

THE TELEVISION SERIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE AS ONE OF THE FORMS OF AIDING EDUCATION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN VIEWS ON PUBLIC HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

The development of digitisation goes hand in hand with simultaneous strong intertwining of the technology of communication with daily life. New media and the resulting opportunities play an elementary role both in the media sector and in the social space. At the same time, technological progress brings new effective forms of contact with recipients and media users. The following questions should be posed: Do the occurring changes support education and social transformation, including the health care sector, or do they create cognitive dissonance? What is the role played by TV series in this process? TV series become channels of access to mass recipients and the ideas, values and information they present take a form which is acceptable and absorbable by recipients. In the era of the inflow of information and unprocessed facts, such a “familiar” message becomes effective and efficient.

Key words: television series, digital age, technological changes, public health

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Change is a natural process occurring in society. As literature on the subject indicates, it may have various causes. It would appear, that in addition to many other (causes), time is a rather natural source of the transformations taking place in society. As Anthony Giddens opined, values and cultural norms change exactly with the course of time. Many of the norms dealing with our personal life, which we consider to be evident today, until the not so distant past, were in opposition to universally recognized values.¹ The next determinants, in addition to time, which qualify social change are technological progress as a consequence of social development, as well as cultural diffusion as a derivative of technological changes, and of the processes occurring in contemporary societies.² Certainly however, the most important and most rapid source of social changes is technology, and innovation, that is the development of new technology, is a potent force carrying out change in society.³

In the social sphere, where technological changes are the principal determinant of change and transformations, is the media system with the whole gamut of tools and possibilities of influencing the functioning of society as well as initiating or assisting the changes taking place in it. The media however, being an integral element of the social system, are dependent upon society's transformation, as well as through gathering, selecting, editing, and creating messages, and also on directing information to a large number of recipients, itself influences to a significant degree, the course of this transformation.⁴ The appearance of new information-communication technology, also changes, in a natural manner, the methods of employing the media.⁵ Convergent, digital electronic communication has taken on, in this new reality, a completely different characteristics than mass communications made efficient through the use of the traditional media. This has to do above all, with the interactivity, and at the same time the interchangeability of the roles of sender and receiver. The conditions are created for asynchronous communication, in which the message may be stored, and used at a given moment, as well as "disintermediation", that is the access to any type of information source and other content directly, and to other content direct from the sender and *vice versa*, and also the "neo-intermediation", which is the appearance of, for example in the Internet, new intermediaries aggregating and offering content. Passive, linear communication ("get whatever program, is available") is transformed in front of our eyes into active non-linear communication; through the use of portable transmitters one may receive information on the move. A new system of paying is also developing, in which *micro-payment* (from credit cards to *click-and-pay*) is used for (virtual) goods bought on the Internet. However, it's necessary to stress, that what's changing above all in the new media reality, are the position and char-

¹ Giddens 2005, p. 47.

² Ibidem.

³ Turner 1994, pp. 217 et sq.

⁴ Wrońska 2006, p. 325.

⁵ Strategy of Social Capital Development 2020 (2013), pp. 44 et sq.

acteristics of the receiver. The sender may personalize the message and address its contents to specific groups, or individuals, while an individualized receiver may cherry pick through the rendered contents⁶. In effect, the relationship between the sender and the receiver as well as the control point of the act of communicating: to an ever increasing degree, is shirting in the direction of the receiver, who more and more disposes of his own decisions, regarding the choice of selected contents, when he receives them, as well as the place where those contents are obtained by him.⁷ Moreover, thanks to landline digital television, the receiver gains access to a decidedly greater number of programs without a monthly fee. The picture and sound quality have been significantly improved thanks to the lack of distortion of the picture, which appears in analog television, while the sound is of digital quality thanks to Dolby Digital Plus. The receiver at the same time has access to additional services, such as a program guide (the so-called EPG) and to captions for programs. Modern transmission technology is also linked with the introduction of high definition television (HDTV – High Definition Television), and also the possibility of a parallel reception of several sound tracks (in several languages as well as surround-sound). Another attribute resulting from this process of digitalization, is mobile access to modern television via portable devices, for instance laptops and tablets.⁸

The aforementioned changes in the media space, resulting from the digital revolution, also influence the functioning of the media in the social sphere, including those processes taking place in society itself. The convergence of the media with telecommunications is escalated due to the ongoing digitalization of this sector, and influence the manner in which we function in society. In effect, together with the development of digitalization, there is a strident, simultaneous splicing of communications technology and day-to-day life, in which the new media and their possibilities play a decisive role.⁹ It is also noteworthy, that television has remained the most popular medium in this process, which is manifested in the amount of time which receivers spend watching it.¹⁰

The question arises however, as to what exactly is the function of television, and its task in this changing, digital milieu. Does it, in the context of the subject raised by the authors of this paper, assist the education and social transformation, as far as health is concerned? What tools are effective in the process of reaching the receiver, in this new, digital reality?

