МЕДІАТЕХНОЛОГІЇ

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MEMES AS A MEANS
OF COMMUNICATION AND MANIPULATION

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The article considers memes as a short form of internet statement. Memes was discussed as a successor to the primary interpersonal communication in the form of rock drawings, pictures, pictograms, and hieroglyphs. In addition, the issue of memes as a tool of media and political manipulation has been described. Areas of discussion also include paid trolling and specialized media services to build a modern political campaign through memes. The use of memes as a political marketing tool was discussed.

Key words: Memes, communication, manipulation, media marketing, subliminal message, Central and Eastern Europe.

Levinson places the beginning of social communication with the development of traits of abstract thinking and expressing their thoughts, in humanoids; calling it the hard determinism of the media because the development of information transfer technology through the development of communication carries an irreversible social effect called the development of humanity[1]. It can therefore be adopt that the development of primary mass communication began with the development of the Cro-Magnon human. Rock drawings created around 20–10 thousand years BC were a kind of primary transmission of information, mammoths, hunting[2], the first clumsy lines forming objects, animals or scenes from the lives of people of that time, were the first sources of mass communication, just like language – the invention of speech and language meant crossing the barriers of the place of time and situation. The word as a symbol transfers the thought into the realm of both the real and imaginary world, in time and place, from the past to the future[3]. This word can

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[1] Levinson, P. (1999), *Miękkie Ostrze,* Muza, Warszawa, s. 19.
[2] Nougier, L.–R., Joubet, P. (1991). *Tak żyli ludzie. Czasy Prehistoryczne,* Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław, s. 40.
[3] Goban-Klass, T. (2004), *Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i Internetu,* PWN, Warszawa, s. 16.

be understood as a pictogram, a drawing, letters written as a word, and articulated sounds. Which changed its meaning over the centuries, but always carried information, creating, according to Levinson, individual levels of development that influenced the creation or invention of new ones[4]. From rock drawings to the first Sumerian tablets from 3300 BC[5]; through Egyptian hieroglyphs, Linear A from Crete dated around 2000 BC6, or even Aztec and Inca calendars carved in stone[7]. The change of the picture script to the alphabet is dated: the Sumerians changed them around 2800 BC[8], the Chinese during the reign of the Shang dynasty[9], they are considered to be the precursors of writing; but pictures, pictograms, picture writing have accompanied us until quite recently, and even today. The image of a dog in a cave on Onegda Lake is 5,000 years old[10], Inca knots slightly less, sticks with patterns cut out as a method of communication used by American Indians were used until the 19th century[11], but even today we meet with picture communication. With the dynamic development of digital technologies, pictorial communication experiencing a renaissance in the form of emojis, memes, countryballs and even most of the posts on the Instagram portal.

The icons also carried a certain message, the Icon itself gr. εἰκών means an image, and defines all representations of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints and biblical events[12]. Renata Jara notes that the icon derives from secular representational portraits and has adopted the idea of giving the representation a mystery–magical meaning. The denominator of which is the sacred function in public and private devotion[13]. However, they are just as much an element of communication, transfer of religious values and information through images, sometimes supplemented with short Greek or Cyrillic inscriptions. However, icons or pictures of saints were not only a religious element, sometimes they were meant to convey short message. From 867 AD, in the apse of a Byzantine temple, under the image of Mary with the child, we see such an inscription: «Pictures that the slanderers destroyed, pious emperors restored»[14], which can be thought of as some form of information conveyed by an image with short text. Each statement can be understood as an individual or a whole, any communication mode will be a word – for example a photo or a newspaper article[15].

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[4] Levinson, P. (1999), *Miękkie Ostrze.* Warszawa: Muza. s. 27–29.

[5] Fronczak, J. (2002), *Fascynujące dzieje planety Ziemi,* Reader's Digest, Warszawa, s. 295.

[6] Restellini, P., Caselli, G. (1991), *Tak żyli ludzie. W czasach pierwszych cywilizacji,* Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław, s. 29.

