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## MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS IN THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE CITY

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This article explores the media-communication aspect of the social dimension of the contemporary city, conceptualised as a communication hub within global information networks. The analysis is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of structural functionalism, the network society, and systems communication theory. The study reveals that media not only reflect urban processes but also actively shape urban space, influencing identity, social integration, and public discourse.

*Keywords:* media communications, city, network society, social media, urban space, digitalisation.

**Problem Statement.** The relevance of this study is driven by the fact that the modern city functions as a communicative hub where social actors engage through various formats – ranging from traditional local mass media to numerous digital networked platforms. In the information society, the urban space is effectively transformed into a stage for parallel discourses, multiple representations, and streams of messages. Consequently, the movement of information acquires functional, networked, and systemically autopoietic qualities, as seen through the prism of structural functionalism (T. Parsons)<sup>1</sup>, the theory of the network society (M. Castells)<sup>2</sup>, and systems communication theory (N. Luhmann)<sup>3</sup>.

Referring to Talcott Parsons's structural-functionalist perspective (Parsons, 1951)<sup>4</sup>, each city carries out a range of vital functions within a broader social system. In terms of socio-communicative activities, the media facilitate adaptation, since local television, radio, and online publications help orient residents amidst political, economic, and cultural shifts. In addition, mass media contribute to goal attainment by assisting in formulating collective tasks (urban development, greening initiatives, educational projects). Integration is enabled through a shared information space, wherein various social groups experience

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<sup>1</sup> Parsons, T. (1951), *The Social System*, The Free Press, New York, 404 p.

<sup>2</sup> Castells, M. (2010), *The Rise of the Network Society*. 2nd ed., Blackwell, Oxford, 597 p.

<sup>3</sup> Luhmann, N. (2012), *Introduction to Systems Theory*, MPG Books Group, Bodmin, 284 p.

<sup>4</sup> Parsons, T. (1951), *The Social System*, The Free Press, New York, 404 p.

unity, thus reducing social distance. Pattern maintenance is reflected in the manner by which media and social networks cultivate fundamental values – respect for history, civic engagement – «consolidating» important orientations in the collective consciousness. Ultimately, communicative activity synchronises the city's systemic elements (the political sphere, economic relations, culture, everyday life) and ensures the formation of a cohesive information environment.

**The aim** of this study is to identify and theoretically substantiate the media-communication processes in the contemporary city, as well as to ascertain how these communication processes form, support, and transform urban space as a social system.

**Analysis of Recent Studies and Publications.** The role of media in shaping urban spaces, the information environment, and social transformations has been extensively examined in contemporary academic discourse. Chernysh (2024) delves into the factors of mediatization within urban environments, emphasizing the significance of digitalization and the development of information and communication technologies that intensify urban processes.<sup>5</sup> Seleznieva (2022) offers a theoretical framework for understanding the term «media space», asserting its relevance for the academic exploration of the information society. She posits that media space constitutes a segment of the broader informational space, characterized by unique features such as its subject composition and immaterial components.<sup>6</sup> Temchenko (2020) investigates urban media practices in both European and Ukrainian contexts, accentuating the impact of local and hyper-local media projects on the construction of urban identity.<sup>7</sup> Avraham (2000) examines the portrayal of cities in the news media, identifying factors that influence the nature and extent of media coverage of urban areas. His work underscores the importance of media images in decision-making processes related to tourism, and investment.<sup>8</sup> Wold (2022) explores the use of social media as a source of information in Norwegian newspapers, demonstrating how ordinary individuals become active participants in media discourse through the virality of their content on social platforms.<sup>9</sup>

**Methodological Basis of the Research.** The theoretical and methodological framework of the research is built on an interdisciplinary combination of structural functionalism (T. Parsons), according to which the city is considered a subsystem of a broader social system, performing media-adaptive, goal-oriented, integrative, and pattern-maintaining functions<sup>10</sup>; the theory of the network society (M. Castells), which highlights the influence of global information flows and network interaction shaping the local nature of urban communications<sup>11</sup>; and systems communication theory (N. Luhmann)<sup>12</sup>, according

<sup>5</sup> Черниш, А. (2024), «Чинники медіатизації міста». Вчені записки ТНУ імені В. І. Вернадського. Серія: Філологія. Журналістика, Том 35(74), №3, ч.2, с. 84-88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32782/2710-4656/2024.3.2/14>

<sup>6</sup> Селезньова, О. (2022), «Термін «медіа-простір»: теоретичний підхід». Науковий вісник Ужгородського національного університету, №70, с. 359-363. <https://doi.org/10.24144/2307-3322.2022.70.57>.

