

*Mediatization of Politics and Politicization of the Media.  
Two Dimensions of the Relationship*

**KEY WORDS**

mutual relations, political system, media system, mediatization of politics, politicization of the media

**ABSTRACT**

The article examines the relations between the media system and the political system. The analysis concentrates on two exceptionally important aspects of these relations: the mediatization of politics and the politicization of mass media. Both aspects are derived from the paradigm of the dominance of one system over the other. Firstly, the mediatization of politics implies imposing rules and logic characteristic of the means of mass communication upon the political system. This narrows the room for maneuver when making decisions and conducting political activities. Secondly, the politicization of the media is an attempt, made by politics, to dominate the realm of mass media and use them instrumentally to achieve its own, often purely partisan, purposes. Hence, it is in the best interest of democracy to build relations between the sphere of politics and the mass media on the principle of cooperation, not rivalry, since various interlinkages are of a symbiotic nature, i.e. based on shared interests.

**Diversity of links between the realm of politics and the mass media**

A modern society treated as the social system consists of two crucial components: political and media (sub)systems. Both systems are independent and autonomous in a democratic society; they both have a significant impact on the functioning of other social (sub)systems. The importance of politics stems from the fact that the political system, when compared to other systems, is characterised by the ability to impose its own, even authoritarian ideas and values as well as to construct procedural and institutional forms of the society's functioning<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile, the growth of social significance of the mass media – reflected in the process of mediatization – has caused that the changes in the media system impinge upon internal transformations within other social systems<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See: M. Kaase, *System demokratyczny i mediatyzacja polityki*, [in:] *Media masowe w systemach demokratycznych. Teoretyczne problemy i praktyczny wymiar komunikowania politycznego*, ed. by B. Dobek-Ostrowska, Wrocław 2003, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> M. Meyen, *Medialisierung*, „Medien und Kommunikationswissenschaft” 2009, H. 1, p. 35.

The functioning of both systems, however, relies heavily on their mutual relationship. The symbiotic dependence between these two spheres of social activity is the foundation of this relationship<sup>3</sup>. The political system needs legitimacy for its actions, which it receives primarily due to the mass media that promote and explain political decisions and their consequences, record their social reception or inform about expectations and requirements of the society towards its political representation<sup>4</sup>. Simultaneously, the means of mass communication cannot properly operate without the political system which provides the media with an inexhaustible source of information, opinions and topics being of great interest for the recipients.

Both areas of social activity are therefore bound to each other; nonetheless, when their mutual relationship is observed, an element of instrumental treatment of the other party can be perceived. It means that a specific kind of a game of interests is played between the mass media and politics, and it seems that the means of mass communication have the advantage over the latter in a democratic state. Their dominance is determined by three premises of a structural, psychological and normative character:

- in the structural sense, due to the specificity of the influence they exert, the mass media can ensure reaching a large population of recipients (potential voters and supporters) – unavailable by any other means – attractive in terms of both the number and diversity of socio-demographic features,

- in the psychological sense, according to their audiences, the media's main asset is the high degree of trust and credibility, which increases their social prestige and importance,

- in the normative sense, the means of mass communication are particularly significant in a democratic society at times of conflict, when they seek to legitimise their independent – free from various forms of pressure and political control – position in the field of politics<sup>5</sup>.

Particular attention in German political science and study of communication is paid to the fact that, owing to their unique social rank, the mass media are useful to political power for three reasons: 1) they provide the political system with the necessary information about social realities, 2) they continuously affect the process of shaping views and attitudes of the society, focusing the attention of its audiences around issues and topics selected by them, 3) they familiarise the public with the results of political actions and processes, interpreting them appropriately or, at times, even

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<sup>3</sup> The importance of the symbiotic interdependency between the realm of politics and the mass media is emphasised by J.W. Adamowski, *Media masowe w kampaniach politycznych*, [in:] *Media masowe w praktyce społecznej*, ed. by D. Waniek, J.W. Adamowski, Warszawa 2001, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> See: Z. Oniszczyk, *Relacje między mediami a systemem politycznym w niemieckiej nauce o komunikowaniu*, „Zeszyty Prasoznawcze” 2000, No. 3/4, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Blumler, M. Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication*, London–New York 1995, pp. 12–13.

deforming them<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, if we observe the interaction between the realm of politics and the mass media from the perspective of interests and objectives of both systems, we could indicate three characteristic patterns – specific paradigms of their interdependence:

- paradigm of participation in the authorities – by controlling the legislative, executive and judicial powers, the media become the independent Fourth Estate in the social perception. The possibility of exercising the power is determined by economic independence of the media and their political autonomy;

