

THE MEDIA CULTURE AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF INFORMATION: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN FOSTERING MEDIA EDUCATION

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Abstract

We are in living an era of media explosion. This fact has already been acknowledged by many scholars in the field of Information and Communication Technologies. The present stage in the evolution of media culture is pregnant with blessings and curses. Today, what humanity makes out of this culture of digital media depends greatly on the ingenuity or creativity with which it is approached. The utmost desire of humanity is to maximize the utility of the blessings that derive from it and minimize the curses that are liable to it. One productive measure of achieving this dream is an inclusive and radical engagement in media pedagogy. This is a pragmatic and worthwhile measure to curb the already increasing excesses of the “curses” made out of the present media culture. One outstanding example of the many cases of abuse of the media culture today is the escalating democratization of information through all sorts of yellow journalism or commercialization of information, especially through social media platforms. The radical response needed to turn the present media culture into an instrument of learning, creativity, positive cultural and political engagements, and an environment of friendship requires a creative collaboration of relevant spiritual, political, and other social institutions, especially the Catholic Church and the States. This is the hub of this article. Our focus is to investigate the phenomenon of media culture today, its effects on humanity, and to indicate some pragmatic measures through which the Church in collaboration with political and social institutions can contribute to transforming the present-day media culture into an instrument, environment, and an experience of love, truth, justice, solidarity, and fraternity for humanity as a whole.

1. Introduction

Information pollution¹, Fake news², and indiscrete dissemination of information on the internet constitute the concept often described as the “democratization of information”. Speaking on the characteristic features of post-modernism³, Alan Macfarlane, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at King’s College, Cambridge, laments what seems to be the “standardless-ness” of the postmodern era, identifying among other heating factors, the effects of the democratization of information⁴, better expressed as the democratization of disinformation. This factor is not an “only child” in the family of the causal factors of the diminishing value of information experienced today globally, but debatably a principal one indeed.

There is no doubt that humanity today is heavily and inevitably media-centric. The infosphere is dominated by what could be described as the GAFAMS⁵ - family factor, with new and potential internet platforms rigorously emerging. This status quo is not far removed from the incredible evolution of the media culture from the antiquity of the oral media tradition to the medieval era of the print media, through the modern epoch of mass media tradition, till the post-modern era characterized by digital media. Obviously, rather than diminish its viability, its ability to connect people, and its powers of convergence for various purposes (economic, diplomatic, religious, and political, etc.), there is an upward heave, which is rigorously forcing its way to hyper-digitality. Effect-wise, the media culture is

¹ Information pollution refers to low-quality, distracting, or incorrect information that causes damage to knowledge and quality of life. Common examples include spam, poor-quality content, and superfluous content.

² Fake news refers to false or misleading information presented as news. Fake news often has the aim of damaging the reputation of a person or entity or making money through advertising revenue. (cf. Hunt, Elle (December 17, 2016). “What is fake news? How to spot it and what you can do to stop it”. The Guardian. Retrieved January 15, 2017).

³ Postmodernism is an intellectual mode of discourse defined by an attitude of skepticism toward the “grand narratives” associated with modernism, opposition to notions of epistemic certainty or the stability of meaning, and emphasis on the role of ideology in maintaining systems of socio-political power. (cf. A. Gary, “Postmodernism” in N. ZALTA, EDWARD (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, Retrieved 12 May 2019).

⁴ Cf. M. ALAN, “A World Without a Worldview: The Condition of Post-Modernity” rendered in March 2014, based on the Chapter ‘How do we know’”, M. IAN (Ed.) Beijing, 2014, in URL: <<https://www.amazon.co.uk/How-Know>> accessed: 12:11:2022.

⁵ GAFAMS refers to mainstream internet platforms that dominate the digital media: Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, and Samsung.

fast becoming more ubiquitous, seductive, useful, irresistible, and of course, more dangerous. With this astonishing influence of the digital media culture, there is no doubt that the Information and Communication Technology sector of both global and domestic communities ranks among the driving forces of economics, politics, and even religion. Obviously, these come with enormous advantages and disadvantages – what could also be expressed as “blessings” and “curses”.

Elon Musk, the founder of the Boeing Company, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and chief engineer at SpaceX, the CEO of Telsa Inc., and co-founder of Neuralink and Open AI, at a conversation with the Minister of the Cabinet of the United Arab Emirate (UAE), Mohammad Abdullah at Gergawi, during the 2017 World Government Summit (WGS17), reverberated what is, in fact, the leading anxiety of present-day humanity about its future in the face of the radical advancement of ICTs and Artificial Intelligence (AI). He underlined the need to brace up for the enormous challenges ahead. According to him, what is at stake is very fundamental, namely, the meaning and identity of the human person bothering on privacy. This advancement has also transformed the human experience of the digital media culture in the 21st century into a sense of an instrument, a history, an environment, and in fact, a lifestyle. It is within this digital echo system (ecosystem) that humanity in this epoch draws a good deal of existential experiences, as well as inspirations on measures of confronting more creatively, both traditional and novel challenges threatening human coexistence. In light of this, the concept of media education and its application as a panacea for teaming social challenges, including conflict intervention in the 21st century begs for a wider audience as a positive mechanism with which to arrive at the desired destination

In this sea of change, the Church as the moral and spiritual catechist, and the conscience of humanity, what ought to be her role in harnessing the “blessings” that come with the present-day media culture, and mitigating the “curses” that derive from it? Indeed, her basic role is that of educating, de-educating, and re-educating the media-humanity, this time, by the media, with the media, and in the media – what Professors Filippo Ceretti and Professors Massimiliano Padula of the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome, prefer to designate in the Italian language as, “meducazione”⁶ (that is, Media Education). Principally, it has to do with a media pedagogy capable of equipping humanity with the required pre-

⁶ F. CERETTI – M. PADULA, *Umanità Mediale: Teoria Sociale e Prospettive Educative*, p. 11.

ventive, and preparative knowledge that enhances safe and creative navigation through the rugged contours of digital internet platforms without sacrificing the dearest possession of the human person, namely, the human dignity, to the seduction, and influence offered by it. Put differently, Media Education hinges on the provision of adequate information about a successful and productive presence in the infosphere (be it online, offline, or onlife).

