

The Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University



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**The new vision for popular culture and the media as its main medium**

Doctoral study for the Ph.D. Degree in Mass Communication

Abstract

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## Introduction

The understanding of pop culture that has developed in the Western humanities and social sciences has virtually not been reflected in the Georgian reality. It is rare for us to have a scientific paper or research that studies the influence of mass culture on the formation of modern human thinking through the media. This can be explained by the delayed spread of digital technologies in Georgia. „Mass culture” is perceived as a set of needs and interests. Perhaps that is why the study of mass and pop culture remains beyond scientific research, which leads to the neglect of a new cultural phenomenon emerging in the wake of the new media.

The research paper "New Vision of Popular Culture and Media as Its Main Medium" encompasses both the analysis of existing literature and research in this field, as well as the innovations that emerged directly in the work process and appeared in the study results. Accordingly, the paper reflects the current changes caused by modern technological development and the emergence of new media. Topics such as the role of new media in creating and spreading popular culture, the emergence of its latest forms, its impact on human behavior and taste formation, especially among young people, because they are the ones who use new media outlets actively. The purpose of our empirical research is to study online games addiction and its impact on the adolescent psyche. This problem is undoubtedly important today, and its understanding will be relevant from the perspective of many disciplines in the future. As research has shown, the impact of online games on personality formation can be varied, both positively and negatively.

Scientific research about pop culture is essential because it is the most important example of human experience. A modern person lives and develops in a world saturated with pop culture, which is so closely embedded in his / her daily life and the society that it can be found everywhere. Therefore, without analyzing this phenomenon, it is hard to understand the everyday characteristics of a modern person, especially the social aspects. The modern development of mass media, especially new or digital media, further highlights the importance of studying this phenomenon.

There is a special attitude in modern sociology towards the formation and development of that part of a culture which we call „pop“ or, in some cases, „mass“ culture. The term „pop culture“ has received the status of a scientific research object in recent decades. It is becoming increasingly

difficult to find the exact criteria differentiating between „high“ and „elite“ or „mass“ and „elite“ culture. In addition, modern sociological theories do not consider masses or social communities as the main object of „pop culture“.

The process of pop culture research is progressing at a rapid pace in Western countries. The primary wave of academic science has grown into an intellectual flow, where nowadays the streams of different disciplines are already flowing in. New media today, as never before, is evolving extremely quickly. It responds instantly to technological advances while transforming the consumer's daily life, his / her existence, time management, means of communication, ways of receiving, processing, and transmitting information, changing the whole culture.

Anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and literary critics are trying to pay more attention to pop culture and especially to its new forms. A clear, conceptual borderline between „elite“ and „popular“ culture is already blurred today. Scientists have begun to understand how much these two areas have in common in terms of social practice forms. Today pop culture is considered the most important field of political and social conflicts, as a political tool for mobilizing the masses. Although we have tried to pay less attention to pop culture as a political tool in this study, as it is another broad research topic, it would be difficult to study the whole issue without it. Therefore, the political aspects of mass culture will also be discussed in the present study.

## **Chapter I - Media Systems and Media Theories (Overview)**

### **Media Systems**

**Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini** put an emphasis on sociocultural parameters and matrices of social development in their monograph „Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics“.<sup>1</sup> The authors note that media systems are changing in the wake of various historical trends, especially in the context of globalization and

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<sup>1</sup> D. Hallin and P. Mancini - „Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics“, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004. p. 360

commercialization. Their comparative analysis assures us that the commercialization of media systems makes them a large-scale business.

Hallin and Mancini developed the following classification of media systems.

**Liberal Model of Media Systems** - Media is a market tool. The public may not be interested in politics. Therefore, the media acts as a mediator between citizens and the political elite.

**Polarized Pluralist Model** - The priority of the media is television. According to the authors, the media market is under the influence of the government, and there are virtually no commercial media outlets.

**Democratic Corporatist Model** - means the active involvement of the state in the freedom of the mass media and the development of the media market. This model discusses the features that were characteristic of the coexistence of commercial and socially-oriented media at an early stage in the development of print publications.

### **Media Theories**

According to “Journalism and Society” by **Denis McQuail**, his theories are “closely related to certain normative principles that are more relevant to reality than theory”, so they can be considered “models”.<sup>2</sup>

Denis McQuail discusses several media theories:

**The model of trust** - is based on the idea that the purpose of the press is to establish a close link between the media and the audience, and to raise civic awareness, which plays an essential role in initiating civil dialogue. Journalists should focus on the news which is necessary to inform the citizens about.

**The democratic participant media theory** implies the reflection of the societal diversity in social processes, as well as the underground and illegal functioning of the mass media.

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<sup>2</sup> D. McQuail – “Journalism and Society”, 2nd Edition, 2014. p. 368.

**Critical media theory** takes into account the factor of media owners and believes that their interests, prevailing ideology, informational integrity of the text, and the desire of the advertising client should be taken into account. According to this theory, it is necessary to free society from false beliefs, inequality, and injustice.

According to the **social responsibility media theory**, the press must ensure the integration of society and express its diversity. Freedom from restrictions is not enough, freedom must have “positive goals” and be effective. The public broadcaster must adhere to defined norms and cultural values, must take responsibility for meeting the general and specific needs of the public, and be accountable to the public.

According to the **media theory of the “fourth branch of government”**, personal involvement arises as a result of unity and integration. The media should reflect not only the views of the elite but also the views of the whole society, which ensures the formation of the proper public opinion

**The free press media theory** is based on the public demand to have a free press that is accountable to the masses. In a failed state, journalism can not function properly.<sup>3</sup>

**Mikhail Nazarov** developed the following media theories:

**Soviet media theory** is based on the view that the media should not be privately owned. The state, in turn, uses several means to censor broadcast materials.

**“Third world” media theory** – Societal and state development is inconceivable without the involvement of the media. The choice of the covered topics is influenced by the public demand and economic priority. According to this theory, journalists should report on countries with similar political, economic, cultural, and demographic conditions. According to the author, censorship is allowed to protect national interests.

According to **authoritarian media theory**, the work of the media should not lead to a violation of the power of the existing government or the established order. According to the author, the published information should not contain criticism directed at the dominant

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<sup>3</sup> D. McQueil – “Journalism and Society”, 2nd Edition, 2014. p. 85

political party. Therefore, journalists are not free in their activities as criticism may be considered a criminal offense.

**The media theory of democratic representation** - All society members should be able to use the media to their advantage. The content of publications should not be controlled by the government, and the media should primarily serve its audience.

**Social responsibility media theory** - Media outlets should express different, diverse views, facilitate public discussions and fulfill their responsibilities. Their functioning should be regulated by relevant institutions and legal norms. Interference with the media will only be justified if security issues are at stake.

**The independent press model** is special because according to this model, no prior consent is required for publication, and there is no censorship. Criticism of political parties, government, and officials is not condemned. Journalists in the mass communication institutions themselves are independent.

Many media theories developed by different authors at different times can be discussed. They reflect the interdependence between society, the state, and the media systems at particular periods of history.

## 1.1. Theories of Media Effects

### **Framing Theory**

The concept of framing is of particular importance for mass communications, and in its research process, it is preferable to take into account the approaches of other sciences. According to framing theory, the concept of framing is used by various disciplines and represents the research object in many of them.

In mass communication, communication texts play an essential role in describing the importance of this. The concept of framing can also be used in the context of media. Accordingly, the research paradigm of framing theory is the framing process and the actors and systems involved in it. According to sociologist William Gamson,<sup>4</sup> framing mostly involves selectivity in the narrative and raising certain issues. It makes it possible to keep the audience focused on certain topics in the materials, to make these points more memorable and important. However, the perception of the framing product also depends on the characteristics of the recipient, such as audience values, life experience, culture, beliefs, and lifestyle.

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

Mass communications have an important role in our society, their function is to inform the public about current or recent events. In mass media and mass culture, mass communication is defined as the message produced to influence a large audience, created by professional communicators using modern technological devices.

In the next stage, the media uses gatekeeping and agenda setting to control access to news. This news covers different areas - from politics to fun and sports.

Gatekeeping is the way the news goes before it is made public. Many people are involved in this process. Often the decision-makers are reporters, producers, editors, and publishers themselves. They make decisions when choosing a topic or when deciding regarding covering an issue or problem. As well as those who give consent to make this news public. It is they who decide whether or not this news will reach the audience. Decisions are also made when choosing which angle to choose for covering any event and where to make the emphasis.

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<sup>4</sup> William A. Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld - „Movements and Media as Interacting Systems“. 1993.



Accordingly, in the mass media and mass culture, agenda-setting is defined as the process by which the mass media determines what to think or discuss. The first journalist to observe this feature was Walter Lippmann<sup>5</sup> in the 1920s. He pointed out that media determines the appearance of images in our consciousness. He believed that the public reacts not to real events but to the images that are on their minds. Therefore, agenda-setting is used to remodel real events as simpler models before we deal with them. Researchers Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw followed this concept. As Stephen Littlejohn<sup>6</sup> concludes, McCombs and Shaw best describe the function of agenda-setting in "The emergence of American Political Issues".<sup>7</sup> According to the authors, there is ample evidence that editors and broadcasters play a special role when they cut and publish news daily. "This impact of the mass media - the ability to affect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking - has been labeled the agenda-setting function of mass communication. Here may lie the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about."<sup>8</sup>

The agenda is set differently in different media. It also depends on the specifics of these media outlets. Also, the different media may break the agenda set by each other, or, conversely, enhance the reality of the "picture" that was already created<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Lippmann – „Public Opinion“.

<https://wps.pearsoncustom.com/wps/media/objects/2429/2487430/pdfs/lippmann.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Stephen W. Littlejohn – „Theories of Human Communication“. Seventh Edition. Albuquerque, New Mexico. Wadsworth, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Maxwell E McCombs and L. Shaw Donald – „The Emergence of American Political Issues“. New York. West Publishing Co, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Maxwell E McCombs and L. Shaw Donald – „The Emergence of American Political Issues“. New York. West Publishing Co, 1977.

<sup>9</sup> Berdzenishvili T. - "Mass Culture-Political tool" - Publication "Dialogue of Cultures in Georgian Art of the XX Century" - Tbilisi, 2017.

## **Diffusion of Innovations Theory**

According to the Diffusion of innovations theory, innovation as a concept, which is the basic concept of this theory, can be interpreted as anything new (subject, idea, concept) that is perceived for the first time by an individual, or group, or community.

Innovation can spread within any group, from one member to another, and so on. As a result, group members will learn about this innovation. Patterns of the assimilation process are described by scientists through the assimilation curve, which depicts the intensity levels at the beginning, middle, and end of the process.

Innovation can also spread between groups when a certain idea and novelty is passed on and introduced by members of one group to members of another group. Bringing inter-group diffusion to a larger scale when interacting groups are culturally different is called intercultural diffusion.

The innovation diffusion theory was not originally formulated in the field of mass communications, and its relevance was enhanced by the process of industrialization. The process of transition from traditional to modern society, characterized by the introduction of mechanization and urbanization, has caused fundamental shifts in societies and changed the lifestyle and attitudes of the population once and for all.

Industrialization brought many innovations that society was not accustomed to at a rapid pace, and society was not ready to accept these innovations in everyday life at the same pace as the change took place. That is why the study of the types and process of spreading (diffusion) of innovations is on the agenda of the social sciences.

Initially, the field of agriculture became the object of research, as industrial organizations tried to quickly introduce new inventions in the agricultural field. This was the case in the USA during the Great Depression. A 1950 study by Neal Gross and Bryce Ryan<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bryce Ryan, Neal Gross – „Acceptance and diffusion of hybrid corn seed in two Iowa communities“. <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/researchbulletin/vol29/iss372/1/>

intended to show farmers' interest in hybrid corn seeds (which were more resistant) newly introduced on the market. The object of observation was the process of spreading innovation to farmers, which later became part of the innovation disseminating theory in mass communications.