<sup>7</sup> Temchenko, L.V. (2020), «Урбаністичні медіапрактики: європейський та український досвід». Communications and Communicative Technologies, vol. 20, pp. 80-90. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15421/292012>

<sup>8</sup> Avraham, E. (2000), «Cities and their news media images». Cities, vol. 17, no. 5, pp. 363-370.

<sup>9</sup> Wold, T. (2022), «Ordinary People and Social Media as Sources in Norwegian Newspapers». Journalism and Media, 2022, vol. 3(4), pp. 750-770. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia3040050>

<sup>10</sup> Parsons, T. (1951), The Social System, The Free Press, New York, 404 p.

<sup>11</sup> Castells, M. (2010), The Rise of the Network Society. 2nd ed., Blackwell, Oxford, 597 p.

<sup>12</sup> Luhmann, N. (2012), Introduction to Systems Theory, MPG Books Group, Bodmin, 284 p.

to which the city emerges as an autopoietic subsystem that, through self-observation and the continuous exchange of messages, supports and reproduces its own structures (Luhmann)<sup>13</sup>. The scholarly foundation is enriched by works on urban studies, media sociology, and the information society (McQuire<sup>14</sup>; Silverstone<sup>15</sup>; Chernysh<sup>16</sup>).

**Presentation of the Main Research Material.** Within an information society, social interaction is inseparable from the media sphere, which encompasses both professional media outlets and user-generated content. Digitised forms of communication intertwine with the traditional urban environment, creating hybrid social practices. The Australian researcher Scott McQuire conceptualises the contemporary city as a «media-architectural complex», in which the interaction between architecture, media platforms, and social practices gives rise to new experiential spaces<sup>17</sup>.

Traditional media (television, radio, newspapers) have evolved and now operate within an era of online broadcasting and interactive platforms. This evolution reflects a constant shift in consumer preferences – from standard messaging formats to individualised, often network-based content. The media can shape and disseminate perceptions of urban locations by fostering «emotional attachment» and identification, providing channels for transmitting collective memories, associations, humour, and critical observations.

Among the typical functions of mass media, one usually distinguishes informational, political, culture-forming, ideological, cognitive, entertainment, educational, and advertising roles. Yet the function of the media does not end here. Concurrently, as a structural component of communication in modern society and in the everyday life of the city, mass media perform a structure-forming role for society, reproducing and adjusting the system of social relations.

For instance, despite the digitalisation wave, many cities continue to maintain local radio stations that serve as vital sources of real-time updates about social events, road conditions, weather forecasts, and cultural activities. Such radio effectively fulfils an integrative function, generating a sense of unity at the level of daily ritual – the background «voice of the city».

Journalists increasingly resort to social networks and blogs to identify themes, gather news promptly, and interact with audiences. In media discourse, the city is portrayed from diverse perspectives – as a site of crises and routine challenges and simultaneously a platform for creativity or art-therapeutic practices. Thus, social networks enable a deeper understanding of public processes and emotional reactions of residents, offering a space for discussion, expressions of solidarity, and the search for shared ideas.

Local newspapers, whether in print or electronic form, supplement the communication network. They are often founded or funded by local businesses or directly by city councils.

<sup>13</sup> Luhmann, N. (2012), Introduction to Systems Theory, MPG Books Group, Bodmin, 284 p.

<sup>14</sup> McQuire, S. (2008), The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space. SAGE Publications Ltd. 240 p.

<sup>15</sup> Silverstone, R. (2007), Media and Morality: on the Rise of the Mediapolis, Polity press, Cambridge, 215 p.