This article is therefore set forth to examine the venom which information pollution, or disinformation, and its democratization through fake news and other forms of commercialization of information, has injected into the social fabric, with a major focus on the role of the (Catholic) Church in fostering media education. In light of this task, we will take a critical walk from an explication of the principal concepts: the Democratization of Information, Media Culture, and Media Education. This will be followed through an investigation and discussion of their consequences in postmodern humanity, to the role of Church in mitigating the dangers accrued from these consequences. We will draw a conclusion by calling for an intensification of the collaborative and didactic roles of the Church in education, de-education, and re-education of the medial-humanity by the media, and with the media.

2. Understanding the Digital Media Culture

“If you want to use television to teach somebody, you must first teach them how to use television”⁷. This Statement made by an Italian author, Umberto Eco, represents the need for media education also known as pedagogy which enhances a productive engagement with the increasing plurality of the post-modern era. The present stage in the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has raised remarkable concerns globally. The ubiquitous impact of digital media reinforces the fact that humanity has hit the mediacentric epoch. Yet, this is just a point in the overall evolution of the media culture. Of course, the media is far wider than any of the subsets that constitute its historical evolution counting from the oral media to the present digital media culture.

Never in history has humanity experienced a magnitude of media influence, a tsunami of data, efficiency of ICT, incredibility in security and surveillance system, the velocity of transmission, the power of convergence, and of course, the rate of cybercrimes, abuse of privacy rights, fake news, and media frauds equal to

⁷ Eco, U., “Can Television Teach?”, *Screen Education*, 1979, 31: 15-24.

what has been recorded in the 21st century. The paradox is real. These arise from the radical shift that has heralded what Luciano Floridi, describes as “the Fourth Revolution”⁸, which occurs within the infosphere, which is characteristically a data world featuring ‘the tsunami of bytes’ within the digital ecosystem experience of Big Data⁹. It is in the infosphere that humanity experiences the life circle of data and information inexhaustibly expanding towards the so-called ‘hyper-history’. To its credit, every facet of human experience has assumed an almost entirely new dimension. And of course, the impact is replete in all social fields like economy, politics, security, religion, and even in the camp of conflicts and peace studies¹⁰.

The term “media” has a wide range of meanings and applications. The convergent point is found in its Latin root *medius*, which suggests an intermediary or a transmitter. In this etymological sense, media refers to an object or a person through which certain information passes from point A to point B. However, a conventional view holds that “media” refer to “the communication outlets or tools used to store and deliver information or data”¹¹. However, there is a modern sense of the application of the term media, whose origin is attributed to the Canadian Communication theorist Marshall McLuhan, who described the media as both a channel of communication as well as a message communicated.¹²

Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911 – 1980), a Canadian philosopher, is often quoted for insisting on his *Counterblast* (1954) that, «The media are not toys; they should not be in the hands of Mother Goose and Peter Pan executives. They can be entrusted only to new artists because they are art forms»¹³. This too points beyond the media devices themselves to the arts realizable through their instrumentality. But what is most important is the increasing centrality of the media to everyday life. As such, its relevance today has intensified the exigency for its proper understanding and productive applications. Thus, our conception of the term media, must not be limited to digital media which is dominant in the 21st century. In reality, it extends back to the very genesis of the media evolution (the oral media) and forth to include every form of media that had been dominant in various epochs and into its future.

8 L. FLORIDI, *The 4th Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality*. P. 1.

9 Cf. *Ibid.*, *The Ethics of Information*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 4 - 6.

10 F. CERETTI – M. PADULA, *Umanità Mediale: Teoria Sociale e Prospettive Educative*, p. 11.

11 *Ibidem*.

12 Cf. M. MC LUHAN, *Game Mechanics: Advanced Game Design*, New Riders, U.S.A., 2012, p. 147.

13 *Ibid.*, *Counterblast*, 1954 Edition, Transmediale, Berlin, 1954, in URL: <<https://kyl.neocities.org/books/counterblast.pdf>> accessed 22: 12: 2021.

3. The Digital Media

‘Digitality’ is defined by a series of digits, algorithms, neurons, or codes, while media refers to channels of transmitting them, and the outcome is information. In a way, digital media refer to the channels of digitized information broadcast to us through a screen and/or a speaker. This also includes text, audio, video, and graphics that are transmitted over the internet for viewing or listening to on the internet¹⁴. According to the professor of communication and author of the *Risk Manifesto* Richard Smith,

Digital media means any communication media that operate with the use of any of various encoded machine-readable data formats. Digital media can be created, viewed, distributed, modified, listened to, and preserved on a digital electronic device. Digital can be defined as any data represented by a series of digits, while media refers to methods of broadcasting or communicating this information¹⁵.