At first, the process of perceiving innovation takes place, i.e., the object is identified by the subject as new. Then interest arises and interpretation emerges to satisfy it. If the innovation is interesting for the subject, the process continues, if not - it ends. If interest is aroused, the subject begins to gather information about the object of interest, innovation (among acquaintances, friends, neighborhood, media), and then directly examines it.

According to the Gross and Ryan classification, people go through this process at different times. Those who embrace the innovation first are called "innovators". Then come the "early adopters", the "majority" and the "late adopters", who start innovating only after all the others get results.

The first step in innovation diffusion is to get the news about innovation from the mass media, the supplier, and the neighborhood. The study found that when introducing innovations, subjects gained more trust in the communicators with whom they had direct communication. Consequently, the media, as well as interpersonal communication, play an important role in the process of innovation diffusion.

It should be noted that mass communication does not only play an important role in innovation diffusion, it is the main diffusor of information. In the modern world, the media is the most important source of innovation. Therefore, in this case, the media is both the object of innovation and the means of its diffusion.

### **Uses / Gratifications Theory**

Within the theory of uses/gratifications, there is a relevant question to ask: For what purpose does a person use the means of mass communication? It is well known that before World War II, a very limited amount of research was conducted in the field of mass

communication. However, after the invention of the radio, the advent of the new medium posed new needs, and new research questions emerged.

One of the theories of mass communication “uses for gratifications” was developed in the process of researching the impact of radio as a medium.

The Radio Research Office was originally set up at Columbia University with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation to study the impact of radio on society. The research aimed to study the audience listening to the “soap operas” broadcast on the radio. The research was led by scientist Paul Lazarsfeld. He intended to compare women who actively listened to radio series and those who did not. The survey was quite large-scale, it covered 5000 respondents, both in urban and rural areas. The study was conducted from a psychological perspective. The researchers tried to create psychological portraits of the respondent women and compare them with each other. The results of the study showed that women listeners and non-listeners of radio series did not differ much from each other, although there was still a difference - most listeners had low incomes and low levels of education, less interest in news, and current affairs and lower self-esteem. These data did not provide much content for interpretation, although researchers found several reasons why women listened to radio series. According to him, the women listened very emotionally, and they felt an emotional connection with the characters of the radio series, towards whom they were sympathetic. In doing so, they experienced pleasure and satisfaction. It also became clear that listeners were looking for compensation in the series for what they could not accomplish. They were listening to their dreams come true and it made them happy. From the episodes narrated in the radio series, these women learned how to behave in particular situations, even though a similar situation may never have occurred to them, they were still satisfied with it. Researchers have concluded that women listeners used radio series to get a sense of gratification. This finding gave rise to the theory of “uses for gratification”, which became an important approach in mass communication theories. The issue arises that the listener is not just a passive recipient of the information who is unconditionally influenced

by it, as argued by the “magic bullet theory” (one of the oldest media theories that were relevant during World War II. According to this theory, the audience is passive. The messages provided via media influence the audience and perform a propaganda function).<sup>11</sup> It turned out that the audience, which is active and selective, chooses the product that provides gratification. Consequently, selection motivation may become a need of the audience. It was this perspective of the research that formed the basis for the future development of the “uses for gratification” theory.

An important emphasis in the formation of this research perspective is related to meeting the needs of entertainment. If in the 1950s (in our country in the 70s and 80s) the popular view was that television had a malicious effect on children and “brainwashed” them, according to the “uses for gratification” theory, children are not passive recipients either. As adults, they are looking for an entertaining product on TV, receiving advice on TV about what they are interested in, for example, what to wear, what to listen to, and what is trendy.

Modern society is referred to as the consumer society. This also applies to the consumption of intangible products such as media. Moreover, information and media products are the most important and expensive products in modern times. In the “uses for gratification” theory, the term “use” refers to the use of a product to meet the needs, motivations, and needs of an individual.

## **1.2 A brief history of the connection between the media and the culture**

In the middle of the 15th century, a simple typographic machine and movable letters assembled by the master Johannes Gutenberg in Mainz ushered in a new era of civilization. Printing made mass production possible. In two decades, up to nine million books were printed in Europe and became accessible to the people of all ranks. After religious literature and fiction, the readers’ demands increased and the interest in the current news aroused. The first newspaper in Europe was published

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<sup>11</sup> Stanley Cunningham – „The idea of propaganda“, 2002.

in 1609 in Germany by Johann Carolus. This small piece of paper soon gained popularity, and the idea emerged: „Anyone who wants happiness and news in life, must read the newspaper!“ France followed Germany’s example in the printing of the newspapers. Soon England became the press leader.

In 1810 the German typographer Friedrich Koenig further developed production using a cylinder press and a steam engine. His improvement led to the industrialization of the print media. In 1800 a hand-held typographic machine could produce 480 copies per hour, while a Koenig steam-operated machine gave more than 50 percent increase. It was this increase in productivity that laid the foundation for the rise of daily newspapers.

For Europeans who moved to the United States at that time, the newspaper became a necessary medium for maintaining family ties. However, after they settled in a new country and created their own culture, newspapers became a means of popularizing their culture. It is possible to generalize this example to the whole world and conditionally consider it the first example of the relationship between media and culture.

Political scientist Benedict Anderson argued that the press played a major role in shaping national identity as it united readers around common goals and values across the country. According to Anderson, newspapers contributed to the creation of „imaginary unity“ („Imagined Communities“, 1983).

In 1833 major daily newspapers faced a new threat. A penny press appeared. It was an inexpensive sheet (broadsheet) that cost one penny and provided the reader with sensational information, assassination stories, and current political news. If the newspaper used to cater to a rich and educated audience, the penny press was aimed at reaching out to a wide circle of readers with cheap prices and entertaining, often scandalous, information. The penny press should be considered the forerunner of the yellow tabloids that are so abundant today.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, „non-print “media, such as radio, and cinema began experiencing a boom in popularity. By 1920, radio was much cheaper than a telephone, and with an unprecedented capacity, the information could be transmitted to an infinite number of listeners simultaneously.

In the 1820s and 1830s, cheap movie screenings were held in the US and Canada. Tickets cost 5 cents, and the films were short, mostly 12-minute in length. There was one movie playing

continuously all day. The viewers could come in and out at any time. Perhaps it was designed to increase the popularity of cinema. The five-cent coin was called Nickel, that's why this procedure and the movie theater were nicknamed „Nickelodeon”.

Television has become the dominant form of mass media since the 1940s. Television contributed to the development of a homogeneous and conformist culture, as it established the „norm“ of what a person should be like. The citizens' imaginations were in the hands of radio and television, while the print media had to adapt to this media landscape.

The second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century are characterized by the rapid growth of media forms, including the press, radio, cinema, television, and social networks. Understanding the evolution of media technology helps us to comprehend not only today's but also tomorrow's media.

In 1967, Peter Drucker,<sup>12</sup> an American scientist who was called the father of management predicted that the most important invention after television would be an electrical appliance connected to a power source that would provide instant access to a large stream of information. The scientist argued that in terms of importance it would become the equivalent of Edison's invention and change the human way of life. He also envisioned the impact that computers and the Internet would have on education, social relations, and, more broadly, culture in the future.

Each cultural era is associated with its own technological changes. When the radio was invented, the end of newspapers was predicted, when television was invented, the end of the radio and movies was predicted, when the Internet was invented, the end of television was predicted. It is necessary to realize that the introduction of new technology does not necessarily mean the placement of the old in a museum. Today, media users still read the newspapers, listen to the radio, watch TV, and watch movies. The difference is that now all this can be accessed through one device, be it a personal computer or a smartphone, any gadget that is the medium of the Internet.

„Media culture is a special type of culture in the information society, which combines information and communication means, print and screen culture, material and intellectual values.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Drucker - 1967 - <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/the-manager-and-the-moron>

<sup>13</sup> A. N. Kapranova – „Media Culture in the Context of Modernity”, Youth Scientific Forum (04.02.2019).

The introduction of new information technologies in the middle of the 20th century and their evolution led to qualitative changes in the development of culture. The technical equipment of the editorial offices was updated, the level of education of the staff was increased, the quality of the published materials was improved. Today, to produce a media culture product, one needs a personal computer connected to the Internet, a digital camera, and a smartphone.

### **1.3. Information-technological Transformation of Media in Georgia**

For the last 50 years, society has been observing and, at the same time, participating in the information-technological transformation. This, in turn, leads to the rapid development of news media outlets, telecommunication networks, and electronic communications in general. This process leads to the transformation of the global media system and the expansion of communication channels.

During the Soviet period, the media was mainly a propagandist of political ideology. However, there were cases when TV journalists managed to avoid a totalitarian directive and “justify” the real news, so to speak. Or, conversely, refrain from accentuated coverage of issues that were detrimental to society and the country. For example, In the 1970s, the Georgian state television news program Moambe used to cover the history of Georgian cultural heritage, architectural monuments, and their current condition. Despite the Soviet directive that religious issues were not to be covered on television, the editorial office was able to provide information about Orthodox monuments, often mentioning religious holidays and the names of saints, like frescoes, paintings, or engraved icons included these topics. Journalists, due to the covert coverage of religious topics, constantly put their professional “reputation” at risk. Soon the program was terminated for “unknown” reasons.

Niko Pirosmiani and his work were forgotten and taboo on Georgian state television for some time. Young journalist Tamaz Khomeriki decided to prepare a TV program about Pirosmiani. He shared this idea with Akaki Dzidziguri, Deputy Director of the Georgian TV



and Radio Committee. Although they were unaware of the possible outcome of the program, they still prepared and aired it. The program received widespread acclaim and was repeated three times at the request of viewers. After that, the conversation about Pirosmiani and the popularization of his art began openly.

There were forbidden topics in all fields. Foreign periodicals, science books, fiction, and movies were classified as "Secret". The ban also applied even to some works created and published in the Soviet Union. Only a privileged, ruling circle was able to read such books and watch those movies, which were inaccessible to the masses. It was also forbidden to publish negative information. Road accidents, violence, murder, and even train accidents often could not be covered by the media. Even a catastrophe of global significance, such as the Chernobyl accident, was "hidden" by the media in the Soviet Union. Only after this event became the center of attention of the whole world, the propagandist media was forced to cover this story in news programs, although the real scale of the catastrophe was still hidden.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many private media outlets appeared in Georgia, and in 2005 public broadcaster was established. Following the world trends, the Georgian society has started to actively use the Internet space, including the new media, social networks, and forums. With the spread of the Internet, the involvement of the younger generation, adolescents, and children in the use of new media outlets has become urgent. According to a survey conducted by research company "Sonar" in 2021, the Internet is the main source of information for 48.4% of the audience, 84.2% of young people aged 18-24, and 79.8% of the audience aged 25-34. (["TV Audience Survey" - conducted by the research company "Sonar" in May 2021](#)).<sup>14</sup>

We can confidently claim that no representative study on the digital media dependence of adults/children has been conducted in modern Georgia. Only the statistics are

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<sup>14</sup> TV Audience Survey - Research Company Sonar 2021 <https://cdn.1tv.ge/app/uploads/2021/05/1621839687-%E1%83%99%E1%83%95%E1%83%9A%E1%83%94%E1%83%95%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%A8%E1%83%94%E1%83%93%E1%83%94%E1%83%92%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98.pdf>

known, including the proportion of the number of adolescents and children among Internet users. There is also an increase in the dynamics of Internet users, including an increase in the proportion of younger age groups.