- paradigm of instrumentalisation – in this case, the relationship between politics and the mass media is conditioned by the quest for domination of one or the other system. Two basic variants of the relationship are thereby distinguishable. The first is characterised by the dominance of the media system over the political system since the media, especially television, have a decisive influence on political decisions and activities. Political institutions lose their autonomy to the media and the media rise to the role of a self-reliant political force. The second option, in turn, emphasises the dominance of the political realm and the loss of autonomy by the media system. The media are treated as a tool of the political system used to achieve its objectives. The sphere of politics, directly or indirectly, controls the activities of the media, in which persuasive communication remains fundamental. Also, the political system willingly takes advantage of various institutions of political public relations;

- paradigm of independence and symbiosis – occurs when the media system is bound to the political system through the network of diverse mutual interactions, interferences and penetrations, and the existing system of linkages springs from these actions and processes. The political system is simply doomed to cooperate with the media to provide information on its functioning and the media, in turn, draw facts and opinions interesting to their recipients from the political system. In this way, the relationship between the mass media and the sphere of politics is based on the principle of cooperation and symbiosis, being of a lasting nature<sup>7</sup>.

The above quoted paradigms indicate that three main types of dependence between the media system and political system can be distinguished: 1) symbiotic relations – based on shared interests, 2) mediatisation of politics – related to the domination of the media system and 3) politicisation of the media resulting from the political system aiming at using the media instrumentally (see Figure 1).

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<sup>6</sup> See: U. Saxer, *Vorwort*, [in:] *Politik und Kommunikation*, Hrsg. U. Saxer, München 1983, pp. 9–16.

<sup>7</sup> See: U. Sarcinelli, *Mediale Politikdarstellung und politisches Handeln: analytische Anmerkungen zu einer notwendigerweise spannungsreichen Beziehung*, [in:] *Politische Kommunikation in Hörfunk und Fernsehen. Elektronische Medien in Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Hrsg. O. Jarren, Opladen 1994, pp. 35–50.

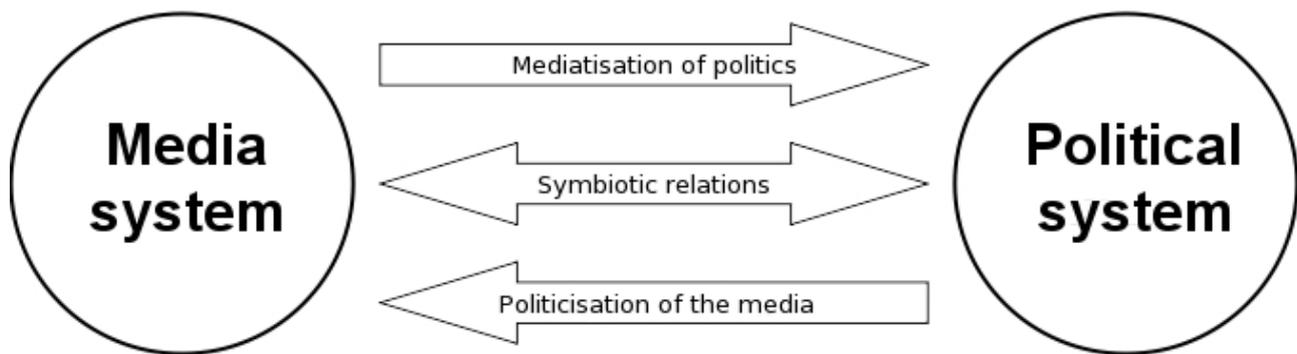


Figure 1. Basic relations between the mass media and the sphere of politics

Source: Own elaboration.

Thus, the nature of this relationship proves that the media system and political system can both interact and compete with each other. The fact which trend will prevail depends upon many different factors; however, the consequences of this interaction are extremely crucial to the stability of any democratic social system.

### Social essence of mediatisation

The concept of mediatisation is of crucial importance to understand the relationship between the realm of politics and the mass media. This term describes a universal social process induced by the growing significance of the mass media to the functioning of various spheres of modern society. In its essence, mediatisation means adapting the actions of actors operating within the realm of politics, economy, culture, science and other social subsystems to the terms defined by the specific influence that the media exert. This adaptation is a guarantee of the media interest and publicity, which are an essential prerequisite for the success within the social dimension<sup>8</sup>. As far as social consequences are concerned, in the long term, mediatisation changes the values and norms that occur in a given society whereas, in the short and medium terms, it alters its idea about the current social problems<sup>9</sup>.

In the German study of communication, the process of mediatisation<sup>10</sup> is considered from the standpoint of two major research perspectives<sup>11</sup>:

■ sociological perspective – according to this approach, mediatisation is the process of *social and*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. H.M. Kepplinger, *Was unterscheidet Mediatisierungsforschung von der Medienwirkungsforschung?* „Publizistik“ 2008, H. 3, p. 327.