The digital media culture must not be seen as an eliminator of previous media models. It is rather a question of recognizing how digitalization and computerization have given further life to the media culture, triggering pushes for change, which do not affect one or the other medium but reconfigure once again the link between media technologies and humanity in terms of opportunities¹⁶. From its environmental connotation, the media has become a sphere of existence, experiences, socialization, choices, emotions, spirituality, and even crimes. But as noted by Antonio Spadaro, an Italian Jesuit Priest, journalist, writer, and editor-in-chief of the Jesuit-affiliated journal, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, “The Internet is not like a system of water or gas lines. Nor is it a mass of cables, wires, tablets, cell phones, and computers. It would be a mistake to identify the Internet and its use with the technological infrastructure that makes connection possible”¹⁷.

¹⁴ Cf. D. RAYBURN, *Streaming and Digital Media: Understanding the Business and Technology*, Focal Press, Burlington, 2013, pp. 1- 3.

¹⁵ R. SMITH, “What is Digital Media? The Centre for Digital Media”, in URL: <<https://thecdm.ca/people/faculty/dr-richard-smith>> accessed 22: 12: 2021.

¹⁶ Cf. F. CERETTI – M. PADULA,, *Umanità Mediale*, pp. 20 - 21.

¹⁷ A. SPADARO, *Cyber-spirituality: “the mechanical brain comes to the aid of the spiritual brain”*, 2019, in URL: <<https://antoniospadaro.medium.com/cyberspirituality-98aee11a4b92>> accessed 23: 12: 2021.

In his 2014 Message on World Communication Day (WCD), Pope Francis emphasized the need for the world of media to have a humanitarian face, demonstrating concern, and tenderness. “The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but people”¹⁸. From these points, it is profitable to note further that despite the sentiments promoted by, and sustained in the internet environment, the internet must be properly understood as an experience within the digital ecosystem, and not reduced to the ecosystem itself. The Network is an experience that those cables make possible just as the home walls make possible the experience of feeling at home¹⁹.

This sphere of experience suites the Oxford University Press’ definition of cyberspace within which the internet is considered as an imaginary space without a physical location in which communication over computer networks occurs²⁰. Life in this sphere or space is characteristically intangible, immaterial, interactive, social, distributed, hypertextual, and convergent²¹. These experiences of action in intangibility and immateriality define the digital experience commonly described as ‘online’, whereas the concrete existence and experience of the media agent are denoted as ‘offline’; yet, there is also an intermediate media experience described as ‘onlife’²². A synthesis of these experiences is succinctly presented by Floridi as life in the infosphere:

During the last decade or so, we have become accustomed to interpreting our life online as a mixture of adaptation of human agents to digital environments (internet as freedom from constraints and freedom of pursuits), and a form of postmodern, neo-colonization of digital environments by human agents (internet as control). With interfaces becoming progressively less visible, the threshold between *here* [...] and *there* [...] is fast becoming blurred,

¹⁸ FRANCIS, *Message of the 48th World Communications Day (1 June 2014): Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter*, Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2014, in URL: <<https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2014/01/23/pope-francis-message-world-communications-day-2014>> accessed 23: 12: 2021.

¹⁹ Cf. F. CERETTI – M. PADULA, *Umanità Mediale*, p. 21.

²⁰ Cf. A. SAMUEL, “Is Deterrence in Cyberspace Possible?”, in *Modern Diplomacy, 2021*, in URL: <<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/12/16/is-deterrence-in-cyberspace-possible>> accessed 23: 12: 2021.

²¹ Cf. F. CERETTI – M. PADULA, *Umanità Mediale*, pp. 21 - 22.

²² Cf. *Ibidem*.

although this is as much to the advantage of the ‘there’ as it is to the ‘here’. The digital–online world is spilling over into the analog–offline world and merging with it. This recent phenomenon is variously known as ‘Ubiquitous Computing’, ‘Ambient Intelligence’, ‘The Internet of Things, or ‘Web-augmented things,’ [...] we are increasingly living onlife²³.

4. Democratization of Information

Departing from the provision of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which emphasizes the freedom of the press, the entire provision encourages the phenomenon of democratization of information. As noted by scholars, freedom of communication and information signifies the free flow of ideas, opinions, and knowledge. It is imperative for the free development of the personality of each person and for the cultural, social, scientific, and economic development of humanity. Democratization of information, therefore, realizes the Human right to information. But the information principled in this provision refers to quality, educative, and reliable information. Unfortunately, the present media age is characteristically an age of abuse of information often described as disinformation. This appellation arises from the rate of disinformation that derives from the digitalization of the media. In the words of a Malaysian author, Samsudin A. Rahim,

Globalization and the building of knowledge societies demand higher access to information. Besides investing in appropriate infrastructure and facilitating media literacy, countries must also ensure better access, availability, and quality of information to their population...(by) taking the necessary steps to democratize information by enacting several liberalization policies, commercialization of media stations, and deregulation of the telecommunication industry²⁴.

On the positive strand, the democratization of information gives the operators of state, economic and religious communication companies the right to

²³ L. FLORIDI, *The 4TH Revolution*, p. 43.

²⁴ R. SAMSUDIN A., “Democratization of Information in Malaysia: A Response to Globalization” URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/50281865_Democratization_of_Information_in_Malaysia_A_Response_to_Globalization> accessed: 28:11:2022.

publish without restrictions, which is hierarchical, biased, and non-interactive, restricts anyone from freely expressing ideas, opinions, and knowledge, and to make them accessible to anyone else. And its products are territorially and linguistically limited and not available worldwide. This presents the opportunity to overcome these impediments for free communication. Accordingly, it paves the way for advancement from freedom of the press to freedom of communication and to democratize information. The democratization of information makes it possible, that ideas, opinions, cultural diversity, knowledge, and education will be accessible anywhere, anytime, and to everybody. There are lots of positive impacts that accrue from this phenomenon which cannot be exhausted here.

