

Axiological Foundations of Youth Media Education

Aksjologiczne podstawy edukacji medialnej młodzieży

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Abstract: This article explores the axiological foundations of media education, particularly with regard to young people. Through a critical analysis of relevant literature and synthesis of research findings on key axiological and ethical areas of the media, the article aims to present crucial aspects of young people's axiological development, including education concerning the inalienable dignity of each person, concern for truth, accountability for one's words, education in critical thinking, and an awareness of the media's impact on key dimensions of human life, as well as the imperative of continuous self-education in this domain. Scholarly, interdisciplinary analyses confirm that contemporary media culture demands urgent and ongoing media competence education, especially for young people, as well as the shaping of their axiological and moral perspectives, without which it is impossible to be a conscious and responsible participant in media culture.

Keywords: axiology, ethics, media education, youth, dignity, truth, responsibility for words, self-education

Abstrakt: Artykuł koncentruje się wokół zagadnienia aksjologicznych podstaw edukacji medialnej, zwłaszcza z uwzględnieniem młodzieży. W oparciu o metodę krytycznej analizy źródeł w postaci literatury przedmiotu, a także dokonując próby scalenia wyników badań nad głównymi obszarami aksjologicznymi i etycznymi mediów, a więc zsyntetyzowania ich, zaprezentowano takie ważne aspekty formacji aksjologicznej młodzieży jak edukacja do niezbywalnej godności człowieka, troska o prawdę, odpowiedzialność za słowo, edukacja w zakresie krytycznego myślenia, a także świadomość wpływu mediów na relewantne obszary życia człowieka oraz permanentna autoedukacja w tym zakresie. Naukowe, interdyscyplinarne analizy potwierdzają, że współczesna kultura medialna wymaga pilnego i permanentnego kształcenia kompetencji medialnych, zwłaszcza ludzi młodych, oraz formowania ich postaw aksjologicznych i moralnych, bez których nie można być świadomym użytkownikiem kultury medialnej.

Słowa kluczowe: aksjologia, etyka, edukacja medialna, młodzież, godność, prawda, odpowiedzialność za słowo, autoedukacja



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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world is characterised by the extraordinary dynamism of media development, which has become an inseparable element of daily life, exerting a significant influence on individuals through three types of impact: direct, communicative, and subconscious. "Each of these influences reveals a panorama of various 'traces' left in the human psyche by contact with mass media" (Lepa 1996, 103). Therefore, from an educational perspective, it is important to recognise the effectiveness of the media's influence and interference in human life, with particular emphasis on young people.

Media outlets have been demonstrated to exert a significant influence on the formation of public opinion, the decision-making processes of individuals, and the evolution of information technology. Consequently, from a social, pedagogical, psychological and ethical standpoint, there is a necessity for media education, particularly for children and young people.

This form of education remains an area of knowledge that has not been thoroughly explored, partly due to its multifaceted and interdisciplinary nature. It concerns the nature of the media and the ability to engage with them responsibly but also requires work and reflection not exclusively the domain of media experts. This field draws upon the achievements of disciplines such as pedagogy, film studies, communication studies, cultural studies, literary theory, sociology, anthropology, political science, art history, aesthetics, and their sub-disciplines, for example, media pedagogy, media sociology, and media aesthetics (Ogonowska 2013, 10), as well as ethics, axiology, epistemology, and even metaphysics. This multidisciplinary approach enables a broader and more profound perspective on media education, recognising a range of important issues that require in-depth reflection, allowing users to navigate the world of media in a beneficial, prudent, and ethical manner.

Contemporary media education cannot be limited to developing technical or informational competencies alone. Its essence, particularly in the context of the media's influence on young people's attitudes and choices, lies in axiological foundations, i.e., the values that should accompany every process of interpreting, creating, and receiving media messages. This education should be rooted in values such as truth, responsibility, freedom, the dignity of the human person, and the common good.

Media education, therefore, cannot be axiologically neutral; it must advocate for truth, freedom, and responsibility for one's words. The axiological foundations of media should be universally applicable to address the challenges of the global infosphere effectively. A key component of media education lies in its axiological foundations, which are indispensable to the very concept of education itself. Axiology in education serves as the fundamental source of educational activities. Suppose we want to achieve our educational goals and reach young people. In that case, we must first establish a catalogue of values that will guide them and serve as

reliable and effective signposts throughout the educational process. The axiology of education undoubtedly helps shape specific attitudes and behaviours in children, young people, and other participants in the educational process, developing the necessary awareness of the importance of values in media reception, the ability to understand them critically and to use them responsibly.