Until now, as Stanisław Michalczyk has indicated, the media, operating in a social system, have fulfilled two distinct, social functions. There are two functions, amongst others, in their proximity, that is a socializing and orientative function.

⁶ The strategy of the Polish state in the field of electronic media for the years 2005-2020 (2005), pp. 182 et sq.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Kononiuk 2012.

⁹ Strategy of Social Capital Development 2020 (2013), pp. 44 et sq.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

The socializing function, in the author's opinion, determines the models for social roles, including those roles fulfilled by the health system, the cases of which are featured in the media, and which have become "tools of cultural transmission", shaping cultural behavior and mores, as well as being a factor of social change. The "socializing force" of the media is dependent upon however, the constancy, regularity, (periodicity) and continuity of influence, and its mechanism relies principally on the process of the identification of its receivers (individuals) with media models. Socialization through mass communication may, as S. Michalczyk indicates, be understood in a dual sense. First of all, as an intermediary in supplying models, values, as well as norms of thinking and acting. Second, as an intermediary in transmitting ways of shaping the relationship with the social milieu and behavior in relation to it, which – ultimately – provides the basis for further social development.¹¹ The second of these indicated functions, the orientation function, in the author's opinion, is dependent upon the fact that the media have the ability to shape social orientation, assist in the solving of day-to-day problems, and supply knowledge and ideas which could be employed in undertaking decisions in the complicated and confusing world of contemporary social relations. This function therefore is directly linked with the life of individuals, and their experiences in specific situations and settings.¹² This function appears to be crucially essential in the aspect of health and the creation in the media of a widely understood image of the health service, and also propagating specific manners of behavior, and indicating manners of activity in situations and problems linked with human life and health.

Moreover, in addition to these delineated and defined functions, the media has at its disposal, numerous possibilities resulting from the specifics of their activity. Their type and amount – in addition to those *a priori* attributed to media institutions – is being continually enriched by new functions, resulting from the principles of the functioning of contemporary society. This is because the groups and elements of society which have existed until now, to which were attributed specific tasks and functions, are being replaced or edged out by institutions which have taken over their tasks. For example, until now multi-function groups, carrying out functions which are: economic, related to pro-creation, socializing, or religious – have been replaced by specialized organizations or institutions, such as a school or church.¹³ In a similar manner, the media may be indicated as an institution which has taken on a series of functions which heretofore have been assigned to other social structures. This is because they have at their disposal tools enabling them to participate in the process of social education and socialization, that is to carry out functions initially assigned to the family as well as to the educational system, including health education, and adapting this to the changing principles of

¹¹ Michalczyk 2008, pp. 43 et sq.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Based on: Sztompka 2005, pp. 437 et sq.

the functioning of the health system.¹⁴ Currently, as Wiesław Godzic has pointed out, the media have become encumbered with too much responsibility for education, and are not in a state to be able to bear the burden of this role. He also opines that as far as health education is concerned, attention should be focused above all on the receiver, who is unable to comprehend the message or does not want to accept it, due to his negative attitude. In order to counteract this, the media message cannot be authoritarian, neither frighten the receiver, nor may it have the character of an appeal.¹⁵ Amongst those television programs which are available, in Magdalena Środa's opinion, the most effective tool in propagating the proper attitudes towards health in society, are television series. An example of this could be the Polish television series "Klan" ("Clan"), in which there is a young character with Down's syndrome. In Prof. Środa's opinion, it's exactly through such a series that we can educate, and not simultaneously discourage viewers with an excessive moralism or didacticism. She opines that the media may fulfill a proper educational role; however the message should get to that recipient, who is already educated to a certain extent, and has a pro-health system attitude.¹⁶

It should be taken into consideration however, that in the new social-media reality, based on digital possibilities, the media may become our ally, as well as our enemy, dependent upon how well we are prepared to communicate with them. The lack of an ability to use the media in a proper manner, even in this process of social change or socialization, is currently one of the most important threats resulting from the employment of this means of mass communication.¹⁷ An erroneous or ill-prepared attempt to use the media – especially in the aspect of health – may produce disastrous results. The "2020 Strategy for the Development of Social Capital" goes somewhat in the wake of this, saying that the policy of the media and computer education is based on the conviction that in order to increase media competence in society, it's essential to undertake educational activity aimed at increasing, among the population at large, irrespective of their age or place of residence, a consciousness of the profits and dangers, which the contemporary audiovisual media contains. Media education, in the opinion of the authors of the "Strategy" is a fundamental tool which makes the populace conscious of the manner in which the media shapes the message, and filters perceptions and convictions. The media literacy of the entire population, not only people who are still studying, but also a reduction of the effects of digital exclusion, which includes a lack of physical access to technology, but also a lack of skills necessary to use this technology, constitutes a contemporary obligation of the state itself.¹⁸ The "2020 National Development Strategy" also called attention to the need for

¹⁴ Wrońska 2006, p. 325.

