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Media panic: the duo media - youth as problem for didactic and teaching plan

ABSTRAKT

Panika medialna: duet media-młodzież jako problem dla dydaktyki i płaszczyzny nauczania

Relacja: młodzież i nowe media jest przedmiotem sprzecznych interpretacji, pełnych utopii lub wypełnionych niepokojami i lękami. Debaty o nowych mediach powodują rozgrzanie reakcji emocjonalnych. W tym przypadku mamy do czynienia z tym, co może być określane jako panika medialna. Panika przechodzi i jest zapomiana, z wyjątkiem pamięci zbiorowej, innym razem powoduje zmiany o charakterze prawnym i społecznym. Moda na nowe media odsyła starsze media na drugi plan. K. Drotner twierdzi, że nowe media służą jako mentalne metafory do dyskutowania i debatowania o szeroko pojętych zagadnieniach społecznych. Autor podziela poglądy, że poprzez tworzenie sloganów określających konkretne pokolenie zwalniamy od odpowiedzialności wychowawców, nauczycieli i rodziców za dzieci i uczniów, w kwestii ich korzystania z nowych mediów. Jednocześnie firmy informatyczne bronią swoich pozycji w debacie publicznej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: panika moralna, panika medialna, młodzież, nowe media, debata publiczna

Introduction

The article faces the issue of media panic, a sociological concept which seeks to explain an emotional charged overreaction, expressed by public opinion about the appearance of a new medium. Over the past decades, the debates focused mainly on the medium of 'computer' and purposely on the Internet, World Wide Web, videogames and social networks. In these debates, we can witness the extremely polarized discourses, whether treated in public opinion or in scientific publications. When we focus on new media, we are referring, on the one hand, to their utopian features and on the other hand, to the various ways in which media jeopardize social fabric. The idea that media damage the society and that young users are the most vulnerable to the influences is a formulaic one, all of us are well familiar with. At the same time, we lay claim skills and abilities to kids and

adolescents with media, appointing them with questionable locutions. These representations are characterized by recurring strong antithetical dualism. Dick Hebdige depicts them with two images-definitions: "youth-as-fun" and "youth--as-trouble"[1]. This connotative model serves as an interpretative key of the social changes: on one side, the young people are celebrated as the forerunners of a prosperous future and on the other side, they are indicated as the clearest proof of the cultural failure. Postulating the Hebdige's reveals, such visions are often distorted, stereotyped and markedly exaggerated that bear tenuous relation to the life experiences of youth themselves[2].

We consider worthwhile that this work should not aim to sustain one of the two stances. Instead, through an analytical-descriptive methodology, we analyse how moral panic focuses on the binomial youth and how media falsifies debates about their relationship and does not lead to a proper interpretation of reality. As claimed by Kirsten Drotner, through this conflict, adults seek to negotiate definitions of character forming in order to balance fundamental dilemmas of modernity[3]. Nevertheless, through a different theoretical approach, we assume that such conflict is a clear stumbling block establishes by some social actors, thus to impede the development of new didactic methods; more generally, a huge obstacle between youth-media and the entire educational world.

Moral Panic

To analyse the concept of media panic it is necessary to recall a more general sociological concept of moral panic. The most common quote about moral panic is undoubtedly the opening paragraph of the famous book by Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics,* where the author describes this concept in a following way:

"Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to became defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself"[4].

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1   D. Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: on images and things,* London-New York 1988, p. 19.
2   Ibidem.
3   K. Drotner, *Dangerous Media? Panic Discourses and Dilemmas of Modernity*, "Paedagogica Historica", 1999, nr 35 (3), pp. 593-619.
4   S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, London 1972, p. 9.

The triggering of episodes of moral panic is often fuelled by media sensationalism; a fundamental role is played by "moral entrepreneurs", a term introduced by Howard Becker to define that category of people who, within a society, assume the role of a defender of the righteous against a real or imagined threat. The motive that triggers the panic does not necessarily have to be a real problem, but it is sufficient that it is perceived as real. The crucial issue is not whether the problems are real or not, but the process of their reinterpretation. The main actor and catalyst in every social anxiety is defined the *folk devil*. Folk devil personifies the evils underlying in moral panic. This role is usually embodied by members of marginalized groups, represented by caricatured and stereotyped symbols and identified by moral crusade as scapegoats on which the society focuses its anxieties. Thanks to deviance amplification supplied by mass media, it spreads a disproportionate overreaction in the society towards folk devil. This creates a clear polarization in the debates and leads to raising a sharp defined boundary between society and the category of folk devil, according to the scheme Good-Evil.

The concept of deviance is particularly important for Cohen. This researcher believed that deviance is not connected and attributable to the carrying out of a specific act, but a typical example of a social construct. Therefore, deviance is created through the interaction between the presumed deviant and the agents appoint to the social control. Consequently, those people who, mobilise, determine penalties and labels to create the deviance. The process of labelling determines what is considered as a deviant act. This approach defies moral guardians, suggesting that their reaction is counterproductive. Sensationalism media coverage is the base of each moral panic and it has the responsibility of emphasizing deviance, developing a new vocabulary for understanding it. Cohen focused significantly on the ideological role of the media and the active construction of its meaning. Such construction is further liable of polarizing public debates, although this might be a desired political effect, as Stuart Hall et al. emphasise in *Policing the Crisis*[5].

