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Signs and Values of Mainstream Audio-Visual Content Intended for Children and Youth

ABSTRACT

Mainstream audio-visual culture is a firmly established part of our everyday lives, reflected in an uncomplicated approach of recipients to individual products as part of ordinary activities. Mainstream works compete for daily attention of media audiences, relying on the viewers' belief that desires, common to the entire society, can be realized in social reality. They raise the interest of the recipients mainly by means of perceived meanings, signs and values. Regarding the topic of the study, we assume that the story of audio-visual contents intended for children and youth equally reflects a set of several preferred values and signs from which the given content is built and which are part of most globally successful films. The main goal of the study is therefore the reflection of the globalization tendencies of the media industry in the sense of identifying the universal features and preferred values in mainstream images intended for children and youth. For the purpose of achieving this goal, we carry out a discursive analysis of the most commercially successful films of 2021 and one of the most profitable films worldwide within the entire "film history", *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021, director Jon Watts), based on the analytical categories defined in the methodological part of the study. In this context, it is necessary to define the discussed issue from a theoretical point of view (with an emphasis on the cultural overlap of stories intended for a mass audience) supplemented by a case study (discursive analysis) of representative research material.

KEY WORDS

Films for Children and Youth. Globalizing Tendencies of Media Culture. Globalization of the Media Industry. Mainstream Audio-Visual Contents. Mainstream Characters. Media Audiences. Preferred Values. *Spider-Man: No Way Home.*

1 Instead of an Introduction: Theoretical Framework of the Issue

Artifacts of mainstream filmmaking and their globalization, dynamic development and expansion into several countries or branches of the media industry represent a series of different production, promotional or distribution activities that together transform a film in a mass-consumed element. The basic characteristic of such media contents is the effort to raise the interest of media audiences through the contained meanings. When universal elements of the dominant culture are discovered in media content, their transformation into production strategies of individual film companies takes place. This shows a set of signs and values is created, which is then used in the creation of many audio-visual works. According to J. Radošinská, the Hollywood style mainstream film is a typical bearer of a wide spectrum of socio-cultural meanings and ideas. It makes intensely symbolic experiences available to its recipients, reflects their experiences, preferences, at the same time, helps them to further shape them.[1] Thus, paying close attention to mainstream film,[2] while trying to assess the globalization tendencies of media culture, is, for the mentioned reason, a deliberate intention.

Mainstream audio-visual content implies a certain type of apparatus for its own production and values aimed at its consumption. In the above-mentioned way, the cultural unification of media audiences, who accept the same signs, values, faith and orientation, takes place precisely through chosen mainstream images. For the given purposes, some unwritten rules of creation are used in the production oh mainstream audio-visual contents:[3]

A mainstream film should, first of all, use the variability of genres (a combination of elements of several genres within one picture), which should be at least partially "enriched" with an element of entertainment, regardless of the corresponding genre (e.g., the use of light-hearted, humorous sequences in horror or fantasy stories, thrillers, dramas, etc.).[4] The popularity of individual genres helped the film industry construct a base for efficient film production, as a result of what marketing and promotional strategies did not have to be devised for each film separately. However, the traditional division of genres into defined categories no longer applies and we are witnessing the crumbling of boundaries between strictly defined genres. Due to the hybridization of film genres, it is not possible to create a universal categorical apparatus for them, and it is also impossible to clearly define the most popular mainstream genre of all times. L. Artz claims that among the clearly identifiable features of contemporary global blockbusters are genre patterns of action and adventure films, elements of real or alternative history, fantasy motifs, themes related to revenge and humorous situations.[5] However, the

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[1] RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Vývojové trendy americkej mainstreamovej filmovej produkcie. In *Communication Today*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 12.

[2] Remark by the authors: Mainstream film or "blockuster" is a film adapted to the preferences of the majority media audiences.

[3] For more information, see: CHRENKOVÁ, L.: Elektronická invázia amerických filmov. In *Media Literacy Student Magazine*, 2015, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 4-10; SCHATZ, T.: New Hollywood, New Millennium. In BUCKLAND, W. (ed.): *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies.* London, New York : Routledge, 2009, p. 32-33; HUNTINGTON, P. S.: *Střet civilizací: Boj kultur a proměna světového řádu.* Prague : Rybka Publishers, 2001, p. 51; CASETTI, F.: *Filmove Teorie 1945-1990.* Prague : Akademie múzických umění, 2008, p. 295; CHRENKOVÁ, L., VALENTOVIČOVÁ, D.: Digital Media: Invasion of American Film. In MATÚŠ, J., PETRANOVÁ, D. (eds.): *Marketing Identity: Digital Life – Part II. Conference Proceedings.* Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2015, p. 399-414; RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: The Production Mechanism of American Mainstream Film and Their Influence on the Recipient. In ČÁBYOVÁ, Ľ., VELICKÝ, P. (eds.): *Quo Vadis Massmedia, Quo Vadis Marketing. Conference Proceedings.* Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2017, p. 131-142.

[4] See, for example: *Deadpool*, 2016, director Tim Miller – Action / Comedy / Adventure / Sci-Fi / Romance; *Thor: Love and Thunder*, 2022, director Taika Waititi – Action / Adventure / Fantasy / Sci-Fi / Comedy, etc.

[5] ARTZ, L.: *Global Entertainment Media. A Critical Introduction.* Malden, Oxford, Chichester : Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, p. 195-199.

presentation characteristics of a mainstream film should, in any case and regardless of the specific genre classification, refer to the natural need of the target audience to be entertained by referring to popular socio-cultural activities, meanings and values of everyday reality (e.g., love, love life, friendship, wealth, power, etc.).

Another important feature of the dominant culture that is transformed daily into the contents of mainstream film works is the archetype. This is understood as the embodiment of various identities, the ideal of a person or some of his personality traits.[6] Most of the commonly used archetypes refer to mythology. In the environment of American cinema, we most often talk about the myth called "American Adam", which is associated with the manifestation of success, untouched land, the fate of Americans and their continent in the early 19th century. The concept of "American Adam" primarily refers to male protagonists as representatives of American exceptionalism. He is most often portraited as an innocent and lonely hero confronted with the harsh reality of the present, freed from the burden of the past and enthusiastically looking to the future.[7] **Therefore, the main protagonist of a mainstream film should be a man, a loner (by choice or by circumstances), who is under pressure from the society and performs some, at best, heroic deeds.**[8] The motif of an individual taking fate into his own hands is popular in Western culture. His quest for self-improvement, self-actualization, recognition or uncovering a conspiracy is understandable to both children and adults. The hero fights against evil, or struggles with nature, irrational forces, his own dark side; he longs for justice, Promethean rebellion, omnipotence, heroic deeds or eternal love, and he tries to achieve his goals through the motif of "scapegoat" and/or "saviour".[9] However, in the current audio-visual environment, mainstream film is characterized by a change in the position of the male protagonist in the story. It is gradually being replaced by the archetype of a woman as a heroine, mother, wife, etc.[10] This change is probably caused by the strengthening role of women in society.

The positive economic situation in the sphere of commercial film production was also achieved with the help of standardization. This is perceived as the creation of template-like images with stereotypical narration, characters and model relationships. This set of elements has been many times tested in films succedding both financially and with the audience. In this context, the term "stereotype" means a set of commonly expected patterns of behaviour based on the characteristics of a role (e.g., mother, father) or personal characteristics of an individual (e.g., race, age or sexual orientation). The portrayal of a stereotype becomes a form of communication and often reflects the attitudes of dominant social groups. It is important to add that the standardization of stereotypes and their application to the narrative structure of the work is directly based on the archetypal and mythical patterns mentioned above (e.g., Achilles, Odysseus, Herakles and many others, but not only ancient heroes and mythological stories connected with them). A similar situation can also be identified in cinematography - mainstream film not only presents archetypes (e.g., hero, mother, father, sage), but also works

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6   NELMES, J.: *Introduction to Film Studies.* Oxon, New York : Routledge, 2012, p. 481.
7   ROLLINS, C. P.: *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film: How the Movies Have Portrayed the American Past.* New York : Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 561-565.
8   See, for example: Dre Parker – Jaden Smith (*The Karate Kid*, 2010, director Harald Zward); Bruce Wayne – Christian Bale (*The Dark Knight*, 2008, director Christopher Nolan); Hancock – Will Smith (*Hancock*, 2008, director Peter Berg); Peter Parker – Tom Holland (*Spider-Man: Homecoming*, 2017, director Jon Watts); Eddie Brock – Tom Hardy (*Venom*, 2018, director Ruben Fleischer), etc.
9   Compare to: RADOŠINSKÁ, J., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L., KVETANOVÁ, Z.: *Globalizovaný filmový priemysel.* Prague : Wolters Kluwer, 2020, p. 171; PLENCNER, A.: Sociálne významy v mainstreamovom filme. In MAGÁL, S., MISTRÍK, M., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Médiá, spoločnosť, mediálna fikcia. Conference Proceedings.* Trnava, Bratislava : FMK UCM in Trnava, Kabinet divadla a filmu SAV, 2008, p. 90.
10   See, for example: Katniss Everdeen – Jennifer Lawrence (*The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 2*, 2015, director Francis Lawrence); Lara Croft – Alicia Vikander (*Tomb Raider*, 2018, director Roar Uthaug); Natasha Romanoff – Scarlett Johansson (*Black Widow*, 2021, director Cate Shortland), etc.

with various character stereotypes (e.g., housewife, male saviour, male warrior) and transforms them into a more specific, slightly modified form (a stereotype treated as a comic film element – gay hairdresser, an unintelligent blonde, physically unattractive members of the digital gaming subculture). The mass use of stereotypes and their subsequent standardization is based on the needs of the mass consumer, the viewer who wants to know what they can expect from the film already at the moment when they decide whether to buy a ticket to the cinema or not. **People like a certain cyclical nature of motifs and their repetition, standardization in various types of popular genres**[11] (e.g., the hero should experience a fight with himself and at the same time an external fight with "evil", or the film should contain a love story as part of the side plot).

Based on the above, we conclude that the current American mainstream film tends to portray a mythological, bizarre or fantastic world. The emerging trend of portraying gods, superhuman beings, and superheroes as the main heroes of the story is currently being used in several films achieving profits in millions.[12] **A mainstream film should therefore provide a story that can be handled with dazzling graphics and advanced computer effects** (e.g., the main and secondary characters should have bizarre and/or fantastical features that could be enhanced using digital effects).