On the negative strand, this also implies the democratization of disinformation, whereby any citizen is entitled to publish information worldwide himself, and any other citizen has the right to receive, judge, and use it himself, under his own responsibility. And this is where the problem lies. The freedom of the press, without prejudice to its enormous benefits, has also made it possible for abuses of information through the GAFAMS-family factors earlier mentioned in this article. Across the mainstream digital media platforms (the GAFAMS) through posts, reposts, clickbait, likes, and comments, floods of misleading news, attacks on personality, immoral content, and lots more have become increasingly accessible to vulnerable children, youths, and adults. This negative aspect of the democratization of information today makes it incumbent on the Church to rise to her collaborative and didactic roles through her competent institutions for the purpose of humanity confronted with piecemeal destruction with the weapon of information.

The Church must continue to emphasise information ethics. This involvement of the Church has not been lacking, and she should not relent in her role. Collaboration with international bodies like the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organizations would be necessary to develop a Charter of Freedom of Communication, which ensures free, safe, and democratic access to electronic communication, while also ensuring the regulation of information pollution, protection of the confidentiality of communications, and preparation of the consuming public for a creative intake of electronic and other forms of media information. This is achievable through information regulation policies that provide zero tolerance to unethical information by holding the companies in charge of the platforms responsible, and creating adequate public awareness, especially among children and youths who are the most vulnerable victims of the democratization of disinformation.

A corollary vice to the democratization of disinformation is what is often described as the Weaponization of the Media, in which the media has often been manipulated by some propagandists' sites as a weapon of destruction to targeted individuals or groups. This practice is very common in democratic states among political parties. And the use of digital media for various forms of incitement towards conflicts, promotion of hate speech, the assassination of characters, and the bridge of privacy is becoming a recurrent variable in the postmodern world. Apart from being a weapon in the hands of politicians and political parties, the media is increasingly serving the same purpose in inter-state conflicts, inter-companies, and inter-organizational conflicts. However, this trend of weaponization is more alarming within the security and intelligence sectors. It has been a strong contributing factor to the economic failure and instability of some countries. It has also lent support to the military and security failure of some countries, institutions, and organizations around the globe.

Some people have turned the digital media into an environment of crimes, cyber-shaming, cyber-bullying, cyber-ghosting, and a lot more, which contribute heavily to the emotional and psychological trauma of others increasing the rate of depression, suicide, and even death. Many children have fallen victim to toxic content that affects their morality, and even religions have become victims of lies told with pride through the media. Indeed, the media has been used by many for the purpose of committing crimes against the humanity of some specific target or those that fall prey to media seduction. All these are possible to a great extent, based on the right to freedom of expression in article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 18 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which are domesticated in the various Constitutions of the Democratic States.

5. Media Education

The Italian expression “meducazione” is a neology combining two broad concepts: ‘media’ and ‘education’. It is a new dimension of education that takes cognizance of the holistic formation of the human person, especially in the digital space as regards his rapport with the ‘actual’ and the ‘virtual’ or the information environments. According to the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), media education (media literacy) bothers on

the access, utility, scrutiny of, and participation with the media in all its forms, (television, radio, the internet, mobile telephones), and the press²⁵.

As noted by a contemporary scholar on Media and Social Change, Patricia Ann Aufderheide, from UNESCO's 'media literacy' and 'media-literate' definitions, it can be said that these definitions correspond to the widely accepted definition bothering on the ability of a citizen to access, analyze, and produce information for specific outcomes²⁶. A standard point of departure is UNESCO-approved definitions of Media Education. Education begets literacy, and illiteracy is attributed to its absence. Education is therefore the instrument for the acquisition, manifestation, and transmission of every form of knowledge. Hence, the confluence point of the two concepts is the knowledge itself that must be applied through further education for an improved experience of human existence.

5.1 In what Consists the Media Education?

In summary, we are talking about the education of the media, by the media, with the media, and in the media. Media Education is a new path created for preparatory and preventive reasons as a modern pedagogical response to the pluralistic, digitalized, and hyperconnected aimed at enhancing humanity's navigation through the challenges arising from the escalating influence of the digital media culture without sacrificing the most precious wealth of the human person, namely, the human dignity and fraternity. As pointed out by UNESCO above, the primary emphasis on the process of education in this regard hinges on what could be described as 'the educational prepositions': "Media education is about teaching and learning "with" and "about" media, rather than "through" the media"²⁷.

Although the exclusion of the preposition "through" may appear as a negation of the fact of its instrumentality as a channel through which literacy could be attained, in reality, the emphasis of UNESCO is to present media education as an end, rather than understanding it merely as a means. This is an important signal to the changing perspective of the concept of media education from being defensive to being empowerment-oriented, to equip the media citizens with

²⁵ Cf. UNESCO, "Media Education", in URL: <http://www.unesco.org/new/youth_media_education.pdf> accessed 21: 12: 2021.

²⁶ Cf. P. AUFDERHEIDE, (ed.), *Media Literacy: A report of the national leadership conference on Media Literacy*, CO: Aspen Institute, Aspen, 1993, P. 6.

²⁷ UNESCO, "Media Education".

proper epistemological might with which to attend media civilization and critical literacy compatible with present-day social demands. Thanks to the work of Ceretti and Padula, which deepens an elaboration on the concept of media education, devoting good space to elucidate the media educational propositions, which constitute an integral formative process of acquiring media literacy. The first step in this process of media education is educating ‘the’ media itself. And this introduces us to the concept of medial-humanity, which leads to the conclusion that we are the media in so far as the media is a projection of humanity²⁸.