<sup>16</sup> Черниш, А. (2024), «Чинники медіатизації міста». Вчені записки ТНУ імені В. І. Вернадського. Серія: Філологія. Журналістика, т. 35(74), №3, ч.2, с. 84-88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32782/2710-4656/2024.3.2/14>

<sup>17</sup> McQuire, S. (2008), The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space. SAGE Publications Ltd, 240 p.

Weekly publications may contain thematic sections on the city's history, prominent figures, or cultural events. Even small local outlets posted online can reach a far broader readership, including potential investors or labour migrants. Extending Luhmann's argument<sup>18</sup>, newspapers perform a self-observational function for the city: through ongoing publications on pressing issues and future prospects, feedback is transmitted between the public and local authorities.

City portals – official municipal websites, interactive maps, e-governance services, and digital encyclopaedias, including Wikipedia – play a significant role in the digitalised world. Such platforms undertake an adaptive function, aligning the city with the modern demands of technological efficiency. The introduction of e-portals modifies the mechanism of the city's self-observation: through online queries and submissions, citizens can monitor administrative processes, while the authorities gain more precise insights into public sentiments and expectations.

No less significant is that in the modern city, alongside journalism, there exist other forms of communication, including advertising, PR, campaigning, and propaganda. In the context of information overload, where audiences are fragmented, and attention is limited, a convergence of communication formats takes place. For instance, the digital edition of a local newspaper can become an instrument of political influence or a PR campaign, with editorial «gatekeeping» utilised to advance messages favouring specific groups.

Luhmann posits that social structures are self-referential entities that arise and are reproduced through communication<sup>19</sup>. Within an urban setting, a core function is the preservation of systemic codes (legal, economic, cultural, political), communicated among different audiences via the media. In this way, the continuity and coherence of content is ensured; it supports the city's mechanism of self-observation, through which the city evaluates its problems and achievements via collective discourse, and it fuels the «autopoietic cycle» that continuously generates new messages. Any published journalistic piece can spark discussions, prompting systemic renewal or notable responses from local authorities or public initiatives.

According to Manuel Castells, the modern city operates as a nodal point in global financial-information networks that are not attached to any specific territory in the classical sense<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, traditional formats (press, radio, television) converge with internet platforms, mobile applications, and social networks. Residents can broadcast their impressions at any time, connecting to global discussions. This decentralization of the information landscape amplifies the complexity of communications and fosters competition among different narratives; even minor events can achieve extensive resonance in the public consciousness.

The current media sphere offers opportunities for creativity and self-expression, as demonstrated by recent research on creative thinking in social networks.<sup>21</sup> With the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, user-generated content (UGC) significantly reshapes the

<sup>18</sup> Luhmann, N. (2012), *Introduction to Systems Theory*, MPG Books Group, Bodmin, 284 p.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Castells, M. (2010), *The Rise of the Network Society*. 2nd ed., Blackwell, Oxford, 597 p.

<sup>21</sup> Wang, L., Ismail Kamal, J. (2022), «Social Media and Creativity of College Students: A Literature Review», *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, vol. 7(10). URL: <https://msocialsciences.com/index.php/mjssh/article/view/1829/1379> (accessed 01 February 2025).

online media landscape. Urban space emerges as an array of unique sites, wherein each resident or tourist expresses an individual emotional-cultural experience through posts and photographs. This heightens emotional engagement and fosters people's attachment to the city.

Under conditions of digitalization and «McDonaldisation» (Ritzer), the boundaries between professional and amateur content are blurred, and cultural standards are often standardized, as a substantial share of the audience demands straightforward, automated solutions. Meanwhile, professional media strive to survive under new business models and financial restrictions by employing interactive formats, advertising, native content, and so forth. This raises the question of how “mass” modern digital media really are, given their targeting of ever more segmented audiences.

Media practices of local residents and visitors, particularly tourists, also significantly shape the image of the city by generating stories, photographs, and videos that expand the traditional urban media discourse. These phenomena are examined in the context of user-generated content and creativity (Wold, 2022<sup>22</sup>; Wang, Ismail Kamal, 2022<sup>23</sup>; Tourists and residents on social networks become the authors of city narratives, capturing local distinctiveness, micro-histories, and everyday details, thus shaping a collective image which may differ substantially from official portrayals. These perceptions affect emotional attachment to the city and structure people's understanding of its space.