The axiological and moral foundations of media education are inextricably linked to the idea of the subjectivity of every media recipient and their development as a conscious member of the information society. This education not only transmits knowledge but also forms, educates, and prepares young people for responsibility, engagement, courageous critical analysis of content, and defending their beliefs in accordance with their moral compass. In contemporary educational practice in many countries, efforts are made to incorporate media education into the context of media reception; however, their effectiveness varies. In some countries, such as Finland and Canada, media education is an integral part of school curricula and includes, among other things, analysing sources of information, recognising manipulation, and assessing the credibility of content. In Poland, media education remains underdeveloped, often limited to optional classes or projects implemented by non-governmental organisations or non-public educational entities. This is due, in part, to the lack of ministerial programmes for this type of education and the fact that digital media are constantly changing traditional patterns of receiving and interpreting content, which is challenging to keep up with today.

1. EDUCATION TOWARDS DIGNITY

At the core of any mature contemplation on humanity lies the concept of dignity, a cornerstone of morality, human rights, and social relations (Chalas 2021, 35). Janusz Mariański states directly: “No concept holds greater significance for the cultural and moral trajectory of Europe and the world than that of the human person” (Mariański 2017, 7). There is no dignity without the person, just as there is no person without dignity. These two concepts are closely intertwined and form the basis for understanding the phenomenon of the human being. However, the answer to the question ‘Who is man?’ turns out to be not so easy, especially for a young person who expects an answer to such a question. Throughout the history of anthropological thought, a plurality of answers to this question have emerged. On the one hand, the human person is often portrayed as the centre of the universe, an almost omnipotent “creator and ruler” shaping and directing the world. On the other hand, his status, particularly in contemporary contexts, is not so apparent at all because it is often reified, as if he did not possess the fundamental value that protects him in every situation – personal dignity by being a person. For humans due to their ontological and cognitive structure, they are persons (Chung in-Sang 1988, 83).

The Psalmist's query in Psalm 8 of the Old Testament, "What is the human person?" is met with the following reflection:

"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands."

Psalm 8:3–6

These words undoubtedly express one thing: admiration for the human person, rooted in the unique and inherent nature with which they have been endowed. This uniqueness is expressed in what, in the language of anthropology, is called dignity, which is a universal and autotelic value. A value shared by all human beings, regardless of their characteristics. "Dignity is a distinctive value, exclusive to human beings" (Glinkowski 2024, 39).

This value is perhaps best articulated by the philosophical movement of personalism, which elevates human dignity to an inalienable attribute of the individual. Christian personalism captures the essence of human personal dignity by portraying the human being in a personal relationship with God, their Creator, from whom they originate (Granat 1985, 79). This perspective further emphasises the importance of constructing social life to serve the good of each person and stresses the primacy of the human person over social conditions and mechanisms. The origins of this movement can be traced back to Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. In modern times, it is represented by thinkers such as G. Marcel, J. Maritain, E. Mounier, M. Scheler, E. Stein, K. Wojtyła, W. Granat, and C. Bartnik (Bartnik 2001, 510). "Personalism, therefore, reveals the greatness and uniqueness of a human being against the backdrop of the spectrum of existence, differing from other beings precisely because of the inalienable dignity inherent in every person in an essential, equal, and inseparable manner, regardless of any characteristics such as age, gender, disability, illness, origin, views, race, religion, nationality, or other attributes, as well as independently of their behaviour, conduct, and choices." (Zygmunt 2009, 37).

Human dignity is not merely an abstract concept; it constitutes a tangible value that must be recognised, affirmed, and protected. Dignity manifests itself in interpersonal relationships and moral obligations towards others. Education paradigms that ignore this crucial dimension risk fostering deficits in empathy, mutual acceptance, and compassion, potentially exacerbating antisocial tendencies.

It is essential to recognise that human dignity does not derive from heteronomous sources, such as the Constitution or other legal acts, but rather from the very essence of being human. It serves as the foundation of all human rights. The human person perceives their dignity in an axiological sense, albeit one that may vary in intensity

across individuals. Therefore, education should instil in every person the conviction that even those who seemingly lack qualities highly esteemed by society nonetheless embody an image of genuine humanity grounded in human dignity. Dignity is a substantial value inherent to the person, which cannot be lost even through immoral conduct. The principle of human dignity serves, therefore, as a universal foundation for human existence. This concept requires that education be recognised as a space where young people develop their ability to distinguish between lower values (utility, pleasure) and higher values (truth, goodness, beauty, dignity).

Educating young people to understand human dignity is not merely a pedagogical act but, above all, an axiological and moral process that shapes the subjectivity and responsibility of everyone. Each human being exists as a subject who, as a rational, free, and autonomous being in the spiritual realm, is a conscious and free entity, unique within the cosmos due to their inalienable auto-telic value of dignity, with which their Creator has endowed everyone. Personalism strongly emphasises this reality, asserting that every human person should be respected by others at every stage of their life from the moment of conception and regardless of their circumstances. Personalism, in its deepest essence, embodies authentic humanism, referred to as integral humanism, whose rich tradition has always emphasised the greatness of the human person (Maritain 1981, 25).