<sup>9</sup> See idem, *Demontaż polityki w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, Kraków 2007, p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> German researchers studying the influence of the mass media on the functioning of modern societies apply mainly two terms: mediatisation (*Mediatisierung*) and medialisation (*Medialisierung*), using them either synonymously or explicitly highlighting the differences within the problematic scope of the two terms. See: M. Meyen, *Medialisierung*, pp. 23–38.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, pp. 26–27.

*cultural changes* within the framework of which *culture, everyday life and human identity transfigure under the influence of the media development*<sup>12</sup>. Mediatisation leads to the fact that *the communicational environment of people diversifies and expands, and, consequently, increasingly more people, increasingly more frequently and in the more diverse manner, bind their social and communication activities with the increasingly more varied media*<sup>13</sup>;

■ communicological perspective – in which mediatisation involves primarily social consequences of the process of public communication increasingly more dominated by the mass media. In this sense, mediatisation makes it necessary that various actors of the process of public communication take into account the logic and specificity of the media functioning<sup>14</sup>.

If we therefore accept the communicological perspective, mediatisation then includes three vital, related to one another, problems: 1) weakening or loss of autonomy by various social subsystems, 2) reduction of the functional importance of particular social subsystems and 3) dependence of the strength and rank of various social subsystems on the sphere of the mass media activity<sup>15</sup>. Weakening or the loss of autonomy is the consequence of a situation when the media have a significant impact on the process of personnel recruitment, when they determine their professional careers and impinge upon the practice of a profession in various social subsystems. The reduction of the functional significance of social subsystems results from the fact that individuals, institutions or structures operating within them have to conform to the rules of achieving a success imposed by the mass media, what therefore precludes them from carrying out their tasks optimally and rationally. In this case, the logic of various subsystems functioning becomes subordinated to the logic of the media functioning. Furthermore, the dependence of the strength and power of different subsystems on the sphere of the mass media activity means that the freedom to make decisions within these subsystems is limited since the media, by reporting particular issues and events, determine which decisions can be granted social acceptance and understanding and which cannot. This narrows the field of decision-making manoeuvring as, sometimes, only one variant of the solution to the problem may gain the media legitimacy.

All these three aspects of mediatisation clearly indicate that, currently, the positive media publicity, positive media image of people and things, has become a functional prerequisite for the success of actions undertaken in various social subsystems constituting a democratic society.

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<sup>12</sup> See: F. Krotz, *Metaprozesse sozialen und kulturellen Wandels und die Medien*, „Medien Journal“ 2003, H. 1, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>14</sup> See: J. Westerbarkey, *Journalismus und Öffentlichkeit. Aspekte publizistischer Interdependenz und Interpenetration*, „Publizistik“ 1995, H. 2, p. 155; G. Vowe, *Mediatisierung der Politik. Ein theoretischer Ansatz auf dem Prüfstand*, „Publizistik“ 2006, H. 3, p. 441.

<sup>15</sup> See: H.M. Kepplinger, *Was unterscheidet...*, p. 327.

## Mediatisation of politics

One of the main areas of mediatisation is the field of politics. The mediatisation of politics is, in fact, bound to the aforementioned paradigm of instrumentalisation. The media are actually treated as *an autonomous and competitive centre of power*<sup>16</sup>, seeking to dominate the political sphere. In this perspective, the mediatisation of politics is the process of imposing rules and the logic of actions typical of the means of mass communication on the political system<sup>17</sup>.

Thus, what are the grounds for such understanding of the mediatisation of politics? In the light of the research, two kinds of premises can be identified: the first group is of a causal nature while the second one – of a functional character<sup>18</sup>. The causal approach enables to determine the mechanisms and sources of the domineering position of the media towards the political system; the functional approach designates the areas of the growing impact of the means of mass communication on politics.

The adoption of the causal optics permits to distinguish three main sources of power of the mass media in their relations with the political system: 1) organisation and conduct of the public discourse, 2) control of the access to information, views and interests present in media messages and 3) political, economic and social importance of media institutions and enterprises to political authorities and business<sup>19</sup>.

The first of the above presented sources of the media power stems from the fact that, according to the theory of agenda setting, it is the media that construct the hierarchy of the importance of the issues and problems discussed by their audiences or dealt with by political parties, social organisations and business institutions. The media also exercise control over the flow of information and opinions concerning the actions of the authority, which gives the media the opportunity to create its positive or negative image. The media, directing the interest of the public towards politics, strengthen or weaken the legitimacy of political power in a permanent and continuous manner. Under this approach, the power of the media thus involves initiating and highlighting the public discourse on selected topics and shaping the picture of the reality reported in accordance with the media logic.