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, 86.5% of the population aged 6 and older owned a mobile phone. In 2020, the number of mobile phone owners was 1.7 percentage points higher than the previous year. It increased by 2.3 percentage points in urban-type settlements, and by 0.8 percentage points in rural-type settlements, amounting to 91.1 and 79.7 percent, respectively (National Statistics Office of Georgia – “Indicators of use of information and communication technologies in households [2020](#)”). According to various studies conducted around the world, every third internet user is a child.

Digital technology has already changed the world and as more and more children in the world use the internet, digital technology is changing childhood more and more. Excessive media/computer consumption in children can lead to motor developmental delays or sensory processing problems. When children are hyperstimulated, it affects their **physical** condition (obesity, endocrine system disorders, musculoskeletal defects), their **central nervous system** (the area responsible for behavior regulation does not develop well / neurons fail to develop branches properly), and their **psychology**. Using a computer is not recommended for children under the age of two. The American and Canadian scientific communities have even coined the term balanced usage of computer technology because, in children, the perception of the real and virtual worlds causes an imbalance in their psyche.

There is a considerable amount of market research on consumer behavior commissioned by private companies in Georgia, studying factors that influence people's behavior. Along with the development of social media, consumer behavior and the decision-making process itself have changed. The customers prefer to get advice from similar customers rather than the manufacturers of the product. People trust emotions, e. g. other people's emotions (especially those of famous people, when they have a positive attitude towards them), and not just information. They need to perceive the attitudes of others. 98%

of the young generation want to buy this or that item because of the social network and its influence. The social network has become an important/huge sales platform.

Companies in Georgia are actively using social media marketing. As the study revealed, the surveyed companies pay a lot of attention to how they plan each day on the social network.

Public opinion polls also unequivocally confirm the effectiveness of social media and say that the mechanisms which social media managers mention and which they use to set their agenda and thus influence society are quite effective. Social media, unlike traditional media, can provide targeted information to different segments of society.

According to public opinion polls conducted in Georgia, social media plays a more important role in the daily life of young people than traditional media. The Internet is the main source of information for 48.4% of the audience, although it depends on the age group. The Internet is the main source of information about current events and news in the country for 84.2% of the audience aged 18-24, and for 79.8% of the people aged 25-34. The role of the Internet is particularly small for the age group over 55. The role of the Internet and television is most balanced in the age segment of 45-54, with 50% citing television as the main source of information and 42.2% naming the Internet. (**“TV Audience Survey” - conducted by the research company “Sonar” in May 2021. Research Method: Quantitative research by telephone interviews; Sample Size: 1801 Interviews**)<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> TV Audience Survey – Research Company “Sonar”, 2021.  
<https://cdn.itv.ge/app/uploads/2021/05/1621839687-%E1%83%99%E1%83%95%E1%83%9A%E1%83%94%E1%83%95%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%A8%E1%83%94%E1%83%93%E1%83%94%E1%83%92%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98.pdf>

## Chapter II - Traditional and Modern Vision of Mass Culture / Popular Culture

### 2.1. Theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of mass culture / popular culture

The study of popular culture has a long history. However, depending on the research task and methodology, this concept is understood differently in different disciplines. Popular culture research can be considered as part of mass culture research. The term popular culture, as an independent meaning, has been used in the scientific literature since the 1960s.

As Marcel Danesi, a professor at the University of Toronto points out<sup>16</sup>, in modern society, no one understands the essence of „popular“ better than Marshall McLuhan. His first work, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, laid the foundation for pop culture as a field of study prior to Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*. Marshall McLuhan's theories about the connection between mass communication systems and culture have had a significant impact on the development of the discipline. According to his views, the development of communication technologies is causing a number of changes both in people's thinking and social institutions.

Mass culture is a phenomenon of industrial society. Different concepts are used to describe it - distasteful, commercial, low-level, market consumption. The philosophical reflection of mass culture occurred in parallel with the study of the phenomenon of mass and mass society. Understanding mass culture became the subject of scientific interest only in the 1940s.

In the first half of the twentieth century, pop culture as the negative socio-philosophical force was criticized by the Frankfurt School representatives - Theodore Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, and others. They considered pop culture to be a consumer culture that is produced for the market as any other material product.

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<sup>16</sup> Marcel Danesi - „Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives“.

In Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno's "Dialectic of Enlightenment,"<sup>17</sup> the analysis of mass culture gave rise to a tradition characterized by a social critique of mass culture as a culture industry, in which culture is perceived as a product created, as a means for the fulfillment of non-authentic, false needs, and as a tool for ideological manipulation.

Popular culture studies had a relatively different direction according to the American tradition. It undeniably was influenced by European tradition. However, American studies were fairly autonomous overall. Unlike the European tradition, understanding of the mass and mass culture phenomenon by American scholars (the usage of these concepts originally began in communication and sociology fields) was more neutral. While in European discourse the term "mass" implies evaluation and is associated with something low-quality (due to the Frankfurt School tradition), in American studies, the term "mass culture" emphasized its possibility of spreading, referring to the masses of readers/viewers, and so on or meant the spread of cultural values. Popular culture was always related to the functioning of the mass media. That is why scientists who studied the field of mass communication made a great contribution to popular culture studies. Many different aspects of the 1920s mass culture were reflected in the so-called "propaganda concept", later in the election and advertising campaigns, and also in the Chicago School sociological studies.

Clement Greenberg's prominent critical essay on avant-garde and kitsch (1939) represents the reflection of American scholars in this field. Despite differences of views, popular culture was originally considered a specific cultural phenomenon that emerged in the bosom of American civilization and was associated with the tradition of American democracy and the pluralism of national culture.<sup>18</sup>

In the sixties of the twentieth century, English-language narratives gradually pushed away from the "dichotomy approach", which embraced the sharply contrasted understanding

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<sup>17</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno – „Dialectic of Enlightenment“. SERIES: „CULTURAL MEMORY IN THE PRESENT“, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> R. Shusterman „Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art“. N.Y.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000. P.145-149.

of elite/mass and high culture / low culture. During this period, more attention is paid to the so-called “intermediate” or middle culture, which was originally inspired by the countercultural movements of those years.<sup>41</sup>

Since the early 1970s critical assessments of mass / popular culture have been declining dramatically in the American tradition. Researchers have concluded that this type of culture does not oppose the “high” culture, but enriches it somehow. The divergence of high and mass/popular culture was gradually replaced by the idea of their convergence. In addition, scholars of this period had a similar attitude towards mass / popular culture.

This approach is characteristic of Herbert Gans’s concept. In his discussion of popular culture, the emphasis is not on the analysis of artifacts or the aspect of “production” of culture, but on the spread of cultural values, and the problem of “accessibility”.

Popular culture has become the research object in the study of Anglo-Saxon culture. Nowadays, the term “cultural studies” is widely used in almost all cultural studies, although it refers to a specific intellectual tradition. The term “cultural studies” is often used in texts to denote the meaning of this paradigm, in an attempt to separate this paradigm from other approaches to cultural studies (sociology of culture, anthropology, etc.). Cultural Studies is a neo-Marxist direction. It unites a group of researchers - R. Hoggart, S. Hall, R. Williams, E. Thompson, et al.

In 1964, the Center for Contemporary Culture Studies was founded at the University of Birmingham. Initially, this direction was characterized by a critique of mass culture from a left-centrist position based on the ideas of the Frankfurt School. Many of the postulations of the Frankfurt School were later rejected, in particular, the division of art into “high” and “low” categories, the dichotomy between the intellectual and its opposition, and so on. Supporters of the Center borrowed ideas from adjacent theoretical approaches and areas of research. For example, Cultural Anthropology, Sociology, Semiotics, etc. Proponents of this direction view culture as something transcendent, associated with the highest expression of the human soul, but primarily as a dimension of daily life, as a set of cultural practices.

According to R. Williams, culture is ordinary. In the framework of Cultural Studies framework, culture is defined not as a means of life but as a diverse means of life or being, the ways of life.<sup>19</sup>

Researchers in this field focus on the relationship between culture and power, and the problem of ideology. The neo-American direction focuses on the analysis of a culture in terms of the connection between ideology and power.

## **2.2. A modern vision of mass / popular culture**

The negative attitude towards the Western model of mass culture in the Soviet Union was primarily related to ideological confrontation. The radically different state arrangements of these two worlds found a different reflection in the culture. What was being created in the West was never openly acceptable and reproducible for the Soviet government. Culture and art were seen more as a means of spreading political influence and messages than a means of developing people and society. According to ideology, the capitalist world could not create anything positive, and acceptable for a Soviet citizen. Therefore, any creations of mass culture, film, music, play, or literature, were declared decadent (fallen), philistine, and even detrimental to those living in the socialist camp.

According to some modern researchers, it is true that Soviet mass culture matched the Western model in many respects, but the main distinguishing feature was its pronounced political and ideological overtones. Soviet mass culture was unusually close to the traditional forms of culture and art. It tried to imitate folk art in such a way that involved carefully collecting and analyzing contemporary and ethnocultural specimens that could easily become subjects of museumification and cataloging. Folk song and dance ensembles, numerous vocal groups and folk instrument groups, folklore public festivals, mass walks, restored folk customs - all of this formed a unified face of Soviet mass culture and were based

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<sup>19</sup> A. Usmanova – “Cultural Studies”, 2000, p. 34-37.

on the traditions, rules, and customs of the so-called Soviet people (this term united the peoples of the republics of the Soviet Union). At the same time, folklore took an “unofficial” place, as it was used as a form of spreading identity-enhancing elements and not as an inherent phenomenon in the development of a nation. While pseudo-folklore, which was essentially mass culture, became official and widely advertised.

For a long time in Soviet ideology, the term **mass** had a positive connotation and denoted universal unity in the struggle for ideas, building a just state, militancy against internal and external enemies, etc. The term **mass** meant progressive, new, corresponding to the spirit of the time. It opposed the notion of **people** as an expression of nationality, something patriarchal. This trend proved to be quite sustainable, and only in the 60s and 70s of the XX century did “mass culture” become less relevant.

Mass culture was also perceived negatively in foreign researchers’ studies. Western thinkers<sup>20</sup> criticized this new phenomenon from the beginning, as they perceived mass culture as an ideological tool and a powerful means for manipulating industrial society.

According to the concept of Herbert Marcuse,<sup>21</sup> an American philosopher and sociologist of German descent, the central assumption is the “total” form of domination of the “organized society” over man, where technology is the main tool of influence. In addition, human personal space is almost rejected, and the individual, who has no other alternative left, is forced to integrate into the existing system. A conformist-oriented person has a possession-oriented, consumerist ideology and, together with others, forms a “silent majority” focused on maintaining the “totality” and rigidity of modern society. If at first “massification” meant the political activity of the masses, in the 1950s and 1960s “massification” was associated with a gradual decline in interest in the political problems.

Modern scholars avoid such harsh criticism of mass culture. In their opinion, the confrontation and antagonistic approach of “universal” and “elite” cultures in mass culture

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<sup>20</sup> K. Mannheim, H. Arendt, E. Lederer – “French School Theorists”.

<sup>21</sup> H. Marcuse – “One-Dimensional Man”, 1964.



are wrong. The understanding of “mass culture” should not be considered an evaluation or aesthetic category. It is not simplified or worsened representation of so-called high culture, but a completely different phenomenon. In general, there is no absolute, clear opposition between the “universal” and the “elite” categories in art. Even in mass culture, we can distinguish stylistic features of the “mass” and “universal” genres. However, more often it is characterized by a rejection of such controversy, a deliberate stylistic confusion. After all, there are forms of art such as cinematography, pop music, circus, and folklore, which by their very nature, are indeed mass culture. When we discuss this or that manifestation of mass art, we characterize not its artistic value, which can be quite high, not the education of the audience, the user, but how it is created, spread, and used<sup>22</sup>.

