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Public Policy Challenges in Digital Media

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New technologies increase the speed and dynamics of the information provided and determine its quality. The increasingly frequent use of algorithms, bots and technological systems based on artificial intelligence changes the credibility of statements, and the content created by machines leads to multiplication of false information. The current legal regulations do not provide the society with protection against the threats posed by technological development in the digital media sector. This particularly applies to solutions based on new technologies in the IT sector, i.e. online media, where the most rapid changes take place.

The subject of the dissertation is the changing digital reality as well as the impact of the mass media and the use of new technologies on the functioning and development of the society. The extensive use of algorithms and techniques based on artificial intelligence in journalism has contributed to the development of such phenomena as fake news, deepfake and content manipulation. Machines are not concerned with selecting content and verifying the source – they are only a tool for creating and publishing information. Algorithms do not search for the truth, but only process previously created resources. As a consequence, the quality of the materials decreases. The media lack information selection, credibility and the source of communications. Thus, information loses its quality, and reporting ceases to be merely a description of reality. This, in turn, leads to presentation of a false image of the world and duplication of negative attitudes – manipulation and lie weaken the society and increase internal conflicts. In addition, misrepresenting the world leads to real problems being ignored. These negative effects should be prevented by a well-thought-out public policy in the area of media.

Contemporary media, in particular online ones, have a huge power to influence people and their environment. All due to changes related to the development of technology, leading to the emergence of network power, i.e. transformation in the field of information transfer and communication methods¹. The media market is dominated by global multimedia corporations whose economic importance exceeds the capital of many countries. Their advantage stems in particular from the use of highly developed technology which has even become the driving force of changes in communication. Moreover, in the case of the characterised transformations, one can speak of an over-territorial range of influence.

The dissertation shows examples of companies from the digital media sector. Particular attention was paid to the analysis of the functioning of the so-called Internet giants, i.e. companies that have dominated the digital space. The way the Polish media market looks like depends on the technological changes introduced by the largest media players, including

¹ M. Castells, *Władza komunikacji*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2013, s. 35

Google, Facebook and Netflix. The competition for the interest of the viewer is so great that this race is mainly about competing in the implementation of new technologies, including content personalisation systems and artificial intelligence. When analysing the domestic digital media market, it should be noted that the challenge for Polish media is to compete not only with global giants, but also with other entities in the sector. As a consequence of these activities, digital media are less and less focused on their essential role, that is, conveying news, and much more often they seek to attract and retain viewers within their own content ecosystem, which additionally affects the quality of the message.

Background

Reflection on the current activities of the media highlights the need to change the foundations of public policy and set new directions for activities undertaken in this area. The current solutions of public policy in the area of media, in particular digital media, turn out to be insufficient, and legal regulations do not sufficiently protect citizens. There is no promotion of good market practices in the area of using IT solutions. Changes are also visible on the labour market. Development of industrial robots, communication systems and artificial intelligence, typical of the digital revolution, reduces the need to hire people. Not only manual workers fear losing their jobs, but also those who provide services, i.e. highly qualified specialists. 'Algorithms, data mining and artificial intelligence take over the work of lawyers, linguists, accountants, IT specialists – apparently the professions of the future. The list is long and depends largely on the progress of work on AI development'². Labour market changes do not bypass the media industry where advanced work on software for creating, editing and publishing content by machines is underway.

The current media development strategy refers to the most general assumptions of the knowledge-based economy concept³. This concept describes the reality in which building the economy comes down to creating conditions conducive to the functioning of enterprises gaining their competitive advantage with the use of knowledge, and in particular innovation⁴. This strategy is also applied in online media, in particular in media corporations. In the knowledge-

² H. Salik, *Robotyzacja, algorytmy, sztuczna inteligencja – taniej, ale czy lepiej?*, <https://www.rp.pl/Plus-Minus/210309681-Robotyzacja-algorytmy-sztuczna-inteligencja--taniej-ale-czy-lepiej.html> (18.03.2021).

³ One of the first definitions of a knowledge-based economy may be found in the publication by OCDE, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in 1996, OCDE, *The Knowledge-Based Economy*, Paris 1996, OCDE/GD(96)102, <https://search.oecd.org/officialdocuments/years/1996> (22.11.2021).

⁴ A. Kukliński, *Gospodarka oparta na wiedzy. Wyzwania dla Polski XXI wieku*, Komitet Badań Naukowych, Warszawa 2001, s. 15.

based economy, the emphasis is on technological progress, creativity, speed of change implementation and production efficiency. Information needed to make the right decisions is also a type of knowledge. On the other hand, what is missing from the concept of a knowledge-based economy is an extensive reflection on the responsibility and moral consequences of technological progress⁵.