Robert Spaemann emphasises that the content of the term “dignity” cannot be captured by an abstract concept, as its understanding is possible through examples or paraphrases (Spaemann 2022, 97). Therefore, if someone says that dignity does not exist when they look at their own experience or the experience of others when their humanity or that of others is violated, they will see the good that is the human person. Therefore, in education, understanding dignity plays a crucial role, as without its presence in human life, it is impossible to comprehend oneself, one’s humanity, vocation, and the need for respect towards oneself and others. Educating young people to achieve a profound understanding of human dignity is the essence of personalistic education. This type of education protects and develops human dignity. In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II noted that a flawed understanding of the human person as an element of a social mechanism leads to a loss of the sense of individual dignity and moral responsibility (John Paul II 1991, 13). The education of children and young people should, therefore, emphasise personal development, independent thinking and ethically grounded decision-making. Pointing out this attribute of humanity, protecting it, and caring for its inviolability are the basis for the moral development of young people, leading to an increase in awareness, understanding, and affirming others.

Educating young people about dignity shapes their attitudes of responsibility for the community and fosters openness to the pluralism of others’ attitudes, worldviews, beliefs, and reasons. Promoting the value of dignity helps eradicate both overt and covert prejudices and stereotypes, creating a more inclusive environment. Furthermore, it has a significant impact on strengthening one’s identity and sense of individual worth, which is the basis for healthy mental and

social development in everyone. Raising children and young people is not about imparting knowledge but about supporting them in becoming themselves. To be human is to be aware of one's freedom and responsibility.

Amidst pressing global crises, such as migration, social inequalities, ongoing warfare, and the depreciation of human life, education for dignity is now essential from the earliest years of schooling. In *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul II noted that human dignity does not diminish with time but instead becomes increasingly relevant, particularly in the context of scientific and technological progress (John Paul II 1979, 16). Dignity education should, therefore, prepare the youngest generations for responsible participation in social and global life. The cultivation of respect for human dignity is not merely one potential direction for education but rather its fundamental essence. At its centre is the conviction that every human person is a fundamental value, in and of themselves. Education understood in this way not only protects against the instrumentalisation of the human person but shapes a more ethical and empathetic society.

In the face of growing social tensions, disinformation, and the erosion of interpersonal bonds, axiological education becomes a *sine qua non-condition* for preserving the humanistic foundations of culture. Education devoid of philosophy of values becomes merely intellectual training, and a society without values risks becoming merely intellectual instruction; a society lacking values is a society without a future. Therefore, the use of media, as emphasised in the "Decree on the Means of Social Communication," necessitates careful consideration of "the conditions and all circumstances, such as the purpose, persons, place, time, and other factors in which the communication takes place, which can change or even distort its dignity" (Paul VI 1963, 4).

2. CONCERN FOR TRUTH

In the realm of media education for young people, truth also comes to the fore. Truth, much like dignity, stands as an autotelic value – inherently valuable and important, regardless of ulterior motives or advantages. Truth has value in and of itself, for without truth, trust, reliability, transparency, honesty or certainty in human life would not be possible. Truth is essential not because of its potential benefits or utility but because it is inherently good and valuable. Truth has always been the foundation of human knowledge and communication, which is why its role in media education for young people cannot be overestimated. Therefore, truth is an axiological category, without which understanding a value-driven reality would be challenging. As Morbitzer (2014, 131) notes, "a lack of understanding of a specific concept prevents its interception, and thus practical respect and life by a given axiological category".

In today's world, where information spreads at astonishing speed and the media play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and attitudes, truth is an indispensable value in itself. Media education should be grounded in the pursuit and discovery of truth and even in sensitising young people to it because only then is it possible to educate critical

and conscious recipients. In this context, truth serves as the benchmark for objectivity, accuracy, and accountability in information dissemination. Youth involved in media education must learn to differentiate between authentic and fabricated information, identify manipulation and disinformation, and appreciate that the pursuit of truth requires effort, reflective thought, and a commitment to the quality of communication.

Embracing truth with care means that media education for young people should promote values such as diligence in conveying facts, objectivity, reliability, and critical thinking. Teachers, educators, and the media themselves should work to protect the truth, as neglecting it leads to eroded trust, disinformation, and the undermining of fundamental social principles. Concern for truth in media education is not only a duty but also a moral imperative for schools, educational centres, educational programmes, as well as parents and religious educators, which aims to shape conscious, responsible and ethical media users. Its presence and care are paramount in building a community founded on knowledge, mutual trust, and accountability. In this way, concern for truth becomes a concern for humanity, which, as the Stoics emphasised, invariably needs truth, especially when its necessity is questioned, and truth itself is losing its meaning.