To get rid of the negative connotation of the above-mentioned phenomenon, the term “**mass culture**” was replaced by the term “**popular culture**” (pop culture) in Western literature. Thus, the terms “**pop culture**” and “**mass culture**” have identical content and are used to describe a new cultural product obtained in a post-industrial society as a result of the fusion of different cultures. In the studies of pop culture, the issue of concepts of high and mass culture is relevant, because high culture is the part of art that is most valuable in the historical, social, and cultural context. Mass culture, as mentioned above, is considered a less valuable product and is often used to characterize pop culture in general. However, it is noteworthy, that many specimens of popular culture can be recognized as high culture because they achieve mass recognition in society and capture the critics’ attention. Consequently, pop culture often blurs the distinction and boundaries between high and mass culture, historically conditioned by class culture.<sup>23</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the emergence of pop culture laid the groundwork for increasing people’s purchasing power regardless of their class or level of

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<sup>22</sup> Berdzenishvili T. - "Mass Culture-Political tool" - Publication "Dialogue of Cultures in Georgian Art of the XX Century" - Tbilisi, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Marcel Danesi - „Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives“.

education. Its spread has been facilitated by the ever-evolving close collaboration between media and technology.

According to Marcel Danesi,<sup>24</sup> pop culture is an experiment in democracy, and it can be seen as a product culture that produces trends and has the same market value as everyday high-demand products. In this case, the market is, on the one hand, an economic and, on the other hand, a creative field, where relevant and short-term forms are created for a specific period. However, popular culture products in a market economy always have a creative spark that can be developed in different directions.

### 2.3. The migration of elite culture into popular culture

Elite culture represents a **high culture**, which, in turn, is an anti-mass culture concept, with its characteristic impact on consciousness and the specificity of perception, as it is characterized by subjective meaning and influence.<sup>25</sup>

Elite culture as a particular form of high culture was formed as a result of significant changes in social culture. In its early stage of development, culture did not require social differentiation, which was facilitated by the collective memory and the syncretism of culture itself. Ruler, warrior, and religious-ideological elite groups gradually emerged in the structure of the society, which led to the emergence of a specialized culture. Artistic and scientific-intellectual elite groups were formed quite late. In the archaic period, the scientific-intellectual elite appeared in ancient Greece. The artistic elite emerged in the Renaissance era. Until then, activities in the aesthetic field were seen as an attempt to replicate God's creation.<sup>26</sup> There are two other important factors associated with the elite culture emergence - the pursuit of the formation of an individual rather than a collective personality formation, and the acceleration of socio-economic development dynamics.

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<sup>24</sup> Marcel Danesi - „Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives“.

<sup>25</sup> A. V. Kostina – “Mass Culture as a Phenomenon of Post-Industrial Society”, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> A. V. Kostina “Traditional, Elite and Mass Culture”, 2011, №2 (26) p. 42.

Elite culture characterizes as a type of culture that can maintain and produce the main essence of culture.

Mass culture started functioning as a defined stabilizing mechanism, as a communication system that enabled the effective circulation in the society of values and ideas that are directed and contribute to the integrity of society. Mass culture facilitated the vertical circulation of thoughts and meanings between high, specialized, and everyday cultures. It also led to the establishment of a horizontal connection in the community, and the inclusion of different subcultures in the common communication space.<sup>27</sup>

The migration of elite culture into popular culture is largely due to the large-scale development of industrial production. Significant social changes in society led to the emergence of new social groups that were disconnected from the traditional way of life, as well as the system of spiritual values that characterized elite culture.

Unlike elite culture, mass culture is unable to create unique content, the perception of which requires intellectual effort and specific cultural development,<sup>28</sup> although not all manifestations of mass culture should be considered primitive. Mass culture is the connecting link between elite culture and everyday culture. Mass culture can easily provide the masses with any information that also contains elements of elite culture. In turn, the value of mass culture lies in giving an accurate picture of the development of social ideals, expressed in popular language. The most prominent elements of mass culture are any kind of urban folklore. Their content is influenced by the daily events, aspirations, and needs that make up the everyday life of the community.

Of course, the rapid spread of mass culture is linked to the development of mass media. In addition, the formation of mass culture was substantially influenced by the commercialization taking place in many fields. Any product should meet the requirements of a potential buyer as much as possible. This also applies to the product of mass culture.

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<sup>27</sup> A. V. Kostina - "Traditional, Elite and Mass Culture", 2011. №2 (26) p. 43

<sup>28</sup> M. M. Ismailov – "The Essence of Mass Culture, its Function, and Impact on Consciousness." Scientific Forum: Philology, Arts and Cultural Studies № 6(8). «МИИHO» Publishing, 2017, p. 19

Profitability usually takes precedence over cultural significance. The feedback is also interesting here - the more developed the mass culture in the society, the greater the influence on the consciousness and lifestyle of the consumers.<sup>29</sup>

The migration of elite culture into popular culture has been driven by technological progress as well as a change in traditional social culture. Elite culture continues to exist. Moreover, it has maintained its inhibition, narrowness, and uniqueness.

### **Chapter III – New media and popular culture**

#### **3.1. New media and its impact on the daily life of society. Types of new media**

Nowadays, the audience of mass media is of particular interest in practical terms. The study of user behavior, desires, and capabilities contributes to the development of media and its effective work both editorially and economically. New information and communication technologies have led to an absolute transformation of the media system. Gradually a new type of audience is formed, distinguished by a new model of behavior. In order to identify the key features of modern media, it is required to focus on the theoretical evolution of its transformation.

Present-day mass media expands its audience, thus responding to the needs of society. Original and utmostly attractive texts and titles are on the rise in the media. The text's form has the greatest effect of impact on the potential user, and this is achieved through the knowledge accumulated in other fields, such as the modern formation of texts and titles, and the specifics of the writing culture.

Contemporary media content, in addition to the traditional platforms, is created and disseminated through a digital platform. Defining and considering the working principle of

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<sup>29</sup> M. M. Ismailov – "The Essence of Mass Culture, its Function, and Impact on Consciousness." Scientific Forum: Philology, Arts and Cultural Studies № 6(8). «МИИХО» Publishing, 2017. p. 19

algorithms is on the agenda for organizing and collecting endlessly scattered content in the digital field. We will discuss this issue in more detail later.

Due to the modern, radical change of media systems, it has become impossible to study this new relationship between the media and the audience by traditional methods. Accordingly, the question arises to create a new, aggregated theory that combines all the classical approaches and, at the same time, takes into account the specifics of communication in the age of the Internet.

The Internet, multifunction smartphones, and satellite technologies together create the ability to accumulate so much information from objective sources that was unimaginable until recently. It was estimated that by 2020, one-third of the information would be shared or stored in the so-called Cloud.<sup>30</sup> As the data show the use of this cloud has reached a larger scale. According to 451 studies, by 2020, almost 90% of organizations were using some kind of cloud technology to store their data. In addition, according to the same study, 45% of work is done through the cloud, while it is predicted that in 2 years this figure will reach 60%.

Nowadays information is automatically collected and accessed through the cloud from anywhere in the world using any device. Added to this is the ability to process, structure, and analyze it. For example, the answer to a question in Google is formed by the interaction of 1000 computers. As a result, in 20 years, up to 50% of work operations will be automated, which in importance can be compared to the industrial revolution of the 18-19th century.

While television broadcasting is still relevant, online streaming services are no less popular. According to a document published by the international research company Kantar, „Media Trends and Predictions for 2020”, compared to 2020 in Norway, the rate of watching online content on the big screen increased by 25%.

Traditional TV stations try to compete with market trends, which is why the BBC has launched the Britbox, a joint project of ITV and BBC studios.

The agenda set by the traditional media can no longer have such a strong impact on public life as it did decades ago. Klaus Jensen expressed this view: In contrast to the familiar political issues, as well as the set of print and broadcast media analyzed by McCombs and Shaw in agenda-setting theory, digital media makes it difficult to understand how the agenda is set and perceived by the

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<sup>30</sup> E. Toffler – „Shock of the future”. 2009, p.100.

audience.<sup>31</sup> In the age of the Internet, the ways of its formation and the influence it exerts are changing.

Traditional media broadcasting is planned with the target audience in mind, and feedback is measured in a variety of ways, such as a rating indicator or a sociological survey. Conversely, new media provides endless possibilities for feedback and conversion into empirical data.

In addition to the transformation of traditional media, the Internet has created entirely new forms of communication and culture, social networks, video streaming channels, and more. New technology has made them accessible from any area and every device. Consequently, new forms of pop culture are created through the means and influence of all these forms. None of the existing technologies has created such an opportunity as the Internet. The communication of an unprecedented number of people has become a reality, despite their geographical distance. Consequently, the rapid spread of pop culture worldwide is directly related to the creation of the Internet and its mediums. As Marshall McLuhan writes: „Culture, social evolution, and technological innovation are so intertwined that it is difficult to determine how they influence each other.“

The term **convergence**, which describes the process of digitization, has been actively used since 1990. It is now used to describe the integration of media, technology, and cultural forms. Convergence is a key feature of modern mass communication and media that integrates into the global system. Marshall McLuhan calls this space a „global village.“<sup>32</sup>

The modern system of mass communications adds to the phenomenon of pop culture the features of engagement and interaction thus making it an unprecedented global phenomenon. It is noteworthy that the existing ways of spreading pop culture did not disappear even after the advent of new tools. On the contrary, it was transformed and changed, becoming more powerful and efficient. This is where the real examples of the most powerful convergence can be seen.

Henry Jenkins offers the following categories to describe convergence.<sup>33</sup>

- ) **Technological convergence** - digitizing existing products and creating new individual devices that allow audio and video recording. Consequently, anyone can shoot and upload content to some digital platform.

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<sup>31</sup> K. Bruhn Jensen - „*Media Convergence*“. London: Routledge. (2010)

<sup>32</sup> M. McLuhan – „*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*“. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

<sup>33</sup> H. Jenkins – „*Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*“. 2006.

- ) **Economic convergence** - the acquisition of more and more media content by large media corporations.
- ) **Social convergence** - distribution channel switching, multimodal navigation, and multifunctionality.
- ) **Cultural convergence or cultural involvement** - new forms of media, such as social media allow this.
- ) **Global Convergence** - the emergence of a mix of hybrid cultural products that are made a reality by global interactions.

In addition to new media, traditional mass media are also trying to meet the challenges of modern times. Their services can be described as MOD (Media on demand), which includes scrolling function, access to an archive of thematic programs, online digital video subscription services, e.g. Britbox, and others. The emergence of HBO and Netflix in the countries where video rental services were popular, in fact, turned this service into an amateur activity and kicked it out of business. Satellite TV network HBO offers viewers its own fiction products and original TV series.

In 1997, streaming media founded Netflix, which is built on the principle of video on demand. It has since become one of the largest Internet television networks in the world. From 2013, mass production and supply of films and TV shows began. It is noteworthy that the traditional media and these two giants also offer consumers two trends of product - TV shows and movies, albeit in a non-traditional way. This industry trend is being followed by Apple iTunes, Amazon Instant Video, and Google Play which allow users to watch their content online.

