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From a historian's perspective

At the end of the first decade of existence of the quarterly “*Studia Medioznawcze*”, established in need of an exchange of thoughts and presentations of research in the area of media studies, it can be said that this is one of more dynamically developing fields of study¹. We are dealing with mutually defined phenomena, specific problems to be solved, commonly accepted techniques and methods of research; all that making up, as can be evidently seen, the establishment of an independent field of study.

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One proof for the dynamic development of this discipline can be the establishment, in academic circles, of its name – media studies, associated with public or mass communication. When in 2004 I published in “*Studia Medioznawcze*” the article, *Źródła a media masowe – próba systematyki*², one of the topics discussed was the issue of the discipline's name. “Despite long running discussions and attempts to standardize the name, it still remains a heated issue since it researches various aspects of modern communication, media marketing, public relations, press law, media systems, language of mass communication means, media economy and issues of press and journalism. To simplify the problem, since there has not

¹ For example: Z. Bauer, *Dziennikarstwo wobec nowych mediów. Historia, teoria, praktyka*, Kraków 2009; J. P. Bierówka, *Pół wieku badań nad mediami w Polsce. Konferencja na Uniwersytecie Wrocławskim*, “Zeszyty Prasoznawcze” 2006, No 1/2, p. 155–159; J. Chańko, *Nauki pomocnicze historii nowożytnej i najnowszej (XIX i XX w.). Stan i perspektywy*, “Zeszyty Wiejskie” No 11 (2006) (see: Appendix 1. *Prasoznawstwo historyczne*, p. 246–247; Appendix 2. *Prasoznawstwo historyczne – zarys zakresu dyscypliny*, p. 254–255; Appendix 3. *Prasoznawstwo historyczne – próba systematyzacji możliwości wykorzystania prasy w badaniach historycznych*, p. 255–256); B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Rozwój studiów nad komunikowaniem politycznym w Polsce na tle badań światowych – główne obszary badawcze i perspektywy rozwojowe*, “Global Media Journal” – Polish Edition No. 1(2006), www.globalmediajournal.collegium.edu.pl/artykuly/wiosna%202006/Dobek-Ostrowska-rozwoj-%20badan%20nad%20komunikowaniem.pdf; *Dziennikarstwo, media, społeczeństwo*, ed. by P. Mocek, Warszawa 2005; T. Goban-Klas, *Cywilizacja medialna*, Warszawa 2005; idem, *Od prasoznawstwa do medioznawstwa: perspektywa naukowego globtrotera*, “Global Media Journal” – Polish Edition No. 1 (2006), www.globalmediajournal.collegium.edu.pl/artykuly/wiosna%202006/Goban-Klas-od%20prasoznawstwa.pdf; A. Gwóźdź, *Medioznawstwo – dyskurs czy paradygmat badań kulturoznawczych*, „Kultura Współczesna” 2007, No 1, p. 80–92; idem, *O pewnym możliwym aliansie, czyli w stronę medioznawstwa jako kulturoznawstwa*, “Kultura Współczesna” 2008, No 2, p. 204–213; *Media i komunikowanie w społeczeństwie demokratycznym*, ed. by P. Michalczyk, Sosnowiec 2006; K. Migoń, *Bibliologia wobec medioznawstwa: izolacja, komplementarność czy integracja*, [in:] *Książka i prasa w systemie komunikacji społecznej*, ed. by M. Juda, Lublin 2002, p. 13–18; I. Niebał-Buba, *50 lat badań nad komunikowaniem i mediami w Polsce: stan obecny, wyzwania i perspektywy*, “*Studia Medioznawcze*” 2007, No 1, p. 113–125; W. Pisarek, *Wstęp do nauki o komunikowaniu*, Warszawa 2008; J. Załubski, *Komu jest potrzebne prasoznawstwo?* “*Studia Medioznawcze*” 2005, No 4, p. 26–39; idem *Media i medioznawstwo*, Toruń 2006 (tu zob. *Komu potrzebne jest prasoznawstwo?*, p. 11–28); G. Zaraziński, *Komunikacja i media. Wprowadzenie*, Siedlce 2006.