The dictatorship of relativism in the contemporary postmodern world diminishes truth. As Krzysztof Zanussi writes in his essay "Prawda czy towar?" (Truth or Commodity?), the owners of a significant global news network openly stated that information is a commodity, and it must be tailored to the consumer's desires. Here, truth is treated as a commodity. As Shakespeare mocked relativism, "it is like as you imagine it" (Zanussi 1996, 255). Axionormative relativism has reduced objective truth to an anti-value. In his article "Prawda w mediach" (Truth in the Media), Krzysztof Zanussi argues that "it is impossible to discuss truth in the media or any other sense today without referring to postmodernism, the fashionable nemesis of Marxism in the humanities. This movement, in its popular form, instils fear of those who proclaim the existence of objective or, worse, absolute truth. It warns that proponents of this truth will impose it by force, threatening totalitarianism, fundamentalism, and a dark dictatorship. I painfully encountered this while guest lecturing in Polish studies in Warsaw a few years ago. Young people were discouraged from seeking any truth in favour of relativism. Consequently, I saw a group of lost young people, dangerous in their way and prone to extremes. It is uncertainty that drives people to violence; those with something to hold onto are more resistant to despair. Fanatics often come from the lost, less so from seekers. However, to seek, one must believe that truth exists, even if it is always incomplete and imperfect in the form, we can assimilate it" (Zanussi 2008, 192).

In today's postmodern culture, the world fragments into numerous mini-discourses, existing as isolated islands in an archipelago on the ocean. Living in a pluralism of subjective truths, which celebrates diverse meaning systems and divergent thinking, undermines the value of objective truth. The very diversity, alternativity, and ambiguity are today recognised as values deserving of respect, leading to the subsequent assertion that all opinions, beliefs, and convictions are equally valid and useful. In a pluralistic world of truth, accommodating multiple viewpoints and "many

truths,” there is no place for proclaiming objective truths. Individuals no longer express the truth that is intersubjectively communicative and verifiable but present their intellectual product in a “private” language, engaging in a “language game,” sensing that it leads nowhere, as games are for amusement, not for seeking truth. Media education, in the sense of truth, should become a priority and the highest ethical requirement in relations with the media, both in preparing and training future journalists for their profession and in educating young media consumers. Journalists, above all, should be concerned about truth, as stipulated in existing deontological codes. Luka Brajnović, a pioneer of journalistic deontology and former professor at the University of Navarra’s Institute of Journalism, stated in an interview with Rafał Grabowski: “I would advise journalists always to tell the truth, that is, always to be convinced that what they say reflects reality. They must fight in defence of truth, not only convey it but also fight for it for the common good, for the good of the audience, and the good of the state in an ethical sense. It is a unique mission. (...) Journalism must be based on truth. If it distorts it, it is not journalism but propaganda and manipulation. Journalism is informing, and there is no informing without reference to truth” (Brajnović 1996, 21). In journalism, truth is a fundamental norm, an obligation of impartiality, and the accurate reporting of facts, distinguishing it from falsehood. There is a constant need for differentiation. “Either there is truth, or there is a lie; either there is good, or there is evil. Lies cannot be treated as a mild, harmless drug. A lie is the death of a journalist” (Niewęłowski 1996, 32).

3. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORD

Responsibility for the word is intrinsically linked to truth, particularly given the amplified power of words in contemporary culture, extending beyond media contexts. According to Ewa Badyda, “Thanks to current means of communication and new forms of social communication, it has a wider reach and is practically unrestricted. Thanks to modern media, the scale of its persuasive impact also increases – it can influence the behaviour and attitudes of communities, which is illustrated by many examples, from the successes of Goebbels’ propaganda through the newspeak of the communist era, which became a tool for maintaining political power over society, to today’s consumer behaviours shaped under the influence of television commercials” (Badyda 2012, 175).

However, behind the media stand specific people who either accept responsibility for the content they publish or, in the name of a falsely understood freedom of speech, distort the truth across various fields of journalistic work. Adam Lepa aptly notes that “the high function of the journalistic profession, far exceeding the mere mechanical transmission of information and shaping the attitudes of individuals and society and thus having in its power the souls of citizens, requires above all a deep sense of responsibility for the transmitted word and image” (Lepa 1996, 111). Contemporary media today have a significant impact not only on shaping so-called public opinion, influencing the social, political and cultural attitudes of their recipients, but also on

shaping individual preferences, worldviews, behaviours, tastes, and beliefs of people, especially young people. In this context, the responsibility for the word – both in the ethical and axiological sphere – is a significant issue. This responsibility is not merely a moral matter but is the axiological foundation upon which the actions of the media and their creators should be based. Therefore, the ethical and professional responsibility of journalists for the word, for their power to create and influence reality, become an issue that not only needs to be addressed in the media but also needs to be controlled.