Clearly, new technology and endless possibilities for information dissemination have also led to the development of existing forms of pop culture. A good example is an emergence of a DIY (Do it yourself) culture on new media platforms<sup>34</sup>, which involves consumers projecting their own identity on existing pop culture products. The DIY culture gives a new look to the classical understanding of pop culture as it makes it possible for everyone and anyone to appreciate its product. Consequently, a popular culture product is assessed not in terms of quality and productivity, but in terms of dissemination and recognition by any consumer. For example, in 2016, TikTok (social network, online video sharing platform), an application for making and sharing short videos, revolutionized

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<sup>34</sup> Marcel Danesi - „Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives“.

the field of trends. Its content determines what consumers buy and what they wear. Moreover, a new buying habit has developed and manufacturers have been provided a platform to present products online.<sup>35</sup> As of October 2020, the TikTok app has been downloaded more than two billion times worldwide. TikTok is the best way to raise awareness on issues such as racism, homophobia, bullying, ecology, etc. The distinguishing characteristic of this platform is that it combines content creators (content and product creators) and allows all users to post their created product on the platform as it does not require high-quality audiovisual material. These videos, on the one hand, replicate existing trends and, on the other hand, create new ones. Seven out of ten TikTok users believe their commune can change the culture. The power of the collective creativity of this platform in the modern media is indisputable. It was established in just a few years as an „enterprise” of popular culture, which has an impact beyond its own platform.<sup>36</sup>

The new demands of modern people are being met through new media, applications, and online platforms. Most of them are available on personal computers, mobile phones, and special gadgets. People use dozens of such gadgets all day long to get information, to communicate, to shop online, to plan their day, to listen to music, to watch a movie, to buy movie and theater tickets, and so on. All of this completely changes the daily life of the individual, his habits as a user, time distribution, behavior, and, most importantly, cultural tastes.

### **3.2. Dissemination of pop culture through traditional broadcasting and new media**

Due to the limited space available for advertising in the traditional media of all countries of the world, advertising clients needed a great deal of effort to obtain expensive advertising time. It was considered the most effective way to reach a huge audience. By the end of the 20th century, with the advent of cable TV and the Internet, the number of media platforms had expanded. So did the access to their audiences. In the 21st century, audience segmentation and the increase in the number of online mediums have created a reality where traditional broadcasting is no longer dominant and spreading information around the world is available even without it.

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<sup>35</sup> <https://digitalweekday.com/2021/04/28/how-tiktok-is-changing-pop-culture-and-the-world/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/new-studies-quantify-tiktoks-growing-impact-on-culture-and-music>



As it is known, the audience is not a passive user of media content, as it was thought until the 1950s. Today, audiences in all segments are actively involved in receiving media messages. However, they are selective and prefer a product that is close to their subject of interest or responds to their needs. The recipient of a media product is a member of the society that consumes tangible and intangible products fulfilling his or her needs. Media is a powerful and indispensable tool for creating and disseminating popular culture. Therefore, it provides and creates the space for the need to adopt and consume culture.

Television broadcasting in Georgia started in the late 1950s. Due to the fact that before the 1990s, there was only one channel with perfect programming, it was uncompetitive (in the early 1990s, other players appeared in the Georgian media market as private broadcasters). The spread of popular culture in the Soviet Union was more associated with Soviet agitation than with commercial business „games”. It popularized the mass culture forms promoting the ruling party’s interests, supporting the creation of the homogenous society, and consistently inhibiting self-reflection and resistance. In short, the media played a supporting role in communist ideology through pop culture.

In contrast, after World War II, the Western media market developed in many directions, creating a diverse and competitive product of pop culture. Taking into account the feedback of the mass audience, it formed more and more complex content and delivery forms, and business models of broadcasting and media. As it is known, good feedback is a premise of a high development tendency. Hence, the desegregation of the broadcast types and their audiences in the Western media, and the tendencies of delivering popular culture to the target audiences created a wide scope of observation for the researcher. In addition, the scale of professional research in the media and mass communications after World War II has grown significantly and has laid the theoretical foundations that have contributed to the refinement and development of the field.

Media researchers conducting child behavior studies attach great importance to the analysis of the dissemination of popular culture through the media. Research practitioners have never had a unified approach to the role of pop culture and mass media in children. A majority of researchers agree that children actively assimilate what is delivered on TV and that the main motivator for them to consume media is fun. Funny shows, programs, and movies are the most active transmitters of pop culture elements. Unlike the previous eras, in the information age the use of media, mediums, and new technologies by children is often encouraged by parents. Many believe that this way children

acquire skills that facilitate their easy integration into the culture of everyday life. The same can be said for the consumption of video games, which often contain elements of simulated reality. In this case, too, we can consider the development of cognitive skills defined by the activity, which trains adolescents in the use of new technologies.

British doctor Richard Graham notes that often parents are confused, whether their child is addicted to video games, or the child is only having fun and passion for games. According to the doctor, the criteria by which addiction can be estimated determine the extent to which activity affects fundamental aspects, such as sleep, eating, socialization, education, and so on.

According to researcher Killian Mullan, since children and young people spend a lot of time staring at screens, it creates the impression as if they are addicted to TV. It should be noted that children also use technology for daily activities (e.g. preparing homework), and the line between fun and purposeful use is virtually blurred.<sup>37</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically changed the daily life of everyone. Distance learning and remote working conditions have added a special function to online. Online teaching methods were actively used in various countries during the difficult epidemiological situation, including in Georgia, the Second Channel of TVSchool, which offered school lessons to pupils on TV and on digital platforms. During the active period of the pandemic, the BBC developed the same practice.

Generation Z unites those born between 1997 and 2012. This demographic group mostly consists of children of millennials born in 1981-1996. Generation Z, unlike its predecessors, is the most diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. It is also distinguished by a good education, social and cultural awareness, and a special desire for self-expression.

In the pop culture analysis, youth culture is one of the key topics, because the new generation is the initiator of the establishment of popular trends. The trends he watches are not forgotten even in adulthood but rather become stronger and transform into pop culture. The principles of the market economy also greatly influence this process. The transformation of pop culture in modern urban societies from youth culture to mainstream is a historically related cycle.<sup>38</sup>

The media and the commercial market cooperate in order to create and distribute a youth cultural product. Consequently, the business is trying its best to gain Generation Z's trust, although the latter

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-42541404>

<sup>38</sup> Marcel Danesi - „Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives“.

has the highest distrust of companies compared to its predecessors. According to Salesforce, in a survey of Generation Z, only 42% of respondents trust companies, compared to 50% for millennials. According to Deloitte, only 48% of Generation Z think that businesses have a positive impact on society. It is completely acceptable for this generation to advertise and market a product that shows the real consumers' impressions and does not present the product perfectly. Generation Z is aware and worried that private businesses have access to their personal information with the help of new technologies and may benefit from doing so to make more profit. According to Fluent, only 39% of Generation Z worldwide trust companies promise that the personal information, which they share during the registration process, will be protected and will not be used for commercial purposes.<sup>39</sup>

Technology giant Facebook, which has been part of the platform known as Meta since 2021, faces a number of challenges regarding personal information protection. Its founder, Mark Zuckerberg, had to answer a number of allegations in 2020 and 2021. The issue was about using the platform's personal profiles information to gain access to information and neglect people's safety. As Francis Haugen, a former employee of the company said, the social networking algorithm worked on this very principle, and it could even offer health-damaging information to gain more customer engagement. According to Haugen, in this dilemma, the company always made decisions in favor of its own profits, resulting in a system that deepened divisions, extremism, and polarization, which, in turn, gradually undermined public order. The same problem was highlighted by a report published by the Wall Street Journal,<sup>40</sup> describing the negative impact of Instagram owned by Facebook on adolescents and young people. The report discusses creating a toxic space for teenage girls who may already be dissatisfied with their appearance while at the same time being in an environment where they are constantly watching unrealistic, filtered, and processed photos. The report contains information obtained by Facebook through internal research. According to the data, 32% of the teenage girls surveyed said they felt bad about their appearance, and Instagram made their feelings even worse.<sup>41</sup> Because of the algorithm we talked about above, girls may come across a product that, for example, causes anorexia, alongside completely neutral information. 13.5% of adolescent girls in

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<sup>39</sup> [https://www.emarketer.com/content/gen-z-doesnt-trust-big-business?ecid=NL1001&fbclid=IwAR0UXOQ51kQU5pNwCKmz\\_UCfGAcndJTvbLgA6G6K-U8R3sHt3DffLaQFSeQ](https://www.emarketer.com/content/gen-z-doesnt-trust-big-business?ecid=NL1001&fbclid=IwAR0UXOQ51kQU5pNwCKmz_UCfGAcndJTvbLgA6G6K-U8R3sHt3DffLaQFSeQ)

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-facebook-files-11631713039>

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-58570353?fbclid=IwAR0jJy-mMGDTJ\\_nW4OWuu6lPxIC6JE\\_41Q1bFWeaekGfGxSQpAhIIXC11zE](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-58570353?fbclid=IwAR0jJy-mMGDTJ_nW4OWuu6lPxIC6JE_41Q1bFWeaekGfGxSQpAhIIXC11zE)

the study said Instagram motivated their suicidal and self-harming thoughts, while 17% said they had difficulty eating and had developed anorexia nervosa.<sup>42</sup> After raising these issues, Facebook temporarily suspended the development of the Instagram Kids project.<sup>43</sup> Conversely, Facebook accused the Wall Street Journal of selectively presenting information, noting that according to the same survey, which the report relied on, the majority of users, namely eight out of ten, said they were satisfied with the social network and positively assessed its impact. However, two things are noteworthy here. First, it is difficult for the above-mentioned negative impact to appear as a global problem based on individual analysis. Also, the 20% dissatisfied with this study is actually a very large number, and it is a statistically significant factor. Prior to the Wall Street Journal report, Facebook was repeatedly accused of hiding the full details of the study for failing to disclose information on key issues.

Consequently, it is easy to understand why Generation Z has a distrust of the commercial realm. Moreover, new media are constantly offering new platforms for self-expression for teens and young adults. Generation Z's favorite platform is TikTok, where they are more actively involved in product development and trend creation. This is what makes this platform the most influential social network today. Generation Z comprises 60% of the app users. According to a study by McKinsey & Company, this generation is characterized by an appreciation of individual identity, rejection of stereotypes, and a desire for new forms of self-expression.<sup>44</sup> TikTok is a platform for unifying a variety of content, and at the same time, its algorithm is distinguished by the special efficiency of personal product selection for the user.<sup>45</sup>

Popular culture is a characteristic of a person, which reflects the socio-cultural changes happening in the wake of the development of new information and communication technologies. A new, different cultural phenomenon and practice have emerged in modern times involving millions of actors. The widespread use of such practices affects the daily and professional lives of all individuals, leading to the transformation of traditional cultural institutions.

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<sup>42</sup> [https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/09/us/instagram-eating-disorders/index.html?utm\\_content=2021-10-09T19%3A30%3A03&utm\\_term=link&utm\\_source=fbCNNi&utm\\_medium=social&fbclid=IwAR2TV24CjfVHsi\\_yT\\_Xai-ZmKSh6hNSz0zgLqJcUEOMbEXHtlZ8ZBJ5tA8M](https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/09/us/instagram-eating-disorders/index.html?utm_content=2021-10-09T19%3A30%3A03&utm_term=link&utm_source=fbCNNi&utm_medium=social&fbclid=IwAR2TV24CjfVHsi_yT_Xai-ZmKSh6hNSz0zgLqJcUEOMbEXHtlZ8ZBJ5tA8M)

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/05/facebook-whistleblower-testifies-before-senate-committee.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/true-gen-generation-z-and-its-implications-for-companies>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2020/07/07/what-the-rise-of-tiktok-says-about-generation-z/?sh=4b5a03865490>

The situation is more complicated when it comes to the perception of popular culture by adolescents. As already mentioned, the main motivator for children and adolescents is fun and not getting intellectual resources. Consequently, adults consider their choices lightly and view them as the contrary to „good“. In this case, adults find it very difficult to resist popular culture, which in the perception of many people incredibly simplifies the social world, complex social history, identity, and structures of the core value. The spread of this popular culture is carried out continuously through the media.

The key concept in understanding the relationship between popular culture and broadcast media is media literacy. This term is mostly used in the context of education, although it has several other meanings. Most researchers and practitioners recognize the importance of media literacy and the need to integrate popular culture into the media. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly difficult to „protect“ the audience (mostly adolescents and children) from commerce, false news, pseudo-values, and often violence, as messages of this discourse can now be received over the cell phone, through numerous social media channels.

