (not very active) – from of science of cognition and social communication to science of media and social communication; or 2) to add a new discipline – science of media and social communication to social sciences.

Either solution will bring enormous benefits especially regarding:

- international exchange (of ideas, students, experts), having international terminology (media and communication studies) is imperative to diplomats, names of institutions and European statistics;
- doctoral and post-graduate academic titles;
- development of research on a wider base, sponsored by European and Polish grants (including KBN);
- simplified classification of materials and publications in data bases and libraries.

Let's hope that this need for the development of modern social and humanistic disciplines will be understood and met by Polish academic regulatory bodies. Without unnecessary delay.

¹² In 2005, in answer to an appeal by six universities regarding culture studies the Central Committee for Scientific Titles and Degrees approved that new discipline. In 2008, introduced were next disciplines such as: “health studies”, “energy studies” and “biotechnology” and the name “functional art” was changed to “project art”. MP 2008, Nr 97, pos. 843 (December 10th).