5.2 A Synopsis of Media Education

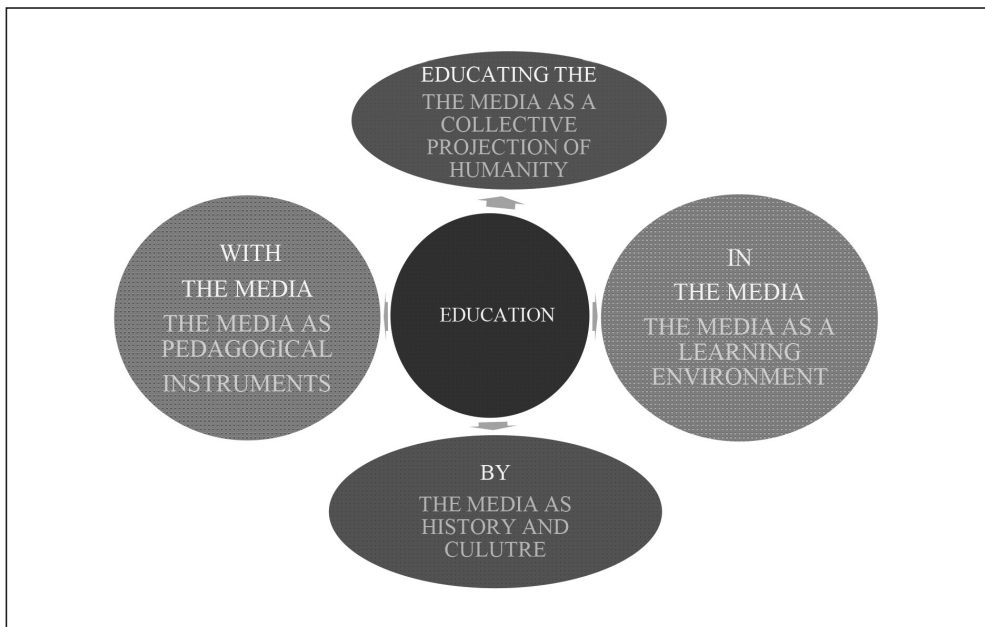


Fig. 1: This is a synopsis of the elements that constitute Media education adapted from UNESCO’s documents, and the work of Ceretti and Padula- Umanità Mediale.

Media education, in the final analysis, hinges on the formation of the human person in such a way that takes cognizance of all his faculties that enable the existence of the person, his functionality as an active member of the societies

²⁸ Cf. F. CERETTI – M. PADULA, *Umanità Mediale*, p. 36.

within which he finds himself, as well as making him capable of moral and social responsibilities and collaborations for the common good, especially, the construction of peace-laden humanity. These faculties are the moral faculty or the conscience – the seat of justice, equity, and moral responsibilities; the intellectual faculty – the engine room for rational activities; and the affective domain – which is at the service of emotional sentiments, and reciprocal sharing. 21st-century humanity is characteristically mediacentric. The existential experience today is inevitably digitalized. And the human person finds himself influenced strongly by the ubiquitous effects of digital media. The major part of our collective humanity has been projected into the Infosphere, and all aspects of individual and collective life, economically, politically, religiously, and others; are lived more and more online, offline, and onlife.

This is true to the extent that the media as a radical projection of humanity (the media) also serves as a pathway (with the media), the methodology, the means of knowledge (by the media), and the environment that enhances the acquisition of existential experience in general (in the media). The concept of media education also takes care to create an equilibrium between the preventive value of education. It emphasizes the negative aspects of the media culture, especially the digital media, and insists on the need to prevent humanity, especially the most vulnerable younger generations from access to social media as a measure to keep them away from media corruption of their morals and de-emphasizes imprudent addiction to digital media platforms.

It also takes cognizance of the preparatory values of education, which insists rather on the need to equip humanity for a fruitful engagement with the increasing advancement of digital media trends without falling prey to its malpractices. There is a third aspect that insists on the reparatory values of education. Where the harm was already committed, media education serves to secure reparation and healing. Whereas the first could be seen as a skeptic's reaction to the dominant media trend, the last two constitute an optimist's perspective. The relevance of media education is to address these points and creatively lead humanity from skepticism to optimism toward a pragmatic engagement with the various media devices and platforms, and trends made available in the surging media revolution for a general improvement of our individual and collective existential experience. When these said are done, the social media and the proliferated social media devices and platforms would be creatively transformed from the instrumentality of violence and conflicts to a credible instrumentality of peace and convivence.

6. The Roles of the Church in Fostering Media Education

The Church remains not only the conscience of society, but also its catechist, and the custodian of its moral and spiritual values. With regards to the media pedagogy in question, the first role of the Church is that of collaboration by which it creatively synergizes with the family and the state, stimulates and unites others on the one hand, and unites itself with others on the other hand, as a creative response to the exigency of media education in humanity today. The Church also has didactic and guiding roles. These roles of the Church will occupy our minds from thence.

6.1 Collaborative Role of the Church in Media Education

For a productive engagement in media education, there is a dire need for media-educational solidarity. Of course, this strategy has limitless accommodability, it requires critical involvement of all and sundry, individuals and groups, the private and public sectors, and especially, the Church. To have it clear, we should examine the collaborative role of the Church in media education in two categories.

