

Mass Media vs. Public and National Safety

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The contemporary society is becoming the information society[1]—information, gaining it (or hiding), the speed of processing are getting a greater significance. Undoubtedly, the mass media have a leading role in the transmission of information nowadays. Nevertheless, their role in society is not limited only to inform.

Media—functions and mechanisms of action

The media shape opinions, additionally, they are the place of public debate on significant topics and play educational and entertaining functions. For media owners, the economic dimension is also vital: the media are to make profit by fulfilling their tasks. This profit usually has its source in charges for using the content (selling newspapers, subscriptions, etc.) and income from ads. Therefore, more and more media content is determined by commercial factors.[2]

Although the media themselves constitute the neutral tool that can be used for good or evil purposes, it must be remembered that the content of media coverage depends on many factors (the aforementioned economic aspect is only one of them). First, media content is shaped by real people who have their own views and opinions. Therefore, the total objectivity, even in pure information, remains rather an unattainable ideal. The same selection and statement of publicized facts is already a form of commentary as well as the amount of space devoted to a particular event. A journalist becomes a gate keeper. In other words, certain topics can be publicized by the media and fanned artificially, while others—sometimes having a much greater significance—are muted and marginalized.[3]

State and media

The media relations with the world of politics and state authorities in general are also worth mentioning. There exist various approaches and media doctrines—from totalitarian doctrine, where the media are nearly a part of the apparatus of power and a tool of propaganda, through the liberal one and to the doctrine of social responsibility[4]—which most frequently features democratic societies.

The media system is a complex organism, which normally is under pressure of various factors including the state, society and market. In general, the media system in the state is a reflection of the social and political situation. Diverse external (especially the socio-economic conditions), legal, political and constitutional factors shape the media system and influence its efficiency. And conversely, the media are important for state policy and understanding of the public interest. They also educate society, which would be active in public life, according to axiology and a sense of national identity. State action should also be designed to defend freedom of expression and information, media diversity, protection and development of the domestic market and audiovisual production and also protect competition and structural pluralism of the media (a situation of over-concentration of media ownership—especially in the hands of a foreign capital—is not acceptable from the standpoint of national security). In Poland, these issues are regulated by the Act on Protection of Competition and a Consumer and other acts, which aim to prevent the situation where one entity has a dominant position on the media market (over 40% of market share).[5]

Media vs. information security

The media business is closely related to the concept of information security, understood (in negative terms) as the protection of information against unauthorized (accidental or deliberate) disclosure, alteration, destruction or preventing its process'. [6] However, the negative approach of information security may not be sufficient in regard to the growing importance of information. At this point, essentially each area of national security is becoming increasingly dependent on the free flow of information and the action of systems based on information. The army, economy, energy, media, financial and transportation systems are particularly vulnerable in this respect. As P. Paleri states, "freedom of information does not provide the right to a person to demand all information connected with the state. There is information that may prejudicially affect the elements of national security if made open". [7] Thus, it is necessary for national security to introduce such an information security policy, which would ensure the protection of existing systems and offer a guarantee of survival and freedom of development of the 'information society'. [8]

It must be remembered that information is as strategic asset of states and organizations of the twenty-first century and knowledge and technologies resulting from it will become the basic factor of production. Decision processes in other sectors of the economy and social life even more will depend on systems of processing and transmitting information, whereas a disruption of the proper functioning of information—control systems does not require high inputs of material.

Therefore, it should be expected that competition between opponents would be transferred to the area of information struggle, which is connected with armed battle in the doctrines (and in the future may become a substitute for war). [9] Hence, in certain situations the media can be a tool of destabilizing security of information by the hostile factors, for example:

a. The media may be used by the enemy as a tool of disinformation, spreading public concerns (especially, if hostile states would manage to cooperate with more significant persons from the media world and would make them their agents). In broad terms, disinformation is the 'component of information war techniques, using such methods of influence on a recipient as: a trick, intoxication (addressed to the elite, using the point lies), white propaganda, black propaganda, influencing'. [10] K. Liedel warns that 'modern IT weapons create new

opportunities for taking successful operations that are aimed at controlling the opponent's decision-making processes, even on a national scale. The introduction of multiplesets of carefully selected real and false data to public and latent information systems can create public sentiment and a political climate, which, as a result, will make decisions consistent with the expectations of the perpetrators of these manipulations'. [11] Therefore, "informational security is not safeguarding information alone. It also has to take care of information overload and misinformation based on psychological operations and information warfare whether covert or overt". [12]

