Communication and Media

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ABSTRACT

The media, which provides the framework for the information society of the 21st century, influences people's lives in many ways and through many channels as the fourth branch of power. This is true directly for young people and the professionals who work with them, and indirectly for younger generations through the latter. The image that the mass media paints of certain social groups or generations, the way in which their characteristics are presented, and the extent to which the written press is supportive or critical, all have serious consequences for the people concerned. For example, the continuous negative portrayal of a specific group of professionals, be they teachers or police officers, strongly influences parents' attitudes towards teachers, schools, or those responsible for public safety, which ultimately serves as a model for children.

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to review the most important information related to mass communication, mass media, and the media in order to strengthen media literacy.

KEYWORDS

mass media, mass communication, methods of media, function of mass media, information selection, media literacy

In the globalized world of the 21st century information society, individuals are surrounded by an unmanageable amount of information every day. This information, in the form of news items of varying content and nature, floods us through all the channels created by information and communication technology, significantly influencing our general mood, our thoughts and, ultimately, our well-being.

Although humanity's ability to adapt to its environment is exemplary, it seems that it is becoming increasingly difficult to cope with the tsunami of information surrounding us on a mental and cognitive level. Defending ourselves against the impact of negative news is just as difficult, as there are very few opportunities to escape from the world of information; but it is equally difficult to follow the principle of conscious media use and to develop the ability to distinguish between fake news, misleading information, and reality.

1. Media – Mass Media – Mass Communication

Although we all live in this, do we know what the concept of media and mass media means? How different is mass communication and what are its specific operational characteristics? Who decides what information we can get? At all – do we see reality or do we make our decisions and control our lives based solely on a distorted, manipulated worldview – and that of the next generations, for whom the digital world is already the scene of socialization.

Mass communication is a specific type among communication channels and forms. Yet mass communication is part of our daily lives, and in order to avoid its pitfalls, media literacy is essential.

The essence of media literacy is that the receiver, when evaluating messages, should be aware of all the negative events that can lead to distortions of information and the success of manipulative content. This is particularly important in an ever-evolving world of communication and digital technology. Several experts, like Henry Jenkins, has already drawn attention to the basic assumptions that characterise the new age of communication. These include the fact that communication now flows through a variety of channels, surrounds the receivers and reaches them in a variety of forms and through a variety of media[1].

The primary question – both for the media and for the person consuming it –, is how far can the reader, viewer, internet user maintain their relative independence, personality and will? Is the recipient able to act as a conscious person, as a citizen and as a media consumer? Indeed, mass communication experts agree that "the extent and direction of the media's influence on people's thinking and behaviour is unpredictable"[2].

Media *can be* most simply defined as a set of mass communication tools. In a *narrower sense*, mass communication refers to communication using traditional media such as print, radio, television, and the internet.

However, *a broader* approach blurs the formal boundaries; in fact, it includes all communication channels that are capable of conveying messages to the public.

The concept of media is therefore linked to mass media as a specific form of communication.

However, the concept of media does not refer to communication per se, but to mass communication.

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1 Sulák, 2013.
2 Bajomi-Lázár, 2007, p. 143.

2. The Mass Communication as a Mediator of Media Messages

Mass communication is "the movement of information between social structures mediated by individuals, in which the transmitter of the communication, whether individual or institution, permanently takes the role of the speaker in relation to a set of receivers who are temporally and/or spatially distant"[3].

Mass communication through the media is *characterised by* several specific features: the flow of information is one-way; one party is always in the position of the transmitter (e.g. broadcasters) and the other is always in the position of the receiver (e.g. TV viewers). The roles are not reversed and there is no feedback – or not through the communication channel (e.g. the TV viewer may write a letter as a result of the flawed, untruthful, offensive, etc. content of the program, but this information is fed back to the broadcaster through another channel); the communicator and the receiver are distant in space and/or time; the flow of information requires some means of communication; the information is delivered to all recipients with the same content (e.g.: everyone can watch the same TV news on a given channel at a given time); the possibility is created for information to flow between different social structures through individuals (e.g.: public administration as a social structure).

The current operational situation is communicated to the population through the individual citizens (individuals) watching the news, as another social structure.