The control over the access to information, views and interests occurring in media messages relates to the possibility of selection of opinions and issues presented in different media. According to the theory of gatekeeping, the media have their own specific set of criteria for the selection of

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<sup>16</sup> J. Street, *Mass media, polityka, demokracja*, Kraków 2006, p. 197.

<sup>17</sup> See: M. Meyen, *Medialisierung*, p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> Causal and functional approaches prevail in the German study on the relationship occurring between politics and the mass media. See: W. Schulz, *Komunikacja polityczna. Koncepcje teoretyczne i wyniki badań empirycznych na temat mediów masowych w polityce*, Kraków 2006, pp. 13–15.

<sup>19</sup> The proposed three sources of the mass media power refer to the conception of John Street concerning the three forms of media power: discursive power, power of access and power of resources. See: J. Street, *Mass media...*, pp. 198–201.

information, views or interests, taking into consideration various factors, ranging from the interests and needs of their recipients to their own political sympathies or antipathies. However, if we attempt to outline the most important factors creating the selection mechanism, we may mention, for instance: routine journalistic practices, ways of acquiring and disseminating news derived from the preferred sources of information, the division of work in the media (rivalry between the public and private media, struggle inside the newsroom between the marketing strategy and the editorial approach) or determining the proportions between national and foreign information<sup>20</sup>.

The third source of the mass media power lies in the influence that institutions and media companies (especially large and strong ones) can exert on governments and states. The media not only acquire and disseminate information and opinions, but also bring revenue (taxes) to the state and are an important workplace. Conscious of their strength and importance, the mass media, particularly their owners and administrators (e.g. the Church), can thus effectively oppose to the restrictions of their power in the form of legal regulations counteracting the media concentration or interfering with the content of media messages that violate various ethical standards.

Meanwhile, the functional approach discusses other aspects of the relationship between the mass media and the sphere of politics. As a matter of fact, this point of view enables to distinguish four essential functions of the media treated as an important centre of power in a democratic society<sup>21</sup>.

The first one involves controlling the actions of the authorities. It appears to be fundamental to the effective functioning of the democratic state. The media are, after all, an essential tool of social control over political decisions and activities even though it must be remembered that the scope of this control is limited. Many issues of the so-called routine politics (e.g. procedural decisions) do not raise the interest of the media and their audiences and thereby remain within the domain of political bodies<sup>22</sup>.

The second function can be described as defining crises. It is the media that, often hastily, define different political, social, economic and cultural phenomena as crises, forcing *ipso facto* the authorities to undertake certain actions. The media describe what the crisis is, state its causes, course and consequences but do not offer solutions. Assuming such role, the media do not replace the authorities but only direct their activities.

Revising the actions of the authorities can be considered the third function of the media. In crisis situations, they become the advocate of introducing changes to the measures taken by the authorities which is often combined with exerting pressure on the government in order to re-

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<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 200.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. W. Jabłoński, *Kreowanie informacji. Media relations*, Warszawa 2006, p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> The importance of the field of the so-called routine politics in relations with the media is stressed by M. Kaase, *System demokratyczny...*, pp. 54–55.

examine the existing situation. In this case, the pressure exerted by the media may be crucial to verify political decisions and activities.

The media critique of the operations of the authorities frequently has a personal dimension. Thus, stimulating personnel decisions can be regarded as the fourth function of the media. If the public opinion accepts the media interpretation of a crisis, the government will be forced to make personnel changes. An attempt to postpone personal decisions can lead to the decline of the public trust in the government which is reflected in an increasingly more negative image of the authorities, observable especially in various opinion polls.

It is easily noticeable that the functional importance of the media reveals itself primarily under emergency conditions. It is the consequence of the fact that politicians and other decision-makers fall under the influence of the triple illusion, resulting from overestimating the role of the mass media in a crisis situation<sup>23</sup>. Firstly, they believe that the media reflect the actual distribution of the public opinion; secondly – that the majority of the population receives media messages concerning the crisis with the same interest as they themselves have; and thirdly – that the society reacts to these messages as strongly as their circles. As a result, it leads to the irrational behaviour of politicians, either opposing to the demands of the putative majority or panickily yielding to the alleged will of the public.

The above described attitudes and behaviour of politicians can be explained by the mechanism of double impact that the mass media exert on the opinions of people who are the object of media messages. The media influence them through both the direct effect of the messages themselves as well as the fact that the interested ones imagine how these messages affect other recipients (see Figure 2)<sup>24</sup>. Consequently, politicians frequently present in media relations become particularly vulnerable to the influence of the mass media. Simultaneously, the importance of a group of advisers and media experts cooperating with politicians, who can explain the logic of the media functioning and the significance of media messages, gradually increases.

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<sup>23</sup> See: H.M. Kepplinger, *Demontaż polityki...*, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 121.