### **Modern forms/ways of forming cultural taste**

#### *Or how the Internet is changing the culture of behavior*

Predominantly, cultural tastes, as the result of our social existence, are understood as the tastes of our friendship group or the subculture we are closely associated with. Unfortunately, in the age of new media development, we have very little idea and information about how software algorithms come into our lives, shape our tastes, change our perceptions, give us recommendations and change our cultural vision, and sometimes even transform us completely.

In the social sciences, we often find information about tastes and preferences. What leads to the formation of cultural taste and then its development? When does the formation of human cultural aspirations begin? Numerous authors view the formation of tastes and aspirations in culture as part of the formation of social classes, the emergence of social hierarchies, or social mobility.<sup>46</sup>

Recently the debate over this issue has intensified again. New media forms created new class / cultural phenomena. This caused renewed interest in Pierre Bourdieu's analytical framework.

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<sup>46</sup> Herbert Gans - Popular Culture and High Culture, 1974, p. 125

However, despite this interest, not enough attention is paid to the question of how cultural infrastructure and emerging and developing digital media formats can influence and shape cultural tastes and change important preferences. Consequently, this may result in a generalization of important analysis regarding the power of cultural forms and their social aspects. This may be the case when the discussion of cultural acceptance has lost one of the most important aspects responsible for shaping taste. Of course, it does not mean that the social and personal communication field no longer affects the formation of taste. It does not mean that family, upbringing, environment are not as relevant as they were 50 or 100 years ago. However, today, against the background of the emerging and strengthening of new media, new technological infrastructure is emerging in the form of algorithms. This technology is gradually directing users on the way to the formation of cultural tastes. For instance, today, as never before, the tastes of a group of the same typology are dramatically distinguished and eclectic. If we use the terminology that emerged after Bourdieu, cultural acceptance has become omnivorous,<sup>47</sup> as computer algorithms subconsciously change people's preferences and push them to a „desirable“ choice. This ultimately results in a change in taste. To make the stronger arguments for this hypothesis, we need an accurate answer to the question - what is cultural causality? We also need to reach an agreement and acquire a unified understanding of the essence of culture, so that examples of algorithms and recursive forms can provide a detailed analysis of this topic. In this research paper, we can use as an example one of the most popular companies of our century, Amazon. Apparently, its algorithmic system is considered and used most tangibly today.

Amazon, one of the largest online stores, is quite popular and well known to Georgian consumers. Books, music, movies, and everything else the buyer chooses are for sale on Amazon. As Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge describe:<sup>22</sup> Amazon's personalized recommendations work effectively. Multi-dimensional taste profiles/portraits are created by tracking page history, word search, and individual customer purchases. These profiles are based on reading habits, listening to music, or other consumer behavior. The company uses this information to automatically recommend the customer to purchase a different product. This is based on the typology of goods purchased by people with a homogenous profile / psycho type. Grouped together are people who have about the same preferences, and hypothetically (later already practically), they may want to buy the same items. That

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Peterson - Audience Segmentation, 1992, p. 243

is to say, the product recommended by the system should impress them. For example, a consumer visits Amazon to buy one particular book whose author is familiar and interesting to him. He has decided precisely what he wants to buy. However, the program offers a product that is not relevant to him at the moment. Since the algorithm has well studied his profile (interests, preferences, lifestyle), it offers a product that suits his taste and probably will appear in his shopping cart. It could be a music disc, a drastically different consumer product, or even a self-care product that a similar profile, or psycho type, had already purchased a minute ago.

Amazon uses not only these automatic recommendations. It also gives the customer some sort of direction by showing the products that others have already seen or selected and displays the number of purchases. Amazon also shows customers what percentage has chosen and bought this product, how many people made the choice at the time, and more. This list can be continued further, but it will suffice to say that all this data is used for algorithmic selection.

It is interesting to consider the product Amazon Cloud Player. The idea was as follows, music collections should no longer be stored on one device, as in other cloud systems (so-called virtual storage systems), but rather be on the so-called cloud, on a shared server where it will be accessible from any internet-connected device. This product/service allows customers to purchase any piece of music through Amazon and, at the same time, securely store it on the Amazon cloud. Offering this service means that consumers no longer have to worry about storage for their own music collection. The new offer allows you to allocate the music you like into one space. Imagine that we are getting a space that can monitor our listening to music, listening time, type of music, peculiarities of our listening habits, and so on. Amazon uses this to enrich and process its own data, which eventually adds up to the company's vast amount of intellectual analytics and then finds its use in referral systems. Today, many other companies own similar photo, video, or audio storage systems.

In the modern world, many people are addicted to computers, tablets, and mobile phones. Therefore, one might think that television has fewer users than it previously had. However, if we look closely and investigate, this is not necessarily the case. According to Nielsen, the world's population watches TV for an average of 5 hours a day, which is actually more than the 1990 data. This is about 34 hours per week and 1800 hours per year.

In Georgia, the average TV viewing time according to Kantar (TMI) is 33 hours per week (male 29, female 35). This is more time than the average Georgian spends at work. People traditionally

spend most of their time in front of the TV, watching live or pre-recorded programs (the audience in Georgia watches live programs an average of 29 hours a week). Two decades after the Internet Revolution, despite economic challenges and visual upgrades, the old regimen is still dominant.

Georgia has joined the army of new media users who get Netflix services. That's why it is relevant to see another example of taste formation by analyzing this company's strategy along with Amazon.

In the age of technology dominance, changing the company profile for Netflix was a new and very bold decision. Experience has shown that even small changes in the habit while watching a product can have significant cultural effects. The audience of Georgian news is more than 1 012 000 viewers per week (TMI data according to Kantar). Imagine what the population of the country would be like if the news had not aired at all.

Netflix, like Amazon Studios and other imitators, aims to change the behavior and values of traditional television according to the internet generation. Instead of nurturing a collective identity, streamers see culture as a shared taste rather than an artificial division into time slots. Netflix's strategy runs counter to prevailing hierarchies and norms. Its purpose is to reprogram the viewers themselves.

Usually, it is not necessary for the most popular product on the market to be the most profitable, although in the case of televisions, when the price of advertising depends on the rating, relative popularity is very important. If it is possible to attract viewers from the desired demographic group, this can directly lead to success or failure. This is a business model for which large groups of people need to watch the same thing at the same time - today it is called Event Television. Many marketers around the world, including in Georgia, agree that TV shows are „designed for marketing purposes”, and as Walter Lippmann (Netflix Studio representative) puts it, television has long been „the creator, the servant, and the prostitute of merchandising.”

Internet users are more loyal to their interests than to established networks. However, they may have watched the same material with others. This is regularly done through a referral algorithm that is shared via Facebook, Twitter, and email. New content is like a snowflake - some melt, some accumulate and form one big team. For example, customers may not have watched a live Georgian program/show when it was aired, but it is possible that this product still gained more than a million views in two weeks.



Netflix Management views its organization as a network. In America, NBC (National Broadcasting Company) realized the meaning of this concept in 1926 and began working with AT&T (American Telephone and Telegraph Company, founded in 1885) to create the first national broadcasting network. At that time our country was celebrating the reception and launch of the first radio signal. The industry was just an abstraction, the main goal was to disseminate information. Understanding the media's distant perspective began on the other side of the ocean. If we want to draw an analogy with modern trends, it is interesting to note that in the 1930s the entertainment media industry in the United States was largely local. Radio stations technologically mostly covered only local cities. NBC's innovative idea was to create one high-quality product for the whole country.

The National Broadcasting Network met the demands of the time well, and it became an effective mechanism for getting the audience on a daily cultural diet. In 2011, the independent studio Media Rights Capital acquired the rights to film the British political drama „House of Cards”. Netflix did not bother to go to their presentations and offered to shoot two 13-episode seasons without any pilots, which in fact sounded like a gamble, though it was quite well calculated. Whatever Netflix calls itself, much of its game is based on data.<sup>48</sup> Netflix knows more about its customers than any other network operating through intermediary cable operators. It knows what its customer is like and what kind of behavior it has. Netflix never explains what its numbers (or anything that looks like ranking data) mean. However, the case of the “House of Cards” describes well the rules of its game. Netflix inquired how popular actor Kevin Spacey was throughout his career, and what evaluations he had among the viewers. It acted similarly in the case of director-producer David Fincher, examining the degree of popularity of his films. The company had an approximate idea of how many fans the product created by this tandem would have and so calculated the number of viewers of the show.

Because of this attitude towards work, Netflix has the great advantage of changing viewer behavior. The strategy is to give people the illusion that their preferences do not depend on the programming grid. It was no coincidence that Netflix competed with Amazon to become a premium supplier of children's series. After all, waiting for new episodes of favorite TV series for children is the most exciting for children. From this information, we can deduce what future televisions will be like. Only live events on TV will be sports events, news, shows, and award ceremonies. All other

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<sup>48</sup> David Beer „Popular Culture and New Media”, 2013, Chapter 4, p.63-66.

script products will turn into a streaming show. Netflix competes with others with its original programming, at the same time it maintains the correct targeting of old shows, and it can also predict new demands. Ultimately, with this approach, television is becoming more and more like a retail business.

Instead of an entire nation united by shows, we now see a segmented audience that is more driven by individual preferences.

Each of these examples presents completely new, modern trends in taste change and formation. The algorithms responsible for the recommendation, draw the user's attention to specific cultural products and, consequently, are able to hold a kind of cultural „meetings”, which, in turn, nourish and „feed” the taste. Of course, this is not directly related to the formation of cultural tastes, nevertheless, it has undoubtedly become an important part of the formation of consumer culture in our century. There is also no doubt that it is possible to watch the news and find so-called trends by using these search engines and online resources.

Using the search engine Google, we know what other people are looking for, what they are interested in, we see who is watching, who is talking about, and what opinions are expressed by different people about this or that product. We see trends in social networking, moreover, we read and use recommendations. Each of these processes uses our data, our feedback. The algorithm sorts out the variety of our choices in order to further select and focus on the product, message, behavior, or culture we need and value based on our own culture of behavior. Therefore, it lets us know what is the most, topical, „hot”, important today. People, on the other hand, subconsciously tend to go where everyone else goes, that is, where the masses go. People like what is universally recognized and approved. Perhaps it is no longer secret that broadcast media, including TV shows, take into account the reactions of online users, using a kind of citation index to determine the prospects for the future development of the program. They consider what the viewer likes, what he reacts to, and so on. Actually, such a database is very large, and if we look in detail, we find that the number of existing databases (from which we get information about what is happening around us) is proportional to the systems that slowly change our behavior and ultimately help us find our own „culture”<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Berdzenishvili T. - "Modern Forms / Methods of Forming Cultural Taste" - Publication "The Idea of National Identity in Art". Tbilisi, 2019.

### **3.3. New category of pop culture - video games**

Traditional social order society is considered as the “first wave”. The so-called “second wave” society already had access to the mass media. It had national, regional, and cable broadcasts, and it created trends, basic narratives, standards through the spread of popular culture in society. As Walter Lippmann points out in “Public Opinion”, it created the images that shape the perception of the world in the human mind. The “third wave” not only accelerates the pace of innovation but also utterly changes the structure of information. The result is a completely different type of culture, in which the information is constantly flowing and losing its relevance in seconds. In this culture, the transition from one piece of information to another is so rapid that it causes a substantial rift between the audience of mass communications and the “third wave” community.