The commercial aspects of film production reveal that Hollywood bases its strategy on a certain basis of "chaos". This state is manifested in using massive advertising, the application of various methods and strategies, the construction of multiplexes and the availability of a huge budget intended for the production, promotion and subsequent distribution of individual outputs. All this happens within the creation of one commercial film project, while all these strategies and procedures are dependent on a developed and constantly improving computer technology.[13]

Through electronic media and cooperation with media industry sectors, creators have many opportunities to connect the given content with the widest possible media audience. **For this reason, a mainstream film should bring with it a piece of intellectual property in order to strengthen the "flow" of media messages between multiple media platforms.** The cooperation of various branches of the media industry and the migratory behaviour of media audiences makes it easier to obtain preferred pleasures (e.g., figurines created on the basis of animated characters used in various industries).[14] This process of convergence is an irreversible phenomenon occurring in all media processes. Just think of the fairy-tale characters Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse, who are not only animated heroes, but also brands appearing in the food, textile and entertainment industries. Cartoon comic book characters have thus become elements of mass culture.

The American production of film works for the majority audience is currently one of the most profitable segments of the global media industry and, due to its commercial success and cultural dominance, represents not only the driving force of the economic and investment potential of films, but also, to an increasing extent, the source of the recipients' social and cultural identity. It achieves its leading position thanks to commercial products – films that are easy to understand and at the same time sufficiently attractive.[15] Among other things, the use of fragmented narrative structures, open, contradictory and unbalanced endings helped

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[11] Compare to: MAGÁL, S., VALENTOVIČOVÁ, D.: *Filmový a mediálny manažment: Filmová produkcia I.* Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2011, p. 134; NELMES, J.: *Introduction to Film Studies.* Oxon, New York : Routledge, 2012, p. 499.

[12] See, for example: *Immortals*, 2011, director Tarsem Singh; *300*, 2006, director Zack Snyder; *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, 2014, director Ridley Scott; *Thor: Ragnarok*, 2017, director Taika Waititi, etc.

[13] DE VANY, A.: *Hollywood Economics – How Extreme Uncertainly Shapes the Film Industry.* London, New York : Routledge, 2004, p. 255.

[14] JENKINS, H.: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide.* New York, London : New York University Press, 2006, p. 2-3.

[15] For more information, see: RÖWEKAMP, B.: *Hollywood.* Brno : Computer Press, 2004, p. 92; RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Vývojové trendy americkej mainstreamovej filmovej produkcie. In *Communication Today*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 11.

it achieve a positive result.[16] **It means that a mainstream film should be open to another plot continuation, and the completion of the plot line with a happy ending should not eliminate any future prospects for its continuation.** Media content ending with an "open conclusion" provides the recipient with space to react individually to existing cultural messages, signs and values.

In order to avoid a situation in which the recipients could interpret the content negatively, unexpectedly or unpredictably, media producers subordinate the creation of new products to the preferences of the recipients, or media audiences.[17] **The central value of the American mainstream film, for example, is built on the universal human interest in love, sex, violence, mystery, heroism, wealth, which relates to the ability of a profit-oriented society, especially the American one, to use this interest commercially for its own benefit**. However, as a result of adapting to the audience's taste, the tension between reception and production is gradually increasing, which is characteristic of the current socio-cultural status of the mainstream. It means that recipients understand mediated messages based on individual values and beliefs, which often results in conflicting interpretations (e.g. different views of the mentioned mainstream values from the point of view of Eastern and Western countries). The strong determination to prevent misinterpretation of the presented audio-visual material dates back to 1930, when strict production rules labelled as the *Production Code* were created. The rules proclaimed the inviolability of marriage and prohibited the depiction of extramarital sex and rape, blasphemy, swearing, violence, murder, or racist statements in media content. Films adhering to the given principles, however, gradually began to experience financial and audience loss. Creators and producers understood that the images simply have to appeal to the emotions of the recipients themselves, to the circulation of their pleasures, to the feelings of relaxation, otherwise they would not achieve any breakthrough success with the mass audience. This was the main reason for the demise of the hard "production censorship" in 1966. Subsequently, the shots and subjects that had been taboo until then or had had to be masked became available. Open depiction of violence and sexuality on an unprecedented scale gradually conquered the movie screens and shocked the audience.[18] The general comprehensibility and ability of films to appeal to universal human interests have become the key advantages of American mainstream production. Producers began to realize the constant changes in the preferences, needs and interests of the audience, which caused changes in the production strategies themselves. Production companies subsequently adapted film concepts to audiences based on predetermined ratings (in the US, the rating is awarded by the *Motion Picture Association of America MPAA*, which has been operating since 1966).[19]

The age limit of the majority audience is currently between 12 and 24 years. The key rating for mainstream films is therefore PG-13 (*Parents Strongly Cautioned*). Such films are unsuitable for children under the age of 13, or they should be accompanied by a parent to a film with this designation. This category is not only the most comprehensive, but it is also the highest possible rating that producers can get for a film without significantly affecting its profits.[20] Films intended for audiences of all ages are rated PG (*Parental Guidance Suggested*). The PG rating

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[16] See, for example: *Inception*, 2010, director Christopher Nolan; *Donnie Darko*, 2001, director Richard Kelly; *The Batman*, 2022, director Matt Reeves; *Interstellar*, 2014 director Christopher Nolan, etc.

[17] RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Aktuálne trendy v mediálnej kultúre.* Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2013, p. 18.

[18] Compare to: HUNTINGTON, P. S.: *Střet civilizací: Boj kultur a proměna světového řádu.* Prague : Rybka Publishers, 2001, p. 54; RÖWEKAMP, B.: *Hollywood.* Brno : Computer Press, 2004, p. 56; FARMER, B.: *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorships.* London, Durham : Duke University Press, 2000.

[19] RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Vývojové trendy americkej mainstreamovej filmovej produkcie. In *Communication Today*, 2014, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 23-24.

[20] Movies with PG-13 rating: *Transformers: The Last Knight*, 2017, director Michael Bay; *The Simpsons Movie*, 2007, director David Silverman; *Avatar*, 2009, director James Cameron, etc.

Studies

warns parents to consider watching the relevant content with younger children, or to accompany them in this activity, as some of the scenes contained in it are unsuitable for younger children.[21] Rating G (*General Audiences*), on the other hand, guarantees that the picture in question is "harmless", aimed exclusively at a child recipient.[22] The rating marked R (*Restricted*) is typical for works intended for viewers over 17 years of age, while children under the age of 16 may watch the film only accompanied by an adult.[23] Awarding a film with the strictest rating NC-17 (*No One 17 And Under Admitted*)[24] announces that the film is intended for persons over 17 years of age, as it contains strong expressions of sexuality, nudity, violence or strong language.[25]

Sex and sexuality are values that are currently quite often constructed by the dominant culture through various institutionalized ways, but **the absence of explicit displays of nudity and sexual act in mainstream films is the key to box office success.**[26] In the indicated manner, the potential audience is expanded to include child viewers both on the domestic and foreign markets. Therefore, we find almost no sexually oriented nudity in the narrative structures of the most profitable audio-visual works of recent years. According to E. J. Epstein, the principle in today's Hollywood is that the only way to success is without nude scenes.[27] Despite the above, we encounter extraordinary audience popularity of films marked "R" and "NC-17". They do not achieve such commercial success as PG-13 films, but nevertheless they make the mass audience aware.[28]

When it comes to depictions of violence in films, the *MPAA*'s meter is highly inconsistent in its rating system. In the media environment, but also in the socio-cultural environment, we witness various acts of violence and the violence in news is presented to us almost constantly. We become "immune" to a lot of such information, which also results in a more benevolent approach to awarding individual ratings regarding the occurrence of violent scenes in a specific film. In visualizing the sins committed and their subsequent punishment, the same can be said about America as about gladiatorial games in ancient Rome - America also tends to show viewers live violence (e.g., *NFL: Super Bowl*, *UFC: MMA Fighting*), where violent scenes are amplified by media promotion followed by massive dissemination to diversified media audiences. Thanks to such depictions, Hollywood mainstream production presents a distorted view of life itself and its values. It turns out that the impact of violent scenes is more pronounced and distorted if the crime is not punished, brings success to the person who uses it, is carried out by a group, not an individual, serves a higher purpose, is received in the environment in which the perpetrator lives, is depicted realistically, with details, or it is performed by an actor who is considered nice, attractive and popular outside the film.[29] In this context, the "cult of movie

[21]   Movies with PG rating: *Shrek the Third*, 2007, director Chris Miller, Roman Hui; *Bolt*, 2008, director Chris Williams, Byron Howard; *Home Alone*, 1990, director Chris Columbus, etc.

[22]   Movies with G rating: *High School Musical 3: Senior Year*, 2008, director Kenny Ortega; *Cars 3*, 2017, director Brian Fee; *The Lion King*, 2019, director Jon Favreau, etc.

[23]   Movies with R rating: *Sex and the City*, 2008, director Michael Patrick King; *The Matrix Resurrections*, 2021, director Lana Wachowski; *Deadpool 2*, 2018, director David Leitch; *Joker*, 2019, director Todd Phillips, etc.

[24]   Movies with NC-17 rating: *Pulp Fiction*, 1994, director Quentin Tarantino; *Crush*, 2013, director Malik Bader; *Fifty Shades of Freed*, 2018, director James Foley, etc.

[25]   KOCHBERG, S.: The Industrial Contexts of Film Production. In NELMES, J. (ed.): *Introduction to Film Studies.* 5th Edition. New York, London : Routledge, 2012, p. 34.

[26]   BENSHOFF, M. H.: (Broke) Back to the Mainstream: Queer Theory and Queer Cinemas Today. In BUCKLAND, W. (ed.): *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies.* London, New York : Routledge, 2009, p. 195.

[27]   EPSTEIN, J. E.: *Ekonomika Hollywoodu: Skrytá finanční realita v pozadí film*ů. Prague : Mladá Fronta, 2013, p. 33-36.

[28]   See, for example: *Fifty Shades of Grey / Darker / Freed*, 2015 – 2018, director Sam Taylor-Johnson, James Foley; *The Hangover – part 1 – 3*, 2009 – 2013, director Todd Phillips; *Ted* – part 1 – 2, 2013 – 2015, director Seth MacFarlane, etc.