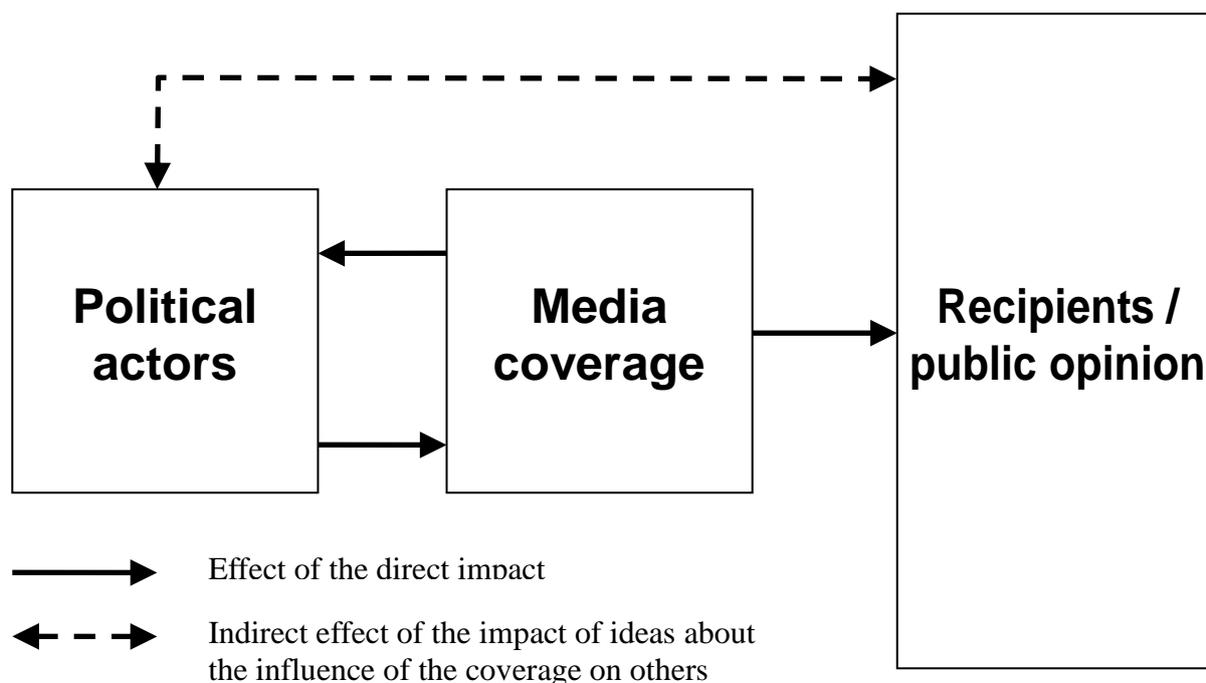


Figure 2. Mechanism of the double impact of media reports on political actors who are their subject

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of H.M. Kepplinger, *Demontaż polityki w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, Kraków 2007, p. 121.

Thence, we shall approach the question concerning the basic consequences of the mediatisation of politics. In the light of the German study of communication and its achievements, they can be divided into two main groups: firstly – effects within the systemic dimension (important to the functioning of the political system) and secondly – effects within the personal dimension (important to politicians and other political actors).

As far as the first group of consequences is concerned, we can list five significant effects of the mass media influence on the sphere of politics: 1) impact on political elites, 2) impact on the political decision-making process, 3) changes within the political system, 4) creating the external image of the political system, 5) shaping symbolic politics<sup>25</sup>.

The influence of the media on political elites results from the specific sensitivity of this category of recipients to media messages. As the research proves, political leaders come into contact with these media messages that have already been selected by their co-workers<sup>26</sup>. As a result, the increased proportion of information being of interest to politicians reaches the elites, making the

<sup>25</sup> This conception is the author's own.

<sup>26</sup> For further reference, please See: H. Puhe, H.G. Würzberg, *Lust und Frust. Das Informationsverhalten des deutschen Abgeordneten*, Köln 1989 and F. Harmgarth, *Wirtschaft und Soziales in der politischen Kommunikation. Eine Studie zur Interaktion von Abgeordneten und Journalisten*, Opladen 1997.

impression that the public opinion is concentrated only on these specific issues. It is often the consequence of systemic errors involving the wrong choice of topics or tendentious selection of the means of mass communication disregarding the prestigious and opinion-forming media.

The impact on the political decision-making process stems from the fact that the political system draws information on the social reality primarily from the media coverage that frequently becomes the foundation for taking particular political decisions or actions<sup>27</sup>.

Structural changes inside the political system can also be the outcome of various alterations occurring within the media system. The best example here would be the phenomenon, reported by German researchers, of the diminishing role of local party structures which, to an increasingly larger extent, become directly guided by the party headquarters using the modern electronic media<sup>28</sup>.