[7] Nougier, L–R., Joubet, P. (1991), *Tak żyli ludzie. W czasach Majów, Azteków i Inków,* Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław, s. 50.

[8] Fronczak, J. (2002), *Fascynujące dzieje planety Ziemi,* Reader's Digest, Warszawa, s. 297.

[9] Restellini, P., Caselli, G. (1991), *Tak żyli ludzie. W czasach pierwszych cywilizacji,* Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław, s. 33.

[10] Nougier, L–R., Joubet, P. (1991), *Tak żyli ludzie. Czasy Prehistoryczne, ,* Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław, s. 66.

[11] Meissner, E. (1997), *Co? Gdzie? Kiedy? Zdarzenia które zmieniły świat,* Przegląd Reader's Digest, Warszawa, s. 16.

[12] Jara, R. (2016), *Ikony Z Kolekcji Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego w Sanoku,* MBL, Sanok, s. 9.

[13] Ibidem, s. 9.

[14] *Bizancjum. Tajemnice Starożytnych Cywilizacji. Cesarstwo Wschodniorzymskie, cz. 2, vol. 68,* OXFORD, Poznań, s. 33.

[15] Barthes, R. (1970), *Mit i Znak. Eseje,* PIW, Warszawa, s. 27.

Memes, i.e. a picture combined with a short text – carrying certain information, in the current definition are associated with new technologies and media. As the above-mentioned communication through images is not new, it is only a modernized remake of the previous civilization achievements of mankind. Richard Dawkins first defined the word meme in 1976 as relpics, mutations and evolve (memetics)[16], now, however, it has changed its meaning, and is associated with a schematic picture with short text shared on a large scale via social media. The first attempts to systematize this form of communication appeared as a genre of internet expression, picture message, they are divided into simple and complex memes, and categories such as:

- memic reaction – reaction to an event,
- template meme – adding one's own statements to the created template[17] consisting mostly of two counterfactual images.

Compound memes are defined as informational, comic-book compositions or demotivators. The memes themselves gained popularity in 2005, via social media for example a Facebook. The division according to technology is simple memes: stencil memes, memic reaction, memes with idiomatic expressions; and the complex memes: anatomical diagram, direct statement to the recipient, comparisons / statements, comic book, verbal-iconic game[18].

Memes can be divided into thematic groups:

- Entertainment
- Political – jokes from the virtually all leading politicians in the world, marking their mistakes, empty promises or unrealistic ideas
- Situational – series of memes about Proboscis Monkey as shows the vices of the Polish nation in a crooked mirror, or a series of literary memes[19] as a juxtaposition of 19th century Ukrainian writers with contemporaries i.e. a combination of reativity despite the miseries with creativity for money. And also as well as various memes combinations with Pochekun Почекун[20].
- Demotivating – like a photo of a sad Keanu Reeves taken in 2010[21] to which they are glued: a stuffed fox, sad Proboscis Monkey and Pochekun.
- The form of a comment – both political, on the reality around us or mocking hypocrisy, such as, for example, Fighting Poland – driving a German car Polska walcząca – niemieckim autem jeżdżąca[22] as a comment showing the hypocrisy of the owner of a BMW car on which he placed a sticker Death to the Enemies of the Motherland.

[16] Drawkins, R. (1989), *The Selfish Gene,* Oxford University Press, Oxford,. p. 192.
[17] Niekrewicz, A. A. (2016), *Od schematyzmu do kreacyjności. Język memów internetowych.* s. 17.
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[22] Polska walcząca niemieckim autem jeżdżąca. (2020), *Wiocha.pl.* URL: https://www.wiocha.pl/1644938,BMW-Polska

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- Common knowledge – eg information that the Louis le Prince made the first movie in history, not Edison[23].
- Mocking.
  By target:
- Age groups
- Youth
- Students
- 18–35
- 35+
  By the dedicated groups and personalized ideological groups
- Nationalism
- Chauvinism
- Fans
- Women, Men, Others, etc.
- Religions and ideologies
- History, hobbies

In a short Internet statement, there are often light and non-controversial memes about comments on movies, computer games, and comics based on Japanese manga. The remaining part, however, are memes that are far from political correctness, conventions, often also any kind of compassion, saturated with profanity or eroticism.