¹⁵ Experts: positive role of series, talk shows and media campaigns, <http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/eksperci-pozytywna-rola-seriali-talk-shows-i-kampanii-medialnych#> (access: 7.04.2015).

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Wrońska 2006, p. 325.

¹⁸ Strategy of Social Capital Development 2020 (2013), pp. 18 et sq.

more effective media education and activities to combat cyber illiteracy. It was noted here, that the working out of a needs, basis, and abilities permitting the population to take full advantage of the new technology, would seem to be, in addition to development of the infrastructure as a whole, a condition for the development of a digital society. In order to take full advantage of the digital possibilities, the promotion and propagation of available Internet services is essential. In order to make it universally possible to take advantage of digital technology, as stated in the “2020 National Development Strategy” efforts should be conducted on two levels – on the one hand, through the dissemination of digital competence amongst people, and on the other hand through the popularization of digital services and installing an awareness among potential users of their need to possess access to the Internet. (...) In order to make a digital Poland, it is also, therefore, necessary to stimulate the supply side, that is to increase the amount of high-quality services available, but also the demand side, that is to create an awareness of the existence of these services, and propagate their being used. In the sphere of the development of digital competence, activities should be focused first of all on two groups of people; those who are teaching, and therefore need to use the Internet to prepare and conduct classes on a digital level, and older people, who may not have Internet at home and don’t even perceive the benefits it can provide. Overcoming the differences in digital abilities, as well as instilling the perception of a need to take advantage of the new technology in society as a whole, is absolutely essential if we want to prevent the problem of digital exclusion.¹⁹ According to the most general and widespread definition used by researchers and politicians social exclusion means, that a given individual or group, being members of a community (most often this means a community of citizens in a given state) who are unable to fully participate in all spheres of the life of that community. It often could be added, that this limiting of their participation is not a result of the convictions of those who are excluded, but rather from deficiencies completely, or to a great extent, beyond their control. This exclusion could have to do with work, consumption, participation in culture, the life of the local community, or in politics.²⁰ In the instance of information-communications technology, those people who don’t have access to digital technology, or the appropriate skills or motivation to effectively take advantage of these technologies, become to an ever greater degree threatened with digital exclusion. Information-communication technologies, being a contemporary condition for access to a complete participation in social life, cause these differences in access and employment of the Internet to have essential social consequences, including social and economic exclusion.²¹ As the results for the aforementioned “2020 National Development Strategy” in Poland, indicate the dividing lines between those people who are fluent in digital technology and

¹⁹ Strategy of the State’s Development 2020 (2012), p. 115.

²⁰ Panek, Czapiński 2013, pp. 342–375, based on: Czapiński, Panek 2013, p. 342.

²¹ Panek, Czapiński 2013, p. 340.

those who don't possess these skills, are: age, place of residence and education. In as much as use of the Internet by young people is practically universal, the digital exclusion of older people has become a significant problem. It should be mentioned here that regarding the latter group of people, digital competence is not a natural component of the process of socialization, and is closely linked with the level of education.²² In effect, the basic problem in reducing the phenomenon of digital divisions and barriers in the universal employment of new information-communication technology is not the lack of access to computers and the Internet, but rather a lack of motivation, knowledge, and skill in the use of this technology.²³ When calling attention to the fact that we live in an ageing society, it would appear essential to undertake activities to promote the digital inclusion of senior citizens. This activity should be, to a significant degree, directed to people who are over 50 years old, and encourage them to acquire education with the goal of renewing their previously obtained skills and knowledge. The media itself must play a significant role in this process. This is because media education, conducted by the media, will reach all users.²⁴ A question arises: what tools, which the digital media employ, appear to be the most effective in this educational process, including education dealing with health? Is it essential to create new tools or is it possible to employ forms well known and used until now, in order to reach receivers, with special attention to mature people, for whom the subject of health would appear to be especially interesting? The obvious answer would seem to be that the media should use all available tools and manners to reach receivers in this educational process. The traditional media, to which people are accustomed, without a doubt, play an enormous role by their ability to assist people to freely navigate through available content. It shouldn't be forgotten however, that together with new technological forms appear new forms of reaching receivers, who are occupying an ever greater position in the market. When considering the television market, it's necessary to point out that amongst the new, non-linear, subscription audio-visual services, which have become accessible for viewers in the digital age, VoD – video on demand, has occupied the most important position. These are the services most often chosen by users of the new media. Traditional television stations offer these services, which include in their services (tvp vod, tvnplayer, ipla) films and television series transmitted over the airwaves, as well as cable and satellite television, Internet portals, and providing telecommunication services.²⁵ Thanks to the spread of portable devices, ensuring a link with the Internet, viewers may often watch other video content in addition to television programs. It is becoming more and more popular to watch programs which have been rescheduled (PVR) or, thanks to the “keep watching” function, which offers some video

²² Strategy of the State's Development 2020 (2012), p. 115.