The work of Hall et al. reflects on the relevant practices of mass media stemming from the synthesis of Marxist Cultural theory, inflected through Gramsci's idea of hegemony, with an Althusserian conception of the media as an ideological state apparatus largely concerned with the reproduction of dominant ideologies[6]. This approach must be considered as a theoretical enrichment.

Those two theories of moral panic differ in other ways. We can affirm that Cohen adopted a certain neutrality in his exposure, abstained from drawing firm conclusions about policy implications, though „different reader can draw different

5   S. Hall, C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke, B. Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, London 1978, pp. 214-215.
6   J. Woollacott, *Messages and Meanings*, [in:] *Culture, Society and the Media*, M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran, J. Woollacott (ed.), London-New York 2005, p. 107.

implications"[7]. This scholar argues that moral panic is a means to influence public opinion and social consciousness and orchestrate consensus, through a highly emotional and rhetorical speech, in order to assert implicitly the requirement to adopt sweeping and draconian measures. While Hall et al. on the other hand, incorporated their definition of moral panic with the notion of an irrational or unjustified response[8]. Their analysis demonstrated how moral panic is not a randomly phenomenon. It is rather, a timelessness strategy developed, supported and forced by the ruling class to resort a new technique of exercising control and repressing dissent, thus to consolidate their supremacy, take away the focus from the systematic crisis of capitalism and expand, through the mobilization of "common-sense", their sphere of influence in that part of society, called by Gramsci, "civil society".

Despite today, the society does not present itself as a monolithic entity, far from rendering the concept of moral panic as obsolete. Responding to criticisms of Angela McRobbie and Sarah L. Thornton[9], Chas Critcher suggests that the concept has to be reviewed and supplemented. This author acknowledges greater ambiguity and multiple items presented in the media today, but consider that some of them are more powerful and have a greater media impact on public opinion[10]. Moral panic has become more complex and conflicted. As Cohen himself reflected, contemporary moral panic has seen the media became more self-reflective in their coverage, so that „the same public and media discourse that provides the raw evidence of moral panic, uses the concept as first-order description, reflexive comment or criticism"[11].

Media Panic

The relation between the modern media technologies and youth is extremely problematic because the debates are polarized. While there is a side which emphasises the benefits provided by new technologies and the genius of young digital natives; on the other side, there is point out the downside which is destructive and crumble potentials. Therefore, youth and new media are subjects of contradictory representations full of utopia or anxieties and fears. From this consideration, Drotner developed the term *media panic.* This scholar, started from the concept of moral panic, applied it to the media and examined how those

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[7]   S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panic: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd ed., Abingdon-New York 2011, p. 231.
[8]   S. Hall et al., op. cit., p. 16.
[9]   A. McRobbie, S. L. Thornton, *Rethinking 'Moral Panic' for Multi-Mediated Social World*, "The British Journal of Sociology", 1995, nr 46 (4), pp. 559-574.
[10]   C. Critcher, *Moral Panic and the Media,* Buckingham 2003, p. 58.
[11]   S. Cohen, 2011, op. cit., p. 231.

are not only the driving force for spreading moral panic, but the same media contribute to create panic about themselves and new media technologies:

"In some cases, debate of a new medium brings about – indeed changes into – heated, emotional reactions: in that case we have to do with what may be defined as a media panic. It may be considered a specification of the wider concept of moral panic, and it has some basic characteristics: the media is both instigator and purveyor of the discussion; the discussion is highly emotionally charged and morally polarised (the medium is either "good" or "bad") with the negative pole being the most visible in most cases; the discussion is an adult discussion that primarily focuses on children and young people; the proponents often have professional stakes in the subject under discussion as teachers, librarians, cultural critics or academic scholars; the discussion, like a classic narrative, has three phases: a beginning often catapulted by a single case, a peak involving some kind of public or professional intervention, and an end (or fading-out- phase) denoting a seeming resolution to the perceived problems in question"[12].

Panic media regards the concerns generated by a new medium launched into the marketplace. The consequence of this introduction is a strong public reaction, which can lead to fear, threat and in some cases, the use can be regulated or even directly banned. Drotner referred to various media or literary genres introduced in the popular culture, such as novels, films, comics. We may also include specific genres of series of stories, like John Springhall analyses in *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*[13]. Drotner indicated that the phenomenon is largely perceived as a potential threat for the children and adolescents and by extension, as a possible conflict to Enlightenment ideals of human and cultural development[14]. The historical analysis of these panics stresses the strong coherence and repeatability of the topics discussed in the debates.

We can argue that every kind of technological literacy increases social anxiety and the new forms of cultural competence threaten the established order. The advent of new media has been proven particularly threatening to the ideal visions that are built around childhood. Such media exposure occurs quite early and hinders the mediation of parents, teachers and authorities. Moreover, such exposure strengthens adults' sensation to perceive a sense of panic and an inadequacy toward new media. Changes, technological innovations and new literary genres have a strong destabilizing effect. The underway changes and the birth of on-line culture have restarted this cyclical pattern of panic, convey old fears again compelling. These emotions allow national governments to consider and examine new standards to regulate the on-line world and to allow the companies to increase invoicing about software development (for example to afford greater security to access the internet for kids and adolescents).

