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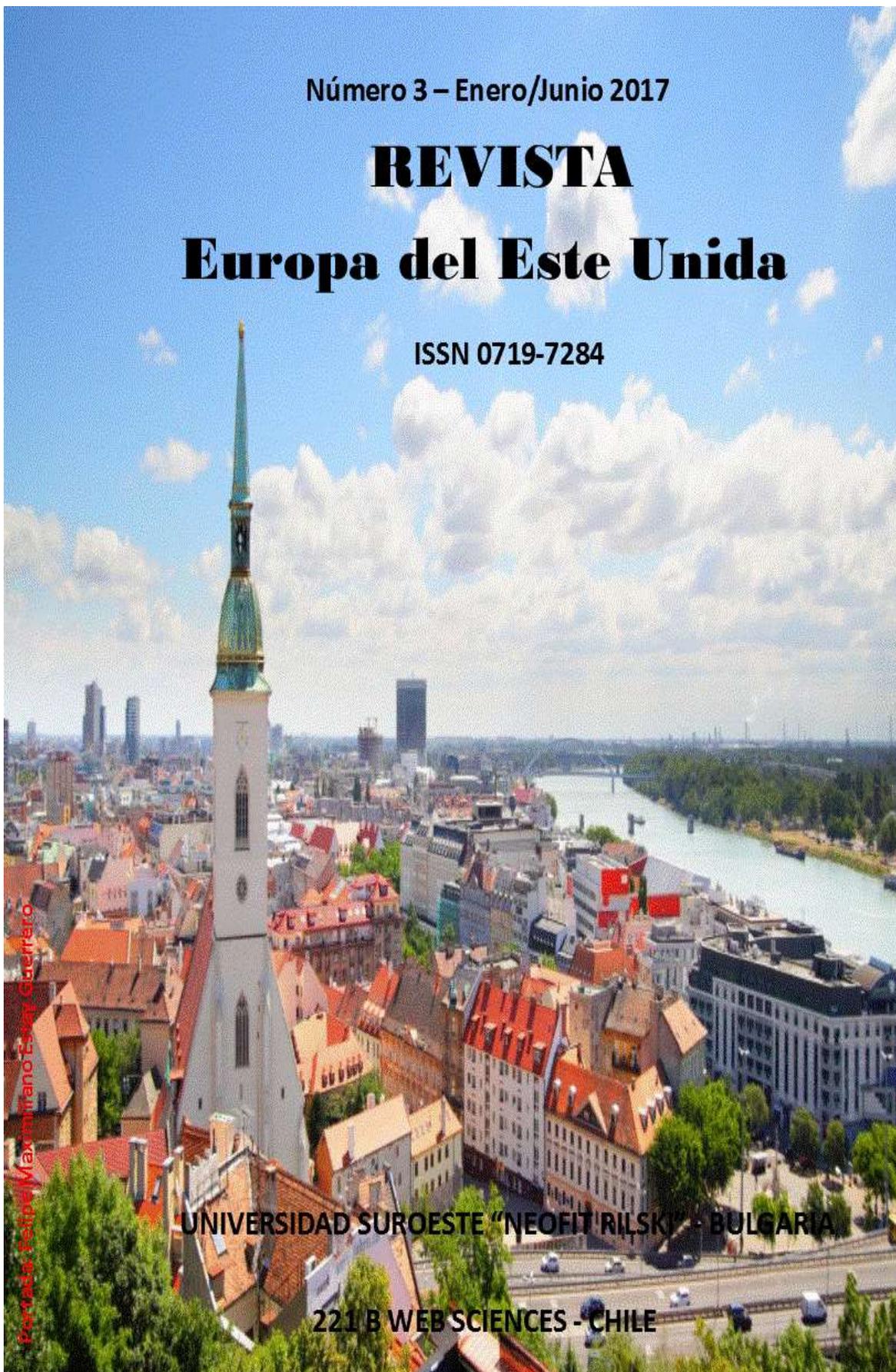
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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SOCIAL PROCESSES

LA INFLUENCIA DE LOS MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN SOCIAL EN LOS PROCESOS SOCIALES

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Abstract

Social media is a result of the development of information and communication technology and web area. The multidimensional interaction through them led to the development of specific social relations and the creation of new social morphology of modern societies. It is essential to note that the ways social change has been identified have varied greatly in the history. Globalization, network connection and the influence of media are typical for modern societies. Social process and social interaction are interrelated, it is difficult to find boundaries between them therefore we have to explore and discover the causal relations.

Keywords

Social change – Media influence – Social media

Resumen

Los medios de comunicación social son el resultado del desarrollo de la tecnología de la información y la comunicación y la web. La interacción multidimensional a través de ellos llevó al desarrollo de relaciones sociales específicas ya la creación de una nueva morfología social de las sociedades modernas. Es esencial señalar que las formas en que se ha identificado el cambio social han variado mucho en la historia. La globalización, la conexión de red y la influencia de los medios de comunicación son típicos de las sociedades modernas. El proceso social y la interacción social están interrelacionados, es difícil encontrar límites entre ellos, por lo tanto, tenemos que explorar y descubrir las relaciones causales.