²³ Strategy of Social Capital Development 2020 (2013), p. 18 et sq.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Information on elementary problems of radio and television broadcasting in 2013, Warsaw, March 2014, www.krrit.gov.pl, p. 7 et sq.

services on demand (VoD), one way watch films in episodes over several days, in numerous places and on various devices.²⁶ It is also noteworthy, that the highest VoD popularity among viewers is enjoyed by various television series, and their viewers are people with a higher education 69.8% as well as university students 72.5%.²⁷ The results however, from an analysis of the viewers of those series transmitted in traditional television, is that these programs have a public that is composed above all of women (more than half of viewers). The age of those who view these series, is principally composed of those over 50 years old, while there is a truism that interest in these types of programs increase with the viewers' age. The smallest group of viewers is composed of those less than 25 years old; the greatest is of those who are over 60. As far as educational background, people with an elementary (more than half) and secondary school education (almost 1/3) dominates.²⁸ Both groups of series viewers, those who use VoD and those who watch in traditional television, appear to be complimentary in age structure and level of education.

The supposition could be made, that through the use of both of these means, these television series reach a wide, and what is exceptionally important, varied viewing public, which includes a wide *spectrum* of educational level as well as those over 50 years of age, therefore potentially threatened with digital exclusion.

Regarding the power of these series, also understood as a sender of information, and effective tool of education, may be attested to by additional data indicating the ratings of this type of program. "Klan" ("Clan") has been transmitted on the TVP 1 channel for 14 years. Some 2,000 episodes have been broadcast in that time, and its highest ratings totaled more than 5 million viewers. "M jak miłość") ("M as in Love") has been show on the TVP 2 channel for 11 years, in over 860 episodes, and its highest ratings attained over 12 million viewers²⁹. In 2013 alone these programs were among the most popular in Poland, in both public and commercial television. "M jak miłość" ("M as in Love") – broadcast by TVP 2 had 73 episodes in 2013, and the number of viewers (AMR³⁰) reached 6,598,568. This series attained second place amongst the most popular programs on TVP in 2013. Ninth place was occupied by another series, "Na dobre i na złe" ("For Better or Worse") with 47 episodes and viewers numbering (AMR) at 4,631,582.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 51.

²⁸ Viewing figures of Polish and foreign series on TVP1, TVP2, Polsat and TVN channels in September, October, November 2009, with a particular emphasis on the new items in the autumn line-up", Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (National Broadcasting Council), Programme Department, www.krrit.gov.pl.

²⁹ A. Kubik, TV series of moral anxiety, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,126079,11439601,Seria_le_moralnego_niepokoju.html?as=1 (access: 26.04.2015).

³⁰ AMR (Average Minute Rating) – an indicator describing an average size of the audience of a specific TV programme during a particular period. The audience size is expressed in thousand individuals. The indicator may refer to the whole population or a specific target group. Based on: TV market in 2013 – report. (National Broadcasting Council), Warsaw 2013.

In TVN however, the “Na Wspólnej” (“Together”) series had 157 episodes and viewers which numbered (AMR) 2,843,579. It occupied eighth place among the most popular programs in 2013 for the TVN station.³¹

As various types of research have indicated, numerous television series, with regards to their popularity, have become on the one hand an excellent tool for perpetuating universally accepted norms or changes of specific types of behavior, but on the other hand have become an instrument used to stigmatize that which is socially unrecognized and unaccepted. For many viewers, it is exactly this world that is presented in a television series which has become a determinant of a lifestyle and a source of information concerning a changing social and cultural reality. These television series have become in addition, a place for the promotion of, and information concerning, social and economic campaigns, as well as various types of government programs, in virtually every sphere of life, including health. They are also a potentially effective educational tool. As specialists have emphasized, television series are a superb manner of penetrating peoples’ consciousness, familiarizing them with difficult subjects, and convincing them for example, to sign a “declaration of intent”. As Prof. Zbigniew Gaciong, the principle medical consultant for the “Lekarze” (“Doctors”) television series opines, the transplanting of organs is a subject that is intriguing not only for viewers and screenplay writers, providing the possibility for various types of conflicts, drama, and impassioned events, but it is also a subject which is exceptionally important socially. As he stressed “obtaining acceptance for the concept of donating organs is the basis for the success of transplanting organs as a method of curing diseases, so therefore, a change in the attitude of society as a whole, is possible thanks to a television series”.³²

So, just what is a television series? Wiesław Godzic is of the opinion that a series is a narrative form of television, which presents in a regular manner episodes, which contain simultaneously occurring plots, with the participation of a fixed group of characters. It is characterized by, amongst others, episodes which have a cause-effect link, and develop fictionally, (by the same token, episodes can’t be watched out of order). Episodes do not usually have a precise ending, individual episodes have at the very end a surprising element which suspends attention.³³ A television series may also fulfill a string of functions, and as it were, via the story being told, may also achieve various goals, and represent numerous problems found in day-to-day life and multiple manners of solving them. In addition, as W. Godzic indicates, these series break a lot of taboos, though their goal is not a radical struggle; what is important is the very fact of “highlighting” the problem. The most popular programs therefore, deal with issues linked with vio-

³¹ “The most popular programmes in 2013. Daily viewing figures – report”. Monitoring Department, Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (National Broadcasting Council), Warsaw 2013.