In general, the contemporary urban media sphere is transforming everyday life, stimulating the emergence of new forms of self-expression, entertainment, and professional endeavour. Intensive use of social networks can spark creative thinking, amplifying the exchange of ideas and experiences. Simultaneously, information overload often diverts attention from deeper forms of creative practice. The establishment of «online laboratories» of urban life already illustrates how ordinary individuals produce content, serve as authors and moderators of public debate, and coordinate volunteer or civic initiatives.

**Conclusions.** In light of current urban processes, the media have become a living manifestation of post-industrial, communicative, and creative practices. The modern city cannot be reduced simply to its physical infrastructure and local institutions; it is increasingly acquiring the characteristics of a complex communication system that integrates traditional and digital formats of mass information. Urban space emerges as a conglomerate of interconnected media practices: from local radio stations and newspapers that promote everyday ritual integration, to decentralised user-generated content capable of «going viral» on social networks and mobilising communities. All this reveals significant media functions: from helping residents adapt to rapid changes, integrating social groups, and shaping collective behavioural patterns, to the implementation of the city's self-observation and autopoietic reproduction.

Social networks, blogs, online maps, review platforms, digital museums, and archives collectively form a multi-layered field wherein the city mirrors itself, reflects, comments, and modifies its structure. Such networked conditions involve risks associated with

<sup>22</sup> Wold, T. (2022), «Ordinary People and Social Media as Sources in Norwegian Newspapers». *Journalism and Media*, vol. 3(4), pp. 750-770. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia3040050>

<sup>23</sup> Wang, L., Ismail Kamal, J. (2022), «Social Media and Creativity of College Students: A Literature Review», *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, vol. 7(10). URL: <https://msocialsciences.com/index.php/mjssh/article/view/1829/1379> (accessed 01 February 2025).

propaganda, information overload, McDonaldisation, or the erasure of local authenticity. Simultaneously, existing digital analytics mechanisms offer deeper insights into the behaviours of urban residents, enabling collaboration between businesses and communities, as well as integrated marketing solutions. Ultimately, the city as a «communication hub» can no longer be considered merely a material space; it also functions as a symbolic network where information signals determine its tempo and developmental trajectories.

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## МЕДІАКОМУНІКАЦІЇ У СУСПІЛЬНОМУ ВИМІРІ МІСТА

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У статті проаналізовано медіакомунікаційний аспект соціального виміру сучасного міста, яке є не лише матеріальним, а й символічним простором, де формуються та відтворюються соціальні зв'язки, ідентичності й культурні практики. Предмет дослідження – комунікаційні процеси в урбаністичному середовищі, що реалізуються як через традиційні ЗМІ, так і через цифрові мережеві платформи. Мета роботи – виявлення особливостей функціонування медіа у міському просторі, зокрема їхньої ролі у формуванні урбаністичного дискурсу, інтеграції соціальних груп та у підтримці ідентичності міста.

Методологічна основа дослідження ґрунтується на міждисциплінарному поєднанні структурно-функціоналізму (Т. Парсонс), теорії мережевого суспільства (М. Кастельс) і системної комунікаційної теорії (Н. Луман). Застосовано порівняльний аналіз медіа-практик і особливостей медіапродуктів міста, що дало змогу ідентифікувати ключові комунікаційні тенденції та їхній вплив на соціальні процеси у місті.

У процесі дослідження встановлено, що медіа виконують не лише інформативну чи розважальну функцію, а є важливим інтегративним чинником для міських спільнот. Вони сприяють конструюванню колективної пам'яті, зміцненню соціальної солідарності та самоспостереженню міста як соціальної системи. Зроблено висновок, що сучасне місто не можна розглядати окремо від медіакомунікаційного контексту. Медіа стали каталізатором соціальних змін, створюють умови для полілогу, демократизації інформаційних потоків і формування глокальних ідентичностей.

*Ключові слова:* медіакомунікації, місто, мережеве суспільство, соціальні медіа, міський простір, цифровізація.