² M. Jabłonowski, *Źródła a media masowe – próba systematyki*, “*Studia Medioznawcze*” 2004, No 1, p. 29–41.

been much success in the implementation of names such as communication studies or science of communication, some researchers opt for the traditional press studies name, in connection with Cracow's quarterly "Zeszyty Prasoznawcze" (Press Studies Notes). Others opt for the name *mass communication*, with regard to the process of communication via press, radio, television, speech, graphic transmission and all kinds of acoustic sounds as well as visual-light symbols. There are those who prefer the term communication as a science of the nature, processes and systems of all forms of communication including time, space, personality and circumstances. The discussion on this topic is not over yet. Lately, more popular has become the term *media studies*, related to mass communication in its most developed form and taking into consideration the three perspectives: theoretical, technical and practical. This name is short and it refers to the etymology of other existing disciplines such as linguistic studies or press studies. Here, mentioned could also be the fact that when the quarterly "Studia Medioznawcze" was launched in 2000 [...], its name was not considered controversial among academic media circles". Today, five years later, it can be said that the discussion on terminology is over.

It is worth mentioning, at this point, other theses presented in that article, after being verified and supplemented with present day knowledge. The basic goal of media studies, just like any other discipline, is cognition. Media studies are to research the phenomena of internal and international information transmission in all possible formats, to learn its sources and effects³. Knowledge obtained should allow us to understand the relations between human thought (opinions, programmes, doctrines) and activity (publication, radio programme, TV or Internet transmission). If relations, tendencies and regularities in the created by media reality are defined, existent is a basis for the formulation of generalities and forecasts. Reassuming, media studies are to allow us academic analysis and assessment of mass media means. Theoretical knowledge allows us not only to describe the existing reality but also to prepare evaluations, make forecasts and various types of media campaigns.

Media studies generally deal with the present time, that is with what is happening in and with media around the world. From a historian and political scientist's perspective, whatever happens between people is history and, hence, is subject to the same cognition rules

³ Based on Warsaw University's Institute of Journalism academic research interests, published work and conferences which took place, it can be said that media experts predominantly focus on issues of media structures and characteristics of domestic and international media, media economy, existing models and relations between broadcasters, media property issues, financing, advertising, public relations, access to media, censorship and self censorship, the future of media and the Internet, press law, international systems, especially those in post Soviet countries, media in the EU and language of mass information.

as other above mentioned studies (what is not a forecast is history)⁴. In this sense, media studies, similarly to other social sciences, can be treated as a historical science. History, in its broadest understanding (political, economic, military, and even more so cultural including press, radio, television and now also the Internet) should be an introduction to media studies since it shapes the difficult to define base necessary to humanistic evaluation of any problem⁵. In this context, a historian needs to remind researchers of awaiting dangers. Lack of a proper perspective as well as an incorrect choice of resources chosen can have fundamental influence on the interpretation of facts or it can lead to attempts of changing fact. This needs to be taken into consideration by media researchers⁶.

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Researching phenomena related to information transmission, researchers use methods from other sciences⁷. They may be referred to as “media studies auxiliary sciences”. Development of this field of study results in increasing number of “auxiliary sciences”. This development is in tune with advancement of not only humanistic studies or natural sciences (i.e. precise measurements) but also with various technological fields (photography, radio, television, digital recording). Combining all that, we obtain knowledge on how media formulate and reach their goals or how it is possible to, for example, carry out an analysis of media processes and determine their regularities. Among basic media “auxiliary sciences”, making this field of study interdisciplinary and also, to a degree, incoherent and eclectic at this point⁸, there are: history, political sciences, Polish, law, sociology, economy, statistics, culture studies and social psychology. Each of the above is its own field of study with

⁴ J. Ryszka, *Nauka o polityce. Rozważania metodologiczne*, Warszawa 1984, p. 19–20.

