"Medium is the message" – Creating a University Image in the Time of Web 2.0

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The starting point of the article is McLuhan's statement that "medium is the message". The way universities promote themselves in media is causing specific associations with recipients. The university idea is changing, the requirement for entrepreneurship, the change in the way of the public universities funding, and the corporate approach to university force them to take action that will enable them to operate in a highly competitive market. The universities promote and build their image using mass media characteristic for business marketing, and at the same time, the media that reach young people – the social media.

Keywords: image of university, media development, new media, Web 2.0, idea of university, social media

Introduction

The changes resulting from the development of social media are of major importance for both communication within a university and the process of creating the university's image. For the Web generation, representing the vast majority of university students, Web 2.0 is a natural communication environment, because "A man is embedded in the new, electronic environment exactly in the way that their ancestors were embedded in the surrounding of a jungle or a savannah" (McLuhan, 1975). Creating the image in such an environment is becoming an increasingly complicated process as it requires a convergent message in much diversified media. In the process of planning messages promoting universities, it

is impossible to neglect the media that are perceived as modern ones and without which interaction would be much constrained, the objective of the article is to prove that in the time of new media the McLuhan concept of 1960s is still taken advantage of. The concept, concurrently with the development of social media, is regaining importance in the process of creating the image of universities.

Medium is the message – from the McLuhan era to new media

"Medium is the message" is a statement of a representative of determinism and although it was coined in XX century it is still up-to-date, especially these days when we have to cope with a change in communication technologies. The focal point of the McLuhan assumption is perceiving a medium itself as a message because the very medium is "a factor shaping and controlling the scope and form of human activity" (McLuhan, 2001). Therefore, if a medium is a message, its impact upon both social structure and recipients' perception is larger than the impact of the message content. That is why the condition of finding out the message content is the very understanding of the nature of the medium because it not only shapes the content, but the recipient as well. A dominant medium in each era has control over people, changes their social relations, contributes to the emergence of different social structures and triggers the birth of a new kind of audiovisual culture. Therefore, the understanding of the media role might be a key to the explanation of all the cultural changes. "Electronic technology – as a medium of our lifetime – transforms and changes the nature of social relations and influences all walks of our lives. [...] Everything undergoes changes – you, your family, neighborhood, your attitude towards other people. [...] All the media transform us totally: nothing is left unchanged, untouched." (McLuhan, cited from Loska, 2011).

McLohan broadly defined the media as everything that strengthens or intensifies senses (e.g. thoughts through a language) or body organs (e.g. a wheel constitutes an "extension" to a foot, electronic circuits are the extension to our nervous system, a book is an extension to an eye) and increases their efficiency. Every kind of innovation in the media broadens some abilities of a human, "we shape the media and then they shape us". McLuhan discussed the changes resulting from "inventions in traditional media, e.g. print changed the way of the perception of the world from oral one into the visual one (McLuhan, 2004). However, in his primary concept he focused on changes in the world influenced by the electronic media as – according to him – they released the man from the captivity of the print media which had many negative consequences for the society.

EDUKACJA EKONOMISTÓW I MENEDŻERÓW | 4 (46) 2017 |
| Małgorzata Koszembar-Wiklik | *"Medium is the message"* – Creating a University | 159–172

"Medium is the message" – Creating a University 161

Further in his writings he states that technical inventions including the media result in cultural changes, and allow to arrange and interpret our social existence.

McLuhan divided the media into hot and cold ones. The hot media are those that extend one human sense and generate a state of large saturation with data in a recipient. Thus, they do not require any further recipient's involvement. These are i.a. the radio and film. The cold medium (i.a. speech, telephone or TV) because of small quantity of the information transferred, requires from the recipient involvement and participation as well as an intellectual effort – "hot forms make you not involved, and cold ones make you much involved" (McLuhan, 2004). McLuhan claimed that "a hot medium is the one that extends and individual sense with high definition. And the high definition is the state of strong saturation with the data. Photography has the high definition, but a motion picture – a low one as it includes very little visual information. A telephone is a cold medium or a low definition medium as – while using it – a human ear receives very few pieces of information. Speech is also a cold medium of low definition – it provides not many data, making the recipient complete the missing ones. In turn the hot media do not leave much for the recipient to be completed and, consequently, generate in recipients insignificant involvement in what the recipients are provided with. The situation is totally different is case of the cold media. They simply force the recipients to the involvement and completing the message. It is, therefore, apparent that the hot medium such as the radio impacts the recipients in a much different way from the way the recipients are impacted by a cold medium such as a telephone" (McLuhan, 2004).