Memes as an element of marketing and manipulation

Everyone is aware of the power of the possibilities that memes bring, they are cheap, easy to create, they reach a really large group of recipients. Currently, outside of the entertainment sphere, memes are used in marketing, ecommerce, political marketing and as an element of hybrid warfare.

While marketing and ecommerce do not arouse much controversy, and the use of popular memes e.g. the Proboscis Monkey in Poland by Xiaomi to promote new phones at affordable prices[24], is the pinnacle of sophisticated advertising marketing, after all, the famous monkey named Janusz always chooses the cheapest opportunity. In case of the new election slogans of the currently ruling party in Poland, «We can do it[25]» – it wasn't a spontaneous reaction of society. Brexit, Presidential campaign in the USA, Election campaigns in Poland or even regional elections in Ukraine, in the era of digitization, all have largely moved to the virtual world, today, not only television or the press are the main tools in political campaigns or propaganda. Most of all, Internet information channels, which include memes, have become them.

Political campaigns do not differ from each other in any country, every politician or party wants to win and will do everything in his / her power to make it happen. Promises, scoring an opponent, looking for scandals, discredit in the eyes of voters are standard

[23] Edison. (2020), *Kwejk.pl.* URL: https://kwejk.pl/obrazek/3641119/edison.html

[24] Sienkiewicz, J. (2018), Polski oddział Xiaomi zaadoptował nosacza znanego z memów. *Nowy Marketing.* URL: https://nowymarketing.pl/a/19676,polski-oddzial-xiaomi-zaadoptowal-nosacza-znanego-z-memow

[25] Orłowski, M. (2015), «Damy radę» – wyborcze hasło PiS nie jest oryginalne. Przed Szydło byli Bob Budowniczy i warszawscy raperzy... [MEMY]. *Gazeta Wyborcza.* URL: https://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,18622822,memy-po-konferencji-szydlo-damy-rade-skopiowac-obame.html?disableRedirects=true

slogans that fall practically at every rally or debate in the world. A new phenomenon is the campaign in social media, in addition to the posts of the interested ones, we encounter waves of hate speech, we are inundated with endlessly shared memes whose heroes are politicians / parties. And it would not be surprising if it was a simple advertisement, such as many, but it is a message saturated with negative messages, usually an insulting messages aimed at a specific person. Some examples from international politics to start with: after the failure of the sewage treatment plant in Warsaw, there were many memes about the mayor of Warsaw, «Rafał Trzaskowski Warsaw chamberlain – sewer patron» «Szambelan Warszawski[26] – patron kanalizacji», oddly enough, they return each time Trzaskowski announces a conference on a new political movement bearing his name, incitement to impeachment against the current president Zelensky[27] – converted from a visit to a school, or vulgar juxtapositions of the current Lviv mayor with his opponent[28] – it's a drop in the sea of hate. However, that the dissemination of false information in the form of a visual collage with a literary one has a long history. It is worth recalling the political fight of Benjamin Franklin with a publisher named Titan Leeds from 1733 in North America, the future US president released a fake news in the newspapers about the death of a popular writer and publisher of almanacs to take over the publishing market[29], unfortunately the Titan failed to prove he was alive, and was still accused of not being himself, that someone is impersonating him, is a doppelganger. And it can be said that the actions on the human subconscious both in those days and now are effective, Joseph Murphy wrote that consciousness carries out all orders, in the form of judgments and beliefs which send her subconscious[30], once people had read about Leeds' death, this news it took root in their minds as the first information they received. Later rectifications either escaped them somewhere, or were considered fake by subconscious disbelief. Tom Phillips also claims that people react differently to the truth, they ignore it, even if they have evidence to prove it right, or they don't want to check the authenticity, or they want it to be true, even if they know deep down that it is not, it is a kind of information vacuum[31], that is why the struggle for first associations is so important in the means of manipulation.