Palabras Claves

Cambio social – Influencia de los medios de comunicación – Medios de comunicación social

Every society is changing and the processes taking place in it form separate stages in its development. Its subsystems - social, political and cultural - are dynamic, so each one of them is built up of people and social structures that perform specific functions but at the same time are open, communicate with each other and interact.

In the reality of today's global society, the main motive power of social change are information and communication technologies. They are the basis of creating new production systems and new types of communication and management.

Social change

There are many social theories that provide a scientific explanation of the concept of „social change“ – each of them reflects a certain historical reality. Change is a function of social reality and describes changes and modifications of every aspect of social processes and models, of social interaction or organization. According to Toffler¹ change is a process through which the future enters our lives – there is „too much change in too short a period of time“. Modern technologies create things that a prehistoric human would hardly understand.

Main factors which affect social change can be classified in three groups: economic, political and cultural, each influencing the others. Their impact affects the pace at which individual societies develop, but the nature and direction of progress are determined by the degree of development of the human intellect. Science and technology progress in the development of modern society. They influence the way people think, their perceptions of the legitimacy and power, they form social structures, systems and values².

The use of the information and communication technologies is an undeniable fact. They are the basic factor in the evolution of society. „Interactive computer networks grow at extraordinary rate, they create new communication types and channels, and shape the future of life. Social changes are just as dramatic as the technological and economic processes of transformation“³. Global communication generates an instant flow of information and creates and reflects a new and different culture that crosses national borders.

The concepts of some of the most well-known social theorists describe the transformations that society is undergoing, and help to interpret the effects of progress in technology development.

Over the past few years, the concept of networking has gained broad popularity. Manuel Castelles is a Spanish sociologist especially associated with research on the information society, communication and globalization. He describes the increasing rates of innovations and the unusual transformations taking place in our society. He analyzes the processes of globalization and the new economy, focused on the impacts of information technology on modern world. Numerous applications are being developed to achieve

¹ A. Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990).

² A. Giddens and M. Duneier, *Introduction to Sociology* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2000).

³ M. Кастелс, *Възходът на мрежовото общество*. Том 1 (София: ЛИК. 2004), 20.

different goals. This leads to technological innovations that increase the pace and scope of change.

The dividing lines between levels in society are often blurring, but that doesn't mean they disappear. Society is an open network which structures are linked together with channels of communication. The progressive development of information and communication technologies in recent years has created new forms of network interaction, which leads to different types of social relationships in society.

The role of the media

The influence of the media on society is a matter that has been debated (for a long time) by various researchers in the field of communications. The normative, social and communication theories interpret the impact of the media on social change from different points of view and for different purposes.

The media determine the important issues for society and is described as „a huge social force. This power is the power of information and its impact on consciousness and behavior. This power is in the universality of life, represented by information through the media in the consciousness of man“⁴.

The traditional understanding of the media, stemming from the etymology of the Latin word "medium", is a mediator, a channel of communication. In today's society, the media is described as „the fourth power“, i.e. a pattern of the other three authorities - legislative, executive and judicial. They are not only a communication channel, but are also the basis for the functioning of many businesses as part of the implementation of integrated marketing communications, they play an important role in popularizing and imposing political ideas, messages and concepts, they form public opinion. The media is a factor that has a tangible (strong) influence on social life and relationships.

The processes of social change in which media play a key role, according to Winfred Schultz⁵, can be defined as extension, substitution, amalgamation and accommodation. They consist of the following:

- extension - media technologies extend the natural boundaries of human communication and give new opportunities. Human communication is limited in terms of space, time and expression, and the media serve to overcome these constraints;

- substitution - media partly or completely substitute certain social activities and social institutions and thus change their character. For example, children play computer games instead of playing outside with other children; or people use online banking instead of visiting a bank.

⁴ Д. Филипов, Медийната революция. Икономическа теория на медиите (София: УИ „Стопанство“ 2002), 29.

⁵ W. Schulz, Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept. European Journal of Communication. March 2004, vol. 19, no. 1 (2004) 87-101.

- amalgamation – media's definition of reality amalgamates with the social definition of reality – we are listening to radio while driving, reading a newspaper while we are on a bus or subway, watching TV while dining, etc.

- accommodation - the media industry is a part of the gross domestic product because the media provide jobs and income for a large number of people. Political actors must alter their behaviors to accommodate the media's logic and standards of newsworthiness.

These four processes are interconnected and describe the mediatization of society.