⁵ The issue was presented slightly differently by T. Kowalski (*Mediamorfoza – rzecz o przyszłości mediów i mediach przyszłości w aspekcie konwergencji*, “Studia Medioznawcze” 2001, No 1, p. 23) stating: “From a historical perspective, media development is similar to the process of biological species evolution – new media forms have developed by broadening and enriching ones existing earlier”. In this context, one more remark is in order – new media grow old quickly, they have to give way to new ones and become traditional ones; for more see: W. Dudek, *Nowe media a zmiany sposobu kształcenia na poziomie akademickim*, “Studia Medioznawcze” 2001, No 4, p. 19.

⁶ Theoretically, historians can also assume that each new work brings us closer to understanding an issue, with corrections being made by future works, for more see: T. Mielcarek, *Między monopolem a pluralizmem. Zarys dziejów środków komunikowania masowego w Polsce w latach 1989–1997*, Kielce 1998, p. 8.

⁷ For more see: T. Goban-Klas, *Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i Internetu*, Kraków 1999, p. 92–93; W. Dudek *Ewolucja zainteresowań badawczych mediami*, [in:] *Środki masowej informacji w Polsce po likwidacji instytucji cenzury (1990–2000)*, ed. by J. Adamowski, Warszawa 2000, p. 15.

⁸ For more see: *Nauka o komunikowaniu. Podstawowe orientacje teoretyczne*, ed. by B. Dobek-Ostrowska, Wrocław 2001, p. 26 and 31.

individual subject research⁹, however, any and all of them can also serve as a tool in media studies and be an inseparable part of the academic workshop.

It would be relatively simple to study the mutual relations between media studies and their “auxiliary sciences”. However, that does not exhaust the issue. It seems that particular attention should be paid to the opportunities provided by modern technology. The Internet today is not just a tool but a source of sources¹⁰. We can, without doubt, assume that the development of journalism online and the associated research have created a new quality in modern media studies. The computer has become an enemy of the so far “erudite” methods of research; it has streamlined the workshop, it has changed the way information is gathered, processed and organized and it allows access to libraries and data bases, including editorial archives on a domestic and international scale¹¹.

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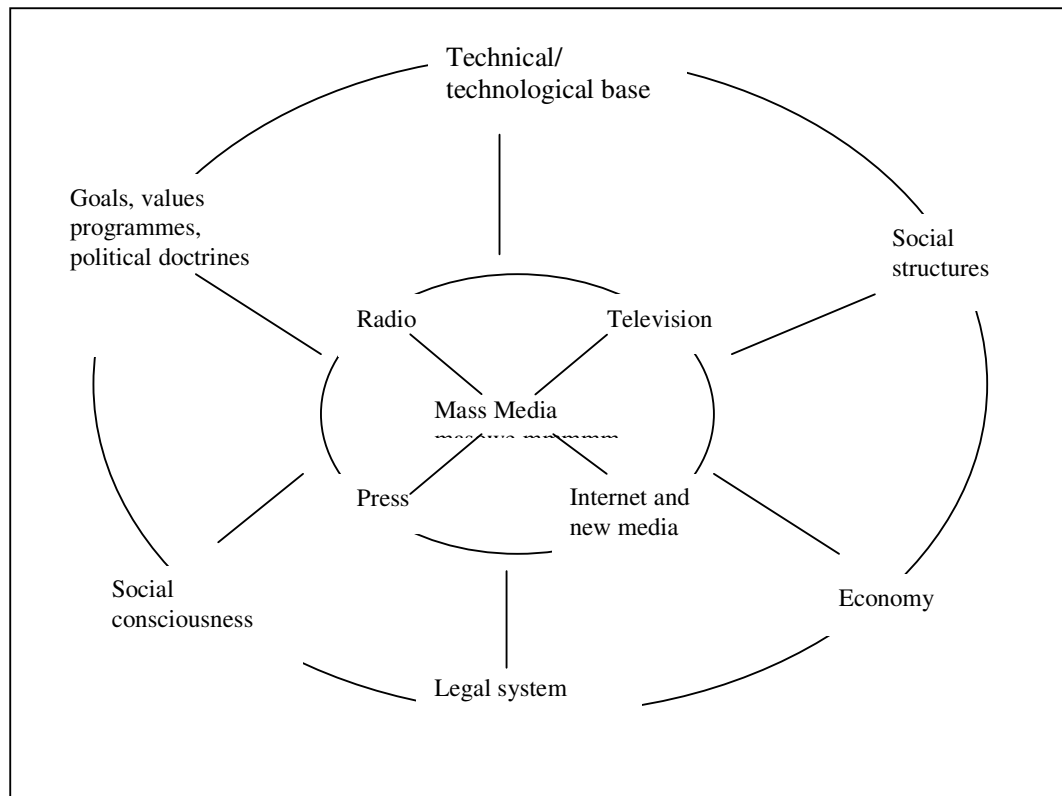
One fundamental question asked in the area of media studies is: what and why influences the changes taking place in modern media? It is a question about the surrounding or the environment in which they function. When answering this question, we come to the conclusion that mass media means describe and co-create the part of our lives which reflects the processes taking place in other areas of life and is by those areas (values, goal, political programmes, society social structures, social consciousness, state of technical base and economy, existing legal system, administrative solutions, other media) largely defined. Taking into consideration historical and social determinants of media phenomena and how they were influenced by various factors, we can attempt, similarly to the political scientist, Artur Bodnar¹², a graphic diagram of “media sphere” (see chart 1).