³² “Doctors Save Lives”. A new campaign of TVN channel has begun”, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/lekarze-ratuja-zycie-ruszyla-akcja-telewizji-tvn,318616.html> (access: 15.04.2015).

³³ Godzic 2004, pp. 37 et sq.

lence, drug and alcohol addiction, prostitution, diseases, and also the ethics of human behavior in the contemporary world.³⁴ In many Polish television series (not necessarily medical ones) for instance “Klan” (“Clan”) “Barwy szczęścia” (“The Colors of Happiness”) and “M jak miłość” (“M as in Love”) a medical theme is often taken up. An ever increasing number of doctor-patient themes appear, the result of insufficient communication between a doctor and his patient, oncological diseases, and the needs of people who are struggling with cancer. These are exceptionally important subjects, as they deal with subject matter concerning the value of health, respect for one’s fellow man, and therefore are usually taken by viewers with a great dose of emotion.³⁵

In the opinion of A. Wiśniewska, the educational properties of a television series may be attested to by the fact that thanks to it, the viewers acquire knowledge about life, politics, or diseases. After Krystyna Lubicz in the “Klan” (“Clan”) series underwent a mammography examination, and cancer was detected, the very next day in clinics – especially in small towns – there was a significant increase in the number of women who were interested in such an examination. No news or opinion-oriented program would have such an influence on shaping the consciousness and attitudes of viewers as these series. It’s no wonder that the screenplay writers, in Wiśniewska’s opinion, attempt to make a concerted effort to take advantage of their propagandistic powers to take up such lofty social causes dealing with the problems of AIDS, homosexuality, drug addiction, tolerance for the disabled, sick, or those of different races – all of these subjects are in these serials in different threads of the plot.³⁶

Moreover, the characters of a contemporary television series also become educational partners. This happens, due to, amongst others, the effect of weakening former traditional authorities, this is exactly the hero of popular culture – alongside the family, school, and Church – which has become the new authority for young viewers, who from a given character’s experience, glean knowledge about the world around them, and about culture and interpersonal relations. It’s the television series which assists the young to comprehend the mechanisms appearing in our times and enables them to find themselves in our convoluted post-modern reality.³⁷ There is no doubt, that a television series equips a young adult with a certain amount of the “right” knowledge, and this might be another reason why young people spend time in front of the screen. This is also an argument confirming the educational values of the soap opera.³⁸ From this view, the screenplay writer more and more often creates characters of young adults, who contend with those problems that people in his age group may come across in everyday life, starting with problems of an emotional nature, to financial difficulties,

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Harland 2012.

³⁶ Wiśniewska 2007, pp. 180 et sq.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Ibidem.

stimulants, alcohol, and drugs, or more precisely, on the dangers posed by them. In S. Michalczyk's opinion, the media today are a type of "cable linking people-receivers including the young, as well as the old, with the world" or "a system of contemporary warning", which allows us to find an answer to the question "What new is going on in the world today?"

The media therefore supply material for the rationalization of everyday life, provide a feeling of being informed, of being safe and of possessing knowledge about the world. Be that as it may, as S. Michalczyk points out, these functions are not realized in a complete manner. That's why, in his opinion, one may speak about the phenomenon of "rational ignorance", that is, that knowledge obtained from the media is not complete, but the receiver obtains the awareness of possessing this news, however it is sufficient in principle, for a feeling of a rationalized world.³⁹ One cannot however, overestimate the significance of the media. Knowledge obtained in this manner does not have a lot in common with factual knowledge. This is because access to information does not create knowledge. Information is data, perceived as facts, which once acquired are transformed into news for a given person. Not all information, which we get, becomes news for us, and not even an enormous amount of news is not yet knowledge. Understanding it however, provides a new quality. News and information start to create a common system, in which he who possesses it may move about freely, draw conclusions, analyze, and compare. It's only this state of organizing news, in the author's opinion, which could be called news as such.⁴⁰ In M. Golko's opinion, there are increasingly more frequent calls for creating a "news society" instead of an information society. This results from the fact that the value of information is less fleeting than the value of raw data and information. Such a "news society" should, in the author's opinion, be characterized by, amongst others, an ability to perceive the relativity of information and that which could be termed "relation" of information, its common links, and society's own ability to make observations of the world, perceiving and defining problems, drawing its own conclusions from these observations, the ability to conduct discussions, and the goal being reaching alternative truths.⁴¹

The media, as K. Gierelo-Klimaszewska denotes, satisfies the need for knowledge, information, advice, study of life, lessens personal insecurities, finds support for one's own values, and also obtains an insight into one's own life. This occurs through referring the receiver to a given program and taking advantage of its content, experiencing empathy, a feeling of comradeship and links with others, a flight from (one's) problems, for example, entering an imaginary world, filling time and creating a structured routine for that time of a day.⁴² One could therefore admit that the plot of a television series could carry out the function of

³⁹ Michalczyk 2008, pp. 43 et sq.