With the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, video games emerged. At first, they were only part of the subculture because their creation, acquisition, and consumption required special equipment (which was not widely available at the time) and skills (Internet search, understanding video game instructions). Accordingly, it was consumed by people with special skills, equipment, and knowledge. Today, we no longer question the fact that video games became a legitimate part of popular culture and were effectively established in the field of culturology because of their mass distribution. Video games are constantly evolving and have become a hobby for millions of people around the world. Today games are as solid an entertainment industry like movies, television, and music.

It has been about 40 years since people started mass consumption of video games. Online gamers collectively spend 3 billion hours per week in front of their screens. Today more and more people are playing on personal computers or smartphones with IOS and Android systems. Most importantly, there is already a first generation growing up in an environment in which video games are a cultural mainstream. This situation reveals those cultural crossroads when the perception of video games as the pop culture began.

Until some time ago, there was something that prevented video games from becoming an internal part of popular culture as rock music and movies. Even when video games brought millions

in revenue, they still remained out of pop culture. Various factors can be considered as the reason for this. First of all, the creation of the product itself and the different types of actions of the user are required. While the consumption of music and movies does not require much effort from the audience (viewers and listeners can simply watch the image, listen to music and have fun), video games require special equipment (device) and specific skills (trained hands, quick reaction to the image and sound). A video game enthusiast should learn to play the game in much the same way as they learn to play a musical instrument. In short, unlike watching movies and listening to music, video games require specific effort.

Video games from the very beginning seemed to “get stuck” in the field of subculture and they were trying to get out for a long time. They (like many modern technologies) were created by a young hacker in a university dormitory, and for some time were associated only with the culture of young men obsessed with computer technology. That is why as soon as the video game market emerged, the companies selected teenage boys as the target audience, even though girls also participated in the creation and consumption of video games. This was the main reason that has long delayed the emergence of video games as popular culture.

By the end of our decade, reality has changed thoroughly and rapidly, with video games becoming widely distributed and consumed products. The main contributor to this was the mass appearance of a new generation of smartphones on the market. Of course, they are already available to everyone nowadays. It can be said that nowadays every person has the tool with which he can have fun playing video games. Consequently, the interest in “ordinary” games has reached a much wider audience than teenage boys. Games like “Minecraft” and “Angry Birds” have managed to capture the spirit of the time, so precisely that many other elements of the culture should envy. “Minecraft” uses blocks to create different environments, farms, mines, etc. It is possible to join the network individually or with other players. This game, where the individual has to reach the goal, is not easy, but it allows the player to create the desired environment and thus get satisfaction. The player of “Angry Birds” shoots a bird with the slingshot at various objects. If a bird hits a target, the player accumulates points. “Angry Birds” does not require a lot of intellectual input from the player, so it is a good way to relax and spend time after a tiring day. Video games have always been important, even for the spread of electronic music, movie special effects, military culture, and personal computers.

Today technology is a constant in society, and everyday life is already unimaginable without it. One might think that video games are less important than telecommunications or social media and not consider how much video games influence the formation of new cultures, histories, and lifestyles. This impact is especially evident in the last 30 years. About seven generations of video games were created during this period. A good example is the popular video game “Pokémon”, which appeared in the 1990s. As Kurt D. Squire notes in “Video Games and Education”, this simple video game has become a cultural phenomenon.

Video games have affected the structure of the social system. Players try to compensate for the feelings that are unattainable in real life - it is the feeling of victory, success, productivity that a person experiences when playing and winning. This is the generation whose birth coincides with the creation of video games. It is also noteworthy that the attitude of this demographic group towards video games is different from the attitude of the group that was born in the era when the Internet and video games were already commonplace.

Video games have a huge impact on political culture. Organizations such as Molleindustria allow the creation of interactive gaming media that contrasts with traditional media broadcasting. As already mentioned, video games are a powerful component of pop culture, which controls the majority of the audience through digital interaction mediums. Therefore, it is a kind of influence on society, but it is different from politics.

If political culture tries to keep the audience in a passive receptive state, video games motivate the audience to participate in the “play”. Given this difference, it is difficult to imagine fruitful cooperation between these two areas. Conversely, popular culture can be seen as the creator of a challenge that threatens the existing order of the unconditional legitimacy of power and religion. It becomes necessary to link politics and popular culture, because as long as this rift exists, society will regress, and politics will act in a defensive mode, at the same time increasing the destructive approach of popular culture to the power of politics.

While the aforementioned industry does not welcome the politicization of its platforms, politicians have begun to actively use them to communicate with gamers (we mean professional gamers here). A good example of this is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Democrat, the youngest woman elected to the United States Congress, who actively used platforms such as Twitch and 4chan in order to communicate with a younger audience during the election campaign. Also, Steve Bannon, who

was Donald Trump's campaign manager in 2016, used the tactics of creating online forums, and for this, he used 4chan and other platforms on which gamers were actively involved. Bannon's connection to Gamergate (an online movement created by gamers) was often discussed in the press. Gamergate has been linked to misogyny and sexism. It has been involved in debates about the video game industry and the union of journalists, also, in numerous conspiracies and accusations by producers, gamers, and journalists.<sup>50</sup>

With the development of communication systems and media in modern society, the importance of informal knowledge has increased even more. The impact of video games on children's socialization and education has increased. Influence is exceptionally significant in the generation born in the 1990s and beyond. This is the generation that has a special attitude towards video games, and this cultural phenomenon is an integral part of their lives.

The media is repeatedly asking the same question: Do video games have a positive or negative impact? Such an approach is the result of technological determinism. Technology, e. g. Television, computers, e-books, and video games do not make a unilaterally good or bad influence. In fact, they have different effects - both negative and positive. Naturally, this depends on how they are used by different people in different contexts.

Despite the positive effects of video games, their other side can not be left unattended. The violent nature of video games is often talked about. Even the heroes and characters who are adored by society, especially by the young people, are often distinguished by cruelty, ruthlessness, and other traits not acceptable to society. In addition, critics often emphasize the impact of video game violence on the child's psyche. They believe that violence, murder, and bloodshed thus become a natural, everyday occurrence for a teenager, and may even lead to empathy for the abuser and the perpetrator.

There are many instances where the virtual reality of video games becomes part of an already existing popular culture or vice versa. Since 2000, the dystopian genre YA (Young Adults) has gained a special place in popular culture.

The 2000 Japanese film "Battle Royale" by Kinji Fukasaku, based on the novel of the same name by Koushun Takami, soon became a real phenomenon in pop culture. The film depicts the life-and-death struggle of high school students sanctioned by the totalitarian regime. The work is recognized

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/01/gamergate-alt-right-hate-trump>

in popular culture as one of the most influential products of recent decades. Several video games were created under the influence of “Battle Royale”, and the “Battle Royale genre” appeared. This genre combines the types of video games that involve a large number of players, including episodes of the last surviving player and weapons collection, such as Player Unknown’s Battlegrounds, Fortnite Battle Royale, ARMA 3, H1Z1: King of the Kill - H1Z1, Knives Out, Rules of Survival, Garena Free Fire, Apex Legends, etc.

In a video game created under the influence of movies, the user has the opportunity to create a script and reality on their own, which the finished film does not allow. Consequently, the interest aroused by the film, the desire to be involved is realized through the video game. As American sociologist T. L. Taylor writes, games that bring many participants together are designed more for socialization and communication than for the thrill of the game itself.<sup>51</sup> In this case, the player himself creates an avatar that combines his imagination and desires and transforms it into virtual reality. He becomes both a director and a protagonist, consequently changing from a passive viewer of the film into a reality-inducing player.

Soon after the Eastern “Battle Royale”, in 2012, the western product “The Hunger Games” was created, a series of films based on the trilogy of the same name by American author Susan Collins, directed by Gary Ross. The script repeats the adventures of young people fighting for life in the dystopian future. In addition to the combat content, the film highlights social and economic inequality and division. The role of this trilogy in popular culture is multifaceted. It addresses a number of topics: class division, ethics, culture, politics, including such acute social issues as oppression, poverty, gender inequality, etc. In addition to the elements of Greek mythology and the clash of gladiators, “The Hunger Games” is even more saturated with a variety of elements of popular culture than the “Battle Royale”. While telling the story, the author uses the reality show format. While staging a costume show and displaying video games on the screen, she captures the spirit of the time at a stroke. In the film, the viewer sees the dramatic difference between reality and the product conveyed by a reality show, despite its “reality”.

The reality show is one of the most popular formats of 21st century TV production because it reaches the highest level of interactivity. Its participants are real people. The reality show is a good

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<sup>51</sup> T. L. Taylor – „Play between Worlds: Exploring Online Culture.“ 2006

example of how the boundary between reality and virtuality can be blurred, as well as between something existing and its representation and vice versa.<sup>52</sup> Partly the game involves participants working with the camera, impacting the audience, and gaining their favor, even when a struggle for survival is needed. “Smart” players know that this is one of the ways to survive, so they use this knowledge as a “weapon”.

Popular culture and media also play a special role in the dystopian reality of “The Hunger Games”, which in this particular case is expressed in the oppression of the population and overall pressure. The broadcast of “The Hunger Games” forces the population to accept the unbearable situation they live in. In the conditions of tyranny, this entertaining product should divert the attention of the population from much more important, essential topics. According to sociologist Katrina Hoop: “The separation between factual hard news with serious relevance, such as poverty and inequality, and the soft news of infotainment is often hard to see.”<sup>53</sup> As commercial media sells customer attention/viewing to advertisers, it forces them to buy as many products as possible, sometimes spending more money than they actually have.

Viewers can see the roots of the “Battle Royale” in Netflix’s most popular Korean TV series, Squid Game. The media giant is already working on the idea of transforming it into a video game.<sup>54</sup> In addition, video games with similar content, so-called knock-offs, have already appeared on the market.<sup>55</sup> The content of the series is based on a children’s game. However, according to the script, the players will be involved in a deadly battle for 38 million dollars, and there will be only one winner. Each episode is based on a simple children’s game, most of which is familiar to Korean culture, but as a result of the modification of the script – the game becomes life-threatening.

One of the episodes uses the theme of traditional Korean sweets<sup>56</sup> made with melted sugar and baking soda. This product was actively sold on the streets in the 70s. The essence of the game is that the participants are given these sweets, which have engraved a few simple figures - a circle, star,

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<sup>52</sup> Marcel Danesi - „Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives“

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.sjcme.edu/magazine/spring-2014/talk-hunger-games/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.pcgamer.com/squid-game-video-game-netflix/>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2021/11/03/theres-already-a-squid-game-video-game-knock-off-and-its-hilarious/?sh=7dae54956f33>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.polygon.com/22709110/squid-game-games-real-terror-ranked>



umbrella, or triangle. Participants are instructed to remove these figures from the sweets in ten minutes. Those who can not cope with the task are killed.

The impact of “Squid Games” soon became so widespread that many schoolteachers in the UK were concerned that children were repeating the games they had seen on the show, which was clearly not safe.<sup>57</sup> The unprecedentedly popular TV series hashtag was viewed by 22.8 billion users on TikTok by October 2021, while the original TV series had already been viewed by 111 million people. Netflix informed the customers about it via Twitter.<sup>58</sup> New media, especially TikTok, has been flooded by user-created content influenced by Squid Games.

It is noteworthy that the product has become equally relevant and popular in Western and Eastern countries. Netflix CEO in Asia Minyoung Kim, who has worked for Netflix since 2016, has spent years creating a popular product for the Asian market. The Korean TV series “Squid Games” has the most viewers not only in Korea but all over the world. In this part, Netflix, thanks to its good knowledge of the Asian market, has overtaken competitors Disney +, HBO, and Apple TV. Added to this is the correct and precisely calculated international strategy that was necessary for the global popularity of the series. The phenomenon that has led to such a rapid establishment in the pop culture of the game-based series is attracting attention in many directions. No one is arguing anymore that the aspects that are inherent in this pop-culture product are especially relevant in the modern world. More specifically, thanks to the simple game elements on which the script is based, it has attracted the attention of users internationally. Another factor contributing to the show’s popularity is reflecting the social injustice, class divisions, financial inequality, and gender issues.