Zygmunt Bauman, in describing modernity, claims that it is “fluid,” “liquid,” subject to processes of “liquefaction” and “dissolution,” “dissolving everything solid” (Bauman 2000, 7). Therefore, in the era of liquid modernity, media communication has become a tool not only for conveying information but also for shaping new social attitudes and values and for “dissolving” established previously practised ones. Awareness of this situation requires even greater vigilance towards the messages conveyed. In this context, responsibility for words means consciously and ethically selecting content, avoiding manipulation and disinformation, and respecting the rights of the audience. As the “fourth estate,” the media must act in the interest of truth and integrity in the name of ethical responsibility in the public sphere. Hence, the requirement of responsibility for the word. This responsibility requires journalists and editors not only to adhere to ethical codes but also to reflect on the consequences of the content they publish.

It is worth remembering that words have the power not only to inform but also to evoke emotions, which can have both positive and negative consequences. Within such a framework, a critical question emerges concerning the accountability of media professionals for the content they transmit to a mass audience, whether through print media, radio broadcasting, television transmission, or the Internet.

Contemporary challenges related to the responsibility for words are particularly evident in the age of social media, where every user, especially young people, can become a content provider. This phenomenon entails risks such as the dissemination of disinformation, hate speech, and fake news. Within this context, it is important to emphasise that this responsibility lies not only with professional journalists but also on all users of mass media, who exercise critical thinking skills and learn to “separate the wheat from the chaff.” As Alina Rynio emphasises, “The responsible functioning of a human being is, in fact, one dimension of their maturity, and teaching people responsibility belongs to the fundamental categories of pedagogy. This is because responsibility is the foundation of human self-realisation, morality, and social bonds. The essence of responsibility lies in the fact that a person contributes to achieving their good and the good of others” (Rynio 2021, 14).

4. EDUCATION IN CRITICAL THINKING

In the contemporary landscape, we are confronted with an unprecedented flood of information, requiring recipients to be able to selectively filter, analyse, interpret, and evaluate media content (Penszko and Wasilewska 2024, 3). Therefore,

educating young people in critical thinking is becoming not only a desirable skill but a necessity for the informed and safe functioning of audiences. Experts from the Educational Research Institute point out in their excellent report, "Critical Thinking, Assessing the Credibility of Information. Findings from international educational research and literature review," that young consumer of social media, while declaring a high awareness of the dangers flowing from the media, often lack the tools to apply critical thinking in practice effectively. Thanks to the Internet, people have access to much more information, but their attention and ability to process this information are limited (Penszko and Wasilewska 2024, 4)

What constitutes critical thinking? Critical thinking represents a form of metacognition, as it encompasses the ability to identify fundamental elements within the content (or subject) of thought (e.g., assumptions, origins of facts, the credibility of information sources) and evaluate them using universal criteria such as clarity, relevance, reliability, truthfulness, and the strength of argumentation. The essence of critical thinking lies in the multifaceted and contextual analysis of information, activating reflexivity and meta-language, ultimately revealing underlying assumptions to form independent judgements or make informed decisions. Critical thinking, therefore, involves specific strategies for comprehending the cultural environment, including information and media culture, and associated patterns of behaviour" (Ogonowska 2013, 28). Concisely stated critical thinking involves evaluating information and arguments to formulate rational conclusions and identify innovative solutions. In ethics, this skill is termed prudence. Thus, critical thinking aligns with axiological and aretological contexts and forms the bedrock of media education for young people.

Adam Lepa observes that "criticism" tends to make people share their most important opinions with others. Therefore, one of the most visible symptoms of this attitude is the revelation of one's critical assessments and communication with others. A critical attitude towards the media excludes submissiveness to the opinions of others, even if they are very suggestive. These opinions are often contradictory and can, therefore, introduce mental chaos into people's minds, which is conducive to the formation of a critical attitude towards the mass media. This state, which is conducive to the formation of a critical attitude towards the mass media, is called "independence of thought." (Lepa 1998, 143).

Critical thinking is a self-regulating process that demands scepticism, openness to new ideas, and a willingness to revise one's beliefs considering new evidence. Can critical thinking be learned and passed on to others? Certainly, under specific conditions. Education in the context of critical thinking requires the systematic development of several crucial cognitive competencies. Research by Diane F. Halpern highlights the effectiveness of didactic strategies such as teaching independent problem-solving, analysing case studies, and conducting Socratic discussions (Halpern 1999, 71). Socratic discussions utilise dialogue and questioning to foster deeper reflection and critical thinking on a specific topic. The objective is not to persuade the interlocutor of one's point of view but to collaboratively arrive at the

truth through inquiry and analysis. This form of dialogue is exceptionally effective in educating both young individuals and fully developed adults.