The media, by pursuing news, also become (sometimes unconsciously) prone to disinformation of special services and turn into a tool of competition between them or an instrument of a foreign intelligence service wishing to cause internal instability and lead to internal and international tensions by a particular publication. The unreliable relation entails negative consequences. They will be more serious, the more difficult the situation they concern. The scale of damage also depends on the effect which such a situation may have on the whole society, its further development and security. These dangers pose any type of disaster, especially related to public safety. On the one hand, they require the immediate response from the media, however, on the other hand—the ability to refrain from formulating opinions too early, until all facts will be disclosed and all parties will present clear actions. Unfortunately, the modern media wishing to gain the advantage over their competitors, often times publish sensational materials and do not consider the results of too early disclosure. The crisis, therefore, offers an enormous opportunity to increase the popularity of the medium. If its leadership gives in to this temptation, then, a reader or listener, instead of reliable information, will receive a false picture of reality created as a result of the so called 'news creation'. [13]

It is also possible to erode the authority of the country on the international stage by controlling media publications in the neighboring countries. [14] To some extent, it results from globalization and a greater mutual 'penetration' of cultures, countries and societies. This openness of countries and societies, on the one hand, stimulates their development, but on the other—is the source of their vulnerability and sensitivity to external impacts. It manifests itself in the increase of mass communication, which extends to many areas of life—from the economy to culture. [15]

b. The excessive portrayals of violence in the media may affect the sense of security among citizens in a negative way. Undoubtedly, 'the information targeted at the society may affect a sense of security of recipients, especially in the area of public security'. [16] Not only has it applied to situations when the media talk about attacks or present different forms of violence. It may also refer to a broadcast of arrests and detentions of public figures, which may be perceived as a political battle by the society, and thus, increase uncertainty and a sense of instability. [17] According to H. Karp, we can talk about the phenomenon known as media terrorism, which is manifested in intrusive images, saturated with violence and aggression. Media terrorism, i.e., media transfers, ruin lives of not only individuals and communities, but also entire nations and cultures. [18]

c. By disclosing state secrets, which are significant for state defense or its prestige, the media may weaken public and national safety and evoke anxiety among people. Sometimes, the disclosure of such secrets may occur randomly (e.g., Google Maps users have recently discovered the U.S. secret air base at Yucca Lake, Nevada on satellite photos), [19] and sometimes may result from carelessness and lack of responsibility of journalists, and sometimes it can be an intended activity. However, there are situations when the media restrain from certain topics in the name of responsibility for the state defense or prestige. For instance, the case of the alleged CIA prisons in Poland, which was rather omitted in the Polish media. This issue is discussed in the journalistic business from the standpoint of journalistic ethics, however, it is assumed that such an attitude of the Polish media proves their sense of responsibility for the safety and prestige of Poland (the responsibility for national safety prevailed requirements of journalistic ethics). [20] It is worth remembering that this is not just about the prestige of Poland, but also about exposing the country to a retaliatory attack from terrorists (which is of particular importance at least in the context of EURO 2012).

d. The media can be used by terrorists—directly as a tool of communication, or indirectly—the press by publishing information about attacks calls public opinion against the government (e.g., Spain, where a terrorist attack caused the ruling party to lose the election). [21] However, the issue of the cross-references of the media and terrorism is much broader and the provided example is just the proverbial tip of the iceberg. The war on terrorism is in fact the example of the so-called 'asymmetric warfare' translated into 'the armed conflict, in which a country or a group of countries are facing a confrontation with the enemy, whose international status, structure and objectives are beyond the semantic scope of a concept of a conventional war'. [22] In the asymmetric conflict, one party of the confrontation is unable to oppose the enemy in a symmetrical manner, i.e., using the same or similar means of warfare. Therefore, it chooses such a field of confrontation that can be frequently characterized by low expenditure compared to the media, social and political effects. The asymmetric threats are characterized by the uniqueness, surprise and a blow to the most sensitive cells of the state and trans-state structures, with simultaneous low-financial expenses. [23] As K. Liedel notices, terrorism is a kind of a theater, whose message is directed not so much at the victims of the attacks, as at those, who hear about the attacks in the media and begin to feel fear themselves. [24] One of the Polish prime ministers, during a conference on media and terrorism said: 'An act of terror lacks a broader meaning if there is no promotion in the media. Anonymity kills terror and takes it meaning. Therefore, terrorists skillfully use the logic of the media—their mission to provide information and present reasons. Besides, terror and acts of destruction represent the attractive topic—terrible news sell well and result in the increase of circulation and viewership. Tragedy brings in money. Thus, terrorists use the media, however it is also the media that use terror'. [25] For this reason, there is a growing dilemma and conflict between freedom of expression and the right to feel safe. [26]

e. the struggle in cyberspace—hacker attacks on government sites.