Under the influence of changes following the concept of the knowledge-based economy, clear challenges of a general nature emerge. Hence the need to refer in the dissertation to the concept of the society, which corresponds to revolutionary technological changes in the economy and their impact on social life, i.e. a society based on knowledge⁶. The characteristic features of this concept are virtuality and networking, which is manifested, among others, in e-commerce, e-communication, e-work and e-entertainment. Innovation is the driving force of change. The development of the Internet and communication techniques meant that we have transferred all our daily activities to the digital network, connecting with any recipient and at any time without leaving home.

In the face of technological changes and the ensuing consequences, public policy challenges are highlighted. The excessive trust that has so far been placed in knowledge and innovation is having a disastrous effect on the society as a whole. Therefore, it is necessary to identify problems and threats that occur in the knowledge-based society and to notice the shortcomings at the level of the current strategy, both in management and public policy directions, and then present a proposal to modify it. The role of public policy is to develop an effective and far-reaching vision of the development of the society, which requires a broader view on the functioning of both the economy itself and the entire society. This new view, in which public institutions can react to specific, contemporary problems posed by technological development, also in the case of digital media, is the proposal to extend the concept of a knowledge-based society to praxeology.

A wisdom-type science – praxeology, as a general theory of operation – fits in with the existing assumptions of the concept of a knowledge-based society, but gives it a completely new and fuller meaning. It consists primarily in improving all actions, as well as analysing actions undertaken consciously. The aim of praxeology is to formulate, justify and systematise recommendations for effective action, while maintaining responsibility and ethical principles.

⁵ D. Makulska, *Kluczowe czynniki rozwoju w gospodarce opartej na wiedzy*, w: *Pomiędzy polityką stabilizacyjną i polityką rozwoju*, „Prace i Materiały Instytutu Rozwoju Gospodarczego SGH” 2012, nr 88, s. 169–193.

⁶ In the literature on the subject the concept of a knowledge-based society is proposed as well as a knowledge society. P. F. Drucker, *Mysli przewodnie Druckera*, MT Biznes, Warszawa, 2002, s. 457.

This gives hope that the guidelines contained in the science of praxeology will make it possible to better protect the common good and thus achieve the fundamental goal of public policy in the field of digital media. The practical assessment of praxeology comes down to questions about effectiveness, economy, and – which is extremely important – about the ethicality of human behaviour⁷. Praxeology focuses on the fairness of human behaviour and emphasises the importance of the satisfaction that is provided by choosing the right action. This, in turn, is considered not only in terms of the effectiveness of one organisation, but also in a broader, social perspective. For this reason, the application of praxeological principles is an opportunity to construct a new concept of a society based on wisdom, owing to which it will be possible to look more broadly than before at the problems and challenges of the modern state, including redefining strategies for conducting public policy.

The defence of personalistic values becomes even necessary in the face of the world presented by the media – the more so as the management of media enterprises is most often accompanied by a technocratic vision of the future. Lack of ethics only exacerbates this state of affairs. Ultimately, the value of truth is denied as a regulative idea. Therefore, an adequate proposal to overcome the crisis may turn out to be the application of praxeology principles in the management of digital media and in conducting public policy in relation to them.

Research methods applied

A number of steps were undertaken in order to verify the above thesis. First of all, the contemporary media and the challenges faced by the Polish media industry are characterised. The current situation of digital media is influenced by the technological development taking place in particular over the last two decades, as well as the increased demand for Internet access due to the pandemic caused by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The year 2020 has definitely entered pages of history as a point in time from which the Internet has become a space for work, entertainment and leisure for most people. Since then, the role of media coverage has also grown significantly. In order to illustrate the nature and scale of this phenomenon, the author refers in the dissertation to reports of audience measurement in individual media, Internet users' behaviour and viewership results.

The next stage of the work was to conduct an empirical study with the use of an online questionnaire in order to get public opinion on digital media and the quality and reliability of information published on the Internet. In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked, *inter*

⁷ T. Kotarbiński, *Abecadło praktyczności*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1972, s. 38–39.

alia, whether public media pursue a social mission, whether artificial intelligence is involved in publishing processes, and whether global media concerns threaten the development of Polish media. The results of the survey provided valuable data on the perception of the media industry, thus highlighting the public policy challenges in the field of digital media.

The third area of activity is the analysis of existing works, including publications on public policy and social sciences. In this respect, materials on the theory of public policy, the role of public institutions in building society, and studies on praxeology have turned out to be particularly valuable. At this point, it is necessary to recall the works of Tadeusz Kotarbiński, in particular, *Traktat o dobrej robocie* and *Hasło dobrej roboty*, which were, in a way, the starting point for the deliberations undertaken in the dissertation. The question that has accompanied the author for many years, namely what to do to stop the media from being dehumanised, the contact with the praxeology proposed by Kotarbiński brought the first answers. The reflection on the management of contemporary media enterprises, the future of Polish media and the need for a new public policy in relation to them also results from many years of professional experience that the author has gained while working in large media organisations, including at managerial positions.