The media is an integral part of individual perceptions and the functioning of all organizations and institutions. It is an element of the structure of society, that is why its development and functions are influenced by the changes in it and the general laws of the overall social environment, but at the same time it is an important tool used in the continuous actions to improve the quality of life of the people.

Influence of social media

The development of technology is a consequence of human activity - people create, modify and rationalize the technologies. Parallel to this, technology changes their lives, their way of social interaction, the dimensions of cultural achievements, their political and economic realities.

Social media are a consequence of the development of information and communication technologies and the web space. They are an interactive site which content is determined by the participants themselves. In addition to using the published content, each user has the opportunity to edit, add, comment, and evaluate it. The basis for their functioning is user-generated content, which can take a different form - text, photo, video, graphics, presentation, e-book, etc.

Social media is a means of communication that is rapidly entering the everyday life of people around the world. Surveys for 2016⁶ show that 46% of the world's population is online and 68% of them are active users of social media, which is 31% of all the planet's inhabitants.

Social media is a platform for content publishing and each user becomes a source of information that other users can comment and share, thus promoting an idea, organization, or brand. With every action on the web, the user creates potential opportunities for relationships with new and different people. Social media have changed the principles of functioning of social relations in today's digital society. Ordinary people who are online can create information, distribute it to other users, and thus influence public processes.

The Information that is published in a social media, whether positive or negative, shapes the image of an organization or person, influences the visitor's opinion not only on the particular site but determines the reputation throughout the online space, i.e. these

⁶ We Are Social, Digital in 2016. <http://www.slideshare.net/wearesocialsg/digital-in-2016>, visited March 2017.

sites are an element of interconnected and networked communications. This can lead to a multiplication of information or fast distribution.

Practically every traditional media has technical, geographic, temporal and audience constraints, „it creates certain frameworks in which certain forms can function“⁷, while social media offer the opportunity to use various means of expression. The development of mobile technologies gives free access to social media at any time, from anywhere and through different technical devices that offer instant updates of information and unlimited online content.

Social media change the way we use the information. It is not subject to prior censorship. Geographical borders are also of no importance for its distribution. „Whatever moves with the speed approaching the velocity of the electronic signal, is practically free from constraints related to the territory inside which it originated“⁸. Using social media, users can get acquainted with foreign cultures, or communicate and understand different people.

Social media provides a direct and immediate communication between people. In this way we can create a dialogue directly with stakeholders and promote free-flowing communication. Real-time feedback is a cause for the formation of informal online social communities in which we trust all information due to its well-known reputation and its friend recommendation.

Social media is a platform that reflects the pulse of society, shows the problems, the social tensions and activates the proclamation of a civic position. Every user freely express his/her own opinion toward government. In some cases, these are only discussion questions but there are few examples in which they cause real action. Another good example about the impact of social media is the Egyptian revolution of 2011. One of the activists said Facebook and Twitter played different roles in the uprising. Facebook helped to organize the activists inside the country while Twitter and YouTube functioned to help get the message out to the broader world⁹. Back in time the public space in Bulgaria is similar. The consequences of dissatisfaction in Facebook against the high electricity and heating bills at the end of January 2013 brought thousands of citizens to protest on streets and as a result the prime minister and the government resigned on February 20 and early parliamentary elections took place.

Through social media, each consumer has the opportunity to express his / her civic position on various issues, to draw the attention on topics and problems that are important and to provoke a public response. Thus, social media acquire an increasingly important role in defining the public agenda. They are also a source of information about public affairs.

Social media involve a large number of people. They are a communication tool and can unite individuals who share a cause or point of view. Through them specific social connections and a new social morphology are created.

⁷ Р. Буркарт, Наука за комуникацията. В. (Търново: ПИК. 2000), 29.

⁸ З. Бауман, Глобализацията: Последиците за човека (София: ЛИК. 1999), 79.

⁹ P. Howard, the Arab Spring's Cascading Effects. Miller-McCune. 2011. <http://www.miller-mccune.com/politics/thecascading-effects-of-the-arab-spring-28575/>, visited march 2015.

Conclusion

The communication forms are connected with the development of society. „On one hand, the relevant public system puts the structural frameworks for (potential) communication interaction forms; on the other hand, these communication forms have a significant share in the quality of the public environment in which they operate“¹⁰.

Social media are an integral part of individual perceptions in modern society. User content, direct and free communication through them, the networking effect of disseminating information are factors by which social media model social, economic and political processes in society.

According to We Are Social research¹¹, key trends in social media are the evolution in communication, an integration platform, user empowered voices (increasing importance of ordinary people`s opinion), and the development of professional social networks and social trade.

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¹⁰ Р. Буркарт, Наука за комуникацията... 113.

¹¹ We Are Social, Future Social: 10 Key Trends in Social Media. 2016. <http://www.slideshare.net/wearesocialsg/future-social-10-key-trends-in-social-media>, visited March 2017.

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