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12 K. Drotner, op. cit., p. 596.
13 J. Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panic: Penny Gadds to Gangsta-rap*, 1830-1996, New York 1998.
14 K. Drotner, op. cit., p. 600.

The study by Stanley Cohen about moral panic is focused around the role of the mass media in the 70s. Internet, digitalization of books and newspapers, the spread of digital television and radio and more generally, the greater media fragmentation, are the fundamental characteristics of technological change. In the present context, according to McRobbie and Thornton, it is necessary to calibrate the concept of moral panic to take into consideration the social and techno- logical development[15]. This involve a media management, no longer bound to the thought of a single hegemonic élite or a few interest groups; in a similar way, society does not seem to disclose monolithic reactions yet but reactions more and more segmented and diversified among various social groups, who have different ideas and positions. These changes suggest move away from the traditional con- cept of moral panic towards a vision that describes the occurrence of authentic "culture wars"[16]. The deviant behaviour among young are more often the result of complex social interactions rather than the breaking of specific behavioural norms. In a multi-mediated world with partitioned interests, the multiplicity of voice "compete and contest the meaning of the issues subject to <moral panic>"[17]. In cases of media panic, as well as those of moral panic, it is possible to assist in highly polarized debates through which are create stereotyped and socially constructed imagines of the reality, which provoke concern and panic among the public opinion. According to Drotner, "the computer in general and games and the Internet in particular, serve as mental metaphors for discussing and debating wider social concerns"[18]. For this reason computer generates strong emotions, facilitating the creation of strongly positive or negative opinions. When the positive emotions arise, rational assessments prevail especially around the potentials of new media. In the case of computer and information technology there prevails the exaltation of high capacity of storage, retrieval and processing of data. This assessment is more intensified jointly to enhance of possibility to search information. There are also praises about the positive effects that computers have about economy and education. On the other hand, in the negative emotions there prevail emotional assessments. It is emphasised by the violence in the videogames and the imagines of sex and violence on the internet. The focus is also pointed towards the unknowns and the risk which can also be placed in the social networking. Within the framework provided by Drotner and considering the past cases of media panic, does not surprise that, even today, in a great techno- logical times, there are present strongly polarised attitudes toward new media.

As the history suggests, whenever a new technology or a new narrative genre appears in society, claims-makers erect extremist speeches, characterized with

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15   A. McRobbie, S. L. Thornton, op. cit., p. 560.
16   D. Garland, *On the Concept of Moral Panic*, "Crime, Media, Culture", 2008, nr 4 (1), p. 17.
17   A. McRobbie, S. L. Thornton, op. cit., p. 560.
18   K. Drotner, op. cit., p. 594.

strong optimism or pessimism about the impact that new technologies can have on youth and society. The fact that, every time a new technological device comes to the shops, the youth are the first to assign and test it, means that we are faced with a different kind of folk devils compared to those in the moral panic. In the media panic, in each moment a new medium or a device was introduced in the society, the folk devils have become not just the youth or just the media, but the combination of these two.

The invention of youth

Between eighteenth and nineteenth century, the figure of the youth was created. Firstly, it was mentioned as a myth and solitary icon and then as a social category to be imposed as a social and consumerist model with a wide thanatophil endowment: from the proto-Romantic goethian Werther to the cursed suicide of Kurt Cobain, until the troubled and short life of Amy Winehouse. Criminalization of youth did not originate with the Cohen's first edition of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. As Vic Gatrell suggest, there is nothing practically new about societies using youth in media to comment on the state of society, and his observation is internationally true[19].If the theoretical concept of moral panic were born in the second half of the last century, we should not forget that moral panic towards youth occurred since XVII century[20]. These concerns were, at that time, circumscribed to social class to which the 'youth' belonged par excellence, that is to say the working class, considered more easily corruptible. After all, the subsequent history is full of examples. In France, already Baudelaire aroused sensation with his *Fleurs du mal*; the vividness and youthfulness of Rimbaud shook French society due to his anti-bourgeois invectives and his revolutionary attitudes. Certainly, even British moralists were deeply concerned that some writings from some 'imposing' youth could provoke visions of the world and society against dominant moral at that time. Oscar Wilde and his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* on 1891 represented the antithesis of the bourgeois definition of youth and aroused strong sensation in the society also due to the homosexuality of the writer. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was a novel "thought to subvert the taboos and encourage unnatural vices"[21].

Media have a pervasive presence in the social and cultural experiences of adolescents. Media, not only occupy a central place in the life of youth, but they are essential to shape our concepts about young generation as a distinct social

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19   V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868,* Oxford 1994, quoted by A. Ruddock, Youth and Media, London 2013, p. 9.

20   B. B. Roberts, L. F. Groenendijk, "*Wearing out a pair of fool's shoes": Sexual Adivce for Youth in Holland's Golden Age,* "Journal of the History of Sexuality", 2004, nr 13 (2), p. 139-156; B. B. Roberts, L. F. Groenendijk, *Moral Panic and Holland's Libertine Youth of the 1650s and 1660s*, "Journal of Family History, 2005, nr 30 (4), p. 327-346.