6.1.1 CHURCH-FAMILY COLLABORATION

The concept of family and its place in the macro society has often received curious attention from the generality of the society, and especially, from the Catholic Church. The particular role of the family as an institution of fundamental learning is evermore appreciated and saluted. Pope John Paul II (1920 – 2005) during his pontificate, dedicated so much attention to teaching about the institution of marriage and the family. He insisted that the family is “the first and vital cell of society”²⁹, a position already echoed in the document published by the Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 11. These iterate the vital and organic links of the family with society, and its status as the foundation of society. The family nourishes society continually through its role of service to life. For instance, “it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself”³⁰. At this

²⁹ J. PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation on The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, *Familiaris Consortio*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981, no. 105

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

point, it is pertinent to reemphasize the position of the Catholic Church on family collaboration in Media Education:

To parents, for the sake of their children, as well as for their own sakes, parents must “learn and practice the skills of discerning viewers and listeners and readers, acting as models of prudent use of media in the home”. As far as the Internet is concerned, children and young people often are more familiar with it than their parents are, but parents still are seriously obliged to guide and supervise their children in its use. If this means learning more about the Internet than they have up to now, that will be all too good. Parental supervision should include making sure that filtering technology is used in computers available to children when that is financially and technically feasible, in order to protect them as much as possible from pornography, sexual predators, and other threats. Unsupervised exposure to the Internet should not be allowed. Parents and children should dialogue together about what is seen and experienced in cyberspace; sharing with other families who have the same values and concerns will also be helpful. The fundamental parental duty here is to help children become discriminating, responsible Internet users and not addicts of the Internet, neglecting contact with their peers and with nature itself³¹.

The statement above buttresses the corollary fact that the internet is a door opening into a glamorous and exciting world with a powerful formative influence; and that not everything on the other side of the door is safe, wholesome, and true. Thus, the need for openness of young people to media education is sine-qua-non. This will enhance their empowerment to be able to resist the easy path of uncritical passivity, peer pressure, commercial exploitation, and indeed all the seduction of digital media. “The young owe it to themselves—and to their parents and families and friends, their pastors and teachers, and ultimately to God—to use the Internet well”³².

³¹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, *The Church and Internet*, no. 11.

³² Cf. *Ibidem*.

With the overwhelming attraction/seduction of digital, and all the tendencies embedded in it both positive and negative, particularly appealing to all, especially the youths, the family has an additional responsibility of creative vigilance. As a matter of fact, hyperconnectivity demands hyper-sensitivity. This sensitivity is achievable through education, de-education, and re-education of the younger ones on the present-day media culture. Through education, they would be formed holistically with their faculties positively oriented to discern, chose, and follow positive role models on social media platforms. By de-education, they will be formed to decongest their mentality and purge it from toxic information, models, and attitudes they must have already learned from their peers or through contacts with digital platforms. And by re-education, they would be re-formed, equipped, and epistemologically fortified to reenter the media world with a different orientation for maximum positive impacts. To achieve this goal, the role of the family is integral and sine-qua-non. This is not a role to be left solely on the shoulder of the family or the Church. So, salvaging the dignity, morality, and spirituality of the younger generations requires a joint effort of the family and the Church together with government agencies.

6.1.2 CHURCH-STATE COLLABORATION

The bulk of the responsibility to promote media education belongs to the government because the government holds the keys to policies that regulate social life at all levels, including the freedom of the press and ICT. There must be policies that regulate digital media journalism, which does not infringe on the rights of the citizens to information and communication, but regulate propagandists' sites and platforms, otherwise known as fake news industries. The pollution caused by fake news is detrimental to social progress and instrumental to the rise of personal and institutional conflicts. Fake news is a dangerous form of "yellow journalism" sugar-coated to diminish the effects of true information, bring about social chaos, create confusion, and end up with the deformation of the victims due to disinformation. The sensationalism that characterizes fake news is due to its commercial character. For the actors, it is a serious political business meant for commercial gains.

Today, this has become a very destructive weapon of social destruction in the hands of political bigots. It is utilized against the government, other corporate agencies, as well as individuals profiled as a target. And the fact re-

mains that the existence and operation of these war industries are known by the government authorities, at least through the intelligence sector, yet, it is often swept under the carpet. The only valid logic to respond to this irony is that the competent authorities who appear to be helpless in the surge of these trends are directly or indirectly culpable of patronizing them against their perceived enemies. Nevertheless, fake news remains a dangerous distortion of reality, truth, and fact, with a high propensity to conflict. This is one aspect that begs for the creative intervention and collaboration of competent government agencies through creative censorship. And the Church needs to collaborate also with the government in this regard to see that competent government authorities promote media education through educational institutions, which is an environment populated by the category of the citizens most affected by the digitality of the present age.

In fact, the church in Nigeria should set the pace by encouraging the Nigerian education sector to incorporate media education into school curricula. This would enable complete coverage of the processes involved through the schools' formation programs. To start with, Catholic schools and seminaries should design creative media literacy programs through which they would equip the students for a creative engagement with the evolving media culture. To activate civic engagement and responsive government, which the Italian Professor of Political Science, Michele Sorice insists upon in his work, the government is obliged to remove as many as possible, civil obstacles to positive civic engagement. Remarkably, the digital media ecosystem with its hyperconnectivity has become a medium for this engagement, especially by young people of our age. Therefore, another aspect of the relevance of media education is the enhancement of massive civil engagement in governance through their creative presence and contribution. The collaboration of the government on media education in this regard is geared toward creating an open system for positive civic engagement³³.