[29]   Compare to: RÖWEKAMP, B.: *Hollywood.* Brno : Computer Press, 2004, p. 94; ZASEPA, T.: *Médiá v čase globalizácie.* Bratislava : LÚČ, 2002, p. 39, 170; BOLTON, K., OLSSON, J.: *Media, Popular Culture, And American Century.* Lund : Mediehistoriskt Arkiv 20, 2010, p. 221.

stars" seems to be another extremely important fragment of the mainstream, which, among other things, is closely related to the constantly recurring casting of individual actors in similar variations of characters, themes and environments.[30] **Actors become an excellent tool in the presentation of a mainstream film, which makes a film, a product of mass consumption, a successful attraction.** We will mention James Dean, the eternally lonely rebel of the 1950s fight against the injustice of society, or the likeable actor Keanu Reeves playing the character of John Wick, and many other chronically well-known members of the mentioned "cult".[31] Violent acts and criminality committed continuously by a popular actor are thus often justified by society (viewers) precisely because of the actor's popularity among the target audience.

Mainstream film characters and values are used in the production of commercial films simulating a wide spectrum of socio-cultural meanings and ideas. Within this hyperbolized reality, we consider the viewer to be a part of an imaginary story built on the concepts of undying love, happiness until death, or cynicism, which reaches him precisely through the media and mainstream film, especially the American one. However, it is necessary to emphasize the visible encroachment of Eastern culture towards the West. In the Hollywood's mainstream works, this situation manifests itself in the changes of the film environment adapted to the atmosphere of Eastern civilizations, while the very basis of the film remains unchanged. For example, the American films *Batman* (1989, director Tim Burton); *The Hangover 2* (2011, director Todd Phillips); *47 Ronin* (2013, director Carl Rinsch) place the main resolution of the story – the third act – in an Eastern environment (Hong Kong, Bangkok, Tokyo, etc.). Even *Walt Disney Pictures* has several animation divisions of its studios in Asia. With the introduction of the rating system of labelling and the influence of Eastern cultures, the current American production has been slightly modified, but the set of preferred or of universal mainstream signs and values has not changed radically.

Using archetypes, mythology, chaos, convergence, cyclical motifs, standardization, cult of actors, hybridization of genres, genre formulas, open narrative structures, graphic conveniences and many other elements, forms a mass people responding to the given elements within their ordinary activities. All these universal elements of the dominant culture become a set of customary mainstream signs and values that have been used for several decades in the creation of most works of Hollywood film production. Their moderate application to the production strategies of commercial filmmaking is generally seen as a prerequisite for the future success of an audio-visual picture, for example in the form of a positive audience response and a decent monetary profit.

2 Objectives and Methods

The presented study is specified to reflect the globalization tendencies of the media industry in the sense of identifying the universal elements of the dominant culture, which have become part of the production strategies of large film companies. In this context, we assume, that the existence of a set of common signs and values typical for mainstream audio-visual production is, among other things, linked to commercially successful films intended for children and youth recipients. The subsequent case study reflects the selected globalization tendencies of media culture of the 21st century. The attention is focused on a mainstream audio-visual work aimed

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[30] ROBERTSON, P.: *Guinnessova kniha filmových rekordů*. Prague : Cinema, 1995, p. 71.
[31] See, for example: James Dean – *Rebel Without a Case*, 1955, director Nicholas Ray; *East of Eden*, 1955, director Elia Kazan; Keanu Reeves – *John Wick 1 – 4*, 2014 – 2023, director Chad Stahelski; Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson – *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, 2017, director Jake Kasdan; *Free Guy*, 2021, director Shawn Levy; Tom Cruise – *Mission: Impossible – Fallout*, 2018, director Christopher McQuarrie; *Top Gun: Maverick*, 2021, director Joseph Kosinski, etc.

mainly at the mentioned group of recipients, which acquired a commercial character and reached the interest of the audience by being financially and audience-wise successful in an unprecedented way in the cinema environment. For the purpose of achieving the main goal, we choose the title *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021, director Jon Watts) as research material. We believe that the current North American film market operates with different communication strategies, values, meanings and signs that make a film work a worldwide, global phenomenon. We work with the fact that the media organization presents us with mass products easily processed by different groups of recipients, which fulfil their expectations from an emotional, affective, but also cognitive point of view.

The selection of research material is non-probabilistic and deliberate. We are talking about one of the most commercially successful films of 2021 (by the date of 30th June 2022 it had earned almost two billion US dollars worldwide, namely 1.9 billion US dollars). At the same time, it is one of the most profitable films in the history of cinema worldwide (it ranks sixth right after the titles *Avatar*, 2009, director James Cameron, profit of 2.8 billion US dollars; *Avengers: Endgame*, 2019, directors Anthony Russo, Joe Russo, profit 2 .7 billion US dollars; *Titanic*, 1997, director James Cameron, profit of 2.2 billion US dollars; *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, 2015, director Jeffrey Jacob Abrams, profit of 2.1 billion US dollars; *Avengers: Infinity War*, 2018, directors Anthony Russo, Joe Russo, profit of 2 billion US dollars).[32] The sequel of the story of the superhero named Spider-Man is also the highest-grossing film of the distribution company *Sony Pictures Releasing* and is quickly becoming one of the biggest "hits" of the entire *Marvel Cinematic Universe.* As for the qualitative level of the analysed research material, in this respect the title *Spider-Man: No Way Home* receives significantly positive responses from the target audience in the relevant film databases (the rating of 82% in the *Czech-Slovak film database* and 8.3 out of a total of 10 possible points on the *Internet Movie Database* portal). Film critics also evaluates the film extremely positively. We can mention, for example, the nomination for the *Academy Awards* in 2021 for the best visual effects.[33]

We consider as children-oriented material any cinematographic material with the values, signs and meanings that are easily interpretable or understandable by this target group. In this group we include titles with a PG rating (viewing of appropriate content by younger children is possible only with the accompaniment of an adult), G rating (viewers of all ages, general audience) and PG-13 rating (not suitable for children under 13 years old). We pay special attention to the PG-13 category (pictures intended for children older than 13 years and youth between the ages of 15 and 30), which also includes the mentioned research material. A film rated in this way may contain violence, nudity or strong language, but only to a limited extent. Any nudity must be non-sexual, and all profanity must be used extremely sparingly. Violence in PG-13 movies can be intense, but not explicit. The presentation of drugs or their use is prohibited in images with this designation, and the nudity presented must not be of a sexual nature. The titles to which the PG-13 rating corresponds are also among the most economically successful cinematographic contents.[34] To assess the globalization tendencies of media culture, including the identification of preferred mainstream values and signs, we focused our attention precisely on films intended for (older) children and youth with the assigned designation of PG-13.

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[32] For more information, see: DAVIS, B.: *Ms. Marvel Season Wrap Up, MCU Casting News. Phase Zero.* Released on 13th July 2022. [online]. [2022-07-28]. Available at: <https://comicbook.com/marvel/news/ms-marvel-mcu-mutant-ryan-gosling-ghost-rider-sdcc-phase-zero-podcast/>; IMDB PRO: *Box Office Mojo. Spider-Man: No Way Home.* [online]. [2022-07-28]. Available at: <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl2869659137/>.

[33] For more information, see: CSFD: *Spider-Man: No Way Home.* [online]. [2022-07-28]. Available at: <https://www.csfd.cz/film/792852-spider-man-bez-domova/prehled/>; IMDB PRO: *Spider-Man: No Way Home.* [online]. [2022-07-28]. Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10872600/>.

[34] ROCCHI, J.: *Význam hodnotenia filmu.* [online]. [2022-07-28]. Available at: <https://sk.eferrit.com/vyznam-hodnotenia-filmu/>.

The case study is carried out using the qualitative research method of discursive analysis. Discursive analysis is focused on a higher level than the level of individual texts. When researching discourse, files discussing a certain topic with the relationship of the given statement (text) to other statements are important. An important concept of discourse analysis are meanings - it is the kind of information that we first recall when perceiving discourse and plan before we start (or continue) speaking or writing. We are talking about a closer examination of how broader social and cultural changes manifest themselves in the changes in cultural discourse and how the very process of production or perception of texts is looked at. Within media studies, we focus on the representation and construction of relationships as simultaneous textual processes when analysing discourse, as well as on other important sociocultural dimensions of the media text.[35] Regarding the focus of the study and the choice of the research method of discursive analysis, we determine several analytical categories, which in our case reflect the universal mainstream film characteristics and values used in the production of commercially successful films. The analytical categories are as follows:

- genre variability, genre patterns, presence of entertainment in research material;
- the protagonist as an archetype, the motivations of the hero in the story, mythical patterns;
- cyclicity of motives, stereotype and standardization;
- mainstream film values (especially the value of sex, sexuality, violence and crime) and their occurrence in the research material regarding the assigned rating;
- level of work with graphics and CGI;
- the cult of film stars as a means of presenting a film image;
- completion of the plot line, possibilities for further continuation of the story;
- the degree of cooperation of various branches of the media industry with the research material.

Based on the formulated analytical categories, we determine research questions (RQ), the answers to which are contained in the final part of the study:

RQ1: *How does the research material work with genre hybridization, genre formulas, the element of fun, archetypes, mythic patterns, protagonist motivation, cyclical motifs, stereotypes, and the process of standardization itself?*

RQ2: *Is it possible to identify in the research material the mainstream film values connected primarily with the issues of sex and violence? If so, does their presence in the picture correspond to the assigned PG-13 rating?*

RQ3: *What is the level of work with graphics and CGI, the cult of movie stars, the possibilities of further continuation of the story and the cooperation of various branches of the media industry in connection with the research material?*

The answers to the research questions above together result in the main research question. By answering it, we will fulfil the main goal of the study, which is the reflection of the globalization tendencies of the media industry in the sense of identifying the universal features and preferred values in mainstream images intended for children and youth recipients. The main research question is as follows:

MRQ: *Based on the theoretical interpretation and the subsequent discursive analysis of the selected research material, can the values, meanings and signs be comprehensively evaluated, thanks to which a film intended for children and youth becomes a global phenomenon?*

By answering the stated main research question, we evaluate the research assumption:

H: *The stories of audio-visual mainstream content intended for children and youth reflect a set of universal features and preferred values that characterize most globally successful films today.*

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[35] TRAMPOTA, T., VOJTĚCHOVSKÁ, M.: *Metody výzkumu médií.* Prague : Portál, 2010, p. 169-172.