21   J. Savage, *L'Invenzione dei Giovani*, tr. G. Carlotti, Milan 2009, p. 42.

category. Margaret Mead showed how conflicts and tensions accompanying adolescence are a product of culture and not a concomitance of the inevitable physiological maturation; specific culturally phenomena, not universal, own in the western countries[22]. The term 'youth' has to be understood as a relative concept, culturally constructed. The division between the adults and youth world is also highlight by the sociologist Talcott Parsons, who, in an article from 1942 entitled *Age and Sex in the Social Structure of United States*, coins the term "youth culture" to describe "a set of patterns and behaviour phenomena"[23] of this 'new' social American category.

In June 1945, as Jon Savage stresses, a couple of months before the explosion of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nakasaki, *The New York Times* announced the appearance of a new "American invention": *teenagers*. According to this article, teenagers are not ready for the serious affairs of adulthood, therefore inviting them to sink into frivolous activities of "teenager culture"[24]. Thus, this term describes a "new concept of youth as a distinct mass-market. [...]. Consumerism offered the perfect counterweight to the riots and uprisings, it was the American way to divert the energies of youth, without damages"[25].

From the second half of the last century, perceptions of "youth" as a distinct social group were a response to constant and progressive developments. After the Second World War, both in United State and Europe, "baby boomers" in-creased the number of population. In the same period, the expansion of consumer industries and the reconfiguration of traditional labour markets ensured buoyant levels of youth employment and boosted young people's spending power. For this reason, the growth of youth's disposable income underpinned a wide expansion of the commercial market towards "youth"[26]. The exponential growth of the spare time and entertainment industry carry more weight and strength to the Parsons' concept of "youth culture". New trends, new artistic style, new musical genres and new media targeted and consumed by youth are the assumptions which we refer to a generational culture. From this moment, the features seek to determine 'youth' as a distinct and different generational and cultural group from the previous. This is defined not from their bio-psychological attributes, but their distinctive patterns to use media and consumer practices. The overexposure of this 'new' phase of human life gives opportunity to media and politicians to use 'youth' as a recurring means to comment the wider social and policy debates. The symbolic representation of youth, through encode and understanding the broader

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[22] M. Mead, *Coming of age in Samoa: a Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation*, New York 1928.
[23] T. Parsons, *Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States,* "American Sociological Review", 1942, nr 7 (5), p. 606.
[24] J. Savage, op. cit., p. 482.
[25] Ibidem, p. 473.
[26] B. Osgerby, *Youth Media*, London-New York 2004, p. 7.

social changes, allow to celebrate them as precursors of a prosperous and bright future and sometimes, often simultaneously, vilified as the most deplorable cultural decline or failure.

Media as folk devils

The current approaches about the new media technologies among many researches disclose apocalyptic realities or utopian futures. Such approaches are not anything new. Indeed, in the Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates directed numbers of specific criticisms to the alphabetical medium starting from the narration in myth of Thoth. Despite all, to enhance the advantages of orality on writing and spread the thoughts of the mentor, paradoxically, Socrates' disciples truly relied to the writing.

Press was the first technology to allow widespread of information and people to receive messages much more quickly. In the second half of XVIII century, nevertheless, a group of English philanthropists took up the cause of society in order to promote a more useful knowledge and accuse cheap publications, claiming that "it is not the impure novel or romance which attracts the common labourer's ear, or defiles his cottage; but his gross and polluted phrases may often be traced to those profane and indecent songs, and penny papers, which are hawked about our cities, towns, and villages"[27]. The aim of these philanthropists was to defend their writings, containing religious tales in order to indoctrinate population.

These writings were relegated mainly on the new established Sunday schools and in those places where moral regulation was pretty strong so as to contrast the popular narrative, considered as "emotionally charged and politically subversive tales"[28].

Literacy skill is considered an essential instrument for economic, cultural and social development for each human being. In the developing countries, as were those at that time, literacy could enable every person to develop knowledge, improve social status and permit religious readings, opportunities appreciated in that society. However, literacy skill meant also coming into contact with subversive readings for the morality and policy that oftentimes circulated during the period following the French Revolution. On the one side, they sought to politically regulate the new works through with censorship of the press and, on the other side, personal behaviour were guided by moral regulations initiated by moral entrepreneurs.

The years after the Second World War were also the years of the commercial circulation of the comics. In 1953, in the book entitled *Seduction of the Innocent*, the psychiatrist Fredric Wertham strongly criticised comics define them as "debasement of the old institution of printing, the corruption of the art of drawing and

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27   R. Phillips, *The Monthly Magazine*, London 1797, nr. 3 (13), p. 14.
28   K. Drotner, op. cit., p. 599.

almost an abolition of literary writing"[29]. According to the psychiatrist, this was symptomatic of a moral crisis of the society, actually caused by those trash comics. However, Wertham analysed comics with a limited run, followed by a few readers and where the images were particularly bloodier than standard. Also figures like Superman or Captain America attracted criticisms from parents and intellectuals because the comics, in which the figures appeared, regulated their 'black and white' conflicts through brute force, as a drug for the children[30]. Comics proposed confusion about gender and sexual identities. Batman and Robin were condemned for promoting a homosexual lifestyle and Wonder Woman for partaking in un--feminine activities. Wertham also attacked the use of onomatopoeic words apparently believing that they degraded children's reading skills[31].