Shaping the external image of the political system is in fact the media domain. It is they that, reaching large audiences, create the picture of political institutions and politicians, concurrently indicating advantages and disadvantages of their actions<sup>29</sup>.

Modelling symbolic politics relates to the media stimulation of politicians and political parties so that they reach for the means of persuasion referring to emotional argumentation. Appealing to the canon of patriotic values, national symbols or dramatising particular events leads to understating the role of a rational political debate analysing programmes of political parties or their ideological assumptions<sup>30</sup>. Therefrom, symbolic politics is regarded as an effective tool in the struggle to maintain or gain political power, particularly noticeable and used during the period of election campaigns<sup>31</sup>.

A few consequences that are clearly negative in their nature can as well be observed among these belonging to the systemic dimension. It involves primarily the manner of selecting political elites, the rationality of the political process and the responsibility for side effects of political decisions and actions<sup>32</sup>. As a matter of fact, in the system of selecting political elites, instead of competence, knowledge and experience, much higher importance is assigned to the 'media predispositions': telegenicity, outer appearance, ability to use body language or calmness and

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<sup>27</sup> See: O. Jarren, *Politik und Medien im Wandel: Autonomie, Interdependenz oder Symbiose?*, „Publizistik“ 1988, H. 4, pp. 619–620.

<sup>28</sup> See: O. Jarren, M. Bode, *Ereignis- und Medienmanagement politischer Parteien. Kommunikationsstrategien im 'Superwahljahr 1994'*, [in:] *Politik überzeugend vermitteln. Wahlkampfstrategien in Deutschland und in den USA*, Gütersloh 1996, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. H.M. Kepplinger, H.B. Brosius, S. Dahlen, *Wie das Fernsehen Wahlen beeinflusst. Theoretische Modelle und empirische Analysen*, München 1994.

<sup>30</sup> See: M. Kaase, *Demokratisches System und die Mediatisierung von Politik*, [in:] *Politikvermittlung und Demokratie in der Mediengesellschaft. Beiträge zur politischen Kommunikationskultur*, Hrsg. U. Sarcinelli, Opladen–Wiesbaden 1998, p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. U. Sarcinelli, *Symbolische Politik. Zur Bedeutung symbolischen Handelns in der Wahlkampfkommunikation der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Opladen 1987.

<sup>32</sup> See: H.M. Kepplinger, *Demontaz polityki...*, p. 136.

composure when dealing with journalists. The rationality of the political process, in turn, gives way to the rationality of the media. The media specificity often dictates rules and principles of implementing political actions. Meanwhile, as far as the accountability for unforeseen consequences of political decisions and actions is concerned, blurring and shifting it onto political opponents becomes a norm.

While speaking about the effects of mediatisation of politics within the personal dimension, attention should be drawn primarily to: 1) the degree of politicians' familiarisation with the public opinion<sup>33</sup>, 2) the social status of politicians perceived as not enough expressive officials or political stars<sup>34</sup>, 3) the image of the politicians' character and their competencies<sup>35</sup>, 4) the impact of various aspects of their media image on the decisions of voters<sup>36</sup> and 5) the assessment of individual politicians' morale which is disclosed particularly when the media discover their involvement in various scandals<sup>37</sup>. In social practice, the aforementioned effects reinforce the tendency to perceive the political system through the prism of the activities of political leaders being the major 'actors' of media messages.

On the basis of the forequoted, it can therefore be concluded that the mediatisation of politics is a multidimensional process, constantly transforming the political system. However, this process is inscribed into the evolution of modern democracy founded, *inter alia*, on the principle that politics needs the mass media more than the media need politics.

### **Politicisation of the mass media**

The term 'politicisation of the media' refers to the aforementioned paradigm of instrumentalisation of interconnections between the political system and the media system. As a matter of fact, the very nature of the media politicisation involves the situation when the realm of politics attempts to dominate the media and uses them to realise its own, frequently purely partisan, purposes. Nevertheless, it is not a clearly expressive notion what is best described by the following statement: the politicisation of the media means *an overt encroachment of politics upon and its presence (in all its forms and variations) in the daily life of the mass media*<sup>38</sup>. Hence, other terms relating to these issues, such as the media partisanship, are also used. While the first of these terms is burdened with the lack of explicitness as it can mean both exerting pressure on media activities by the sphere of

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. B. Peters, „Öffentlichkeitsselite” – Bedingungen und Bedeutungen von Prominenz, [in:] *Öffentlichkeit, öffentliche Meinung, soziale Bewegungen*, Hrsg. F. Neidhardt, Opladen 1994, pp. 191–213.