The elements of the concept imply its mass nature and the linking of information to events of social – rather than individual, personal – significance (if a news item reports the birth or divorce of a child, it is linked to an individual who is significant to the community in some way (e.g. a well-known writer, singer or actor)).

A similar definition is used by András Szekfű: "Mass communication is a periodic form of communication in which the same message can be conveyed to a large number of recipients simultaneously or almost simultaneously by means of a technical device (medium)."[4] In other words: the large number of recipients, the simultaneity and identity of the message, the technical medium are also emphasised here. However, a new element is periodicity, i.e. intermittence, repetition.

An important element of mass communication is its "*mass*" nature. This refers to both the extremely large audience and to the "mass production" of messages. For this reason, there is a conceptual approach in the literature that "mass communication is *an industrial process of information production*, in which the *masses of a* certain *elementary or secondary education*, created by urbanisation and the industrial revolution, are on the receiving end, organised into reading camps that can be described by socio-demographic indicators. On the production side, there is the *organised, industrialised production of messages*, using the market research and marketing methods of the

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3 See in more detail: Janousek, 1972.
4 Béres and Horányi, 2001, p. 5.

modern economy, partly to observe and partly to create the recipient needs that the product will satisfy."[5])

Partly related to this is the fact that the vast majority of the information communicated – unlike in other forms of communication – disappears or dissipates after it has been communicated.

The "mass character" has a major impact both on the production side, and the recipient side as well. The fact is that the content of the communication is defined by the producers, and transmitted in a form and by means that reach all members of the otherwise very diverse audiences, with their different levels of education, interests, etc.

The *functions of mass communication*, therefore, include information and appeal, as well as the expression of emotion (if the producer wants to create an effect), the appearance of contact (if he/she wants to make people believe that the information is only for a specific target group) or entertainment (if he/she wants to play an aesthetic role and teach, educate or cultivate).

Whatever the function of mass communication, producers need information. The birth of news starts in the first departments. In modern systems, although broadcasters themselves employ their own *data gathering* specialists (e.g. reporters, local – and often volunteer – correspondents), the information is not collected by them, but by news agencies operating as separate systems.[6]

Given the sheer size of the information collected, it is necessary to select it beforehand. This can take place *in the* so-called *processing units* – for example, studios, newsrooms – where the data are received via various channels (e.g. telephone, satellite Internet etc.). This is where the information will be communicated. The last "actor" in the birth of news taking the form of mass communication is the *broadcaster*. This in itself depends on the type of media. It includes, for example, the technical editing and printing of a newspaper, just as much as a television studio and its transmitter. The content and the final form of the messages are therefore developed in the second unit and are not modified in the final stage.

In terms of content, there are three broad categories of publications: political (e.g. commentaries), educational and entertainment. In terms of their purpose, they can be value-free, objective, neutral news, or news through which the communicator intends to influence directly.

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5 Ibid.
6 In 1835, Charles-Louis Havas founded the "Agence Havas of Paris", the first news agency in the modern sense, which can be considered the "forerunner" of today's AFP (Agence France Presse). The oldest news agency still in operation today is Reuters. It was founded in 1851 (by the way, Paul Julius Reuter used a telegraph or telegraphic device to transmit stock market news, where there was no technical background he used carrier pigeons and even the world's first undersea cable.) See more details: Gábor Vermes: The emergence and evolution of news agencies in Kiss, 2009.

Advertising, the role of which will be discussed later, is present in mass communication regardless of the type and purpose of the communication. The media, as has been explained, is the totality of mass media.

Media is in fact the plural form of the Latin word medium, which means "intermediate", "mediating element" (i.e. the transmission of information in communication by writing, speech, gesture, gesture, facial expression, emphasis, etc.). (E.g. in Hungarian, the term medium has long been used to refer to a person who delivers the message, mediates between the other world and the earthly world, for example during a séance or at a funeral service.) In a broad sense, every person, device and object is a medium if it conveys information in a given interaction.

3. The Mass Media and Information Selection

The media is therefore the sum of all mass media and institutions, and as such, it has a significant weight in the life of a country.

This is due to a number of reasons. On the one hand, it stems from the specific nature of mass communication. In the classical process of knowledge acquisition, the individual acquires first-hand experience, analyses and interprets the information received. He/she decides what he/she considers relevant and how he/she evaluates it. In contrast, in this form of data acquisition, *the process is fragmented*. It is not the individual who experiences events, who sees and hears what is happening around him/her. It is collected by the data collectors who are in contact with the producers, it is classified by the processors, who decide whether it is important and, if so, with what sign and value it is passed on to the individual, i.e. the viewer, listener or reader.