3 Results

The title *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021, director Jon Watts) represents the third continuation of the story of the superhero Spider-Man with the young American actor Tom Holland in the main role (*Spider-Man: Homecoming*, 2017 and *Spider-Man: Far from Home*, 2019, director Jon Watts). As in the previous two cases, the subject is the *Spider-Man* comic book (authors Stan Lee and Steve Ditko; *Marvel Comics* publishing house). The analysed audio-visual work is the result of the creative work of the production companies *Columbia Pictures*, *Pascal Pictures* and *Marvel Studios*, while the distribution is ensured by the *Sony Pictures Releasing* corporation. Thanks to the collaboration (*Sony Pictures/Columbia* and *Disney-Marvel*), the character of Spider-Man is included in the so-called *Marvel Cinematic Universe* (abbreviated *MCU*), which expands the *MCU* to include the fictional world of *Sony's Marvel Universe* (abbreviated *SMU*), specifically *Sony's Spider-Man Universe* (abbreviated *SSU*) based on the characters of the *Marvel Comics* publishing house (e.g. Spider-Man, Venom, Morbius and many other related referents with their own dedicated films).

Spider-Man: No Way Home is considered a landmark in the Spider-Man series. For the first time in the entire film history of the *MCU* or *SSU* franchise, the identity of the protagonist, Peter Parker (Tom Holland), "an ordinary boy from the neighbourhood", is revealed. The public revelation of the superhero's identity fundamentally changes his everyday life. The protagonist faces public condemnation for his heroic actions, which often caused extensive material damage (Spider-Man is nicknamed "the public enemy"). In the same way, the circle of his closest friends, who supported or even helped him in his superhero activities, find themselves in a hopeless situation. We will mention, for example, Michelle "MJ" Jones (Zendaya), Edward "Ned" Leeds (Jacob Batalon), May Parker (Marisa Tomei), Happy Hogan (Jon Favreau) and many others. To restore the former life for his loved ones and for himself, he asks for the help of Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch). However, a failed spell aimed at erasing the memory of Peter Parker as Spider-Man opens several parallel worlds. Through them, several anti-heroes that Spider-Man as the comic book character has ever met, such as Otto Octavius (Alfred Molina), Electro (Jamie Foxx), Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe), Sandman (Thomas Hayden Church) and Lizard (Rhys Ifans) enter the plot. In addition to the negative referents, the incarnations of Spider-Man, originating from different parallel worlds, also appear in the story. The character of Spider-Man, portrayed by actors Andrew Garfield (*Amazing Spider-Man*, 2012; *Amazing Spider-Man 2*, 2014, director Marc Webb) and Tobey Maguire (*Spider-Man*, 2002; *Spider-Man 2*, 2004; *Spider-Man 3*, 2007, director Sam Raimi), thus creatively connects the otherwise "functioning" plot lines and the related narrative aspects of the work (primary plot, main and secondary characters, etc.) into one integrated universe.

The connection of characters, stories, plots and ideas foreshadows **the combination of several genre elements and the manipulation of predefined genre formulas**. This genre hybridization, understood as the blending of elements of different genres in one work, is typical for stories with fantasy motifs. The term "genre" itself can be characterized as a set of formal and content elements of a certain work. We identify the elements of an action film in the analysed image. The tension, which becomes dominant in this genre, is intensified by the fight of the protagonist against negative characters, or against evil. The protagonists have superhero, magical, or supernatural abilities, together enriching the action plot with a fantasy motif (e.g., the wizard Doctor Strange, the "spider man" Spider-Man). This fantastic world is confronted with reality, while scientific inventions and modern technologies play a fundamental role in the story. Through them, the protagonist and secondary characters strengthen their supernatural abilities (e.g., Spider-Man's suit made of nanotechnology), or they try to correct these abilities with the help of science (e.g., the development of a drug to suppress the dark side of anti-heroes). In the title *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, we find several elements of a science fiction film, for which it is typical to implement the knowledge of contemporary science and technology into the

narrative structure of the work. There is also **an aspect of entertainment in the film**, while the given "comedic component" is mainly based on a system of primary intertextual references to popular socio-cultural activities, meanings and values of everyday life (e.g., through situational and conversational humour, dialogues or the actions of the characters themselves). In this context, it is necessary to emphasize that the genre categorization is only indicative, because by trying to classify the work into certain genre formulas, we do not sufficiently reflect its formal and content structure. We should not forget the subgenres. Their presence in the film even more points to the incoherence or unprincipled joining of diverse story elements and means of expression into one whole. For example, from the point of view of subgenre categorization, we can also label the work *Spider-Man: No Way Home* as a "marvel movie", superhero, science-fantasy, techno-fantasy film, etc. However, "labelling" a film with different (sub)genres at the same time means losing its informative value. It should not be forgotten that it still represents an important set of information for potential viewers.

The media construct different representations of social groups by creating and reinforcing certain kinds of characters. They are made up of repeating elements (appearance, behaviour patterns). These are often archetypes that carry meanings related to the character themselves or their relationship to the environment. They are supposed to signal to the receiver how they should look at the character and how they should evaluate it. Within this problem, we refer to the works of structuralists and linguists, i.e. the categorisation of seven character types according to V. J. Propp,[36] the breakdown of archetypes according to a psychoanalyst C. G. Jung,[37] the three elementary components of the "psyche" by S. Freud[38] or the six basic positions of the characters within the story by A. J. Greimas.[39] In all cases, it is a description of the function of the referents of the story from the position of applied archetypal formulas. According to the proposed model, we assign functions to the individual characters and define the types of situations in which they occur.[40] In order to clarify **the archetype of the hero** in the presented studies, we focused exclusively on the main character of the story, on Peter Parker himself, aka Spider-Man. The assessment of the main actor of the plot from the position of the applied hero archetype represents a useful analytical aid for the investigation of the manner of speaking of the given character towards the recipients of the audio-visual work. The hero archetype is one of the most frequent and recognizable archetypes in media content. This late modern hero has various names in the 21st century cinema. It can be a superhero, an anti-hero (who is often seen as a hero of today's popular culture[41]), "American Adam", and so on. We could also include Spider-Man in the three mentioned categories – he is a person who does not stand out with some unique set of values or beliefs, but with his super heroic abilities (archetype of the superhero)

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[36] For more information, see: PROPP, V. J.: *Morfológia rozprávky.* Bratislava : Tatran, 1969, p. 35-67; TRAMPOTA, T., VOJTĚCHOVSKÁ, M.: *Metody výzkumu médií.* Prague : Portál, 2010, p. 148.

[37] For more information, see: JUNG, G. C.: *Archetypy a nevědomí. Výbor z díla. II. svazek.* Brno : Nakl. Tomáše Janečka, 2003, p. 156-161; DICKEY, D. M.: *Aesthetics and Design for Game-Based Learning.* New York, Oxon : Routledge, 2015, p. 90.

[38] For more information, see: BERGER, A. A.: *Media Analysis Techniques.* London : Sage Publications, 2005, p. 85-87.

[39] For more information, see: TRIFONAS, P. P.: From Semantics to Narrative: The Semiotics of A. J. Greimas. In TRIFONAS, P. P. (eds): *International Handbook of Semiotics.* Dordrecht : Springer, 2015, p. 1099-1107.

[40] Case studies and practical applications of the archetypal patterns of V. J. Propp, C. G. Jung, and A. J. Greimas to major and minor characters in superhero stories, see: RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: Naratívna analýza a jej miesto vo vedeckom diskurze. In RADOŠINSKÁ, J., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L., KVETANOVÁ, Z. (eds) et al.: *Empirické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch.* Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2019, p. 48-82; RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: Narácia v snímke Avengers: Pomstitelia. In RADOŠINSKÁ, J., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L., KVETANOVÁ, Z. (eds.) et al.: *Empirické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch.* Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2019, p. 83-117.

[41] See, for example: RADOŠINSKÁ, J., MAGALOVÁ, L.: Supes, Inc.: Episodic Television Drama The Boys, Antiheroism and Society of Performance. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 28-52. [online]. [2022-10-05]. Available at: <https://www.mlar.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MLAR_2022_No_1.pdf>.

and the typical personality characteristics of an innocent and lonely hero confronted with the harsh reality of the present (archetype of "American Adam"). He most often tends to solve problems in a violent way (in the character of Spider-Man, we find the archetype of the anti-hero, or the "shadow" of the protagonist, when he starts thinking about revenge and killing, but in the end, his friends show him "the right way"). The movie protagonist is a strongly individualistic and strongly narcissistic action hero with a specific trait – he almost never dies in the story, not even on a symbolic level. Although this "American Adam" ("Western" white-skinned heterosexual hero with obvious physical features) is presented as a brave character (trying to fight for good, justice, sacrifice for others and for higher goals), on the other hand, he is a strong individual with superhuman (spider) abilities, capable of controlling others and committing violent acts (desire to take revenge on enemies). Although some of Spider-Man's characteristics are not strictly positive (e.g., narcissism, irresponsibility, cunning, hidden aggression), they should in any case be – and are – accepted by the majority of the audience. The conflict between the need to be an ordinary teenager with ordinary problems (applying to college, dealing with partner and friend relationships) and being an extraordinary superhero (protecting the loved ones and society by using superhuman abilities) also defines Peter Parker aka Spider-Man as the so-called "fragmented hero".

Archetypes are fixed and have an unchanging place within the narrative determined by the logical sequence of the plot. The knowledge that every narrative has a certain narrative structure leads to the search for the universal patterns which often refer to various **mythic patterns and ideas**. According to J. Radošinská, it is blockbuster movies about superheroes that become carriers of secularized myths (myths of a non-religious nature) and various symbolic messages, that participate in the creation of pop culture (media) myths. The above applies mainly to films based on stories about extraordinary people (most often physically attractive action heroes with abilities exceeding the capabilities of a real person) and aimed mainly at young and teenage viewers.[42] Among them, we also include the film *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. Myths about heroes are one of the most common in ancient history. These are mostly fictional stories of gods, demigods, ancient heroes, which are not supported by verified facts and are largely guided by the imaginations of ordinary people. Therefore, mythmaking in an altered form continues in connection with the strengthening role of the media in society. In this context, Spider-Man can also be considered a hero whose presence in media content is the result of the transformation of the originally understood "heroic myth model". We are primarily talking about the acceptance of his superhuman abilities, as well as the belief that the hero should always triumph over his opponents.