The remedies

In connection with the aforementioned (very briefly) aspects of the impact of the media on the public and national safety, the question about the possibility to remedy such situations arises. This can be accomplished by:

a. The education of the government and administrative workers in the area of cooperation with the media, the protection of information, information management, and media crisis management. [27] The contacts with the media, the governmental emergency tools and public

communication should constitute a key element in all kinds of antiterrorist exercises, which would be as important as the operational response, command and coordination of various antiterrorist departments.[\[28\]](#)

b. The education of journalists in the field of national safety issues, developing in them a sense of responsibility for public and national interest and improving the typically journalistic workshop (such features as: reliability, the habit of verifying information with at least two sources). The issues of professional ethics as well as convincing media workers to educate society in shaping the attitudes of responsibility for public safety and encouraging their participation in its creation remain significant matters.[\[29\]](#) It is worth recalling postulates related to the media that K. Jakubowicz formulated already in 1999:

- Do not create a forum for terrorists by quoting their manifestos and letters of requests.
- Do not inform about the threats against certain people.
- Do not give further details about public figures that could be exposed to terrorist attacks.
- Avoid mentioning names of victims so their relatives do not find out about their loss from the media (this rule does not apply to public figures). The media should indicate the source of information about victims and details of the attack.
- Do not conduct interviews with the victims of a disaster who are in shock or suffering, or with their relatives who are in mourning—without their permission and confidence that they agreed to give an interview under the influence of emotions.
- The first estimates of the number of victims are usually imprecise. You should be careful with their administration and, if necessary, revise them.
- Do not re-use large parts of the direct relation from events, not to suggest that they are still ongoing.[\[30\]](#)

c. Keeping the reasonable information policy by the state and its institutions—especially in armed conflict situations (such as war journalists and the policy towards them).

d. Such regulations of the media that they meet the requirements of national security. It can be mentioned: the anti-concentration rules, the imposition on journalists of the duty to serve society, the relevant regulations in the Act on Access to Information etc.[\[31\]](#) Generally, the doctrine might promote a dialogue between authorities and the press[\[32\]](#).

As can be observed, there exist numerous danger zones. The possible preventive actions are focused on the regulation and enforcement of the law as well as educational action. They should have a dual nature so that the media people would be aware of their responsibility for public safety, whereas persons who are directly responsible for this safety would be familiar with the principles of the media and, hence, would be able to communicate with them effectively.

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- [1] Umehao Tadao, a Japanese journalist, is considered the author of the term 'information society'. In his article published in 1963, Tadao wrote about the society based on information systems. Interestingly, he never used the term 'information society' in the article directly, however, his ideas became popularized. Currently, there are numerous definitions of the information society. They differ since the phenomenon of the information society is recognized in terms of various sciences: sociology, computer science, etc. Cf. MERKLEJN, I.: Teoria społeczeństwa informacyjnego Umehao Tadao i jej znaczenie dla dalszych badań. In: FRANCUZ, P., JĘDRZEJEWSKI, S. (eds.): *Nowe media i komunikowanie wizualne*. Lublin 2010, p. 13. According to the report of IBM Community Development Foundation, the information society features the high level of information usage in everyday life by most of the citizens and organizations and the use of uniform or compatible information technology for personal, social, educational and professional use, and additionally, the ability to transmit and receive digital data regardless of distance. Cf. NOWINA KONOPKA, M.: Istota i rozwój społeczeństwa informacyjnego. In: BIAŁOŁOCKI, T. (et al.): *Spoleczeństwo inform@cyjne – istota, rozwój, wyzwania*. Warsaw 2006, p. 15.
- [2] Cf. Funkcje komunikowania masowego. In: PISAREK, W. (ed.): *Słownik terminologii medialnej*. Kraków 2006, pp. 62 – 63.
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- [7] PALERI, P.: *National Security. Imperatives and Challenges*. New Delhi 2008, p. 283.
- [8] National security is one of the circumstances that permits government censorship via prior restraint. The example can be the right to restrain speech about military activities during times of war. Cf. TUROW, J.: *Media Today. An Introduction to Mass Communication*. New York, Abingdon 2001 (4th edition), p. 82. An alternative to government censorship is government secrecy. But it is important to note that in the USA secrecy regulations applies to government officials, not to mass media. If journalists find out these secrets and decide they should be published, they could not be punished. But the officials who allowed the secrets to become known could be penalized. Cf. HIEBERT, R. E.,

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[9] Ibid.

[10] KARP, H.: Wokół zagadnień terroryzmu medialnego. In: *Cywilizacja*, 2001, no. 39, pp. 31 – 32.