It could be wondered whether the above categorization of the media matches the contemporary realm of the media. The convergence of the media discussed by H. Jenkins (Jenkins, 2007) results in the fact that it is increasingly difficult to determine whether a medium should be considered a hot or a cold one. A book that has been digitalized, posted on the Internet and has a hyper-textual structure is not identical with a printed book. When McLuhan was doing his researches, the Internet was in infancy. So what kind of medium is the Internet? In terms of the involvement of a reader the Internet is a cold medium – it encourages the users to being active, but does not enforce their active involvement. Thus, the new media (the Internet) can be both hot and cold ones.

The prognoses of McLuhan were based on the analysis of the past and social changes that technological advancement resulted in the past. For McLuhan "a new medium is never a supplement to the old one. Until it changes the form of already existing media and finds a niche for them, it will not stop overwhelming them" (McLuhan, 2004). In case of the Internet it can be observed that after absorbing some media (TV, books, newspapers), the Internet is transforming them into

something new, e.g. adding hyperlinks or dividing contents into smaller sequences in order to retrieve them easier. Such media as a telephone or a cable, and then the radio and TV, enabled covering distances in space and time. However, it is the Internet that is capable of combining a speed of message communication, immediacy of receiving it, multimedia properties of the message and its durability. Various technologies and ways of communication have been integrated into a single digital framework, i.e. the integration of the media has taken place (Kerckhove, 2001). However, a more profound change has occurred along with development of Web 2.0 – enabling participation and interaction of the users that never before had been offered by other media.

New media and Web 2.0

The notion of the new media is defined in many different ways and in spite the fact that numerous authors deal with this issue, the term itself is still not fully defined. Two stages can be distinguished in both development and attempts to define the new media. The first stages dates back to early 1990s when the notion "the new media" gained popularity although it referred to the changes having taken place in 1980s. The second stage regards the development of the Internet and WWW as well as the "media metamorphosis" of a cellular phone (Gorman, McLean, 2010). The cellphone, together with its multi-functionality, ceased to be a device used only to making calls and has become the medium combining the options of listening to music, taking photos, recording film, the Internet browsing, playing mobile games, using GPS or making payments. L. Manovich defines the new media as the analogue ones converted into digital ones (Manovich, 2006). The new media according to D. McQuail, are apparently a "powdered set of communication technologies" (McQuail, 2012).

The problem with defining the new media results from, i.a. the considered assumptions as the primary historical criterion is insufficient while distinguishing the old media from the new ones. Therefore, it is easier to define the new media through determining their features. D. Kerckhove enumerates such features as multimedia character (integration of all available forms of communication), communicativeness (fast exchange of information), hyper-textual property (combination of contents by means of logical links network, enabling a permanent flow of interrelated pieces of information), interactivity (Kerckhove, 2001). R.K. Logan puts forward an idea of asynchronization (time elasticity), mobility, convergence, accumulation of contents, large network, digitalization, co-operation between new media participants within the communities create,

lack of categorization into senders and recipients (Logan, 2010). Nowadays the notion of the new media is commonly used and so deeply rooted that we do not perceive them as new ones anymore. The most significant changes in the media occurring in universities and being important form marketing processes concern the advancement of Web 2.0 and all the social media based on it. Social media are a set of applications relying on the Internet solutions, based on ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0, enabling creating and exchanging contents, generated by the users themselves (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 includes all the Internet services, the value of which is generated by the users. One of the major characteristics of Web 2.0 services is their open character, thanks to which new contents can be added all the time by all the users. Web 2.0 technology – as no other technology before – allows to make use of active involvement of its users. The role of the user is equal to the one of designers and profile owners while creating the profile. On many occasions such a role comes down to creating contents, elements, applications or even the entire parts of the profiles (Kaznowski, 2008). L. Gorman and D. McLean claim that in Web 2.0 the way of using nets where interactivity and creating the contents by the users, data sharing and content sharing is significantly changed (Gorman, McLean, 2010). Such changes are of crucial importance for creating the image of universities making use of Web 2.0. Although we do not have full control over conversations in social media, we are able to influence it and build our relationships with the environment through it (Safko, Brake, 2009). Moreover, some social media, e.g. Facebook stem from the University environment. Since the very beginning Facebook has been connected with the community of students. M. Zuckerberg together with a group of students created "the Facebook" an on-line social service through which the registered users were able to find and still continue their school relationships and share news and photos. The service arose a wide interest among students and became successful at Harvard University. Over ⅔ of students registered on a newly created website already within the first two weeks of its existence. Then, the interest spread over other elite universities – Princeton, Yale and Stanford (Charles, Davis, 2017).