Adam Lepa also recommends considering other postulates that shape critical thinking, including continuously expanding knowledge about the media, systematically engaging with media, and consistently acquiring information from multiple sources to compare diverse perspectives and attain a significant degree of credibility regarding both the medium and the information it disseminates. Furthermore, attitudes such as engaging in dialogue with others about media – where external opinions on media and published content can lead to constructive debate that fosters relatively objective criticism – cultivating intellectual curiosity essential for forming a critical attitude towards media, nurturing a friendly attitude towards media that can benefit individuals and society, and developing sensitivity in the realm of truth are crucial (Lepa 1998, 144-145).

An essential element in the skill of critical thinking is the cultivation of metacognition, which refers to an awareness of one's thought processes or, in other words, a conscious understanding of one's knowledge about thinking and the control thereof. Thus, metacognition is the continuous process of planning, monitoring, and evaluating how we think, learn, and acquire information (Pina, 2024). It encompasses, for example, the ability to gain knowledge about why, how, when, and where to apply what we have learned and discovered. Developing metacognitive skills can enhance the capacity for critical thinking and adaptation, and it can also effectively assist media consumers in learning how to receive and interpret acquired information, thereby fostering greater independence in their reception. Metacognitive skills are valuable not only in daily life, from professional endeavours to solving personal problems, but they also aid in thoughtful decision-making. Furthermore, reflection on one's thinking leads to prudence, resilience against manipulation and propaganda, and informed media consumption.

In the context of critical thinking, I would also like to draw particular attention to protection against manipulation, which enables the identification of persuasive and disinformation techniques employed in the media. Manipulation is ubiquitous in media communication and involves attempting to influence human consciousness by altering the perception of reality through distortion and deception. "This influence aims to distort information and limit the recipient's decisions, which are then not authentic because they are not made in truth and freedom. Manipulation is, therefore, a conscious action, not accidental; it is not a mistake or inaccuracy. It is planned but difficult to detect, and this is precisely where the strength of its influence on the human subconscious and the transformation of consciousness lies. This method of manipulating the means of communication ultimately concerns the individual, meaning it is always the manipulation of the individual" (Czuba 1996, 136-137). Thus, manipulation has two characteristic features: it is planned and concealed. The appropriate intention and its goal, which is always hidden, invariably co-determines the strictly manipulative action (Lepa 1995, 24-26).

The manipulation of the subconscious through visual and auditory means leaves profound imprints on the human psyche (Lepa 1995, 83). However, in contemporary times, especially in the age of artificial intelligence, the manipulation of images, which are easily generated using AI, is also increasingly recognised. Currently, a “civilisation of the image” prevails, which penetrates people’s consciousness most quickly and easily.

Manipulation is particularly dangerous for young people because it constitutes a form of control over the individual, effectively depriving them of their freedom and autonomy - the fundamental attributes of human dignity. Therefore, education in critical thinking in media reception is urgently needed for all recipients of social communication, primarily for their conscious, free, and responsible functioning in the media world. However, this requires a well-thought-out didactic strategy that considers the specifics of contemporary media, their quantity, and the ease of access to them. The systemic and systematic implementation of programmes that develop critical thinking is also related to the teaching of logic and hermeneutics, which should become an unquestionable and undeniable priority of educational policy, especially since psychologists unanimously emphasise that critical thinking is not innate but requires systematic education, training, and conscious practice.

5. AWARENESS OF MEDIA INFLUENCE ON USERS

In contemporary society, the media serve as the primary filter through which reality is interpreted. Consequently, from an axiological standpoint, value-oriented media education plays a crucial and indisputable role in shaping the axionormative consciousness of its recipients. Through such education, individuals learn to navigate the media landscape, for instance, to distinguish between information and opinion, between advertising and propaganda, authentic communication and manipulated portrayals of reality, and truth and falsehood. This ability to differentiate is not at all straightforward in today’s media environment. Sander van der Linden, a Dutch social psychologist, emphasises that “the illusory truth effect, in a way, precedes conscious reflection because when we see or hear something repeatedly, our brain reacts more quickly to such claims, as they are familiar. This is called ‘cognitive fluency,’ and unfortunately, the brain often misinterprets this reception of a message as a sign of its truthfulness. In other words, our brain assigns a higher logical value to claims we have encountered before. Research indicates one problematic consequence of this phenomenon: repeated exposure to false news leads people to consider sharing such messages with others as less unethical over time because they begin to perceive it as true” (Van der Linden 2024, 37-38). These studies thus demonstrate that properly formed awareness, in essence, equates to a well-informed media user who can make sound moral, civic, consumer, social, and entertainment choices.