Generally valid elements, motifs, archetypes are found not only in the referents of the work, but also in the narration itself. The universally developing plot focused on the main character of mainstream films, originating from the "West", is collectively referred to as the "American monomyth".[43] This determines **the motivations of the (super)hero on the way through the story**. One of Spider-Man's most important decisions is to *return* to the world of supernatural phenomena with the help of Doctor Strange, with the intention of restoring the "past lives" for himself and his loved ones. With his *initiative*, the protagonist overcomes obstacles and eliminates the threat from parallel worlds with his superhuman abilities. After a series of several losses (the loss of a loved one, the threat of colonization of the Earth by aliens), Spider-Man decides to *leave* – with the help of supernatural forces, he disappears from public life and with his departure, the lost security and peace return to society and his loved ones. The protagonist's

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[42] RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 13-14.

[43] For more information about the term „monomyth" and „american monomyth" and its application in audiovisual images, see: CAMPBELL, J.: *Tisíc tváří hrdiny*. Prague : Portál, 2000; LAWRENCE, J. S.: Star Trek as American Monomyth. In KAPELL, M. W. (ed.): *Star Trek as Myth: Essays on Symbol and Archetype at the Final Frontier.* Jefferson : McFarland & Company, 2010, p. 93-111.

motivations are conditioned by certain social meanings, namely his desire *to fight against evil and struggle with irrational forces* (Spider-Man's fight with enemies, villains), *to struggle with one's own dark side* ("the fragmentation" of Spider-Man's personality), *to gain recognition* (Spider-Man tries to convince society that he is the "good hero" and not a "public enemy"), *to achieve the so-called "Promethean Rebellion"* (Spider-Man disobeys Doctor Strange's instructions in an effort to protect the Earth and other parallel universes from villainous rampages and "time chaos"), *to gain and keep love* (developing Spider-Man's relationship with MJ), and *to achieve justice* (Spider-Man wants to avenge the death of a loved one and restore order in society). At the same time, notice the presence of the *"scapegoat" motif* in the work (Spider-Man sacrifices himself with the help of a spell to return to the period, in which even those closest to him did not know about his connection with Peter Parker) and the *saviour motif* (Spider-Man, together with his versions from two different parallel universes, fights against evil).

In the analysed work, we also deal with **cyclicity, stereotyping and the degree of standardization of the film story**. Considering the applied archetypes, mythical patterns, motivations of the main character and, above all, the presence of a monomyth (universal elements and story motifs) in the work, a model story is created. This story, to some extent, determines the predictability of the storyline. From the point of view of the narrative structure of the work, we identify in the title *Spider-Man: No Way Home* a certain standardized (long-term established) exposition of the story, the so-called American three-act structure: 1. The identity of the protagonist is revealed; the public riots and Spider-Man, Peter Parker is a public enemy (incident); 2. In an effort to reclaim his old life, Peter Parker and Doctor Strange open parallel worlds, through which several well-known negative characters penetrate into reality; Spider-Man tries to "cure" the anti-heroes and give them a second chance, but loses a loved one and (temporarily) fails (confrontation); 3. Spider-Man's desire for revenge is stopped by his friends, they help him overcome his moral and personality crisis and achieve his original goal, which is the return of the other characters to parallel worlds and the restoration of "normal" life for his loved ones (resolution). At the same time, the character of Spider-Man reflects the established patterns of behaviour and actions of a superhero, but also reveals the typical character traits that every superhero should possess – he is active, professes the principles of humanism, helps the weak, protects the vulnerable, fights against evil in various forms, protects the loved ones. He is physically attractive, funny, smart, longs for love, lonely at a certain point in the plot and he is willing to sacrifice his own happiness for "higher goals". Standardization of character traits is also present in other characters. For example, Peter Parker's smart, beautiful girlfriend Michelle "MJ" Jones, his devoted friend Ned or the principled Doctor Strange. Anti-heroes are divided into two groups – those who are willing to change for the better (e.g., Otto Octavius) and those vengeful ones, consumed by evil who believe they are the right ones (e.g., Green Goblin). The motivation of the hero in the story is undoubtedly subject to standardization and stereotyping. The initial motivation of the superhero's actions is related to revealing his identity and the subsequent effort to restore the lost life, anonymity and safety for himself and his loved ones. With the coming complications and after the loss of a loved one, we observe a turnaround in the protagonist, a moral fall, and the desire for revenge becomes the "driving force" of his actions. However, in the final (resolution) part, the protagonist returns to his moral principles, overcomes his own impulses and desires. The motivation for his actions, at this point, becomes the desire to save the loved ones, friends and return to "ordinary life". However, Spider-Man (like a typical superhero) fights not only with the enemy, but also with himself. In the case of the title *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, the cyclicality of motifs and stories is visible and clearly "admitted" by the creators, when the characters of Spider-Man from two parallel worlds, portrayed by actors Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield, enter the plot. From mutual dialogues we learn that all representatives of Spider-Man share similar fate and overcome almost identical obstacles in life (interpersonal, intrapersonal, socio-cultural and moral conflicts).

Every mainstream film presents certain values (e.g., interest in love, sex, violence, heroism or wealth), while these reflect audience preferences. According to J. Radošinská, film heroes of the 21st century (including superheroes) often represent sets of values that are far from the former heroic ideals.[44] Within the analytical categories, we focus more closely on detecting **the presence of mainstream film values** in the film *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, while specifically considering the issues of sex, sexuality, violence and crime. Although sex and sexuality are extremely "popular" topics in cinematography (one could say that they are values of everyday life), their non-explicit depiction or absence in the film ultimately expands the target group of potential viewers to children, or young recipients. However, "superhero" film works (including the film analysed by us) primarily focus on depicting the values of heroism, violence and crime, but they also significantly reflect the so-called everyday values (e.g., love, friendship, desire for wealth or power). Their presence in *Spider-Man: No Way Home* is evident and follows from the very genre classification of the film. The filmmakers place great emphasis on friendship, romantic love and love for family or loved ones (e.g., the inseparable friends Peter Parker, MJ and Ned, who together overcome obstacles and are the main character's source of moral strength; the main character's intimate relationship with his guardian, aunt May). The central idea of the film is the "fight of good against evil" and the hope that evil can be defeated or even "cured". In connection with this idea, in addition to the above, the film also clearly points to the question of belonging and help, cooperation for a good cause or higher goals. The stated values are "transformed" into the character traits of the protagonist, who is a kind of embodiment of the positive qualities of a superhero - a teenager who has no significant negative qualities or "bad habits" (does not drink alcohol, he does not smoke, he treats other people with respect, he is an ambitious student, he works on his future). Although in the story he "falls to the moral bottom" and longs for revenge and killing, in the end (with the help of his friends), he "gets up", suppresses his own desires, his shadow, or alter-ego, he remains true to his ideals and completes the work he started. Another characteristic of the protagonist is presented in a significant way, which is sacrifice – Spider-Man gives up his friends and love to save the world and remains a "lonely hero".

The audio-visual work *Spider-Man: No Way Home* is rated PG-13 (*Parents Strongly Cautioned* – based on the *MPAA*'s rating system according to **the suitability of films for individual age categories**). The given rating indicates that the film is not suitable for children under 13 years of age and some of its components may be unsuitable for this age group. The assessment system has a preventive nature, appeals to parents and requires their cooperation. According to the rating rules (*Classification and Rating Rules – Motion Pictures Association, Inc. & National Association of Theatre Owners, Inc.*), images that depict or contain nudity (even without sexual undertones), sensuality, vulgarity but also drug use, bad language, "adult activities", for example, are rated PG-13. A film marked with such a rating may depict violence, however, this should not be realistic, extreme or persistent. It is the same with vulgar language. If swearing appears once in the picture, the given audio-visual material can be classified as PG-13. However, if such vocabulary is repeated or used with a sexual undertone, the film is automatically included in the category "not suitable for children" and "intended for viewers over 17 years old" – R (*Restricted*).[45] In addition to the PG-13 category, the title *Spider-Man: No Way Home* also has a description of the content as follows: *"Sequences of action/violence, some language and brief suggestive comments".*[46]

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44 RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 48.
45 For more information, see: *Classification and Rating Rules*. [online]. [2022-08-11]. Available at: <https://www.filmratings.com/Content/Downloads/rating_rules.pdf>; *Ratings Posters*. [online]. [2022-08-11]. Available at: <https://www.filmratings.com/Content/Downloads/mpaa_ratings-poster-qr.pdf>.
46 *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. [online]. [2022-08-11]. Available at: <https://www.spidermannowayhome.movie/>.

The most prominent category in the analysed image is the value of violence. At this point, the assignment of the PG-13 rating for the depicted violence is debatable. It should not be explicit, realistic, long-term, or persistent. However, in the title *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, violence is an "integral" part of the storyline and, although it is a sci-fi action venture, the level of violence depicted often slightly exceeds the limit determined by the PG-13 rating. For example, the protagonist takes revenge on an enemy who caused the death of a person close to him, while the blood from battle wounds is visible in the footage. The picture also directly shows the death of one of the characters (in this scene we again encounter an explicit display of blood, but with the absence of large details of lacerations and fatal wounds). Even though the depicted violence is not realistic (e.g., the heroes break through several floors of buildings, fight with supernatural forces or alien enemies), there are also scenes in which the characters attack innocent civilians, real people, which seemingly transfers the fictional violence to the real world. We also identify verbal violence in the film. It occurs in the form of threats, for example *"Now you die!"* (Octavius to Spider-Man); *"I wanna kill him. I wanna tear him apart."* (Spider-Man talking about the enemy), etc. At this point, it is also appropriate to mention bullying as one of the forms of aggression, which is often accompanied by violence. In the film *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, the protagonist, his best friends and family encounter bullying after Spider-Man's identity is revealed (e.g., the heroes are subjected to constant photography, ridicule or inappropriate comments from the people around them). However, bullying can be considered one of the central themes that the film tries to bring closer to the viewer. Violent acts related to bullying are also indicated (e.g., a stone is thrown through the window of the apartment where the main character lives, with which hateful people try to hit him). Crime connected with violence is depicted in the story primarily in the actions of anti-heroes, so we consider it an integral part of this film genre (action, adventure, sci-fi film).