Even Critcher focused on a case of media panic, the so-called "video nasty", namely those movies are loaded too much with violent contents[32]. The panic triggered by such films was mostly fuelled by launch into the marketplace of VHS and video recorders (VCR) in 1980. Over the years growth a heated debates towards violent movies projected in the cinema that often led to establish censor films commissions, in the case of VHS and VCR, there were not relevant legislation about violent images in the movies sold in the videotapes. Since there were legislation aimed to control the spread of potentially violent movies through this new channel, introduction of VHS and VCR provoked a great fear and a tangible media panic. The symbolization, another characteristic highlighted by Cohen draws in "unambiguously unfavorable symbols"[33], was also accentuated by *The Sunday Times* using the highly emotional term "video nasty"[34]. At the beginning, the English government refused to fulfil the new regulations required. This refusal caused the interventions of the English moral activist, Mary Whitehouse and the most popular national newspapers, all lined up to criticize the government for not having introduced an act designed to stop the spread of such 'hazardous' films. Eventually, the government decided to intervene. In 1984, in a short time, the *Video Recordings* Act was approved imposing a strictly control over videotapes and fines up to 20,000 pounds.

Every time there is a brutal murder by a teenager, traditional media weave narration focused on the negative influences of new media on the mind of the young protagonists. Similarly, a number of researches analyse the cases trying to find confirmation of the correlation that ties crime news to new media. For example, the former military psychologist David Grossman and researcher Gloria

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[29] F. Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, London 1954, p. 381.
[30] J. Springhall, op.cit., p. 121.
[31] F. Wertham, op. cit., p. 145.
[32] C. Critcher, op. cit., pp. 64-80.
[33] S. Cohen, 1972, op. cit, p. 41.
[34] J. Petley, *"Are We Insane?" The "video Nasty" Moral Panic*, [in:] *Moral Panic in the Contemporary World*, C. Critcher, J. Hughes, J. Petley, A. Rohloff (ed.), London 2013, p. 78-79.

DeGaetano's studies try to warn society about the capacity of the films and videogames to increase the contempt for human life. In their book, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A call to action against TV, movie and video game violence*[35], these two authors argue that violent video games not only glorify violence but teach adolescents how to excel it in practice. Their thesis is inspired by the events took place in Kentucky, in December 1, 1997, at Heath High School. The then fourteen years old, Michael Carneal stole some guns and rifles from parents and, after having gone to school, opened fire killing three girls and wounding five other students. After the event, media point out that Michael had exercised playing videogames before commit the massacre. In 1999, at Columbine High School, two students introduced firearms into the building and opened fire on classmates and teachers. That day twelve students and one teacher were killed. In the following weeks, the media fuelled debates seeking responsibilities of the massacre in youth sub-cultures and influence that media could have had on them. The two young killers, according to the mainstream media, belonged to the youth subcultures 'goth' and 'nerd'. Media tracked similarities between the methods used by the two young during the massacre and the film *The Basketball Diaries*, where Leonardo DiCaprio wears a black raincoat and shoots six classmates in the hallways of the school. Others compared the events to movie *Matrix*. Others blamed heavy metal singer Marilyn Manson and the industrial metal band Rammstein. The two young were known to be avid players of the videogame *Doom*[36]. Many of these accuses were proved unfounded because the two young did not have almost no connection with the media or subcultural groups accused of fomenting the crime[37].

After all, it is better to highlight that the concerns towards videogames and violent movies that emerged in the last two decades are not a new phenomenon. Savage, in his book *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, reports the stories of some young lived in the nineteenth century. Histories are full of incredible parallels to the massacres took place in the United States at the turn of the new millennium. For example, in this book strikes the history of Jesse Pomeroy. In his life he committed heinous murders despite his fifteen years. His age and his violent crimes inflamed public debate and the most important newspapers clamoured for capital punishment. The judges commuted the capital punishment to life sentence and Jesse was in prison all his life. The media and experts, lifted as social champions, are trying to give an explanation to those events. Someone singled out Lombroso's phrenology and physiognomy, while others believed that the main cause were the dime novels that Pomeroy was a fanatic reader. The dime

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[35] D. Grossman, G. DeGaetano, *Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence*, New York 1999.
[36] C. Anderson, K. Dill, *Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings and Behavior in the Laboratory and in Life,* "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", 2000, nr 78 (4), p. 772.
[37] D. Cullen, *Inside the Columbine High Investigation*, September 29, 1999, [online] http://www.salon.com/1999/09/23/columbine_4/.264 [November 7, 2015].

novels were paperback books of adventure, at that time very popular among young Americans. In particular, titles like *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend Whoop-Up* attracted the concerns of society, describing in detail the bloody battles between the Americans native and the conquerors of the New World. As in the current massacres, in Pomeroy's life emerges as media focused more about readings of the young than about the difficulties he had faced during his short life. Jesse had deep psychological and physical scars caused by the father's violence, "the small demon had simply learned all too well from adults. In practice, he was dehumanized, abstracted into a symbol of pure evil"[38].

Mentioned examples, despite occurring in periods very far from each other, have some common characteristics. Both the media coverage and the public debates focus on youth as the embodiment of a more general moral malaise. The popular entertainment and youth are wrongly cited as major factor that influence directly the behaviour of the murderers.