In Poland, the discussion on the use of social media in a political campaign started 5 years ago, already then, the Szefernaker in an interview stated that, together with the candidate for Prime Minister Beata Szydło, they considered whether the photo from the trips would be «memogenic» or not[32]. It was an example of an attempt to come into being, to be recognized through memes with a good or bad opinion, but still known. The initiative came from the stakeholders themselves and there is nothing outrageous about it, they wanted to be noticed enough to create a subliminal message in the society that only they exist on the political scene, and those who are not there do not count. However, in the

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[26] Żart dnia: Szambelan Warszawski AD 2019. (2019). *wRealu24.* URL: https://wrealu24.pl/zart-dnia-szambelan-warszawski-ad-2019/

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[29] Phillips, T. (2020), *Prawda.* Krótka historia wciskania kitu, Albatros, Warszawa, s. 51–57.

[30] Murphy, J. (1998), *Potęga podświadomości,* Świat Książki, Warszawa, s. 28.

[31] Phillips, T. (2020), *Prawda.* Krótka historia wciskania kitu, Albatros, Warszawa, s. 44–47.

[32] Sowa, B. (2015), Paweł Szefernaker: Nie dowodzę hejterami. Moja armia jest armią pokoju. WYWIAD. *Dziennik.pl.* URL: https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/media/artykuly/509006,pawel-szerefnaker-o-kampaniii-w-internecie-nie-ma-hejtu.html

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pages of Newsweek there is an article «Hejterzy bez zachamowań» in which we read that specialized Hate–companies will smear politicians, destroy his life and career. Everyone, without exception. All political parties use their services[33], they advertise with the slogan *«We create facts on the internet».* Next article titled «Tak, PO miała swoją armię trolli, ale PiS poleciało po bandzie» states that the currently ruling party in Poland employs 50 professional trolls, but their activities were extended by mailing; unpopular judges, journalists and others began receiving e-mails of slander about themselves[34]. SpiderWeb announced that the service of writing unflattering comments costs about PLN 1 for 1000 characters, and the monthly creation of fake comments and memes about PLN 3,000[35]. Crowdmedia analyzing hatred on the Internet and conducting interviews with the creators of the «new reality» states that *«Why use substantive arguments that will not be understood by an already wide audience. It is much easier to use non-substantive, clickable and sensational arguments like WE inform, THEY lie[36]».*

Manipulation of national values and stereotypes

The famous German philosopher and psychologist Eduard Spranger divided people according to the values they strive for, type: economic, theoretical, political, social, religious and aesthetic[37], it aroused controversy, but no better taxonomy has been invented. The people included in this systematics are both the target group and the creators of media manipulation. Manipulating national values and stereotypes, folklore, and pop culture of individual nations is simple and often appears in the form of a meme. For example, the aforementioned Monkey Janusz or stills from films such as Taras Bulba[38], they are both a mock commentary form national vices but also become a tool in the hands of manipulators and propagandists. On the Instagram page of Slavorum[39], we meet both memes that praise and promote Slavic culture, and mocking from the quality of life in Slavic countries. In this website all countries are praised and stigmatized more or less equally, which is a clear picture of the typically entertainment use of stereotyping. Tara Swart writes that models of what family, love, and self mean to us are formed very early, the greatest impact comes from how we internalize these bonds of experience and belief and then transfer them to other relationships in life[40]. Manipulating these values has the potential to introduce conflict situations and tensions between different communities. Leading to a threat to security and public order, or spreading social antagonisms. Into activities of the media reflect all

[33] Kim, R., Lis, E. (2016), Hejterzy bez zahamowani. *Newsweek*. URL: https://www.newsweek.pl/hejterzy-bez-zahamowan-jak-niszcza-politykow/sncqc3n

[34] Grodecka, M. (2019), Tak, PO miała swoją armię trolli, ale PiS poleciało po bandzie. *SPIDER'S WEB.* URL: https://spidersweb.pl/2019/08/wiceminister-sprawiedliwosc-lukasz-piebiak-emilia-trolle-pisu.html

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[36] Kuczyński, M. (2017), Jak PiS zbudował armię internetowych trolli? *CROWDmedia.* URL: https://crowdmedia.pl/jak-pis-zbudowal-armie-internetowych-trolli/

[37] Żebrowska, M. (1976), *Psychologia rozwojowa dzieci i młodzieży,* PWN, Warszawa, s. 42–43.