Assessment of language suitability forms part of the assigned rating. We are talking about determining the suitability of the film for individual age categories from the point of view of assessing the language and expressions of the characters. In this category, we find only a few offensive or insulting terms (e.g., labelling Spider-Man as *public enemy no. 1*, labelling one of the characters as an *idiot* or *clown*, shouting *"Shut up!"*, etc.). Other, significantly expressive or vulgar expressions are not present in the analysed film. The film also meets the criteria for the awarded rating in the category of depicting the consumption of addictive or dangerous *substances*, while the consumption of such substances is only hinted at in the film (e.g., a man is sitting in a bar to whom an inner voice tells that he is drunk). The so-called antiserum, which the protagonist develops together with his friends as a cure for supervillains, is debatable. These antisera are placed in syringes, and in the film, we directly see their administration (injection) into the body of a specific villain.

In the context of the film's suitability for underage viewers, specifically for older children over 13 and youth, we cannot ignore the depiction of the value of sex, sexuality and nudity in the film. There are no scenes depicting a sexual act. However, there are several scenes that we could identify as "depicting sexuality or sensuality". In most cases, these are the passages of the film in which the protagonist kisses his girlfriend, they hold hands, confess their love, or lie next to each other on the roof of a building and want to kiss (this shot can give the impression of sensuality or "hidden, suggestive" sexuality). Nudity is only partially depicted in the work and there is no representation of secondary genitals. We can see Peter Parker in his underwear, while his friend MJ helps him take off his Spider-Man costume. For this reason, the story sequence can be included among the parts of the film where parents of minors should "pay attention". There is also a shot in which the audience sees the upper part of the man's body exposed and based on the statement of this character (Electro), we learn that the man in the shot is completely naked. In general, we can say that sexuality and nudity are shown moderately and appropriately in the analysed work, regarding the PG-13 rating.

Visual side, graphic processing and special effects occupy an important place in superhero films. The challenge for filmmakers is therefore a believable portrayal of the magical, superhuman abilities of the participants in the plot, which are directly based on the genre of science fiction. For example, Spider-Man possesses acquired "spider" abilities (he defies the laws of gravity, he is fast, he has exceptional hearing) enhanced by the latest technologies (the Spider-Man's suit created by Tony Stark's company *Stark Industries*). Visual emphasis is placed on the depiction of fights between the protagonist and his adversaries (confrontation within the American three-act structure). In the analysed picture, these clashes are graduated by the arrival of villains from parallel universes, whose external appearance is not "human" (e.g., Lizard, Sandman), or their human body is "enhanced" by technologies, making them cyborgs (Otto Octavius). Also worthy of attention is the character of Doctor Strange, who uses his magical abilities to open portals to other worlds, bend space-time and defy the laws of physics. Dazzling visual effects, eye-catching graphics, a dynamic soundtrack and an elaborate cut-scene generally do not constitute a meaningful part of the narrative. In superhero films, however, the formal side of the audio-visual work is perceived as an equal "partner" of the content level of the image in question. Such an approach to film processing is a manifestation of spectacularity, the "embodiment" of profitability and a reflection of the expectations of a predefined audience. Therefore, the producers follow a scheme, the essence of which is the balance of two factors – a coherent narrative and a refined visual-formal aspect of the work.[47] In this context, J. Radošinská adds that the target audience segments expect an engaging and dynamic, dramaturgically uncomplicated but believable or rather convincingly portrayed story from movie stories about superheroes, which takes place in an attractive, visually imaginative environment.[48] The functionality is evidenced by the positive feedback from the audience and the evaluations of film critics, as well as the nomination of the film *Spider-Man: No Way Home* for the *Academy Awards* in the category of visual effects.

A significant feature of mainstream films is their presentation through celebrities and the cult of movie stars. The casting of actors in a specific film role is largely influenced by the age composition of the potential audience. The assigned PG-13 rating for the film *Spider-Man: No Way Home* foreshadows the target group of viewers, namely older children and youth. In addition, by setting the plot in the environment of the high school life of the most famous teenage superhero from the *MCU* world and by casting young actors in central roles, the filmmakers "strengthen" the relationship with the target group recipients even more. The viewer s ' "identification" with the protagonist is also greatly contributed by his behaviour in ordinary life situations (the choice of university, graduation, but also first partner relationships or friendship). Tom Holland, as the representative of Spider-Man, "meets" the characteristics of a normal, contemporary teenager – he is lively, active, funny, ironic, he cares about love, friendship and the future, he often acts hastily and impulsively. The external character traits of the actors are also suitably adapted to the young age of their film characters, even though the actors themselves are almost a decade older than the characters they portray. The casting of actors plays an important role in this direction. In the analysed film, we identify well-known personalities with rich acting experience, while the audience knows them from other, not only superhero films (Doctor Strange – Benedict Cumberbatch, Spider-Man from a parallel world – Andrew Garfield, Norman Osborn – Willem Dafoe and others). On the other hand, film stories about superheroes open up space for the expansion of the cult of stars, which is created around this type of images, by other actors unknown to the general audience (e.g., Tom Holland or Zendaya). Actors often become famous precisely because of the character they portray, which can "pigeonhole" them in a certain way; in the case of superhero films, this is a fairly common

47   KING, G.: *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster*. New York, London : I. B. Tauris, 2000, p. 3-4.
48   RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Teoretické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM in Trnava, 2018, p. 64.

phenomenon (e.g., Chris Hemsworth, chronically known as Thor, or Robert Downey Jr. as Iron Man). The key characters of an audio-visual work, especially superheroes, are subsequently linked to the physical appearance and acting of their representatives. We are talking about the so-called celebritization, i.e., targeted media production of celebrities.[49]

The superhero with his appearance and character traits is strikingly reminiscent of the heroes of ancient fables and again, refers to the presence of the universal archetype of the hero and mythical patterns in modern audio-visual works. However, a significant difference can be seen in the completion of the storyline. While in ancient fables, the hero's journey ends in disaster (final resolution), contemporary superhero films have the advantage of an open ending, which gives the creators options to continue the story. *Spider-Man: No Way Home* is a natural continuation of the previous two parts with actor Tom Holland in the main role. From the point of view of seriality, the film is a *re-take*, a slang *sequel* (a new plot is built around the characters from the previous story – *Spider-Man: Homecoming* and *Spider-Man: Far from Home*) and at the same time, it is a *reboot* (the entire story of Spider-Man is told again, with a different cast and it is not a sequel to the film stories about this superhero, presented by Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield). We also talk about a *cross-over* (combining several independently successful elements into one whole – characters with superhuman abilities and the stories connected with them). At the same time, we consider the work to be the expected completion of the trilogy about Spider-Man, but it would be more appropriate to talk about the so-called *threequel* – a type of seriality characterized by hinting at the possibility of the creation of further subsequent films, to which the plot itself is adapted. It is typical for all superhero films. In this case, it may not be a direct continuation of the narrative of the superhero in the form of the creation of a fourth film, but we are rather talking about the possibility that the character of Spider-Man will also appear in other audio-visual images within the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, or that space will be opened for the development of other related stories. This is confirmed by the presence of several references (e.g., in the credits scene) to planned audio-visual projects that should take form of a *spin-off* to the Spider-Man *threequel* (focusing on a specific character or event from the previous film that is developed in a separate story, for example on Doctor Strange, Dare Devil or Venom).

Numerous ties to various branches of the media industry enabled the later "transfer" of individual motifs and story lines of superhero comic literature (in our case, we are talking about the *Spider-Man* comic book, published by *Marvel Comics*) into an intertextually saturated, strongly episodic audio-visual form typical of contemporary mainstream film production (audio-visual images associated with Peter Parker as Spider-Man created on the basis of the mentioned comic book). The production of films about superheroes has had a significant impact on the tendencies of contemporary mainstream filmmaking aimed at **connecting literature, cinematography and other branches of the media industry** with the aim of popularization and global monetization of originally comic book stories about superheroes. The aim of the cooperation of several branches of the media industry through transmedia narratives and merchandising is to appeal to a wide spectrum of consumers, while profits from various media or distribution platforms are accumulated. Finally, it is important to add that children and teenage audiences are most interested in licensed products associated with popular films, which undoubtedly include superhero film stories.[50] Most of the so-called "film franchises" therefore consist of works primarily intended for the target groups. The commercial success of the Spider-Man stories and the character of this superhero himself, played by Tom Holland, is a clear proof of how the coexistence of film as an audio-visual medium with other branches of the media industry adds a new dimension to the globalized film industry.

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[49] RADOŠINSKÁ, J., RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L., KVETANOVÁ, Z.: *Globalizovaný filmový priemysel*. Prague : Wolters Kluwer, 2020, p. 132.
[50] Ibidem, p. 33.

4 Discussion

For the purposes of a more comprehensive grasp of the problem, including the correct systematization of individual analytical categories, we pose the following questions. By answering them, we will fulfil the main goal of the study, which is the reflection of the globalization tendencies of the media industry in the sense of identifying the universal features and preferred values in mainstream images intended for children and youth recipients. For these purposes, we carried out a qualitative discursive analysis of a full-length feature film *Spider-Man: No Way Home.*

RQ1:   *How does the research material work with genre hybridization, genre formulas, the element of fun, archetypes, mythic patterns, protagonist motivation, cyclical motifs, stereotypes, and the process of standardization itself?*

In the case of *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, we demonstrated the **hybridization of genres and genre patterns**. The defined genre categorization is only indicative, because strict inclusion in genre formulas cannot comprehensively encompass the formal and content structure of a specific work. However, in the work, it is possible to identify:
- **action movie elements** – tension as the main component of the story, tension-related action events, emphasis placed on the fight between the main character and his opponent, etc.;
- **elements of fantasy and science fiction** – supernatural, superhero abilities of characters, unrealistic environments, magical objects, time travel, strengthening of supernatural abilities with technologies, technological development, etc.;
- **comedic elements** – primary intertextual references to popular socio-cultural activities, meanings and values of everyday life, situational and conversational humour, dialogues and actions of characters;
- **several subgenres** – a "marvel-movie" (a product of the *MCU*, an audio-visual picture in which an inventive hero fights against the odds, finds themselves in bizarre and life-threatening situations, while the story ends with the victory of the main character), a superhero movie (the main and supporting characters have superhuman, even divine abilities), a science-fantasy film (a subgenre similar to science fiction, which emphasizes the implementation of supernatural elements and phenomena directly into the plot), a techno-fantasy film (a subgenre similar to science fiction, in which the presentation of spectacular technological inventions reminiscent of magic dominates) and many other associated subgenres.