As noted earlier, everything has now received the prefix "e-" so that it is common to talk about 'e-government', 'e-democracy', and 'e-governance', which are common in the work of Sorice. E-government refers to the use of ICTs in the administrative and public functions of public administrations and institutions. This is very instrumental to civil engagement, communication, and

³³ Cf. M. SORICE, *I media e la democrazia*, Carocci editore, Roma, 2014, pp. 146 – 158.

participation in the political life of the State³⁴. The digital media environment obviously, with its remarkable hyper sense of connectivity, makes e-governance and e-participation possible³⁵. Now more than ever, every citizen at home and in the diaspora can participate virtually in a referendum, and by other means, thanks to e-government or digital democracy.

There is an operation called “armed secrecy”, which developed during the post-Cold War period and has metamorphosed through various phases into a strong cyber weapon in this digital age. As noted by the Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Westminster, and director of the centre for the study of Democracy, John Keane, the growth of armed secrecy has recently produced bizarre effects. Part of the selective executive branch of the State has snooped on their potential rivals and disinformed legislatures systematically³⁶. The police have conducted clandestine paramilitary operations against either their peaceful opponents, like the case of the Rainbow Warrior Bombing or their violent enemies, as in the bombing campaign and assassination in Spain conducted by the Shadowy Anti-terrorist Liberation Group, whose target was to destabilize Basque terrorists and their sympathizers. And State paramilitary secrecy has been used to protect secretive anti-State organizations employing paramilitary tactics. Finally, the trend of secret armed power has spread into the realm of intergovernmental negotiations. For instance, the routine conduct of the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) affairs involves the integration of national defence bureaucracies with transnational defence organizations to create centres of power that escape the control of any single member State, Government, or Parliament³⁷.

The danger of these trends is that they increase the level of electoral non-accountability and secrecy of government operations, which eclipse transparency. In the end, this phenomenon discourages legislatures from interfering in supra-national negotiations. And today, the hyper level of digitalization gives more advantages to this unhealthy secrecy. Therefore, the government, especially in the inter-governmental and international spheres must collaborate to eliminate the negative aspect of these trends, curb the excesses of cyber war, and secure

³⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Cf. J. KEANE, *The Media and Democracy*, Polity Press, 2007, pp. 98 -101.

³⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*.

privacy at all levels through the process of media education. Of course, the advancement of digitalization and globalization has made indifference to digital media on the part of the government at any level, especially, in the parliamentary democratic regime, impossible. Thus, the only valid measure is the creation of policies of enhancement and accompaniment to enable a productive interaction between the political representatives and the populace, and this is very instrumental to decisions making.

The question of privacy, described by Floridi as the “dearest of our possessions”³⁸ has so much to demand from the government and the Church. Of course, it is a fundamental obligation of the government to protect the life and property of its citizens, and privacy is a major one of them. One prominent challenge in this information age is the phenomenon of information friction. And according to experts, this could be counterbalanced by other factors such as modern anonymity. The magnitude of personal information we emit into the infosphere every time we interact with our digital devices is enormous. And this has motivated the rise of online reputation management companies³⁹ that monitor and improve information about an individual or a brand. The promotion of this kind of enterprise by the Church in collaboration with the government is a very creative way of protecting the privacy of both institutions and human persons. Below are the components of Online Reputation Management (ORM)⁴⁰, profiling, content creation and marketing, press releases, online reviews, monitoring, and reporting. This reputation management oscillates within these variables, and it is worthwhile for privacy security. And with a creative partnership of competent government agencies, this initiative has the propensity of salvaging privacy-related risks and other forms of cyber fraud.

³⁸ L. FLORIDI, *The Fourth Revolution*, p. 113.

³⁹ Reputation management, originally a public relations term, refers to the influencing, controlling, enhancing, or concealing of an individual’s or group’s reputation. The growth of the internet and social media led to the growth of reputation management companies, with search results as a core part of a client’s reputation. Online reputation management, sometimes abbreviated as ORM, focuses on the management of product and service search engine results.

⁴⁰ Cf. ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT, in URL: <<https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=HQsldIfu&id>> accessed 23: 03: 2022.

7. Didactic Role of the Church in Media Education

Emilie Durkheim studied Totemism⁴¹ among the indigenous Australian aborigines, and draw the conclusion that “religion provides social control, cohesion, and purpose for people as well as another means of communication and gathering for individuals to interact and reaffirm social norms”⁴². According to an analysis of Durkheim’s conception of religion by Vikash Ranjan of the Triumph IAS, religion is something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations that express collective reality. Religion acts as a source of solidarity, and provides meaning for life, social control, cohesion, and purpose for people. Durkheim’s concern about religion lay in the fact that it was one of the main agencies of solidarity and morality in society and was, therefore, part of the central problem of social solidarity⁴³.

The social and spiritual roles of religion as the custodian, protector, and disseminator of moral values in the social sphere are in higher demand in this age of digitalization than ever. It is within this role that the Church has a crucial part to play in the process of media education for the common good. The presence of religion in the infosphere is indisputable, of course, the Church cannot stay aloof from this modern trend. This role has already been activated with the groundbreaking Proclamation on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* of the Second Vatican Council Pope Paul VI (1965) through which the Church assumes her full responsibility toward a holistic formation of the human person as a measure of equipping him or her for an active and creative role in the society⁴⁴. Particularly on the evolving trend of digitalization, alert to her pedagogical role, the Church defines the trajectory for positive engagement that safeguards the moral conscience of individuals and the collectivity of human society.

⁴¹ Emilie Durkheim saw totemism as the most basic form of religion. A totem is an animal or other natural object that spiritually or symbolically represents a people and their common origin.