[11] Cf. LIEDEL, K.: Bezpieczeństwo informacyjne jako element bezpieczeństwa narodowego, op. cit.

[12] PALERI, P.: *National Security. Imperatives and Challenges*, op. cit., p. 283.

[13] Cf. OSIŃSKA, A.: Afganistan. Konflikty wojenne w mediach – aktywizacja mediów. [online]. In: Reporterzy.info, a publication date is missing, URL: <http://www.reporterzy.info/318,afganistan-konflikty-wojenne-w-mediach-aktywizacja-mediow.html>.

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[15] Cf. KUŹNIAR, R.: Stosunki międzynarodowe – istota, uwarunkowania, badanie. In: HALIŹAK, E., KUŹNIAR, R. (eds.): *Stosunki międzynarodowe – geneza, struktura, dynamika*. Warsaw 2000, p. 22.

[16] Cf. MAZUR, J.: Bezpieczeństwo publicznemu w prasie – wstęp do problematyki. In: GAWROŃSKA-GARSTKA, M. (ed.): *Edukacja dla bezpieczeństwa. Bezpieczeństwo intelektualne Polaków*. Poznań 2009, p. 149.

[17] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 149 – 150.

[18] Cf. KARP, H.: Wokół zagadnień terroryzmu medialnego, op. cit., p. 31.

[19] Cf. BRANDON, J.: Are These Satellite Images Exposing America's Secrets? [online]. In: *FoxNews*, December 10, 2011, URL: <http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2011/12/10/could-google-reveal-secret-spy-drone-lost-in-iran/>.

[20] Cf. KOWALCZYK, M.: Racja stanu CIA. In: *Press*, 2010, no. 10, pp. 30 – 32.

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[23] Cf. BODZIANY, M.: Socjologiczny dylemat bezpieczeństwa narodowego w kontekście zmiany społecznej i wielokulturowości. In: CZAJKOWSKA-ZIOBROWSKA, D., ZDUNIAK, A. (eds.): *Edukacja dla bezpieczeństwa. Bezpieczeństwo regionalne – wyzwania edukacyjne*. Poznań 2008, p. 500.

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[26] Cf. KOCHANOWSKI, J.: Media a terroryzm. [online]. In: the Ombudsman's website, publication date is missing, URL: <http://www.rpo.gov.pl/pliki/12271025030.pdf>.

[27] Thus, it might be worth creating a book describing the relations with the media for such people? Such publications are issued, e.g., in the USA and Great Britain, e.g., BROWN, L. M.: *Media Relations for Public Safety Professionals*. Sandbury, Mississauga, London 2004.

[28] Cf. ŻUBER, M.: Edukacja społeczeństwa wobec zagrożenia terroryzmem. In: CZAJKOWSKA-ZIOBROWSKA, D., ZDUNIAK, A. (eds.): *Edukacja dla bezpieczeństwa. Bezpieczeństwo regionalne – wyzwania edukacyjne*. Poznań 2008, p. 566.

[29] The conference 'How to write about national safety?' organized by the Institute of Media Education and Journalism at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University (CSWU) in Warsaw in 2008, under the patronage of the National Security Bureau, can be an example of such actions. Its participants formulated the following postulates addressed to journalists, who deal with the issue of national safety: First, a journalist, who decides to write about national safety should be experienced and familiar with this matter. However, equally important to the experience is a constant self-improvement, learning new things. Moreover, a special journalist reliability is a necessary requirement. A journalist must be very precise and carefully verify all obtained information. Then, we should also add such features as objectivity and respecting the principles of journalistic ethics. Cf. SKOWRON, B.: *Jak pisać o bezpieczeństwie narodowym?* [online]. In: *Wiadomości24*, April 16, 2008, URL: http://www.wiadomosci24.pl/arttykul/jak_pisac_o_bezpieczenstwie_narodowym_64376.html.

[30] Cf. JAKUBOWITZ, K.: Zasady pracy dziennikarskiej w sytuacjach kryzysowych. [online]. In: *Forum Dziennikarza*, 1999 no. 1 – 2, URL: <http://www.sdp.pl/1999-01-02>.

[31] See also: HUMPHREYS, P. J.: *Mass Media and Media Policy in Western Europe*. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press 1996, p. 43 – 56; KRUG, P., PRICE, M. E.: The Legal Environment for News Media. In: ISLAM, R. (ed.): *The Right to Tell. The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development*. Washington 2002, pp. 187 – 206.

[32] Cf. KRAMER, F. D., STARR, S. H., WENTZ, L. K.: *Cyberpower and National Security*. Potomac Books, Inc. 2009, p. 484.

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