Peter Parker/Spider-Man, as the main referent of the story, can be characterized from the point of view of the following **archetypal patterns**:
- **the "hero" archetype–** the main protagonist, the central character of the story with a sense of responsibility, fighting a dangerous opponent and saving the world;
- **the "superhero" archetype–** an individualistic and narcissistic action hero with superhuman superhero abilities that are enhanced by technology;
- **the "American Adam" archetype–** a lonely, brave and self-sacrificing individual, a "western" charismatic, white-skinned heterosexual hero with characteristic physical features;
- **the "shadow" and "anti-hero" archetype–** the flip side of the protagonist appearing in critical passages of the story, in which the character decides between "good and evil" and between a violent or amicable solution to the conflict;
- **the "fragmented hero" archetype** – the main character represents the conflict between the need to be an ordinary teenager with ordinary problems and the desire to be an extraordinary superhero.

Due to the limited scope of the presented study, we cannot provide a comprehensive categorization of the external and internal characteristics of the main character from the point of view of the applied archetypal patterns. In any case, however, the protagonist of the analysed picture is perceived as an individual whose characteristics refer to the **heroic mythical patterns** of the past. Under the influence of the media and applying the preferences of the majority audience, these patterns and the stories related to them are subsequently transformed into a spectacular experience aimed at achieving global success. A mainstream narrative centred around a universal hero archetype is equally standardized, with this "American monomyth" largely determining **the story's hero's motivations** and associated **social meanings**:

- **the decision to return** (motivation) – the protagonist's return to the supernatural world with the help of magic, the protagonist's effort to restore the "old" life for his loved ones and himself;
- **being initiative in overcoming obstacles** (motivation) – the protagonist's fight with the enemy, the protagonist's effort to eliminate the danger;
- **the decision to leave** (motivation) – the protagonist disappears from the life of his loved ones after several losses in order to protect their lives;
- **fighting against evil and struggling with irrational forces** (social meaning) – the protagonist fights against villains from parallel worlds;
- **struggling with his own dark side** (social meaning) – internal, intrapersonal conflict of the protagonist with himself;
- **gaining recognition** (social meaning) – the protagonist's effort to change the public's view of his person, or replace the status of a "public enemy" with the status of a "good hero";
- **achieving the so-called Promethean rebellion** (social meaning) – the protagonist's rebellion against a higher authority (Doctor Strange) to achieve his goal;
- **getting and keeping love** (social meaning) – the development of the protagonist's romantic relationship with his girlfriend, a secondary character;
- **achieving justice** (social meaning) – the protagonist's desire for revenge and his effort to establish order in society;
- **a scapegoat** (social meaning) – the protagonist "gives up" to ensure safety and a "normal" life for his loved ones and friends;
- **the saviour motif** (social meaning) – the protagonist saves the Earth and associated parallel worlds from a common enemy.

The processes of **stereotyping, standardization or the cyclic nature of motives** are closely related to the previous analytical categories. The storyline of the story is predictable to a certain extent and the structure of the work is standardized (in the sense of plotting the story according to the so-called American three-act structure). In the film *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, other stereotypes are similarly "established" – the character traits of the main hero (charismatic, protective, humanistic) and secondary characters (devoted, wise, principled), patterns of the hero's behaviour and motivations for his actions (fighting against evil, achieving justice, sacrificing oneself for higher goals and the good of others) or the ongoing inner struggle of the protagonist with himself. The cyclical nature of the motifs is also identifiable.

RQ2: *Is it possible to identify in the research material the mainstream film values connected primarily with the issues of sex and violence? If so, does their presence in the picture correspond to the assigned PG-13 rating?*

Mainstream film values represent a set of values that the audience prefers, directly expects to appear in the work, and at the same time, they are the values that creators deliberately implement in audio-visual content with the aim of satisfying the audience's needs and achieving the expected profit. Based on the carried-out analysis, we identify in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*

several core values that have an impact primarily on *Generation Z* (*Zoomers* or *Post-Millennials*, the generation born after 2000). *Generation Z*, which also becomes the target group of the image in question, most often adopts the role models and value models presented in the media. Such **mainstream film values** contained in the Spider-Man film include:

- **love** – building a romantic relationship, possibly emphasizing the importance of love between Spider-Man and his girlfriend (including all "versions" of these characters coming from parallel worlds);
- **the family** – the intimate and sincere relationship between the protagonist and his guardian refers to the strength and cohesion of the family in the presented story;
- **friendship** – pointing out the inseparability of friendship between the protagonist and his closest friends, while friendship becomes the source of the protagonist's moral strength;
- **togetherness and help** – joining forces of the central characters to defeat evil, achieve "higher goals" and justice;
- **responsibility** – the protagonist's willingness to take responsibility for his actions;
- **heroism** – the heroism of the main and secondary characters, who together save the world and establish "order" in society.

In connection with the depiction of **sex and sexuality**, which also belong to the values of everyday life, we do not find any explicitly oriented scenes in the work. There are only a few action sequences that depict sensuality (e.g., kisses, partial nudity, declaration of love through touch). Based on the above findings, we conclude that sex, sexuality and nudity are depicted decently and appropriately in the analysed film, considering the assigned PG-13 rating.

For "superhero" action films, the value of **violence and crime** is an inherent part, while in films rated PG-13, this violence should not be realistic, extreme or persistent. In *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, violence is a fixed part of the storyline. We can consider its depiction (regarding the genre classification of the film) as unrealistic, even though it is perpetrated against people (the events that take place in the film are the result of the action of supernatural forces and cannot happen in everyday reality). Scenes in which the viewer sees detailed injuries of the characters or even blood are debatable. The extremity of the violent acts depicted is similarly borderline (e.g., a furious battle with the aim of revenge), but in these sequences of the film it is clearly indicated that violence is not the right solution to the given situation neither it is the right path for the protagonist to take. In addition to physical violence, we also identify elements of verbal violence and bullying in the film (threats, signs of violent acts, harassment). In addition to the PG-13 category, *Spider-Man: No Way Home* also contains a content description– *"Sequences of action/violence, some language and brief suggestive comments"*. It is evident from the description which elements may be inappropriate for viewers under the age of 13 and it is highly recommended that minor viewers should be accompanied by a parent when watching a film with the given designation. Despite the above, we can (from the point of view of applying the values of violence and crime) consider the rating to be adequate.

RQ 3: *What is the level of work with graphics and CGI, the cult of movie stars, the possibilities of further continuation of the story and the cooperation of various branches of the media industry in connection with the research material?*

The story of Spider-Man turns attention to universally understandable and globally popular messages. These "links" are processed in increasingly sophisticated and graphically imaginative forms. The formal side,above all, **graphics and CGI images,** of *Spider-Man: No Way Home* is therefore distinguished by the following characteristics:

- the presence of visually dynamic scenes reflecting the fate of the main character (the use of a sharp cut and its alternation in fast time sequences);

- the use of special computer-generated film effects and wide possibilities of attractive audio-visual rendering of the story, which together offer spectacular cinematographic material;
- focusing on the most realistic rendering of action sequences using technically and technologically advanced computer-generated graphics;
- through genre hybridization, the genre elements that are currently most popular with the target recipients are used (a believable depiction of the magical, superhuman abilities of the plot participants, which are based primarily on the genre of science fiction and associated subgenres);
- genre hybridization also allows visually rich formal elements to stand out, among which we include the camera, editing, digital computer-generated effects and sound;
- visually engaging messages convey to the recipient an attractive story full of action sequences and graphically imaginative scenes, resulting in balancing the two factors – content and form;
- an engaging, dynamic, dramaturgically uncomplicated, but convincingly portrayed story about Spider-Man is created, which takes place in an attractive, graphically imaginative environment (the depiction of the realities of a big city alternates with shots of time gates and parallel worlds).

The production of spectacular media content contributes to the iconization of media-known personalities in the form of creating a celebrity cult, or the **cult of movie stars** centred around the title *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. Movie actors and actresses present emotions to the audience, thus personalizing the presended media content. Their presence in the film affirms the recipients that the work is exceptional, entertaining or attractive. For this reason, great emphasis is placed on the appropriate selection of actors for a specific film role. Through a set of famous Hollywood personalities, often cast in similar or the same film roles, the viewer also can automatically assign the actor to the respective film character or characters. As an example, we mention some selected movie characters from *Spider-Man: No Way Home*:

- **Spider-Man – Tom Holland** (*Spider-Man: Homecoming*, 2017 and *Spider-Man: Far from Home*, 2019, director Jon Watts; *Captain America: Civil War*, 2016, *Avengers: Infinity War*, 2018 and *Avengers: Endgame*, 2019, director Anthony Russo, Joe Russo);
- **Spider-Man – Andrew Garfield** (Amazing Spider-Man, 2012 and *Amazing Spider-Man 2*, 2014, director Marc Webb);
- **Spider-Man – Tobey Maguire** (*Spider-Man*, 2002, *Spider-Man 2*, 2004 and *Spider-Man 3*, 2007, director Sam Raimi);
- **Doctor Strange – Benedict Cumberbatch** (*Doctor Strange*, 2016, director Scott Derrickson; *Thor: Ragnarok*, 2017, director Taika Waititi; *Avengers: Infinity War*, 2018 and *Avengers: Endgame*, 2019, director Anthony Russo, Joe Russo);
- **Green Goblin – Willem Dafoe** (*Spider-Man*, 2002, *Spider-Man 2*, 2004 and *Spider-Man 3*, 2007, director Sam Raimi; *Aquaman*, 2018, director James Wan; *Zack Snyder's Justice League*, 2021, director Zack Snyder);
- **Otto Octavius – Alfred Molina** (*Spider-Man 2*, 2004, director Sam Raimi; *Wonder Woman*, 2009, director Lauren Montgomery; *Justice League Dark*, 2017, director Jay Oliva; *Henchmen*, 2018, director Adam Wood).