⁹ For more see W. Kolasa, *Potrzeby prasoznawstwa a bibliografia czasopism w dekadzie przemian*, “Rocznik Historii Prasy Polskiej” 2001, Vol. 1, p. 178. See also: *Nauka o komunikowaniu...*, p. 24–25, from: A. Mucchelli, *Les sciences de l’information et de la communication*, Paris 1998, presented are seven spheres of media research- first: law, history, anthropology, culture, second: linguistics, semiology, pragmatics, third: documentation, computer science and telecommunication, fourth: philosophy, philosophy of science, epistemology, fifth: economy, management, marketing, advertising and public relations, sixth: psychology, social psychology, seventh: sociology of organizations, mass media sociology, political sciences.

¹⁰ K. Narojczyk, *Warsztat badawczy historyka w dobie rewolucji informatycznej*, [in:] *Wybrane problemy warsztatowo-dydaktyczne studiów historycznych. Materiały dla nauczycieli i studentów historii*, ed. by M. Szczurowski, Toruń 2001, p. 40–43; A. Adamczyk, *O potrzebie poszerzenia zakresu nauk pomocniczych historii w warsztacie naukowym historyka-specjalisty dziejów najnowszych*, tamże, p. 98–103.

¹¹ It should be noted here that media studies and didactics development has forced the creation of multimedia centres in research units. However, this is not the focus of the article.

¹² A. Bodnar, *Ekonomika i polityka. Podstawowe zależności*, Warszawa 1978, p. 16–23, introduced the term “media spheres”. See also P. Barwise, K. Hammond, *Media*, Warszawa 2000, p. 71.



For modern media, fundamental are terms such as politics and administration, economic policy, social structures and programmes, social consciousness, ideologies and political doctrines, law, technological and technical base. Media are also shaped by these, hence they should not be treated only as a simple information carrier but its own, independently functioning entity. In its content (composition, expressiveness of titles, volume, advertising, price and finally circulation) reflected are existing relations between media and their “media spheres” as well as existing social structures defining the preferred and infiltrating society goals, values, political programmes and doctrines, which also have a direct influence on the social consciousness of recipients of media transmissions. In this context, taken into consideration should also be the fact that as a result of various social, economic, etc. circumstances individuals can and have done so in the past manipulated the shape and functioning of various media.

For politics, media are unique because via them such wide audiences can be reached, impossible any other way. The media also deliver information which is topical and complete. The economy has a direct influence on the functioning of media since they are dependent on

the technical/technological base, although it should be noted that technological value of an invention does not mean its general acceptance. Media phenomena and processes are connected, influence and condition each other, they change with time and are reflected in the existing but constantly transforming under their influence legal system.