One of the foundations of the power of the media is that the *information is selected* by the professional collaborators, and the citizen, as a recipient, receives only the pre-filtered and interpreted part of the data, facts and events, which is not the same as the whole of reality, especially the reality experienced by the individual. The vulnerability of the recipients, i.e. the viewers, listeners and readers, in this respect is further increased by the fact that the communication can be of two kinds as regards their purpose: they can be *aimed at directly influencing the target audience, or they can be 'neutral'*. However, the fact remains that the media, overtly or covertly, confessedly or secretly, to a lesser or greater extent or to some extent, but - in general - wants to shape the mindset of the population. (Of course, this intention to influence is also expressed in a positive way, as countless scientific and educational programmes aim to improve the public's worldview.)

The influence of the media can be seen in the amount of time the public spends on it. However, a precondition for this is that the recipients have access to the information.

Modern media embraces several forms. The history of its development is linked to the history of human communication, which has seen five major revolutions: the

emergence of speech, the emergence of writing (from hieroglyphics), the printing of books, the rise of computing and finally, the internet.[7]

While previous communication revolutions, including the advent of Gutenberg's printing press, primarily connected social structures, the information revolution has created a digital divide in geographical, social, generational, etc. terms. This has brought with it a restructuring of communities, and the emergence of the World Wide Web, as a final act, has only intensified the process.

An important prerequisite for human communication to have evolved this way was technical progress in the production of communication products (for example, the development of movable type printing technology or the development of computer technology); building infrastructure to carry information (such as the discovery of the railways or the telegraph); the development of an autonomous media system (e.g. the removal of ecclesiastical or political influence), the development of the supply and demand side of the media market (information gathering and publishing became profitable; the demand for information customer demand, first from commercial businesses (market information) and then from the public interested in policy.[8]

Accordingly, primary media are the means of communicating information (e.g. the clay tablet, papyrus, codex) along with the messengers. Secondary media are the print media (the 'Gutenberg galaxy'), which have been present since the mid-15th century. Tertiary media arrive in the 19th century, starting with the telegraph and ending with the appearance of television[9]. The last, fourth, is the digital media that followed the analogue media ("digital Gutenberg").

Television has played a prominent and for many years unique role in the development of the media. From the 1920s, with the first regular radio broadcasts the media began to break down into sub-systems – print and electronic media – which was amplified by regular TV broadcasts from the 1930s onwards.

4. The 'Old' Media

The 20th century and the technical invention of broadcasting, which emerged at the time, were the greatest milestones in the development of *mass communication*.

The spread of reading and writing – especially the so-called "flat vision" required for this – made it possible to interpret what was seen on the TV screen. Whereas certain indigenous peoples, who had a primarily oral – and not written – culture, thinking not in terms of

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7 Forgó, 2011.
8 Habermas, 2007, pp. 610–614.
9 This European media era began, ahead of the American, with the coverage of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The director Leni (Helene Bertha Amalie) Riefenstahl also made a film about the event, using techniques such as the hitherto unknown speed camera, telephoto lenses and aerial shots with the help of 43 camera operators. The Olympics was a special occasion for the mass media in Hungary, too, as it was the first live radio broadcast.

planes but in terms of special dimension, found it difficult to imagine how people could have appeared in the "film box" when they first encountered this technology.

The main forms of media are *on-line* and *off-line media*; in other subdivisions, *print,* online and *offline media; electronic, on-line* and *mobile media.*

They share the common characteristics of visuality, complexity (the ability to affect several sensory areas at once) and the diversity of linguistic and non-linguistic codes. Another important similarity is that each of the different media sub-systems has the capacity to transmit information, inform, shape public opinion or entertain, as well as to provide a form of social control over the functioning of other institutions. The basis for this is the power of the public sphere.

Although the speeches of the ancient orators or the bloody sword of the war caller can be considered mass communication in its key elements, the first real manifestation of modern mass communication by machine is the *print media.* Wall hangings, pamphlets and books were mass media aimed at a substantial number of people. The *print media, which* still dominated in the 1800s and had the richest history, merged the written (e.g. newspaper, book) and the visual (e.g. postcard, poster).