New moral panics emerge with stronger power with the coming of internet. Alice Marwick analysed the theory of moral panic in relation to on-line predators and the consequent introduction of the controversial *Deleting Online Predators Act* (DOPA) in the United States[39]. On-line predators are defined as those adults who use Internet to lure children. In recent years, in the United States, this issue aroused strong stir, which has even led to the creation of a reality show broad-casted on NBC, which tried to arrest the presumed paedophiles. In this regard, Marwick confirms the online predators' case potentially constitute a real moral panic[40]. Moreover, even Thomas Ryberg and Malene Charlotte Larsen highlight that similar media panics affected the social network *Arto* in Denmark[41]. The re-action when it appeared was excessive and disproportionate. Many schools blocked the access to this website and many parents banned their children to use it, forcing them to delete their profiles. In another article, Crispin Thurlow analyses the collective fears that teachers and linguists have about the new technologies as cause of a profound transformation of the language: „and to think this happened in the land of Shakespeare. If the bard were alive today, he'd probably write, <2B or not 2B…>"[42], referring to many abbreviations in text messages used by young.

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[38] J. Savage, op. cit., p. 25.

[39] A. E. Marwick, *To Catch a predator? The MySpace moral panic*, "First Monday", 2008, nr 13 (6), [online] http://firstmonday.org [November 10, 2015].

[40] Ibidem.

[41] T. Ryberg, M. C. Larsen, *Network Identities – Understanding Different Types of Social Organisation and Movements Between Strong and Weak Ties in Networked Environments*, "Journal of Computer Assisted Learning", 2008, nr 24 (2), pp. 103-115.

[42] C. Thurlow, *From Statistical Panic to Moral Panic: The Metadiscursive Construction and Popular Exaggeration of New Media Language in the Print Media*, "Mediated Communication", 2006, nr 11 (3), p. 679.

Considering the long references which denounce the shady sides of the media, it became difficult to justify the negative statements toward current new media. The popular entertainment serves as folk devils on which, political and moral entrepreneurs, flock to more complex social and economic issues. As explained by David Buckingham: "the media routinely serve […] as an easy scapegoat, which may actively prevent a more considered, and more honest, appraisal of the issues. To blame the media provides a convenient means of displacing the concern away from questions which are much harder to examine, and which we may actively wish to avoid"[43].

The increase of competition between media, the effectiveness of pressure groups, in particular their skills at working with the media and providing highly professional "sound bites"[44], facilitate the distortion, exaggeration and the conflict of the news, not allowing users to have a lucid and impartial of reality. Not by chance, starting from Parsons' considerations, is possible to analyse how, in a famous article, Mark Prensky coined the terms *digital native* and *digital immigrants*[45]. The digital native is somebody who was born and grew with the new digital techno-logies or, as Prensky says, they are all "native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games and Internet. In contrast, the digital immigrant is who was born before the birth, or better, the launch into the marketplace of digital technologies and has approached later the digital revolution[46]. Even Don Tapscott in his book *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* gives an exceptionally positive vision of new digital technologies and the new "net generation"[47]. With typical deterministic approach, Tapscott outlines two generations "baby boomers" - the generation born with the development of television - and the "net generation", which sees the computer as the more present technology in the live. While television would be a passive medium, the web is considered much more active; while television gives a unique view of the world, the web gives more space to individual freedom, participation and democracy due to its interactivity. Both Tapscott and Prensky concur defining the today's school as inadequate to perform its role: while students belong to the new generation of digital natives and net generation, teachers and educators are immigrants or even digital tardives. As Tapscott says: „there is growing appreciation that the old approach is ill-suited to the intellectual, social motivational, and emotional needs of the new generation"[48]. Also Prensky underlines that „our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach"[49].

43   D. Buckingham, *Introduction: Reading Audiences—Young People and the Media*, [in] *Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media*, D. Buckingham (ed.), Manchester 1993, pp. 5-6.
44   A. McRobbie, S. L. Thornton, op. cit., p. 566.
45   M. Prensky, *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants*, "On the Horizon", 2001, nr 9 (5), pp. 1-6.
46   P. Ferri, *Nativi Digitali*, Milan 2011, p. 74.
47   D. Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*, New York 1998.
48   Idem, p. 131.
49   M. Prensky, op. cit., p.1.

Digital native and digital immigrants: real phenomenon or digital panic?

The polarization positive/negative, good/evil turns out to be a constant in the analysis about youth and media. Through the panic, adults seeking to re-define the education parameters, undermined by appearing of a new medium. Through the panic, the society tries to cope with the dilemmas of modernity that, anyway, cannot be overcome once for all. The media panic basically attempt to re-establish a generational status quo that the youthful pioneers seem to undermine, and this generational struggle is demonstrated in the different adult strategies of externalising the problem[50].