This means that modern media function within a international system which is dynamically developing¹³. Each of its elements influences the functioning of the whole and not one element is exclusive in its influence on the rest. “Media sphere” as an entity is not institutional which means that it is elastic and non-formalized and that media can also influence other elements of the system.

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When we realize how complex and large “media sphere” and its scope is and when agree that historical knowledge is essential to media studies, the analysis of media phenomena should be dependent on how we read and interpret history. The legacy is the sources which have been debated for dozens of years in historical literature. However, this is not the focus of this article¹⁴. From a media studies perspective, a historical source would be any trace of human thought or activity, treated on two levels – as a reflection of a historical process and as its creation¹⁵. It would then be, “any remains of the past which can give us information about past events regarding history of humanity, or, in other words, history”¹⁶.

There are numerous proposals¹⁷ for the classification of historical sources¹⁷. A great diversity of sources demands some sort of classification, however, devising one single system that would encompass them all is an extraordinarily difficult task. This is predominantly due to the immense variety of forms and content. Additionally, each source is connected to another which makes it increasingly difficult to categorize. A “traditional” typology of source

¹³ W. Sonczyk, *Media w Polsce. Zarys problematyki*, Warszawa 1999, p. 12–16. Functioning are also, particularly among French communication experts, terms such as “mediatisation of politics”, for more see B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne jako obszar badań naukowych*, “Studia Medioznawcze” 2001, No 2, p. 63.

¹⁴ For example, see Ch.V. Langlois, Ch. Seignobos, *Wstęp do badań historycznych*, Lwów 1912; P. Kościakowski, *Historyka. Wstęp do studiów historycznych*, Londyn 1954; J. Topolski *Metodologia historii*, Warszawa 1968; B. Miśkiewicz, *Wstęp do badań historycznych*, Warszawa 1974; E. Mierzwa, *Historyka*, Kielce 1997; Z. Wojtkowiak, *Nauki pomocnicze historii najnowszej. Źródłoznawstwo. Źródła narracyjne*. Part 1: *Pamiętnik, tekst literacki*, Poznań 2001.

¹⁵It should also be noted that common are the roots of the definition with regard to culture, see also J. Szczepański (*Elementarne pojęcia socjologii*, Warszawa 1972, p. 78), he states, “Culture is the entirety of human activity, material and immaterial, values and codes of conduct, objective and accepted in communities, passed on to others and to future generations”.

¹⁶ A. Świeżawski, *Warsztat naukowy historyka. Wstęp do badań historycznych*, Częstochowa 2001, p. 120.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 121–135.

was presented by the author in the article from 2004 cited above¹⁸. It should also be noted that today historians, thanks to growing capacity of digital libraries and archives registering “world history”, have access to sources of which in the past he could only dream.

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Incidentally, it can be mentioned that also historians use information included in media. For some time now, in historical science popular has become a new way of researching history, the so called second class history, in which analysis of the symbolic dimension of history is carried out through researching the functioning, among other things, of historical sites. Historians do not limit themselves to one simple way of viewing certain events or people but also focus on how history was later perceived by others or in collective memory. What associations and interpretations were offered by whom, when and for what reasons, what was the effectiveness and how it influenced the mechanisms of creation of collective identity of some and exclusion of others¹⁹. For this kind of research it is necessary to broaden the research base and use data included in printed press, electronic sources and the Internet. It means going beyond traditional means of research and moving toward more interdisciplinary cooperation (with media experts). It allows representatives of both disciplines to do their work without being limited by restrictions within their discipline. By abandoning the traditional chronological reconstruction of history, researchers can ask sources different questions and use non traditional forms of narration²⁰. As a result, created is a extremely interesting area for the cooperation of historians and media studies experts, where common interests, workshops and research areas can be explored.

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For media experts, the basic source of information are media themselves. Based on these sources, researchers can systematically follow, register and assess the changes and tendencies taking place. With regard to this, several remarks need to be made. Firstly, despite the fact that available are abundant quantities of data, there are problems with accessing a lot

¹⁸ M. Jabłonowski, *Źródła...*, p. 36.