The choice of social media for communication is dependent i.a. on the profile of the university, target groups to whom the message is addressed and the attitude of people responsible for managing the communication. For instance, in Poland such higher school as musical academies make use of a wider spectrum of social media than universities or universities of technology.

University changing concept

Concurrently with changes occurring in the media, the process of shaping image of universities is also influenced by the evolution in their perception. Social and economic processes and cultural changes lead to a different attitude towards the role of universities. The understanding of a university as a non-profit institution is being replaced with a vision of university resembling an enterprise. This indicates a transition from a liberal university to an entrepreneurial one, acting on the principles of a market logic. "Liberal university is a shrine of knowledge in which dependency on the state is quite visible, with hardly noticeable elements of social responsibility. [...] In a liberal university recognizable scholars were employed and they had full autonomy in their scientific and research work." (Leja, 2013). An entrepreneurial university is characterized by a strong centralized management, and co-operation with business as well as search for sources of funding from the outside of the state budget. J. Boguski describes entrepreneurial universities in the following way: "... they expand their own scientific and research infrastructure. Their faculty members conduct research concerning acquiring new technical solutions for the economy. They are actively involved in market activities. Innovations developed by them address the needs of the market. There is also an increase in the number of faculty members in teams of experts working on strategic documents for local governments. [...] An entrepreneurial university encourages its faculty members to active involvement in counselling services while preparing and implementing innovative projects for industry, trade, services and agriculture" (Boguski, 2009). In the vision of an entrepreneurial university the local point is the development of pro-innovation attitudes both among students and faculty members as well as raising funds for researches from external sources. Evolutionary changes in the attitude towards the role and organization of universities is the result of their adjustment to the changing world and expectations of the environment.

Already in post-war time H.G. Gadamer discovered symptoms of a crisis in the field of converting science into a branch of entrepreneurship. He discussed institutionalization of science and treating it like a production project (Gadamer, 2008). J. Wilkin, who identifies threats to maintaining traditional functions of universities enlists among others: commercialization of a teaching process and research activity, the way the universities are financed that threatens their autonomy, market pressure and widespread digitalization, which supports the process of teaching, making it more complicated at the same time (Wilkin, 2013).

The widespread digitalization is already in universities and transforms not only educational processes, but also the way in which findings of the researches are commercialized. The advancement of the social media enables a wider and relatively easy popularization of science. It also enhances the opportunities of international co-operation and influences the communication with groups from surroundings of the universities. Universities have to open themselves up to their social surroundings, they need to "extend the scope of their activities outside their buildings in order to develop comprehensive and varied relationships." (Banyś, 2013).

A. Adamski perceives the development of the new media not only as an opportunity but also as a challenge for education and the necessity of media education. The communication democracy requires molding a critical and selective attitude, and active reception (Adamski, 2015). Mediatization, especially in the form of new information and communication technologies is a process strongly influencing the life of universities. Digital technologies are changing methods of promotion used by universities, sources of knowledge the students refer to and means of acquiring and distributing the knowledge.

Creating a University image and Web 2.0

The University image is an essential factor determining the choice of higher education institution by students. It also impacts the co-operation with social and business environment. Such an imager is not a reflection of reality, but is rather a biased picture or association generated in the minds of recipients on the basis of different stimuli. The perception of a university in the surrounding environment is to a large extent dependent on the way it communicates with the surrounding. However, the image is often stronger impacted by the way it operates than how it is perceived. The task of public relations experts in university is, therefore, to determine the most suitable communication tools and define the form of the message. Following the concept of McLuhan that "the medium is the message", communication means used by universities will influence the perception of the universities in their environment, and therefore their image. Making use of traditional media in a traditional way only, the universities may be unable to achieve the image of modern and dynamic organizations. According to J. Olędzki PR specialist in a University should not only be a person able to get involved in a discourse, but also they should have expertise concerning the choice of tools to be used in the discourse (Olędzki, 2011). The other important issue is a form and language register of the messages: hard facts reported on in a formal language