Structure of the dissertation

As a result of the above activities, a dissertation was written. It consists of five chapters and each chapter is subdivided into four main parts. The subject of the first chapter (*Information in the digital society and public activities*) is the description of contemporary media broken down into public and private institutions. The recurring theme of this part of the deliberations is the message since conveying information is the main role of the media. Technological developments are changing the way information is created and shared. Lack of legal safeguards and the unreliability of public institutions in the face of dynamic technological changes apply equally to the entire media market. The Internet, as the fastest growing medium, is particularly noteworthy. The current legal regulations do not guarantee online safety as they mainly apply to press publishers.

In addition, the first chapter characterises the techniques used by a contemporary journalist. Today's editor, who can count on support in the form of information systems for database analysis, spends a significant part of his or her time and energy checking statistics and observing the popularity ranking of his or her articles rather than searching and verifying the source of information.

The second chapter (*Personalized world of the media in the light of the results of the empirical research*) contains a discussion of the surveys conducted in January and February 2021. The research questionnaire was carried out to learn about the public's opinion on the information published in digital media, the implementation of public mission and the activities of public institutions in the area of media. The study was supplemented by the analysis of existing data, i.e. statistical data on the viewership of websites, as well as information on the share of technology in the development of digital media. In addition, the study showed that managing a media company should be associated with respecting such values as truth, journalistic integrity and freedom of speech. As a result, the respondents' responses contributed to the formulation of public policy challenges in the area of digital media.

In the third chapter (*Two concepts of the development of the contemporary digital society*) two concepts of the development of society are characterised: the society based on knowledge and the society based on wisdom. The reasons for the failure of the first of them were analysed, despite the initially correct assumptions. Corporations that rely in particular on absolute confidence in technology succeed only in a material sense. In the long run, this contributes to the neglect of interpersonal relations, increasing the rank of the machines used and the exclusive focus on the effectiveness of each activity. Particularly in an area dominated by modern technologies, e.g. artificial intelligence or work automation, it is necessary to protect jobs, and to a large extent. This applies not only to maintaining jobs, but to ensuring decent conditions in the entire broadly understood working environment. The concept of a society based on wisdom is the proposal to overcome the crisis.

The goal of the fourth chapter (*Praxeology as the foundation of the society based on wisdom*) is to show that the foundation of the society based on wisdom stems from praxeology. It is both wisdom knowledge and the theory of effective action. Management referring to the principles of praxeology assumes efficiency and economy in the functioning of a business, as well as internal satisfaction and happiness of an individual employee. In praxeology, it is postulated that managerial activities and the entire corporation be assessed with regard to respect for human dignity, which is of key importance for the assessment by public institutions of the quality of enterprise management. Praxeology introduces the category of fairness. In the context of robotisation and automation, it takes on more importance than efficiency itself. Practicing a 'good work' has a chance to contribute to building new organisations based on the principle of '3E', i.e. economy, efficiency and ethics, which then, through good practices, will translate into changes within the entire media market.

The fifth chapter (*Up-to-dateness of praxeology in the context of public policy challenges*) is devoted to the concept of *a good work* proposed by Tadeusz Kotarbiński and, in its context, the shaping of a new public policy strategy in the area under study. The author's reflection related to it concerns the reasons for the absence of praxeology in science and in practical considerations. In the author's view, however, it is possible to try to use praxeology to solve media management problems in the era of IT revolution, as well as to determine the strategy of public policy. Comparing the language of praxeology from the 1950s⁸ with the contemporary language of new, technical media one can see the closeness of both the nomenclature (robotisation, machine operation, automatons) and the issues raised in the field of enterprise management concepts.

Conclusion

The final part of the dissertation offers a summary that allows to capture the most important aspects considered. The author shows in which direction the world of digital media is heading and what challenges it brings in terms of public policy. Good practices, based on praxeology, may be applied in the management of public and private enterprises in the entire media sector, which also entails new tasks in the context of public policy. A view on public organisations that pursue the public interest is also worth noting. As part of public policy, solutions should be promoted whose application leads to the development of society, and not only to the realisation of the interests of a narrow group of recipients and capital. The opportunities created by technological progress should be introduced in a deliberate manner. It is essential that the effects of these actions be considered on the basis of economic policy, taking into account the good of an individual as a free and rational being that has dignity. Otherwise, the technology used will contribute to deepening social alienation, violating human dignity and privacy.

The role of public policy is to define threats to the society that result from the use of highly developed technology in the area of media and to protect citizens. Therefore, the proposal to support public policy is the vision of a society based on wisdom presented in the dissertation, which refers to praxeology. The concept of *a good work* refers to the broadly understood action, with the orientation towards effective action, i.e. bringing the intended results. Its features include, in addition to effectiveness, ethics and economy. The latter is

⁸ The first edition of *Traktat o dobrej robocie* appeared in the series of the First Department of the Lodz Scientific Society in 1955.

defined as the relationship between the products and the resources used, while ethics sets the limits of human action. If we do not turn to the protection of personalistic values, the challenges related to the use of technology, including biotechnology, artificial intelligence or connecting all things within the Internet of Things, will only increase in the coming years, crossing further boundaries.