It can be grouped according to several aspects , such as regularity of publication (e.g. daily, weekly, periodical); the place of publication, distribution (e.g. national, regional, local; domestic or cross-border); content (e.g. political-public, entertainment, miscellaneous); the target audience (e.g. professional, youth, children); by the language used (e.g. monolingual, bilingual or multilingual).

Although radio was the dominant mass communication channel in the first half of the 1900s, the century ended with the worldwide dominance of television. The difference between the two major branches of *electronic media* lies in the channel of message transmission; while radio is auditory, television is audiovisual.

Electronic media can also be categorised according to the following features: the scope of distribution (e.g. national, regional, local; domestic or cross-border); the owner (e.g. public, private, NGO); the function (e.g. public service, commercial); the content of the programmes broadcast (e.g. news, music, literature, sport); the nature of the programmes broadcast (e.g. age group, stratum, minority).

However, at the end of the 20th century, a new media[10] emerged – the *internet* and then *mobile media –* and although their importance is very high, the electronic media still dominate.[11]

5. The Electronic Media

The two major forms of electronic media are *on-line* and *off-line* media. The difference lies in computer technology and telecommunications, and the need to connect the

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10 Forgó, 2013, pp. 18–44.
11 Komenczi, 2008.

communication to a network. While the former requires some type of internet connection, the latter uses other technologies to deliver information to the audience.

The two main types of *off-line electronic media* are *television* and *radio,* which can be either commercial or public service media.

The decisive difference is the form of funding, which is also the context in which the different functions are defined.

Commercial media operate on a business basis. The – predominantly – international businesses are profit-driven, so viewership is crucial in securing advertising revenues.

The public service media are largely funded by public money provided by the state. Accordingly, it is expected to provide balanced and impartial coverage, thorough and responsible news reporting, objective information, sensitivity and responsibility for social problems, and value creation.

However, under national law, all national television stations must broadcast at least 20 consecutive minutes of prime-time news.

Another large group of *electronic media* is *on-line media*. It is characterised by an astonishing pace of development, an integrating role (it embraces and reproduces almost all other forms of media, from cinema to newspapers), and a rapid – though often superficial – response to events.

A significant proportion of the more than two billion *internet users are* also social media consumers. It is a media platform within online media that delivers messages to target audiences through social interaction. It is unique in that it transforms otherwise typical content consumers into content editors by inducing them to change roles. Some of its known forms include *Facebook* and *Twitter.* If Facebook users were citizens of a country, it would be the third most populous place in the world after China and India, with 500 million inhabitants!

Another form of electronic online media is *mobile media* - that is, media on portable, wireless devices such as mobile phones.

By 2008, the number of mobile phones had already reached 3 billion, and more than 50% of the world's population owned one. It follows that telephones are the most typical portable electronic, telecommunications and multimedia device. Their number will continue to rise as smartphones become cheaper. A "smartphone" is defined as a mobile telecommunications device that not only provides the classic functions of a telephone (voice communication, messaging, voicemail), but also functions as a computer, camera, location navigation device, TV set, voice recorder, film recorder, etc.

Its reach is illustrated by the fact that the Twitter social media page of a well-known US show (a daily television talk show hosted by actress Ellen DeGeneres since September 2003) is followed on mobile phone by around 80% of its fan base, which exceeds the population of Norway.

6. Under the Wawes of Information-Tsunami – and Human Brain's Ability

It is a fact that the number of 'citizens' of the global internet society is growing unstoppably: in 2014, 3 billion people used the world wide web regularly, and in 2024, 5.5 billion people. That's 67.5% of the world's population!

But the amount of data transmitted is also huge: by the end of 2024, it was close to 149 zettabytes[12]!

The development of mass communication has accelerated at an incredible pace. While it took 38 years for radio to spread (i.e. to reach 50 million listeners), 13 years for television, 4 years for the internet, 3 years for IPod (Apple's portable music and video player, it took 9 months for Facebook, the best-known social media network![13]

This accelerated speed of development, the extremely rapid and pulsating pace of online media and the relativisation of time is illustrated in the following figure, which sizes up what happened on the internet in one short minute in 2012.