⁴² Cf. V. RANJAN, *Sociology*, Triumph IAS, in URL: <<https://triumphias.com/blog/emile-durkheim-religion-and-societ>> accessed, 23: 03: 2022.

⁴³ Cf. *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ Cf. VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL II, *Declaration on Christian Education Gravissimum Educationis*, Editrice Vaticana, 1965 in URL: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_it.html> accessed: 26: 11: 2022.

By constantly guiding the moral conscience of the society both in the individuality of its members and the collectivity thereof, the Church complements in no insignificant way, the efforts of the government, as well as that of the family. This solidarity is very important to direct humanity at every stage to a vision and concrete use of the digital media as an instrument, environment, and epoch, of self-discovery, self-development, social participation, and interaction for political, economic, and a general positive existential experience. The family must be alert to its parental and pedagogical responsibilities, the government must use the political keys of creative policies to complement the effort of the family, individuals, and corporate bodies, and the Church must keep watch on the moral conscience of the individuals and groups that are present in the digital world, and the international community must not relent in its watchfulness over the progress of globalization that is now characteristically digitalized.

The Nigerian Christian Association Commission on Education in November 2022 set the pace by insisting on protecting, not just the Nigerian and African moral and spiritual values of the Nigerian child against the predatory Western values that increasingly eclipse moral, spiritual, and cultural values in the guise of liberty and choice. In the Communique issued at the conclusion of the annual General Assembly of the Association of Christian Schools in Nigeria held in Jos on 23rd – 25th November 2022, this respected body agreed with the Honorable Minister of Education Mallam Amadu Adamu (CON), on the removal of the strange curriculum on sexuality and education, as well as the rejection of the funds donated to this effect, noting that the content of this Western package is more or less what could be described as a weaponization of thoughts and funds, whose target is the beautiful moral, spiritual, and cultural values embedded in the Nigerian education system. Against these ravenous thoughts, the Association reiterates the position of Dr. Udofia of the University of Uyo, that, “Curriculum is societal means of preserving itself from extinction and raising the type of youth that will be functionally occupied in building the society for a better tomorrow and overcome the challenges posed by the environment”⁴⁵. This is the right move in the right direction. It is expected that the same synergy is sustained in the aspect of media education for the preservation of the required moral, spiritual, and cultural sanity.

⁴⁵ Cf. E. SONNIE, “The case against sex education”, *The News Guru* in URL: <<https://thenewsguru.com/columnist/the-case-against-sex-education-by-sonnie-ekwowusi/>> accessed: 30:11:2022.

8. Conclusion

Media education has vertical and horizontal dimensions, which account for its spatiotemporal manifestation as an instrumentality, history, and environment of self-expression, learning, and growth. The vertical dimension deals with the connection of humanity to the network of waves and frequencies in space at a given time through cables and gadgets. And the hyperconnectivity between humanity and the ubiquitous network enables an existential experience within the infosphere and also heavily circulated into the atmosphere. Following this vertical trend, the three basic existential experiences of being ‘online’, ‘offline’, and the neologism attributed to Lucian Floridi, ‘onlife’ – an experience characteristically digital and virtual⁴⁶. In this regard, media education takes cognizance of the media ecosystem and the media devices through which the network waves or signals are manifested for utilization. On the other hand, the horizontal dimension defines inter-human connectivity – the medial relationship between an individual person or a group of people with another individual person or a group of people at a given time. This aspect bothers what we do online, offline, or onlife and how it affects others within the infosphere and the atmosphere; for instance, when we post a picture of ourselves or someone else, when we comment on the post of someone, when we like posts on Facebook (metaphase), react to posts on Twitter, Instagram, and other platforms.

Each of those simple actions has some magnitude of positive or negative effects on humanity, either of an individual or of a collectivity or both. This horizontal dimension of media education becomes very important because of its link to our existential experience of convivence. There are many cases of cyberbullying which have discouraged some of the victims into depression and in some cases, suicide. Many have testified to their personal experiences of this inhuman behaviour within the infosphere. Marriages have broken, relationships have been frustrated, human beings have lost their lives, and God has been insulted. People have been condemned unjustly, and untold crimes have been committed. Privacies have been abused. And all these happen, often, because of a simple post, a simple like, a simple click, or a simple comment. Of course, these simple actions have cost individuals, families, governments, Churches, and other groups and organizations untold damages. Yet it still retains the possibility of causing more

⁴⁶ Cf. L. FLORIDI, *il Verde e il Blu: idea ingenua per migliore la Politica*, 2020, pp. 11 – 90.

harm, except this antidote of media education is fully activated, accepted, and applied by all. The case involving Egyptian teens was reported on the Channels television Metaphase page on March 25, 2022, as follows: “Egypt Teen Jailed Over Online Shaming That Led to Girl’s Suicide”. This is one of the news that made a headline on the Channels Television⁴⁷.

It is for these reasons that the collaborative and didactic roles of the Church increasingly become demanding and urgent, an exigency, and a clarion call. It is up to the Church in Nigeria, for instance, to encourage the government to take seriously the creative policies bothering on the preparation, and prevention of humanity, individually and collectively, such as the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)⁴⁸, and internet censorship. This is possible through a creative collaboration with organizations like UNESCO, Ministries of Education, and other relevant bodies that will lead to a creative utility of the new level of digitalization of Information and Communication Technologies (ITCs).

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⁴⁷ Channels Television is a Nigerian independent 24-hour news and media television channel based in Lagos, Nigeria..

⁴⁸ F. MACULOSO – J. PURIFICATI, *Il Dizionario della Privacy*, Borgorico (PD), Milano, 2021, pp. 112 - 115.

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