¹⁹ Description of Polish-German historical site, see: www.cbh.pan.pl [accessed: 21.09.2009] and *Historia drugiego stopnia – kilka uwag krytycznych*, [in:] *Deutsche-polnische Erinnerungsorte. Reader dla Autorów i Autorów na temat polsko-niemieckich miejsc pamięci*, Berlin 2009, p. 27–28 (manusc.).

²⁰ See speech by R. Traba and team during the panel “Tożsamość i pamięć. W poszukiwaniu nowego paradygmatu w badaniach historycznych”, XVIII Powszechny Zjazd Historyków Polskich (Polish Historians Congress), Olsztyn 17.09.2009.

of basic information²¹. Secondly, there is the issue of applied research methods and ways of obtaining information. It seems that necessary in this case would be close cooperation of researchers with various types of media and public opinion study centres as they need proper empirical materials. Thanks to the Internet, researchers have access to secondary data “mines”²², including results of public opinion surveys. Thirdly, there is a necessity to archive materials, including those from the Internet, so that they can also be accessed in the future. Efforts should be made to transfer into digital form and support those institutions which create and make available their own electronic archives, such as “Gazeta Wyborcza” or “Rzeczpospolita”. Lastly, there is the issue of the so called technical media base; researchers must take into consideration the fact there is a constant increase in the amount of available information which they need to take into account, process and, most importantly, verify.

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Researchers, particularly young ones, who deal with a large amount of various types of sources state that reading the materials is of difficulty to them. This is due to different characteristics of the research materials. One solution to this problem is to gain information which facilitates work with sources. When researching, the most important thing is to obtain from the analysed content that which we are looking for. Media researchers should utilize versatile information with regard to the analysed issue, including historical connections. Particularly imperative is language of the analysed period, its symbols, culture (including technical) or characteristic to it means of information transmission. Here, crucial are, once again, “media studies auxiliary sciences” discussed above. Media experts should, referring to history methodology but using own research methods, critically assess the source in order to separate authentic materials from useless or unreliable ones²³. Therefore, work on sources needs to be assessed as follows:

– external (source essence, its form and characteristics, background, dating, behaviour) allowing researchers to recreate processes reflected in its form and content. At this point noted should be any changes or transformation from the original source as it is extremely important information to researchers.

²¹ For example, any researcher dealing with modern press should not be satisfied with existing bibliography, for more see W. Kolasa, *Potrzeby prasoznawstwa...*

²² M. Szpunar, *Internet w procesie gromadzenia danych o charakterze wtórnym*, “Studia Medioznawcze” 2009, No 2, p. 142.

²³ For example see: B. Miśkiewicz, *Wstęp do badań...*, p. 174 and on; E. Mierzwa, *Historyka*, rozdz. XVI–XVII. Cf: I. Ichnatowicz, *Nauki pomocnicze historii XIX i XX w.*, Warszawa 1990, p. 143 and on.

– internal, in order to verify whether content includes facts (information) which really took place.

It should be noted that external and internal assessment means two different evaluations of a source. In practice, both these actions complement each other providing the end result as far as the material's authenticity and credibility.

In the modern world, the transmission of information has reached unparalleled speed. Researchers, including media ones, are faced with an over abundance of information. This does not mean that they should not be critical of sources they use. In conclusion, some general remarks are in order:

- there are still numerous issues regarding media studies methodology which require in depth and critical discussion,
- there is a consensus that media studies should enable academic analysis, assessment and forecasts of mass media means and to provide knowledge regarding the formulation and achievement of media goals;
- there is a group of sciences called “media studies auxiliary sciences” which include media research tools and are indispensable to the workshop, their number is constantly growing;
- media studies deal with the part of social life which vividly reflects processes taking place in various spheres of life and is also largely conditioned by these spheres; capturing these determinants allows us to determine “media spheres”;
- media studies experts, similarly to other researchers, make use of various types of sources which provide knowledge in reference to the analysed issue, a fundamental source are media;
- in order to properly read or decipher information included in sources, media researchers should critically assess them, evaluating their background, authenticity and credibility.