In a *single minute*[14], 639,800 gigabytes of data traffic were transferred online, 204 million emails were sent, 30 hours of video content were uploaded to YouTube, and 1.3 million videos were viewed on the same site. More than 2 million searches were made on Google, 277,000 people logged on to Facebook, more than 320 Twitter sign-ups were made, around 100,000 Twitter posts were published, 20 million photos were viewed on Flickr while 3,000 photos were uploaded, LinkedIn added more than 100 new members and $83,000 worth of goods were purchased on the largest US e-commerce site, Amazon.[15]
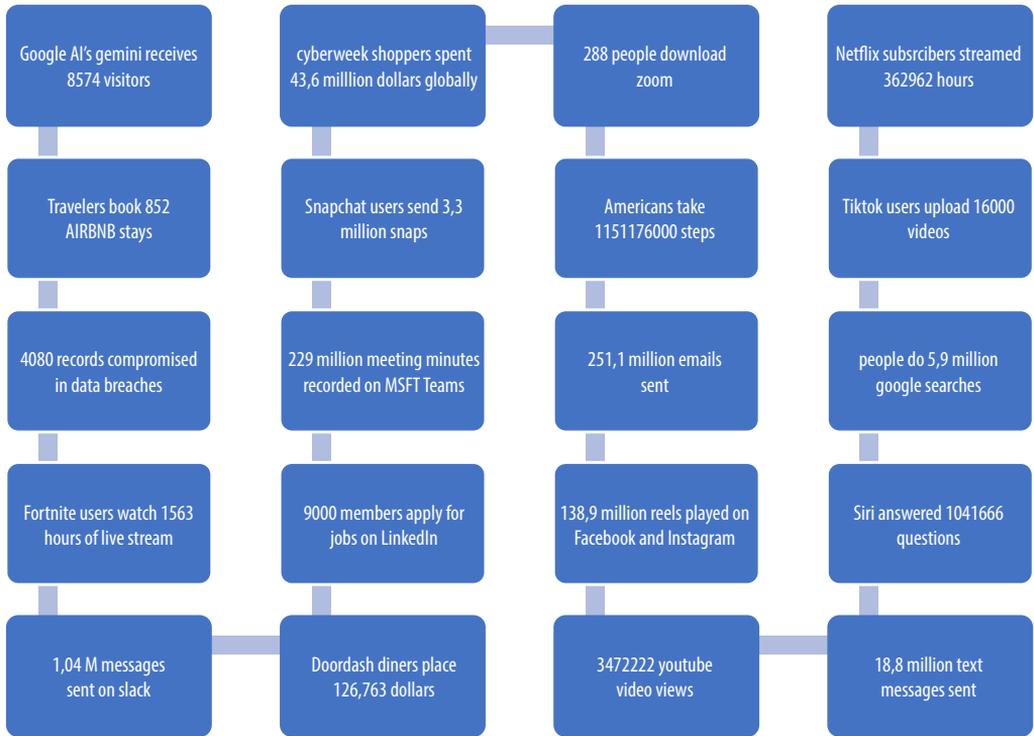
However, the development did not stop. The data for 2024 is even more astonishing.

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12 Hutchinson, 2024.
13 Barát, 2011, pp. 151–164.
14 See: What happens in a minute on the internet? In Enterprise applications of social media [Online]. Available at: http://kozmedia.blogspot.com/2012/04/mi-tortenik-egy-perc-alatt-az.html (Accessed: 16 November 16 2024).
15 Ibid.

Figure 1. One day in internet, 2024[16]

Google AI's gemini receives 8574 visitors	cyberweek shoppers spent 43,6 milllion dollars globally	288 people download zoom	Netflix subsrcibers streamed 362962 hours
Travelers book 852 AIRBNB stays	Snapchat users send 3,3 million snaps	Americans take 1151176000 steps	Tiktok users upload 16000 videos
4080 records compromised in data breaches	229 million meeting minutes recorded on MSFT Teams	251,1 million emails sent	people do 5,9 million google searches
Fortnite users watch 1563 hours of live stream	9000 members apply for jobs on LinkedIn	138,9 million reels played on Facebook and Instagram	Siri answered 1041666 questions
1,04 M messages sent on slack	Doordash diners place 126,763 dollars	3472222 youtube video views	18,8 million text messages sent

This unbelievable pace of development raises a number of questions – especially regarding young age groups socializing in the online space.