Contemporary pedagogy, psychology, and ethics unequivocally indicate that media not only inform but also shape. They mainly influence uncritical young people. Consequently, research is being conducted on numerous media phenomena that have the most significant impact on media recipients. Phenomena such as information

bubbles, fake news, clickbait mechanisms, and “like beggars”—reactions and comments on social media obtained through deception or evoking pity—are already subjects of intensive research because they are of paramount importance in the perception of the world through media. Jakub Kuś, a psychologist of new technologies, explains that “Google Search—and other services of this company, such as Gmail—filters results, tailoring them to us. The Silicon Valley company, based on which links and topics we have previously clicked on, displays content and advertisements that are potentially appealing to us or align with our interests. Similarly, Facebook personalises sponsored articles, page suggestions, and advertisements” (Kuś 2024). Hence, there is an urgent need to acquire the necessary media literacy skills.

Research on media within the framework of media pedagogy emphasises the necessity of developing media competencies in children and adults, demonstrating that individuals who are better educated in media are less susceptible to unwanted media influences and can recognise the intentions of the sender more effectively and efficiently, and vice versa (Prazuner 2010, 48). This is of paramount importance for media users, enabling them to make prudent and thoughtful choices. In an information society, where people are almost constantly exposed to media messages—from news and advertisements to comments on social media, the question arises regarding the scope and nature of this influence. It must be remembered that the awareness of media users is shaped not only by the content they consume but also by the context in which it is presented, the methods of its presentation, the selection of words and images, as well as the specific technological and cultural conditions that determine the reception of information.

From a pedagogical perspective, it is significant that this process begins at a very early age—children and adolescents come into contact with media content before they acquire the skills to analyse it critically. Therefore, media education that aims not only to teach young recipients how to use media in a technical and technological aspect but also how to understand, interpret, and evaluate them in ethical, ideological, and social terms is of paramount importance. Shaping the awareness of a media user essentially means teaching them to think independently in conditions of information overload and chaos.

From a psychological standpoint, media influence awareness through mechanisms that are often invisible to the recipient. There are numerous such mechanisms today, and recipients are generally unaware of them, even though they effectively influence the reception of the message. The repetition of the message, the way it is framed, the choice of words and images, and the emotional intensity of the messages all contribute to certain content becoming ingrained in the user’s mind, regardless of its truthfulness. Research on framing, for example, which involves changing the context or perspective in such a way that a given fact can be interpreted differently than before, shows that evaluation and choice depend on how the problem is presented (Zielonka 2017, 42).

Furthermore, mechanisms such as the repetition effect, the illusion of truth, and cognitive heuristics cause individuals to unconsciously adopt certain narratives as their own, aligning them with their worldview. Social psychology also highlights

mechanisms of social influence, such as the authority effect, conformity, and the repetition effect, which are frequently employed in the media. Media strongly influence emotions and can amplify fears, especially when exposed to sensational or catastrophic content. Children and young people are particularly susceptible to this pressure. Awareness, therefore, is not only a field of reflection but also an area influenced by forces outside the rational control of the recipient.

From a media studies perspective, it is crucial to recognise that media function not only as tools for conveying content but also as social institutions actively participating in the 'production' of knowledge and identity. Contemporary digital media, using personalisation algorithms, engage in an interactive relationship with the user, tailoring content to their preferences. The result of this process can be the creation, through personalisation algorithms, of what is known as an information bubble, filter bubble, or "information cocoon," a situation in which a person using the Internet receives information pre-selected by algorithms based on data collected about them during their previous online activity (Werner 2021, 16). Thus, the recipient primarily receives information that confirms their previous choices, preferences, beliefs, and tastes. In such a context, the user's awareness becomes selective, and the image of the world becomes distorted.

In axiological terms, the influence of media on awareness is linked to the question of the responsibility of broadcasters and the ethical dimension of the message. However, this question is challenging because different media interpret the responsibility and ethics of the message differently. The differences stem mainly from the fact—as Jan Pleszczyński states—that although these two editorial offices refer to the same epistemic and ethical values, they interpret many concepts with axiological references differently and have different worldviews (Pleszczyński 2010, 79). In such a context, the recipient can easily become confused if they do not have adequate axiological preparation.

Media that consciously manipulate emotions spread falsehoods or oversimplify complex social problems, influencing people's choices in an unethical manner and violating their cognitive autonomy and need for truth. Therefore, media education must be based on the values already mentioned, respect, freedom, and responsibility—which form the foundation of conscious and responsible participation in media culture. Only then can a media user recognise the intentions of the message, distinguish information from manipulation, and maintain the ability to think independently.

The awareness of media users is a constantly evolving cognitive, emotional, and axiological construct. It is the result of several factors, including content, the form of the message, cultural context, and individual predispositions. Understanding the mechanisms by which media influence the attitudes and choices of individuals is not only a task for science but also a condition for building a society of conscious and responsible citizens. The awareness of media recipients should, therefore, be supported through educational activities, psychological resilience, and the promotion of ethical journalism. Only an integrated approach combining different fields of knowledge allows for effective recognition and counteraction of the adverse effects of media influence.