EDUKACJA EKONOMISTÓW I MENEDŻERÓW | 4 (46) 2017 |
| Małgorzata Koszembar-Wiklik | *"Medium is the message"* – Creating a University | 159–172

166   Małgorzata Koszembar-Wiklik

will be received differently than those described in a colloquial language, which is much more similar to the one used in conversations than in conveying pieces of information. The social media offer more freedom while using both the language and the picture. However, the language needs to be tailored to the specificity of a social medium. Communication on Facebook is different as it provides an opportunity of using a text, photos, video, whereas Twitter is restricted by 140 characters in a message, therefore the messages gave to be brief and informative. Instagram, however, is a photo service that operates with a picture.

Nowadays, practically all universities use social media in their communication with the environment. They differ in the extent to which the media are made use of and the size of the media. The Facebook icon on internet sites of universities is already nothing extraordinary. Some universities also have the icons of Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Google+ and others. The social media icons are not only on www sites of the universities, but increasingly often they are included in promotional materials such as leaflets, posters, press advertisements or hoardings. And although it might happen that posts on Twitter or photos on Instagram are rarely posted, possessing such icons on the website or in advertising materials is expected to prove a modern character of the organization.

Polish universities differ from each other in terms of using the social media in their communication strategy. For instance, the comparison of public classic universities in terms of implemented social media whose links are available of the university website is presented below:

Table 1. Use of social media in Polish universities

Name of university	Social media used
University of Warsaw	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn,
Jagiellonian University in Kraków	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Flickr
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań	Facebook, YouTube, Linkedin
University of Wrocław	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Linkedin, Snapchat
University of Silesia	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Linkedin, Google+, Issuu
University of Łódź	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Linkedin, Google+, Flickr, Golden Line
University of Gdańsk	Facebook
Marii Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin	Facebook, Twitter

Name of university	Social media used
University of Rzeszów	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter
University of Opole	Facebook, YouTube
University of Szczecin	Facebook, YouTube
University of Białystok	Facebook, YouTube
University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Google+
Mikołaj Kopernika University in Toruń	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Linkedin, Golden Line
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw	Facebook, YouTube
University of Zielona Góra	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter
Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Linkedin, Google+
Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce	Facebook, YouTube, Twitter

Source: Author's own.

As presented above the scope of using the social media is much diversified. Some media enjoy wide interest – all universities have their profiles on Facebook, a major part have their YouTube channel or Twitter account. Other media are used by few universities or a single one, e.g. Snapchat, popular with age group of 18–24 years of age (according to the date of July 2017 this group constitutes 36% of all application owners) (Snapchat, 2017), so potentially within a community of students.

Does the use of the social media impacts the perception of a university as a modern one? According to the researches conducted by the Author among students and lecturers, both groups claim that a higher school has to or should use the social media in the communication process. An insignificant percentage of the respondents claim that the fact of using or not using the social media does not impact the image of the university[1].

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[1] Results of the researches are presented in the Author's publication: M. Koszembar-Wiklik (2016).

Małgorzata Koszembar-Wiklik

Table 2. Opinions on the use of social media in the communication of the university with its environment

Should a modern university use social media in communication with its environment?		
	lecturers	students
Has to use the social media	42.3%	34.2%
Should, but does not have to use the social media	34.6%	51.7%
The use of the media has no impact on the University perception	7.7%	9.5%
I have no opinion	15.4%	4.6%

Source: Koszembar-Wiklik (2016).

The social media do not only provide an opportunity of establishing relations with the groups from the surrounding environment, and of broader and more active communication with them. They also give a chance of presenting the organization as a modern one. However, they also pose a risk connected with the expenses of this communication. Improperly managed Facebook, Twitter or other portal profile, i.e. not active one, rarely updated, with scarcity of information or flooded by it might undermine the image of an organization. Interactive social media give the floor to recipients to voice their opinions and the recipient are not always willing to praise the organization. A likelihood of negative or offensive comments might have a strong impact on shattering the organization's image. The social media – as no other media so far – do not allow to manipulate facts, and the "manipulation with occurrences" aimed at falsifying the reality might be instantly verified by the recipients.