⁴⁰ Wrońska 2006, p. 327.

⁴¹ According: Golka 2008, p. 161, based on: Goćkowski, Machowska 2003; Zacher 2004.

⁴² Gierelo-Klimaszewska 2008, p. 73.

a type social integrator. It could therefore allow the viewer to find himself and his problems on the television screen, and on the other hand would allow the sender (and creator of the television series) to promote the desired behavior, attitude, and values.⁴³

In addition, the television series supplies a ready-made formula, suggesting which solutions work in the real world.⁴⁴ The stories told in these series point to specific values and postures, thereby fulfilling an adaptive function. As Dr. Aleksandra Cislak has indicated, when watching a television series, the viewers find out a lot of interesting things concerning medicine and prophylaxis (preventive medicine). She is of the opinion that in the case of aficionados of medical television series, there is an increasing interest in health issues, but at the same time there is a growth in the tendency to look for illnesses in one's own body, especially various types of rare diseases, which appear more often in the series than in real life. In spite of this tendency however, viewers, on the basis of social comparisons, are starting to see their own lives as being better. This results from the fact that, patients in the television series, usually suffer from rare and convoluted diseases or complications. In comparison with these television characters who are seriously ill, viewers start to evaluate their own problems as being less. This may serve to differentiate medical series from other television productions, which when seen often, tend to lower viewers' satisfaction with their lives.⁴⁵

In order for information reported on television to have any influence on the viewer, the viewer has to take note of it, understand its sense, and accept and be ready to include it in his knowledge of the world. Just as television selectively illuminates a fragment of reality, leaving other information about the world in the dark, so the viewer selectively receives these fragments, focusing his attention above all on that which he agrees with, which then becomes part of his worldview, and his needs, values, and expectations. How this information conveyed is also dependent on the recognized values and attitudes of the viewers. In Krystyna Skarżyńska's opinion, not only does the viewer better remember the content of that information which is in accordance with his own opinions, but also that content which is "convenient" for his needs⁴⁶. This state of affairs occurs because, as K. Klimek indicates, values become one of the principle determinants and goals of human activity. Established values, however, comprise the basis for evaluations, as well as for cultural norms and role models. One could thus affirm that a value is that, which has an enormous significance for a person, which gives meaning to his actions and life. Values oblige him to make choices and make decisions. That

⁴³ Uszyński 2000, p. 78 et sq.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Interview with Aleksandra Cislak, PhD, a psychologist from Szkoła Wyższa Psychologii Społecznej (University of Social Sciences and Humanities) in Warsaw [in:] A. Kubik, "ER" on TV – on the phenomenon of medical TV series", <http://www.medme.pl/artykuly/ostry-dyzur-przed-telewizorem-czyli-fenomen-seriali-medycznych,2737,1.html> (access: 15.04.2015).

⁴⁶ Skarżyńska 2002, pp. 7 et sq.

is why it is necessary to do everything, to make values recognizable, understood, accepted, and respected.⁴⁷ This question seems to be essential, also in reference to the next function of the television series, namely, the role-creating function.⁴⁸ This is because the series, due to the longevity and regularity of its influence, becomes an effective transmission in shaping cultural (and other) role models.⁴⁹

The mass production of television series, as well as the long period over which they are transmitted, and therefore the long time period over which the values expose in them are manifested to the viewing public, results in these series becoming a superb platform for the realization of the next function, namely a normative function. As K. Skarżyńska has pointed out, the repetition of certain information, commentaries, or opinions, and also presenting them in specific proportions, and in a specific order in the program, at better or worse air-times, changes not only (or better, may change) the cognitive means of the viewers, but may also create specific norms and evaluation criteria. This manner of influence, known as normative, is not necessarily recognized by the viewers. The mechanism of this influence is as follows: a frequent, clear illumination of some type of fragment of reality, people, events, or opinions which makes this element important. Increasing cognitive accessibility of a given object permits it to be more easily employed as a model and criterion for evaluating other objects.⁵⁰ In addition, as the author has pointed out, the normative influence of television, and therefore of a television series, depends on its ability to provide viewers with “social evidence of legitimacy” of the “social contract”. Moreover, an important subjective criterion of the legitimacy of any type of opinion, or the validity of any type of behavior is, in K. Skarżyńska’s opinion, recognizing that “other people think this way or act this way”. This “social proof of validity” may be presented in the form of an opinion concerning the behavior of someone in authority, or a television star, but also the presentation of the results of a plebiscite or of public opinion research.⁵¹ It would therefore appear to be appropriate to present a catalog of sources, providing the “social proof of legitimacy” of the characters of television series. The viewers have contact with them several times a week, and use their behavior and decisions as a reference for the situations and problems of the real world. This mechanism has such a significance, that amongst others, thanks to their constant presence, these television series can and do fulfill the role of a catalyst of social change.