The polarization of the dynamics that are associated with media panic is a "digital dualism", namely the strong contrast between actual experience, positively connoted, and virtual experience, as negative connoted. While the significant differences between the 'real and virtual' have to lack from our discussions, we have to consider more thoroughly the similarities between 'on-line and off-line'. On the on-line world we reproduce the same dynamics of the off-line world[51]. For example, in case of cyber bullying that, certainly now have a new visibility and is characterized by new dynamics, but it is still the same problem of bullying that occurs in the real world. As Chiara Giaccardi reports, online and offline, are „two articulations of a unique field of experience and relation, unified by subjectivity that it moves according to trajectories of transitivity, of crossings of boundaries in both directions, and not according to pathological reports of replacement or colonization"[52]. This thesis is also supported by Sonia Livingstone, who says that teenagers have only incorporated new media in their peer networks, using them both in the face-to-face and on-line communication. Young meet and visit each other's house to talk about and play computer games as well as in the past we would meet to exchange books, comics, music or stickers. They use „new media to supplement rather than displace existing activities"[53]. After all, new media have only incorporate traditional media in a single mobile device. Books, radio, television, and so on: every medium converges in the "black box fallacy", as Henry Jenkins describes in his book *Convergence Culture*[54].

The difficulty to correlate the different points of view is also due to the debate extremely polarized. For example, in the debate focuses on the media influences

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[50] K. Drotner, op. cit., p.614.
[51] P. Aroldi, *Dall'antitesi reale-virtuale alla continuità tra esperienza online e offline. Quali sfide per l'educazione?*, "50° Convegno Di Scholé", Brescia September 8-9, 2011.
[52] C. Giaccardi (ed.), *Abitanti della rete. Giovani, relazioni e affetti nell'epoca digitale*, Milan 2010, p. 9, quoted P. Aroldi, op. cit.
[53] S. Livingstone, *Young people and new media: Childhood and the changing media environment*, London 2002, p. 7.
[54] H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York-London 2006, p. 13-16.

in teaching and education, it is possible find the Richard Clark's position who said that media are simply tools and their use do not influence the cognitive abilities, and authors, like Robert Kozma, who claim how the context and the way in which the media are integrated in it have a big impact on the thinking and learning[55]. As Julian Sefton-Green noted: „the concept of an <audio-visual generation> (or what seems to be called, at the moment <cyberkids>) seems to have become a short-hand way of labelling these hopes and fears, and it clearly illustrates how each category seems to have become a way of talking about the other"[56]. The experts and especially educators have to look away from the technologies to the needs of students, youth and the human being in general.

Finally, it is worth note that after more than a century, the literacy issue is still today in the public debates. The contemporary concerns continue to focus, as in the past, about literacy; not more focus on the ability to read and write, but focus on the necessary expertise to concede use new multi-mediated technologies. As Drotner affirms „the intense preoccupation with the latest media fad immediately relegates older media to the shadows of acceptance"[57]. The aim of media panic seems be that of to restore the generational status quo that youth trying alter. Reaction and panic of society about the introduction of a new media can be understood as implicit or explicit means of moral regulation. This explanation find its base in the Cohen's concept of moral panic, in which panic serves as an ideo-logical safety valve whose effects are to restore the moral regulation[58]. Moral regulation can only focus towards cultural education and learning of youth. It creates a generational gap between the young and adults, the latter, still tied to the 'Gutemberg Galaxy', that, owing to laziness and/or mental rigidity, do not want enter in the digital world and, to maintain the authority, they just condemn new media relegating to a mere instrument of game. Just for now, their only hope of deliverance is that children and adolescents turn off new media and disconnect them from virtual world created by new technologies. Youth have to return to the old media, first of all books, regaining their humanity. In order to overcome the adults' panics towards new media is necessary to teach both youth and to adults the good on-line practices. The opportunity of putting in place this solution is undermined by the persistence of strong concerns and utopian visions. If, on the one hand, rapid technological development raises expectations about the revolutionary and innovative effects, on the other hand, the same phenomenon causes of moral panic strictly closed with those that arose in ancient times and in different cultural contexts. Media panic risks to be the cause of prohibition and

[55]   M. J. Brown, *If Technology is the Medium and Instruction is the Method: Then, Do Media Influence Learning?* [online] http://www.lehigh.edu/~mjbg/portfolio/pdf-pospaper.pdf [November 8, 2015].
[56]   J. Sefton-Green, *Introduction: Being Young in the Digital Age*, [in] *Digital Diversions: Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia*, J. Sefton-Green [ed.], London 1998, p. 2.
[57]   K. Drotner, op. cit., p. 610.
[58]   A. Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation*, Cambridge 1999, p. 17.

excessive regulation by the institutions in order of the use of new media. As an example, the deeply division between digital natives and digital immigrants unnecessarily accentuate a split between different generations, which seems out of all proportion to reality.

Conclusion

Through the creation of slogans to indicate a specific generation, we give alibis to educators, teachers and parents to not feel their responsibilities for their children and students when they approach to new media. The task of the educational institutions should not be to feed the distances, insisting to the medium--book as the only tool capable to educate, nor, even less, would be to see modern technology as the only tools capable to promote a more efficient learning abilities. Considering new media as the panacea to the learning and educational problems do not allow neither to understand nor to adequately address the primary needs of youth. To carry through an efficient and effective education as possible it is just necessary have the possibility to use all the tools at our disposal in the best possible way, combining them with each other according to a method well-thought and that places at its centre the youth. The main point is that the methods in which new media are used, have to be critically negotiated at global, national or local level. This should be done especially in educational institutions, such as the school and the family, to allow to come to a shared understanding between different generations of media's implicit and explicit meanings.