<sup>34</sup> See: H.M. Kepplinger, *Politiker als Stars*, [in:] *Der Star. Geschichte, Rezeption, Bedeutung*, Hrsg. W. Faulstich, H. Korte, München 1997, pp. 176–194.

<sup>35</sup> See: H.M. Kepplinger, H.B. Brosius, S. Dahlen, *Wie das Fernsehen...*

<sup>36</sup> See: H.M. Kepplinger, *Demontaż polityki...*, pp. 127–128.

<sup>37</sup> See: T. Geiger, A. Steinbach, *Auswirkungen politischer Skandale auf die Karriere der Skandalisierten*, [in:] *Medien und politischer Prozess. Politische Öffentlichkeit und massenmediale Politikvermittlung im Wandel*, Hrsg. O. Jarren, H. Schatz, H. Wessler, Opladen 1996, pp. 119–133.

<sup>38</sup> J.W. Adamowski, *Media masowe...*, p. 68.

politics as well as their excessive involvement in covering political issues, often emphasising partisan preferences, the second one – media partisanship – seems to be the most unambiguous since it plainly suggests that the media represent or are subordinated to the interests of specific political groups. The media partisanship is also a concept rooted deeply in the theory of the media system as it appears in the conception of interrelationships between media and political structures proposed by Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1995<sup>39</sup>. Partisanship exists also as the antonym of the term de-partisanship of the media, willingly used by people associated with the functioning of the means of mass communication (representatives of control bodies, politicians and journalists)<sup>40</sup>. It thus seems that the term partisanship of the media should be applied more frequently in scientific studies even though the use of all the above notions is rationally grounded.

In addition to terminological issues, it is also worth realising that the wish to instrumentally use the media pursued by the domain of politics has its wider political background. The politicisation of the media should be regarded as a component of the process which Ryszard Herbut associates with the strategic orientation of political parties at state institutions and calls it *the colonisation of public administration by the ruling parties*<sup>41</sup>. This phenomenon is easily noticeable particularly in post-communist European countries where, due to the low level of identification of the electorate with political parties and their weak membership base, the dominant model of the electoral party has emerged. Parties of this kind – wishing to ensure that they have an impact on labile and indecisive voters and a strong political position on the market – seek to take control of the organs of public administration, local authorities, political institutions or even the mass media (mainly the public ones). Having ‘their own’ people in structures of this kind, they are able to use state resources to promote their own parties, leaders and programmes what, in the phase of the decision-making and electoral processes, ensures a significant advantage over competitors. Therefore, the personnel policy becomes an essential instrument for the politicisation of the media in the post-communist countries.

Meanwhile, the conviction that nowadays there are two foundations of political power of the leading parties and their leaders – an efficient partisan back-up and the support of the opinion-forming media – has evolved in the political practice of Western European countries<sup>42</sup>. Thence, the fundamental problem of Western political parties is to create a numerous and well-organised back-up and provide the access to these mass media which have a significant impact on the public opinion. This situation simultaneously raises the basic dilemma of politics in a modern democracy

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<sup>39</sup> See: B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Współczesne systemy medialne: zewnętrzne ograniczenia rozwoju*, [in:] *Media masowe na świecie. Modele systemów medialnych i ich dynamika rozwojowa*, ed. by B. Dobek-Ostrowska, Wrocław 2007, pp. 39–43.

<sup>40</sup> See: A. Dąbrowska, M. Janicki, *Kanał*, „Polityka” 2011, No. 11, p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> See: R. Herbut, *Teoria i praktyka funkcjonowania partii politycznych*, Wrocław 2002, p. 110 ff.

<sup>42</sup> See: H.M. Kepplinger, *Demontaż polityki...*, p. 132.

which involves seeking such forms of political action *that would strengthen communication skills in politics while not threatening decision-making abilities*<sup>43</sup>.

What therefore are the methods that politicians and political parties use to deal with this dilemma? Analysts of the German political market indicate three fundamental strategies of the mass media instrumentalisation applied by the main actors of the political system<sup>44</sup>: 1) exerting a direct or indirect influence on the media coverage of political decisions and actions, 2) expanding their own public relations institutions and adjusting the rules of their functioning to the specificity of the journalistic profession, 3) diverting the media attention from inconvenient topics through a wider use of personalism, ritualisation and symbolics of political activities.

However, as the German experience indicates, various attempts to instrumentally use the mass media focus on canalising their attention and influencing the selection of topics presented by the media. It frequently results from overestimating the strength of impact that the means of mass communication, primarily television, exert. It also stems from the willingness to co-create the criteria of journalistic selection of information and opinions<sup>45</sup>.