However, this amount of information raises questions about the *human brain's ability to* synthesise, process and *interpret this*. Does not the constant stream of news create tension and anxiety? In general, can individuals cope with the information overload that social media can throw at them?

In the beginning, primitive organisms stored their information in their genes.

It took 150 million years, and the evolution of amphibians and reptiles, for the brain's information storage capacity to reach the genes' 109 bits.

16   Author's own work based on Hutchinson, 2024.

The human brain had a storage capacity of about 10^{13} bits[17] at its inception, which is about a thousand times the storage capacity of our genes. (There are different figures (between 10^9–10^{15})).[18]

In principle, we have great potential. Our brain's neural cell population is made up of about 20 billion cells, which operate in a modular system (quasi small groups), with trillions of connections between them, of widely varying strength and content. The problem, according to neurobiologists, is that we do not have sufficient amount of genes to 'build' the networks that the human brain needs to bring them to life.[19]

It is also a fact that the human brain develops up to the age of 20, so the digital generation, today's Z- and α-generation children and young people, are better able to adapt mentally to new challenges. However, it is important to note that "humans are not simple information processing machines". From the moment of receiving information, everyone is unique in how they process, evaluate and interpret events. In this process, the individual relies heavily on his/her genetic heritage as well as on his/her recollections, experiences and knowledge. *This is why a given fact or statement means one thing to one person and something else to another.* However, everyday influences, real lifelong learning, imply a constant process of selection and forgetting. Thus, everything that is not considered important in the processing of information is forgotten. This means the temporary recording and then the erasure of millions or billions of short-term traces of memories a day, which are later classified as superfluous (e.g. what colour were the bus driver's eyes; who was exiting the building through a side door when the door opened).[20]

7. In the Hands of the Owner of Information

However, two further questions may surface in the context of the media. On the one hand, the filtering and evaluation of facts, data and events, i.e. the decision on how important it is for the individual is no longer made by the individual, but by a professional, for example a data processing assistant in a news studio. Similarly, the news producer evaluates the unscreened source information before it reaches the individual. The decision is thus again taken out of the hands of the citizen, who is placed *in* a kind of *passive, receptive status*, who, to put it bluntly, "does not have to think".

On the other hand, there is also the question of how the media can attract and keep the attention of the news consumer and make him/her classify and treat the

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17   A bit is the smallest unit of information. Byte, which is of English origin, is a larger unit {8 bits}). 1 bit is the smallest amount of information that can be received in interaction with the outside world; it is the answer to a question that needs to be answered. It is either yes or no – i.e. no more information is revealed, but in its absence no information is received and no interaction takes place.
18   Fülöp, 2001.
19   Fülöp, 1996, p. 85.
20   Fülöp, 1996.

information as being important (i.e. retain it, not erase it), while an unimaginable amount of information is being flooded into the individual's mind every day.

Understanding the characteristics of mass media, its main mechanisms of operation, and the ability to process and interpret the information it conveys are important prerequisites for both adults and younger generations to be able to form their own opinions and filter out fake news and misinformation.

Fake news" is "fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organisational process or intent. Fake-news outlets, in turn, lack the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information. Fake news overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation (false or misleading information) and disinformation (false information that is purposely spread to deceive people)."[21]

A radio play was elevated to the status of a defining event of the American media era. In 1938, Orson Welles and his fellow actors performed an adaptation of H. G. Wells' War of the Worlds in a one-hour radio program. But radio listeners all over America believed that the monsters on Mars, armed with death rays, had attacked the Earth. "The next morning the newspapers reported a tidal wave of terror sweeping across the nation. It became obvious that it was a panic of national proportions."[22]

Today, however, the situation is much more serious. "The rise of fake news highlights the erosion of long-standing institutional bulwarks against misinformation in the internet age. Concern over the problem is global. However, much remains unknown regarding the vulnerabilities of individuals, institutions, and society to manipulations by malicious actors." – as Lazer et al. conclude their research[23].

Making the world media-free is not possible. However, it is important to be able to interpret the information received and to teach the younger generation to do the same.

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21 Lazer et al., 2018, pp. 1094–1096.
22 Cantril, 1981, pp. 78–88.
23 Lazer et al., 2018, p. 1094.

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