Social change, as indicated by P. Sztompka, is the difference between the state of the social system at a given moment in time, and the state of this same system at another moment. In effect, this process of change, in Sztompka’s opinion, forms new normative structures within society, thanks to which people recognize new values, become guided by new norms, and play new roles, punishing and reward-

⁴⁷ Klimek 2007, pp. 106 et sq.

⁴⁸ Uszyński 2000, pp. 78 et sq.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Skarżyńska 2002, pp. 7 et sq.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

ing (people) for something other than previously.⁵² In addition, the author opines that new ideal structures appear in social systems, due to which people start to believe in new gods, accept new ideologies, obtain new knowledge of the world, and come to know themselves in a new light.⁵³ Thanks to these television series they may, in the opinion of M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, document or even predict changes in a ranking of social values, and in defining social controversy, but only as much, as these are changes already accepted, and even desired, by the public.⁵⁴ This perception appears to be so essential, that currently, we find ourselves in a period where there are many changes in which the health service is regarded, that is in the changes and in relations and expectations in reference to medical services. This is because doctors are afraid that patients, who watch medical television series, will be more demanding, disappointed (because they will create for themselves an image of the ideal doctor and hospital services, on the basis of fictitious television series) however it turns out that television series create among patients-viewers a rather positive PR for the doctors' milieu, because thanks to these series, the patients may "look into" the life of doctors and hospitals, and observe the specifics of their work and acquire a greater understanding of the behavior and work of doctors in the real world. ⁵⁵ Perceiving this appears to be so essential, that at the present moment we find ourselves at a period when many changes are taking place in the health service, and changes in the relations and expectations of the public to doctors' services. This is due to the fear doctors have that patients, upon viewing medical television series will become more demanding, pretentious (because these patients will construct an image of an ideal doctor and hospital services on the basis of a fictional television series), it will occur that these series will create among patients – viewers an exceptionally good PR for the doctors' milieu, because thanks to these series the patients will be able to "take a peek" into the world of hospitals and doctors, and peer into the specifics of their work, and thereby take on a greater understanding of the doctors' work and behavior in the real world.⁵⁵ These series may therefore fulfill the function of individual signposts, indicating the direction of change in the manner of operating, thinking, and evaluating or perceiving reality. Be that as it may, as M. Lisowska-Magdziarz opines, essential social problems are shown here with entertainment as a goal, and are encased in an advertising context. They are personalized and privatized, at times "tabloidized", usually taken out of a wider social context, and therefore should be, in the author's opinion, imbued with unambivalent axiological etiquettes. They are therefore dressed in a melodramatic text and enact with the aid of specific, larger than life, simplified acting. They are also, which is essential, "estheticized", this has to do with attractive people in attractive settings, and are situated in non-controversial and peaceful esthetics. Finally, as the

⁵² Sztompka 2012, pp. 437 et sq.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Lisowska-Magdziarz 2008, pp. 346 et sq.

⁵⁵ Harland 2012.

author admits, although social problems are often discussed in soap operas, they very rarely appear.⁵⁶ In Prof. Adam Gładysz's opinion, every television series has to have a little spin put on it. When one remembers however, that these series are not for doctors, but for average people, one watches them without any negative emotion. The "Na dobre i na złe" ("For Better or Worse") television series, attempts, in the author's opinion, to deal with the day-to-day problems of the health service. It also shows quite well the attitudes of the patients. In addition, thanks to the fact that many people get their information from the Internet, there has appeared – something unknown until this time on such a scale – a desire to discuss and disagree with doctors.⁵⁷ As J.H. Turner indicates, when struggling with new realities or problems, people reorganize their activities, at the same time exchange symbols of culture. Therefore, they first change norms, as these directly guide human behavior. Over the course of time, people start to also change their convictions evaluated according to "that's how it should be" because they have to fit to new models of social relations.⁵⁸

Television serials on the one hand, fill an educational function, and assist societal change. It should be pointed out however, that they also carry out a destabilizing function. Research indicates, that the viewers of television series are principally in the 50+ age group, and therefore of a generation, which was raised and reared with other, oftentimes non-functioning or modified societal norms and values. The image of society and reality portrayed in television series, often deviates from the norms and values accepted by these viewers. This situation could lead to a dissonance. In Poland, at least in the public health service, an authoritarian model still dominates. The doctors maintain a distance, segregating their patients from their professional knowledge and terminology. In television series like "Na dobre i na złe" ("For Better and for Worse") this distance is reduced. There is a place for a sincere and open discussion. We don't see doctors working hard from dawn to dusk on successive shifts, frustrated, given to making ironic and cynical comments, but rather we see doctors who are completely dedicated to their patients, always having time to spend with them. This smooth and polished image, which is in contrast with real life, results in our eagerly watching such programs, and dreaming about being treated (by doctors) in a similar manner. Like every fairy tale, it provides us with an opportunity to experience something which is inaccessible in the real world.⁵⁹

The viewer, constructing his life based on the norms and values known to him, "collides" with the narration of a television series, that is, with a different value

⁵⁶ Lisowska-Magdziarz 2008, pp. 346 et sq.