[38] Я Плакаль. (2015). URL: https://www.yaplakal.com/forum28/st/25/topic1171099.html

[39] Slavorum. (2020), *Instagram.* URL: https://www.instagram.com/slavorum_official/

[40] Swart, T. (2019), *Źródło,* Zysk i S-KA Wydawnictwo, Poznań, s. 259–260.

changes in the state's ideology[41], memes with a monkey in which there is a combination of two images of an upset and smiling monkey with the caption: «Memes with pole monkey – Russian information war, Memes with Ukrainian monkey – Grażyna I can't stand it» «Memy z małpom Polakiem – rosyjska wojna informacyjna, Meme z Ukraińcem – Grażyna zaraz nie wyczymie[42]». On the one hand, they show the sad truth about a society that is even slightly aware of the existence of disinformation, on the other, it can be seen that this society is manipulated by stereotypes, juxtapositions in the context of ethnic divisions and chauvinism. The harmful actions of modern media are expressed in the manipulation of play, awareness using by the duplicate patterns, behaviors that control and transform the inner world of human[43].

That is why memes carry both entertainment and many dangers that we are often not aware of. However, as it turns out, this is not the only threat, according to specialists from Fortinet, hackers use new tools and methods of operation incl. Internet memes to help spread malware[44]. The report was the aftermath of a cyber hacker attack, therefore, like any other website, even simple memes can become a data leak problem, threats to public safety, control or destruction of many important data, documents or projects.

Conclusions

It has been concluded that the use of memes serves both entertainment (that was their original role). But also manipulation and media propaganda. Memes are a very popular and cheap method of political marketing. The subliminal message used in memes impacts society as much as any other marketing and advertising tool. Memes bring entertainment but also many dangers.

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МЕМИ ЯК ЗАСІБ СПІЛКУВАННЯ ТА МАНІПУЛЯЦІЇ

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У статті розглянуто меми як коротку форму інтернетного висловлювання, наступника первинного міжособистісного спілкування, вираженого у наскельних малюнках, піктограмах та ієрогліфах. Коротко узагальнено історію зображального спілкування від перших спроб людини з Кро-Маньйон, через розвиток піктографічного письма, до повернення до цієї форми спілкування у 21 столітті в умовах цифрових технологій. Запропоновано тематичний поділ мемів, а також окреслено групи реципієнтів, до яких він адресований (застосовано поділ на вікові групи та персоналізовані ідеологічні групи).

Порушено питання мемів як інструменту медійної та політичної маніпуляції. Визначено роль мемів як інструменту політичної пропаганди та елемента сучасної гібридної війни в контексті національної безпеки.

Проблематика статті також включає питання платного тролінгу та спеціалізованих медійних послуг з метою побудови сучасної політичної кампанії за допомогою мемів. Обговорено використання мемів як інструменту політичного маркетингу. Для мемів характерна проста, легка та доступна мова, іноді вона вульгарна, політично некоректна, а також сповнена ненависті та стигматизації різних соціальних груп.

Було зроблено висновок, що меми не зводяться до розваги, а є потужним сучасним інструментом маніпуляції та пропаганди. Вони здійснюють сильний вплив на формування молодого покоління, тобто людей, які перебувають у процесі формування свого світогляду. Аналізуючи меседж, який передають меми, переконуємося, що цифрова реальність, яка нас оточує, пропонує викривлене, шаржоване відображення світу. Це, однак, не забирає у мемів їхньої ролі поширення базових знань та культури, національного фольклору через цей спосіб висловлювання в Інтернеті.

Ключові слова: меми, комунікація, маніпуляція, медіамаркетинг, підсвідоме повідомлення, Центральна та Східна Європа.