Table 3. Media and threat to the image

Could the social media be a threat to the image because of the possibility of posting negative comments about the University and its lecturers?		
	lecturers	students
Definitely yes	1%	6.6%
Rather yes	35.6%	23.3%
Difficult to say	23%	26.7%
Rather not	32.7%	31%
Definitely not	7.7%	12.4%

Source: Koszembar-Wiklik (2016).

The question "Could the social media be a threat to the image because of the possibility of posting negative comments about the university and its lecturers?" was responded to in the following way: the largest group of the lecturers (40.4%) considered the social media as posing no threat to the university image; 36.6% of lecturers were of a different opinion.

Every third student states that the social media might pose a threat to the university image because of a possibility of posting negative comments about the university and its lecturers, and 53.4%do not consider such a threat. However, addressing the question "Have you ever come across the forums or other social media where negative opinions about the university and its lecturers were posted?" – 26% of lecturers and 35.3% of students claimed that they came across such critical posts. What is significant is that the activity of both the lecturers and the students on social portals of their universities is much limited. A mere few percent read the posts, still fewer comments on them. Yet, they think that a modern university should consider such media in its image communication strategy. Therefore, we are embarking on the statement that "medium is the message" regardless of the fact whether the social media in official communication of a university play their role of creating "community" through their "managerial duty" of communication in the social media.

Along with the statement that "medium is the message", in his media concept McLuhan indicates that the analysis of the media development (the author was aware of their adjustment potential) includes the consideration of four aspects (McLuhan, 2001). He formulated the aspects in four questions that can be considered as the four media principles:
1. What feature and what processes does a medium strengthen and improve?
2. What phenomena does it eliminate or consider less important?
3. What does it revive or retrieve from the past, i.e. regain?
4. What does it convert into (reversion)?

What do the four issues look like in relation to creating a university image in Web 2.0? To start with one of significant features of Web 2.0 – interactivity – changes a lot: allows to strengthen relation with recipients, restricts the control over the image creation due to a possibility of negative posts, enhances the role of recommendations and mutual instructions between recipients thanks to the possibility of availability of the posts on private profiles of Internet user and decreases the role of one-way media. Web 2.0 allows a permanent access from almost every place in the world, provides a possibility of verifying information in real time, enables establishing academic communities, gives and opportunity of debating with other users. It also ensures the multimedia option which allows the use of contents, photos and films. However, at the same time the role of

the traditional media, e.g. the press or the radio is being depreciated as fat as a university image creation is concerned. It does not mean that such media are fully neglected. Their role in the communication with the environment is shrinking, because of the change to the communication lifestyle of young generations.

Table 4. McLuhan media principles and university image creation in social media

strenghtening: multimessage, permanent access to contents, tightening and changing relations with recipients, interactivity, co-participation, creating communities based on shared way of thinking	**reversing:** restraining control over communication and image creation on the part of a provider, recipients as a co-creators of image, forces the provider to permanent control
regaining: increase in the role of word of mouth advertising, importance of personal recommendations (available on personal profile), increased significance of communities	**extincting:** decline in the role of traditional media in image creation, e.g. the press

Web 2.0 in university image creation

Source: Author's own.

Conclusions

Communications habits of the web generation are different than those of the generation brought up in the time dominated by TV, the radio and the press. Nowadays the majority of Internet users treat the Internet as something "obvious", a tool used at work, in entertainment for communication and they do not think about its sources. The Internet as a medium is rooted in daily life of the web generation as much as TV was rooted in the lifestyle of people born in the second half of XX century, and as much as the radio was characteristic for the post-war "baby-boomers". Does a modern university have to use the social media in communication? The answer seems apparent and is – yes. "Medium is the message" and therefore all the tools used by universities in communication with the external environment will influence the university perception. Wide diversification of communication channels is more important from the perspective

of image building than in terms of informative role. However, some problems arise because of limited control over the social media. One of the threats is the possibility of posting negative comments concerning both the university itself and its individual faculty members. Yet, blocking the function of comments or deleting negative posts may bring about more harm than benefit, as it proves scrutinizing opinions and lack of understanding of the nature of the media. On its part Web 2.0 is based on interaction and co-participation which spurs the growing role of the media. Despite the threats connected with the social media in creating the image, the use of Web 2.0 media has become almost obligatory. It is difficult to consider the social media as a temporary trend that will fade away soon. The social media will evolve, however, the changes to communication generated by them are irreversible. Thus, ignoring the social media could be disastrous to creating the image of universities.

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