6. MEDIA SELF-EDUCATION

Contemporary media culture presents people with challenges that go beyond mere technical skills in operating digital devices. In an increasingly complex and dynamic information landscape, it is not enough to be a user—it is necessary to be a conscious participant in the media space, capable of independent, reflective, and responsible assessment of messages. Therefore, recipients of media need ongoing media self-education, which appears as a process not only of building competencies but, above all, of forming a responsible moral and axiological attitude towards the media world. It is a form of self-education that assumes the active and continuous pursuit of every individual to develop the ability to recognise values, cultivate an axiological sense, unmask manipulation, nurture truth, and use media messages responsibly and critically.

Media self-education cannot be seen merely as technical independence or proficiency in selecting content or using digital tools. Its foundation is concern for the internal formation of the person—for their moral sensitivity, axiological orientation, and capacity for self-reflection. A media user should be someone who not only consumes the content presented to them but also critically interprets it, considering values such as truth, justice, the common good, the dignity of the human person, and respect for others. In this sense, self-education becomes an ethical act through which individuals define their responsibility towards themselves, others, and the media society.

The fundamental premise of media self-education is the conviction that individuals are not born with a ready-made system of values and norms regarding the reception of media messages. Given the vastness and flood of content, its variability, and the often hidden, not always moral intentions of senders, continuous self-improvement and consolidation of moral resilience are necessary. This is particularly important in an era of axiological relativism and moral chaos, in which media often present values in a simplified, trivialised, or even ideologised manner. Independently shaping the ability to recognise good and evil in media messages requires a deep understanding of the cultural, philosophical, and spiritual context in which the recipient functions. It requires developing one's own, well-considered axiosphere. The basis of effective media self-education is, therefore, the recognition that values are not merely subjective preferences but are objective, communal, and even universal. Media, as tools of social communication, should be interpreted not only through the prism of utility or entertainment but also through the prism of their impact on human dignity, relationships with others, and authentic intersubjective dialogue. A recipient who becomes a conscious participant in the media space must be able to recognise when media become a source of misinformation, violence (real or symbolic), manipulation, propaganda, or “brainwashing” and actively resist it. In this sense, self-education becomes not only a path of personal development but also an expression of concern for the common good.

It is impossible to discuss self-education without acknowledging the importance of internal motivation. It is this that drives the process, which is based on self-reflection, critical analysis of one's own media habits, a willingness to learn from mistakes, and an openness to change, including a more frugal use of media. Media self-education is also the conscious shaping of one's information environment: the ability to choose reliable sources, reject morally or cognitively harmful content and engage in valuable dialogues within the media space. It is a process that does not end at any stage of life because media are constantly evolving, and with them, the threats, challenges, and moral needs of the user also change.

Finally, it is crucial to emphasise that media self-education, while inherently individual, does not occur in a vacuum. Its effectiveness is contingent upon the educational culture in which we function—the values promoted within families, schools, religious institutions, academic circles, and professional environments. These institutions should foster and promote self-reflective attitudes, inspire the pursuit of truth, and encourage empathy, responsibility, and assertiveness in media consumption. Media self-education thus becomes an integral component of a broader process, shaping individuals towards virtuous conduct—individuals capable of using media effectively and ethically.

CONCLUSION

In an era characterised by the pervasive mediatization of daily life, media education for young people, but not only, cannot be confined solely to technical proficiency or the ability to access information selectively. It must, above all, serve as a formative process, cultivating responsible, critical, and morally and axiologically sensitive participants in media culture. The reflections presented in this article demonstrate that the essence of media education lies in its axiological foundations: a concern for the dignity of the individual, a commitment to truth, respect for the spoken and written word, responsibility for its use, the capacity for independent thought, and an awareness of the influence of media on human attitudes and choices. Self-education plays a particularly significant role, representing a conscious effort by each recipient to shape their media conscience and moral resilience about the infosphere.

Media education rooted in values is not a superfluous field of knowledge but a necessity if we aspire to use media appropriately and function consciously within an open civil society, within a community of people guided by mutual respect, truth, and acceptance. In the face of dynamic technological changes and the intensifying phenomena of disinformation and manipulation, as well as numerous other phenomena concerning the media landscape, only an axiological approach provides a lasting and substantial foundation for the necessary media competencies. Building axiological autonomy is *a sine qua non* for evaluation and, thus, for valuing what the media presents. However, this autonomy cannot be achieved without axiological experience. It is this experience that enables the

development not only of conscious media consumers but, more importantly, of responsible individuals capable of creating authentic common good in the digital world. The axiological foundations of media education are, therefore, not only a pedagogical challenge but also a moral obligation towards the present and the future, primarily towards children and young people.

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