The analysed research material is the result of a free adaptation of a comic story about a superhero named Spider-Man. Filmmakers select those elements from the literary text that have the greatest commercial potential and try to "retell" them in a way that appeals to global media audiences. The strengthening position of seriality, which opens new **possibilities for the continuation of the story**, significantly affects the overall character of the film *Spider-Man: No Way Home.* In addition, the commercial potential of the given title is cleverly increased by dividing the story of Spider-Man into several parts and continuously producing other sequels. The goal

is only one – to reawaken the attention of the existing base of target recipients and expand it to include additional fans not only of the title, but also of the *MCU* in general. **Completing the storyline with an open ending**, which is typical for pictures reflecting the life of superheroes, allows the creators of the described audio-visual work to apply several types of serialities:

- **a re-take, or sequel** – a new plot is built around the characters from the previous story (*Spider-Man: Homecoming*, 2017 and *Spider-Man: Far from Home*, 2019, director Jon Watts);
- **a reboot** – the story of Spider-Man is told again, in a different way, with a different cast and with no connection to previous films about this superhero (*Spider-Man*, 2002, *Spider-Man 2*, 2004 and *Spider-Man 3*, 2007, director Sam Raimi);
- **a cross-over** – combining several independently successful elements into one whole (characters of Spider-Man from parallel universes, Green Goblin, Sandman, Electra, Otto Octavius and many other referents return to the story);
- **a threequel** – indication of the possibility of the creation of other follow-up films, when the character of Spider-Man will also appear in other audio-visual films within the *MCU*, or space will be opened for the development of other related stories;
- **a spin-off** – the presence of several references to planned audio-visual projects that focus on a specific character or event based on the analysed image (e.g. *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, 2022, director Sam Raimi; *Daredevil: Born Again*, 2024, director Chris Ord, Matt Corman; *Venom: Let There Be Carnage*, 2021, director Andy Serkis).

Image creators of *Spider-Man: No Way Home* emphasize the importance of transmedia narratives, merchandising and multimedia platforms in promoting the media content. **The connection of literature, cinematography and other branches of the media industry** is more than obvious in this case, because as long as the media production is able to appeal to a wide spectrum of consumers, the profits coming from several distribution platforms are automatically multiplied. The story of Spider-Man and the very character of a superhero with spider abilities can clearly be considered as a product that has economic potential for transmedia storytelling and creation of licensed products (linking with the clothing, entertainment, music, food industry, digital game industry and other sectors of the media industry).

5 Conclusion

Based on the answers to the secondary research questions, we can answer the main research question, which is also a comprehensive summary of the studied issue. We specifically focus on a set of mainstream film values and characters in works intended for children and youth:

MRQ: *Based on the theoretical interpretation and the subsequent discursive analysis of the selected research material, is it possible to comprehensively evaluate the values, meanings and signs, thanks to which a film intended for children and youth becomes a global phenomenon?*

A globally successful mainstream picture intended for a child and young recipient should have a set of characters and values that are preferred and desired by the audience. By implementing them into the content and formal side of the work, the creators set conditions for the commercial success of the image in question and fulfil the expectations of the target audience.

Mainstream audio-visual works aimed at the child and youth audience should (and often do) feature **genre diversity, blending of genre formulas and their hybridization**. A typical feature is the coexistence of several genres in one work, as well as the presence of many subgenres

(however, it is difficult to identify their number in one work), which intertwine with each other, but together cover most of the requirements of a predefined audience. Due to the hybridization of genres and their interconnectedness, there is a situation where globally successful mainstream film works cannot be classified into a precisely defined genre formula. At the same time, we point out the presence of the aspect of entertainment in mainstream films intended for children and youth, whether in the form of situational and conversational humour, the actions of the characters, or (also) references to popular social and cultural activities of today.

The protagonist of this type of picture can usually be defined through several archetypes, which reflect his external and internal characteristics – a hero, an anti-hero, an "American Adam", a fragmented hero and so on (based on the categorization of several authors mentioned in the theoretical part of the study). Similarly to the effort to determine the genre of these works, it is not possible to assign only one archetype to a film character when classifying the main characters into specific archetypal patterns. It means that several archetypal characters tend to intermingle. The current trend in cinematography is to build a narrative around a negative character who also becomes the central character of the story (e.g., the gangster family in the TV series *Peaky Blinders* or the character of the cunning Loki, Thor's brother, in the TV series *Loki* of the same name). However, in audio-visual works for children and young people, the given production trend is slightly "suppressed" due to the rating evaluation of films related to this target group. The negative characteristics of the heroes are often closely connected with violent acts and more explicit expressions of sexuality that exceed the limits determined by the *MPAA* for the PG-13 rating.

The presence of **references to historical mythical patterns** depends on belonging to a specific film genre. In the case of films about superheroes, which are almost exclusively rated PG-13, there are frequent references to mythical patterns, but the creators adapt them to the current mainstream audience (the presence of characters with typical costumes that emphasize their masculinity, the use of computer-generated graphics, the application of open endings). Mythological elements are thus spectacularized in a certain way, they become part of the universally flowing plot in modern popular content (the so-called "American monomyth") and are standardized in such a way as to attract the target group of viewers and fulfil their expectations.

Following the archetypal classification of the characters in the story and the inspiration of these stories in mythology, there are several identifiable **motivating factors that accompany the hero throughout the story** and influence his actions or decisions. It can be said that the structure of the storyline is stable from the point of view of the main character's motivations – in the beginning, the main character returns to his natural environment, in which the main plot takes place, acquires the determination to fight against the "enemy" and subsequently decides to leave to protect his closest ones. In mainstream titles intended for children and young people, motivations of the protagonist and associated social meanings condition the direction of the plot and the actions of the characters (e.g., the inner struggle of the hero, the effort to introduce justice or keep love).

The constancy of the storyline predicted by the American three-act structure of the drama relates to the processes in the films intended for children and youth stereotyping**, standardizing the so called cyclicity of motives**. The mentioned processes reflect the audience's preferences and expectations. It means that the recipients can predict what they can expect from a specific audio-visual work based on a standard plot and decide to watch the work based on that. The standardization of the plot and the cyclic nature of the motifs can be linked to the genre classification of specific films (e.g., the romantic drama genre and the corresponding way of constructing the plot through several emotionally coloured story sequences), but also with references to mythical patterns implied in these plots (the mentioned "revival", or cyclical nature of heroic stories). Among other things, stereotyping is also manifested in the character traits of the main character and supporting characters, while the creators design these characters in such a way that the audience, in our case, older children and youth, can relate to them.

Another distinctive feature of globally successful mainstream works aimed at the given target group is the high level of work with **computer effects and the graphic side of the work**. Naturally, depending on the genre, the degree of implementation of these elements in films varies, but in general we can say that high-quality graphic processing and believable computer effects are a significant part of the 21st century cinematography. It is important to balance the content and formal aspects of the images in order to create an engaging, dynamic, convincingly rendered product taking place in an attractive, graphically imaginative environment.

The goal of the creators of most mainstream audio-visual content, not only those intended for children and youth, is to build around the images the so-called **cult of film star**. Less known or even unknown actors, or personalities working in other branches of the media industry, often appear in such works. Actors are carefully selected by the creators regarding the target audience in such a way that they fulfil the potential to build a kind of fan base around their person. The moment when the recipient identifies with the characters in the story through their actions, character traits or problems they face in the story contributes significantly to the creation of the cult.

A typical feature of the described type of images is the ending of the story with an open or partially open ending. Such an approach to the processing of the work gives production companies **possibilities for further continuation of the story** – either in the form of a continuation of the plot, or by focusing on one sub-element around which a completely new story is presented. In the case of superhero movies, especially those that come from the *MCU*, working with a given analytical category is important. In this direction, we can identify several types of serialities (*re-take*, *reboot*, *cross-over*, *threequel* or *spin-off*). They jointly participate in **connecting the audio-visual work with other branches of the media industry**. Of course, production companies choose collaborations in order to reach the chosen target group (e.g., in the case of films for children and youth, collaborations are most often created with the clothing, food industry or digital games industry).

One of the key features of globally successful films designed for the given target group is the implementation of **mainstream film values** straight into the story. These are not only the so-called values of everyday reality (love, friendship, family relationships, responsibility, belonging or heroism), but partly also the values of sex, sexuality or sensuality, violence and crime. The everyday values strengthen the recipients' perception of the need for and importance of the presented emotions and relationships, as well as the moral power that stems from them (in the story). Therefore, in mainstream films intended for children and youth, we can see self-sacrificing friendships, open and honest family relationships, romantic love, helping the weak and defenceless, but also a responsible approach to life decisions. The presentation of **values of sex and sexuality** is equally frequent. Unlike the so-called values of everyday life (although sexuality is also often considered a part of these values), the creators have to work extremely carefully with the depiction of sex and sexuality in images for minor viewers. Scenes with sexual acts and expressions rarely occur in the mentioned films. They are shown non-explicitly and the sensuality that indicates that such acts could happen is typical. In the indicated way, the content creators ensure that the title receives a "lower" rating, so that it will be intended for a wider audience (the PG-13 rating refers to films whose viewing requires parental supervision for children under 13). Similarly, filmmakers are careful with their portrayal of **violence and crime**. For a film to be rated PG-13, the violence depicted must not be explicit or realistic. The presentation of the value of violence can be considered critical, especially since in most globally popular mainstream works, the main plot is built on this value. A significant aid in deciding on the suitability of a program for a certain age category is the rating system used by the *MPAA*. Labelling audio-visual works (but also digital games – *PEGI – Pan European Game Information* system) makes it much easier for the parents of minor recipients to decide on the suitability of the content for the child, as well as the degree of their own involvement in receiving this

content.[51] In this sense, the implementation of the so-called active parental mediation,[52] is the coordination of the child's time spent with the media and accompanying him with media content that may be critical (e.g., in terms of depicted violence or sexuality) that is often considered the most effective tool in managing the impact of audio-visual content on children and youth.

Based on the evaluation of the main research question, we confirm the research assumption (H): *The stories of audio-visual mainstream content intended for children and youth reflect a set of universal features and preferred values that characterize most globally successful films today.* Through the realized qualitative discursive analysis, we demonstrate that the set of preferred values and signs typical of mainstream film works is also applied in films intended for children and youth recipients. The given characters and values are processed in such a way as to fulfil the needs of this target audience and preserve the ability of the audio-visual work to generate profit.

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