How then, in practice, politicians, their advisers and colleagues or institutions of political PR influence the choice of events and issues reported by the media? Empirical studies based on the analysis of the content of media messages bring the answer. As a result, German researchers indicated three basic categories of events relating to the sphere of politics that are present in media messages: 1) natural events – occur independently of media reports, in the natural manner, for instance, voting in the parliament, demonstrations, etc., 2) mediatised events – which would probably occur anyway, regardless of the expected media coverage; nonetheless, due to media reports, they receive a certain feature which remains in accordance with the specificity of work of the means of mass communication, e.g. state visits, party conventions, etc., 3) staged events – prepared specifically in terms of their media coverage, i.e. they would not have happened if their media publicity had not been expected, for example, press conferences convened ad hoc by political parties and politicians, television addresses or political happenings, etc.<sup>46</sup>

The aforementioned comparison explicitly proves that the basic tool of instrumentalisation of the mass media in this case is the preparation of staged events. Owing to them, the selection of themes present in media relations can be influenced by suggesting or, frequently, even imposing one's own point of view. These events can also be used for both raising socially relevant issues as well as considering particular matters, dictated by the fight against the opposition or the inclination to

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<sup>43</sup> W. Van den Daele, F. Neidhardt, „*Regierung durch Diskussion*”. *Über Versuche, mit Argumenten Politik zu machen*, [in:] *Öffentlichkeit...*, p. 48.

<sup>44</sup> See: H. Schatz, *Interessen- und Machtstrukturen im Interaktionsfeld von Massenmedien und Politik*, [in:] *Massenkommunikation und Politik*, Hrsg. H. Schatz, K. Lange, Frankfurt a. M. 1982, pp. 6–20.

<sup>45</sup> See: Ch. Holtz-Bacha, *Ablenkung oder Abkehr von der Politik*, Opladen 1990, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> See: H.M. Kepplinger, *Demontaż polityki...*, p. 143.

divert attention from important – though troubling for a given political party – questions (so-called red herrings). However, mediated events also create possibilities of their instrumentalisation for the realm of politics. Important state visits can thereby be scheduled for the period of the presidential or parliamentary election campaign and party conventions can be divided into the part accessible to the media – organised with regard to their media coverage and filled with media ornamentation (gestures of unity and support, chanting slogans, etc.) – and the closed part, when really essential issues to the given political party are discussed.

The study also indicated that, while the media information concerning natural and mediated events dominated until the 1980s in the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany), the number of mediated and staged messages has increased significantly since then<sup>47</sup>. This implies that, in the era of the growing significance of the electronic media, especially television, the sphere of politics intensified its actions aiming to focus the media attention on events and issues that are important to it.

Another equally important aspect of the politicisation of the media is their involvement in politics in spite of the existing legal regulations. It concerns primarily public radio and television. Financed mainly from subscriptions and government grants, controlled by the bodies accountable to the parliament, these media are particularly vulnerable to political pressures. This results in their political partiality coupled with the practice of interpretative journalism, departing from the reliable and objective discussion on issues and concerns currently bothering the society. In fact, it is a certain regularity since the politicisation of the mass media or their partisanship is equivalent to lowering the level of professionalism they present. This is the price the media have to pay when, whether consciously or not, they succumb to the influence of different actors of the political system.

Therefore, if – concluding this paper – we attempt to determine the instrumentarium associated with the politicisation of the media, we should draw attention to the following activities:

- creating symbolic politics – enabling focusing the media's attention on the image of political leaders, allowing for the dramatisation of events and emotional argumentation. This favours putting serious programme or ideological issues into the background and limits a rational political discourse;
- conducting personnel policy – permitting, only if there are adequate opportunities or legal loopholes, to fill important managerial positions in the media or their control bodies with one's own supporters or sympathisers. It guarantees representing the standpoint consistent with the interests of a particular party in considering various events and matters;
- focusing the media interest around the issues important or useful for political purposes – through

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<sup>47</sup> See: G. Schütte, P. Ludes, *Medienvertrauen und Schlüsselbilderlebnisse. Eine Analyse von Schlüsselbildern in U.S.-amerikanischen und bundesdeutschen Fernsehnachrichtensendungen*, [in:] *Medien und politischer Prozess...*, p. 220.

staged and mediatised events prepared by increasingly more expanded PR political institutions;

- exerting a direct or an indirect political pressure on the media – aimed at their political subordination or affiliation with political objectives of a given party.

Thus, as it has already been proved, politics has at its disposal extensive possibilities of instrumental use of the mass media for its own purposes. However, replacing the paradigm of instrumentalisation with the paradigm of symbiotic cooperation remains in the interest of contemporary democracy. The political system bears responsibility for the development of state and society. Its efficiency depends to a considerable extent on the willingness and ability to repair its mistakes and weaknesses. The pluralistic media system, controlling and assessing the functioning of the political sphere can play an essential role in developing this willingness and ability.