

11TH NATIONAL METHODOLOGICAL CONFERENCE OF MEDIA EXPERTS “VIRTUAL: WORDS, SOCIETIES, IDENTITIES” WARSAW, POLAND, NOVEMBER 19–20, 2020

The Laboratory of Media Studies at the University of Warsaw with the cooperation of the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies, organized in the second half of November 2020, 11th edition of National Methodological Conference of Media Experts entitled “Virtual: Words, Societies, Identities”. Scholars and researchers from top Polish universities and research centres gathered for the two-day event, where they had an opportunity to firstly, share their newest research interests, results and conducted studies, and take part in the workshops which are traditionally organized along with the conference itself. Due to restrictions imposed by the University of Warsaw and the Polish government, the conference was carried out entirely via an online platform.

The event, which took place between 19th and 20th of November, was split into two parts – on Thursday, 19th of November two workshops were held and on 20th of November, 26 researchers and scholars had an opportunity to present their papers and presentations. The common theme which linked the first part with the second was the perception of virtual in modern reality. The participants tried to address questions which appear during gradual process of virtualisation of human’s lives, among them whether this phenomenon can be seen in positive or negative light, how does it fits in thoughts and ideas developed by Neil Postman’s techno-pessimistic theory versus Marshall McLuhan’s techno-optimistic concepts, or what could be the possible impact of mentioned processes on the direction in which civilization and culture will advance, and finally, how this new, immersive reality supported by engaging media can shape and create new, alternative virtual cultures and societies.

DAY 1

First day of the conference began with the official opening and a short speech from the organisers who thanked the participants who declared their will to attend one of two available workshops. The first one, entitled “Virtual ethnography in the light of social distancing” was carried out by prof. Jakub Nowak (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University). Attendees of the workshop were able to hear about virtual ethnography – a topic of increasing importance and interest in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion during the workshop focused, among other things, on what network discourses are, what methods and tools

are useful in ethnographic studies, and when can we talk about digital technology as an object of discourse.

Meanwhile, the second workshop entitled “Semiotics and discourse analysis of sVOD platforms” was hosted by prof. Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz (Jagiellonian University) and dr Agnieszka Całek (Jagiellonian University). A few days before the event, participants who decided to attend this workshop were asked to watch certain titles available via sVOD platforms. At the event itself, prof. Lisowska-Magdziarz and dr Całek presented certain tropes, figures and possible meanings which linked the watched materials and moderated a discussion between participants, who, by following the prepared guideline, debated about the material, and tried to decompose it into the prime factors.

After the end of both sessions, all participants meet once again and discussed the outcomes and gained knowledge from past few hours of the workshops. The discussion threads were a introduction to the second day of the conference.

DAY 2

The second day of the 11th National Methodological Conference of Media Experts began with the official speech given by prof. Janusz Adamowski, the dean of Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies at the University of Warsaw. In his brief opening, he thanked both the organizers and participants, that even under such difficult conditions, they continued to support the tradition of organizing this conference and other events with vast, previous history and fruitful past editions. Prof. Adamowski concluded his speech with an expression of gratitude to such endeavors thanks to which Polish academia can develop and thrive even during unprecedented circumstances.

The plenary session was opened with a presentation by dr Radosław Sojak, MA Beata Królicka and MA Andrzej Meller from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Their presentation was devoted to the image of women in contemporary Polish TV series – the analysis covered eight TV series broadcasted by TVP, TVN and Polsat and was focused on stereotypes subordinated to convention – for example that women are more often presented as emotional and family-focused. The second presentation – by prof. Jacek Wasilewski and MA Agata Kostrzewa – showed the danger of the Internet, especially for young people. The researchers presented the most popular myths about menstruation, showing at the same time that menstruation can be treated as an element of stereotyping. The third presentation on virtual worlds in the field of communication was held by Professor Monika Kaczmarek-Śliwińska (University of Warsaw). Then, dr Alicja Waszkiewicz-Raviv (University of Warsaw) spoke about the fact that VR should be seen as an opportunity to build understanding between stakeholders.

The second panel chaired by dr Monika Koźdoń-Dębecka (University of Warsaw) focused on ways in which virtual reality can influence humans in everyday life. Dr Krzysztof Flasiński (Szczecin University) presented how VR technology can be used in communicating climate change and its impact on the lives of modern society. In his presentation, he stressed that one of the key and often greatly underestimated factors which have an impact on a person immersed in a climate change app, is the ability to hear sounds correlated with watched images. M.Sc. Dagmara Tarasiuk (University of Lodz) showed on the example of hatha yoga the paradoxes which emerged due to coronavirus pandemic outbreak, highlighting that though yoga is traditionally perceived as an individual practice, in modern, mostly western culture, it became a social phenomenon where the link both between participants themselves and with their instructor is essential. MA Wojciech Dudziak (Każda Pomoc) and MA Martyna Kisio (University of Warsaw) presented the results of a report which summed up social initiatives created because of the coronavirus pandemic outbreak.

The third panel was chaired by prof. Jacek Wasilewski from the University of Warsaw. The first speech was presented by MA Filip Gołębiowski, from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and the Institute for Discourse and Dialogue. In his paper, he presented the topic of identity media in digital reality on the example of an analysis of television materials during the 2020 presidential campaign in Poland. This topic was also discussed by MA Mateusz Bartoszewicz from the University of Wrocław, who spoke about the usefulness of the concept of political parallelism in explaining the crisis of the Polish public debate. Another speech on the election subject was given by MA Grzegorz Kowalczyk, from the University of Warsaw, on fake news during this election period. MA Bogdan Andrushchenko (University of Warsaw) gave a presentation on the Belarusian spring and the role of social media. MA Katarzyna Piórecka and MA Marlena Szyber (University of Warsaw) analysed online media content in the United States and Poland.

The fourth and final panel, chaired by Dr Karolina Brylska (University of Warsaw) centred around younger generations of media users. Dr Karolina Brylska and prof. Tomasz Gackowski (University of Warsaw) presented the first results from their study on different ways of learning and teaching via traditional face-to-face lessons and ones performed via VR application and equipment. MA Anita Kwiatkowska (University of Warsaw) presented her thoughts on changing identity of Polish high school students influenced by constant visibility in social media sites. MA Ksenia Wróblewska (University of Warsaw) explained how fandoms can be infused by the possibilities available through social media and how they react to new possibilities introduced by the phenomenon of binge watching. The presentation of MA Konrad Krystian Kuźma (The Maria Grzegorzewska University) which thoroughly explained the specificities

of Lord of the Rings' and Harry Potter's fandoms, concluded the participants' presentations.

11th National Methodological Conference of Media Experts, which main theme was strongly embedded in the reflections about virtuality in its many variations, was closed with a joint discussion where the participants shared their thoughts on the matter and hopes for future development of subjects touched during the two-day event. At the end of the discussion, representatives of the Laboratory of Media Studies and Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies at the University of Warsaw thanked all participants for their scientific contribution and announced that the 12th edition will take place in November 2021.

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