⁵⁷ K. Sikora, Will TV series tell you the truth? We are asking a lawyer, a doctor and a reporter about their opinions on the latest productions <http://natemat.pl/22209,serial-prawde-ci-powie-pytamy-prawnika-lekarza-i-reportera-co-sadza-o-najnowszych-produkcjach> (access: 9.04.2015).

⁵⁸ Turner 1994, pp. 217 et sq.

⁵⁹ Interview with psychologist Noemi Geller. In: E. Biernacka, Medical TV series – why do we like watching them so much?, http://www.poradnikzdrowie.pl/psychologia/zrelaksuj-sie/medyczne-seriale-dlaczego-tak-bardzo-lubimy-je-ogladac_38831.html (access: 9.04.2015).

system. Such a situation may be conducive to the viewer feeling lost, or “not fitting in with this world”. J.H. Turner’s concept appears to be helpful in maintaining a rational judgment and evaluation of the content presented in a television series, in light of the process of socialization of acquiring specific skills. One of these skills is the ability to look at one’s self as a separate object, or imagining one’s self as a specific type of person [...]. If we didn’t have a concept of our own “I”, our behavior wouldn’t be coherent and logical, we also wouldn’t have a constant object or reference point, to which we could refer and evaluate with the aid of cultural symbols. In addition, as the author points out, our personality (our own „I”), would not be easily subject to changes.⁶⁰

In spite of the aforementioned observations, one may not deny that television series have a significant influence on viewers, and equally one may not overestimate the potential these programs possess as carriers of information and education, including that which concerns health. One may assume, that in the digital era, interest in television series, by advertisers as well as by NGOs or even state institutions, will increase with attention to the potential of influencing, as well as the range of access to, viewers. This is because these television series become a means of access to a mass audience, and the ideas presented in them, as well as the values and information, take on a form which is acceptable and assailable to the viewers. In the age of a deluge of information, as well as of raw, unprocessed facts, such a “tame” message becomes efficient and effective. An example of this tendency is the award given to the “Na dobre i na złe” (“For Better or for Worse”) television series in the V Contest of Leaders in the Polish National Health Care System in the category of “Promotion of Health and Preventive Medicine”. This prestigious contest, in which awards are given for the most interesting initiatives and attitudes regarding the maintenance of good health. The panel of judges in the contest, when commenting on their awarding “Na dobre i na złe”, stated that this series “made a singular contribution to the creation of a positive image of the health service in Poland, via the promotion of a pro-health attitude, and medical education in society.” One could suppose, that successive seasons of various television series, not Just medical-oriented ones, will abound in health subjects, and methods of combating difficulties of a medical nature, and will bring up subjects suited to the needs and expectations of viewers of all ages. The subject of health has become one of the most popular and desired subjects of these television sagas. This unique medical fad cannot be underestimated, and the use of all means to communicate with all recipients to educate them and to promote activities which will change their views and social behavior, which could positively influence their health and lives, seem completely justified.

⁶⁰ Turner 1994, pp. 86 et sq.

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STRESZCZENIE

Seriale telewizyjne w dobie cyfryzacji jako jedna z form wspomaganie edukacji i transformacji społecznej w obszarze zdrowia

Wraz z rozwojem cyfryzacji następuje silne i równoczesne splatanie się technologii komunikowania z życiem codziennym. Nowe media i wynikające z nich możliwości odgrywają zasadniczą rolę zarówno w sektorze medialnym, jak i w przestrzeni społecznej. Jednocześnie, wraz z rozwojem technologicznym, pojawiają się nowe, skuteczne formy dotarcia do odbiorców i użytkowników mediów. Należy postawić jednak pytanie: czy zachodzące zmiany wspomagają edukację i transformację społeczną, w tym również w obszarze zdrowia, czy może jednak tworzą dysonans poznawczy? Jaką rolę w tym procesie odgrywają seriale telewizyjne? Stają się one bowiem kanałami dotarcia do masowego odbiorcy, a przedstawione w nich idee, wartości i informacje przybierają akceptowalną i przyswajalną przez odbiorców formę. W dobie zalewu informacjami oraz nieprzetworzonymi faktami taki „oswojony” przekaz staje się efektywny i skuteczny.

Słowa kluczowe: serial telewizyjny, cyfryzacja, zmiany technologiczne, zdrowie