Following the model proposed by Stuart Hall et al., although today there are not the rigid divisions of social classes, we can affirm the active participation of several fronts: on one side, the publishing and information technology companies are able to feed public debate about concerns or idealization inherent new media, in order to defend its advantageous position; on the other side, adults that behind the debate on new media, seem to hide a generational struggle inside of which they have to take into account the media.

With regard to tax about e-book, appears quite clear the judgment of the European Court of Justice, which expressly does not equate the taxation of digital book as paper books. According to the Court, the e-book needs to be read a physical medium and the latter is not included with the e-book. So, the e-book has to be considered a piece of software. In addition, although school programs are almost unchanged, the textbooks are annually modified, so it obliges families to buy new ones. Similarly, we can criticize texts where new media are idealised. As mentioned by a number of authors, the problems of these texts are not only theoretical but also methodological[59]. Moreover, the suspect that the positive results may also be

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59   R. A. Fabio, S. Giannatiempo, *Influenza dei Media sui Processi Cognitivi*, Milan 2004, pp. 6-8.

due to the economic interests of electronics companies is shared by several scholars. According to Jane Healy and Clark, in fact, more effective and positive results on the use of various media were obtained in research supported by these multinationals[60].

Taking into consideration the category of teachers, it is possible to state that there is a constant lack of widespread program in the school about new media technologies, designed to involve the teachers in search of new working hypotheses. There is a need for an examination of the whole educational system responsible for the analysis and field testing. Nevertheless, we believe that „for the moment there is a huge gap between the maturity of media technological and the immaturity of conceptual elaboration about how and for what purpose, that computer can be used in the context of educational practice"[61]. We cannot forget that to instil fear in people's mind is the basis of all moral panic. This situation encourages people to move away from the complexity of visible social problems and retire to a 'fortress mentality'[62], causing a sense of helplessness and paralysis. Parents, teachers and institutions are encouraged to take a defensive position towards new technologies and new cultural models. Teacher can no longer be thought as who gives homogenizing answers and aprioristic solutions which student has to repeat mnemonically; the discovery has its logic: the logic of the query. The knowledge proceeds if it is possible increase our questions and the school should be the place where it is possible to pose them, or better, a place where can learn to ask. When it is present an infinite database as internet is, the task of the teacher is provoke questions and provide research tools in order to solve the problem raised.

There is a new conception of the teacher, who has to subvert the Bourdieu's theoretical concept of *habitus*[63]. The teachers have not to be the representative of the 'truth' and 'moral', but who teach the instrument of research and propose reflection for students. If these are the reasons triggering the moral panic, the invitation is to review, with a cold analytical eye, educational institutions, including new media, if deems them necessary; but it is also an invitation to teachers to re--think their role, in order to build the school 2.0.

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[60]   J. M. Healy, *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect our Children's Minds-for Better and Worse*, New York 1998; R.E. Clark (ed.), *Learning from Media: Arguments, Analysis, and Evidence,* Greenwich CT 2001; bothquoted in R. A. Fabio, S. Giannatiempo, op. cit., p. 8.

[61]   T. Maldonado, *Memoria e conoscenza: Sulle sorti del sapere nella prospettiva digitale*, Milan 2005, p. 184.

[62]   We can define it as a situation in which a group of people feel they are under attack and therefore refuse to listen to any criticism or views that do not fit with their own position and aims.
[online] http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/fortress-mentality [November 14, 2015].

[63]   Habitus is one's physical and psychological demeanouras a result of habits developed over a period of time. Moreover, it is created through a social, rather than individual process leading patterns that are enduring and transferrable from one context to another, but that also shift in relation to specific contexts and over the time. Habitus is created by a kind of interplay between free will and a system of structure, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented toward practical functions. These practices and representations can be objectively adopted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them. Objectively regulated without being in any way the product of obedience to rules. P. Bourdieu, *Per una Teoria della Pratica. Con Tre Studi di Etnologia Cabila,* tr. I. Maffi, Milan 2003.

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Media panic: the duo media-youth as problem for didactic and teaching plan

Summary

The relation between the modern media technologies and youth is extremely problematic because their debates are polarized. There is a view which emphasises benefits provided by new technologies and the genius of young digital natives; on the other hand, there is a point on the downside which is destructive and crumbles potentials. Therefore, youth and new media are subjects of contradictory representations full of utopia or full of anxieties and fears. In some cases, a debate of a new medium brings about heated, emotional reactions. In that case we have what may be defined as a media panic. The panic passes over and is forgotten, except in collective memory; at other times it has repercussions and might produce such change as those in legal and social policy. Like this the intense preoccupation with the latest media fad immediately relegates older media to the shadows of acceptance. K. Drotner argues that new media serve as mental metaphors for discussing and debating wider social concerns. We argue, with an approach close to S. Hall et al., that through the creation of slogans to indicate a specific generation, we give alibis to educators, teachers and parents not to feel their responsibilities for their children and students when they approach new media. At the same time, publishing and information technology companies are able to feed public debate about concerns or idealization inherent to new media, in order to defend their advantageous position.

Key words: moral panic; media panic; youth; new media; polarised debates