As “Hollywood Reporter” reports,<sup>59</sup> an important aspect of the show’s popularity is the power of the video game element. It should also be noted that the main character himself is addicted to the games. In some scenes, the viewer feels as if he/she is watching an actual video game. The difference is that the game is similar to a children’s game in visual design, although the player is fighting for a cash prize at the cost of his own life.

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-58915851>

<sup>58</sup> <https://twitter.com/netflix/status/1448045816308961280>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/squid-game-secret-to-global-success-1235030008/>

In 2021, TikTok created a new space for video game lovers, “The Game Room”, which offers customers a live gaming feed of the most popular TikTok creators and celebrities every month. It is a new opportunity to unite video games and pop culture on one platform and allow all users to connect with players, express their attitudes and encourage them. This inclusive experience offered by TikTok brings together all types of players and their supporters, creating a new space for sharing experiences.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the mass integration of video games in pop culture, it is impossible not to mention the negative aspects that may follow their consumption. In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) included gaming addiction in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11).<sup>61</sup> This disorder implies a decline in the ability to control time while consuming digital or video games, which affects an individual’s family, social, and personal life, education, and work. It also causes anxiety, stress, and depression.<sup>62</sup>

In 2021, the Chinese government decided to restrict access to video games for minors and set strict time limits on video game playing. Access to online games for kids is only allowed for 1 hour on Fridays, weekends, and holidays. According to the BBC,<sup>63</sup> local Chinese media described online games as “spiritual opium” and discussed the harmful effects of online gaming on adolescents. First of all, the focus is on addiction. Based on the local media, the BBC also reports that some parents welcome the decision of the authorities, although the others oppose such intervention.

### **3.4. Sociological survey to study the negative impact of online gaming addiction on the teenager’s psyche**

The above-mentioned problem made it necessary to study the characteristics of adolescents who devote a lot of time to computer games. Within the framework of the doctoral dissertation, based on the purpose and objectives of the study, a **sociological survey**

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<sup>60</sup> <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/gaming-goes-live-on-tiktok>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-42541404>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/322478#signs-and-symptoms>

<sup>63</sup> <https://bbc.in/3nj8TqV>

was conducted to study the negative impact of online gaming addiction on the adolescent psyche.

To test the assumption that intensive computer use leads to adolescent mental disorder, personal alienation, and disruption of contact with others, adolescents aged 15-17 were interviewed. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, and a total of 300 adolescents (target group) were interviewed.

The results of the survey can be summarized as follows:

Half of the adolescents surveyed could not control the amount of time they spent at the computer. This leads the adolescents to disorganization and disrupts their ability to plan their own time.

About half of the respondents spend 2-4 hours on average at the computer, which is three to four times more than the safe time of the computer usage during the day, and consequently affects the mental and physical development of the adolescent.

More than half of the surveyed adolescents admit that computer addiction harms their learning. This is a very serious problem because learning is the most important activity in adolescence.

About 80% of respondents are anxious, irritable, or uncomfortable if they have to shift their focus from the computer to something else. It shows that computer addiction causes irritation, aggression, and reclusiveness if, for some reason, the time spent at the computer is reduced.

20% of surveyed adolescents often prefer to spend time at the computer rather than meeting friends in real life. This leads to a loss of interest in social life, which proves once again that online games contribute to the alienation of a person and lead to disruption of socialization in society, a reclusive lifestyle, and impaired communication skills of adolescents because leading activities at this age are communicative. The adolescent acquires the necessary knowledge about life, first of all, in relationships with his/her peers.

Half of the adolescents surveyed feel dissatisfied if they are not online. However, the feeling of dissatisfaction disappears if they get online. This indicates that they already have some form of computer dependency. In turn, this leads to a reassessment of values. The adolescent aspires to spend as much time as possible with the computer, instead of balancing time, having more contact with people, getting an education, and achieving full self-realization.

Quiet, healthy sleep in adolescence is directly related to healthy hormonal and psychophysical development. 40% of respondents have a sleep problem, which leads to nightmares, sudden attacks of anxiety and fear, and socially stressful situations.

The majority of the adolescents surveyed try to justify their aspiration for a computer. Typically, computer addiction causes anger and judgment from those around a person, which deepens the conflict, thus increasing the desire to spend more time with the computer.

For 45% of the surveyed adolescents, online games are a way to “calm down” against unwelcome thoughts about life. This, in turn, leads to a decline in the ability to solve problems effectively and promptly. They perceive virtual reality as a relief and consider winning online games an achievement. According to the survey, the most common genres among adolescents are shooting, RPG, simulations, and horror movies.

According to the conducted survey and analysis of the psychological characteristics of adolescents, we can conclude:

- ) Computer addiction - this is an event that gets more and more relevant in the information society and negatively affects the formation of mental, social, and physical characteristics of the adolescent.
- ) The most vulnerable categories for computer addiction are Adolescents 10 to 18 years old, as it is during this period that their primary socialization, psyche, and worldview take shape.

) Prolonged computer addiction can lead to disruption of some of the adolescent's mental functions - sociability, empathy, and desire for openness, followed by disruption of relationships, reclusiveness, and alienation the adolescent.

Thus, the formation of computer addiction in adolescents is a very important social problem.

Mankind is surrounded by computer technology and the Internet, and more and more people (especially children and adolescents) are becoming addicted to computer games. This is a problem, and we can only guess what this problem will lead to in the long run. We need to start thinking about this today. Different scientific disciplines should be combined to study this field. Psychology plays a key role in the study of the psychological aspects of the interaction between humans and computer technology.

As research has shown, the impact of online games on a child's personality development can be varied. Depending on the type of game the child plays, he/she may develop logical thinking and creativity. The so-called useful games are:

*Object-manipulative* - helps to learn the basics of driving a car or aircraft.

*Adventure* - develops creative skills, and logical and creative thinking while performing the task defined in the game.

Also, standard computer games help to relax and unwind. However, of course, life is not free from potential harm, and, in general, computer games can harm the psyche of adolescents and children. Games such as role-plays or shooters develop aggression and anxiety in children, and impair communication skills.

From all of the above, we can conclude that computer games can develop a child's cognitive skills and psychology only if parents are attentive and participate in choosing games.

Games that are recognized as harmful to the child's psyche are as follows:

DOOM, Quake, Duke Nukem 3D, Unreal, Grand Theft Auto, Resident Evil II, Wild 9, Sanitarium, Carmageddon II, Mortal Kombat, Blood, Postal, Requiem.

Games that are recommended to replace “shooters”:

Age of Empires 3, Disciples Word, Medieval 2: Total War, Settlers 2, Sid Meier’s Civilization 4, Need for Speed, Richard Barns Rally, and other strategies, racing games, quests, and simulators.

When we talk about online game addiction prevention in adolescents, we need to pay attention to the main point: The educators should consider the notion that the computer is a part of life and not a reward for good behavior.

The only unmistakable method not to allow the teenager to become addicted to online games is to involve him/her in activities where there is no computer equipment. For electronic and online games not to become an alternative to reality for him, to show that in addition to online games many means of entertainment also bring intense sensations, and at the same time develop the body and regulate the psychological state.

1. The amount of time children spend with the computer is directly related to parental behavior and attitudes toward parenting.
2. Children learn behavior patterns primarily from their parents, so adults need to set an example of an active, varied, healthy lifestyle.
3. It is useful and necessary for parents to explain to the child what function technologies play in their lives. On the one hand, it is an opportunity to easily deal with everyday affairs, on the other hand, it is a means of fun, a pleasant pastime. Therefore, maintaining balance is essential.
4. It is useful to plan joint family activities, for example, going to the movies, walking in nature, playing football together, etc.
5. The parents should pay close attention to what content the child views, listens to, and uses while using the computer or smartphone, to select activities that help the child develop and avoid products that may cause fear, anxiety, irritability, etc.

6. Nowadays, there are many computer games and online products that help children develop various skills. In moderate amounts and with parent supervision these activities can be part of teenagers' life.

In case the parent is not able to deal with the problem of the child's gaming addiction independently, it is necessary to consult professionals promptly.

## **Conclusion**

In recent decades, society has become involved in the information-technological transformation. The development of news media, telecommunications networks, and electronic communications, in general, has led to the variability of the global media system and the expansion of communication channels. These changes, in turn, have a major impact on the development of society: from the industrial age, civil society slowly transformed into the information society.

The modern socio-cultural situation around the world shows that the influence of mass culture on the formation of public consciousness is growing dynamically. It is especially important for the development of Georgia and all post-Soviet countries, in general, to provide the society with new, different, yet compatible to the existing, acceptable forms of culture, patterns, lifestyles - which is a function of mass culture. In addition, the "media-infused" mass and popular culture are one of the main spaces and resources in terms of identity construction and self-presentation. This is so relevant and important for Georgia, which is at a new stage of development.

The new media, and the virtual network formed by it, is an integral part of every individual's daily life, as a different communication space and platform for expression and self-realization. Like all systems, the new media has its own rules. Although it is not, in the literal sense, part of the material world, it influences and changes the behavior of the individual and, consequently, changes the individual himself.

The subject of this study is the interplay of popular culture and media. On the one hand, it includes an analysis of the stages of development of media and technology forms, the basic principles of their functioning, and, on the other hand, an understanding of the role of popular culture in this context. Research into new forms of media provides a wealth of information, including social networks, video games, search engines, and other means of communication, which we think will be

of interest to the audience as this topic is new and evolving in the academic sphere. The study focuses on adolescents and young adults, on the generation Z, as the closest to technology and a very specific group in this regard.

According to the study, we can say that popular culture and media, both its traditional and new forms, are inseparable. Moreover, they are characterized by a special connection of interaction, which implies the possibility of significant influence on each other: on the one hand, the media is the way of spreading popular culture, and the media, in turn, forms cultural patterns through their mass popularization.

The emergence of cultural tastes in modern society is mainly linked to the cultural values propagated by the media. The study shows completely new, modern trends in taste change and taste formation. Algorithms responsible for recommending in the media direct the user's attention to a particular cultural product, which nourishes the taste of the audience. Nowadays the agenda created by traditional media can no longer have such a strong impact on public life as it did decades ago. It is typical for new media to offer its agenda to consumers, which radically changes the specifics of receiving and sharing information by individuals. On the one hand, the user himself is a subscriber to information in the field of interest to him and, on the other hand, new media can offer the user similar products that are of interest to him, through algorithms used by search engines, social networks and various digital platforms that integrate content.

In addition to new media, traditional means of mass communication try to meet this challenge of modern times and offer customers demand-based services. The needs of modern people are met through new media, applications, online platforms, most of which are available on personal computers, mobile phones, or special gadgets. It completely changes the daily life of the individual, his / her habits as a user, time distribution, behavior, and, most importantly, his / her cultural tastes.

Technological advancement is an irreversible process. In addition to the larger selection, the continuous flow of information creates spaces that are not regulated by traditional media rules and involve a number of threats. The examples are the personal data protection issue, the admissibility of personal data used for commercial purposes, the increased risk of spreading fake news. These problems are already on the agenda, and media giants are actively discussing ways to solve them.

As research has shown, the interplay of popular culture and media is particularly exciting and important in the lives of adolescents and young adults, as their generation is the first to grow, learn



and self-realize against the background of technologically unprecedented achievements. If for older generations media was just a means of receiving information, study, and entertainment, for today's young people it is a virtual part of everyday life in which they participate, create content, influence each other across geographical boundaries, create and play video games which develop real-life skills, strategic approaches, leadership qualities.

According to the results of the research, the active consumers of the pop culture product spread by the new media are adolescents and young people. In this process, in addition to knowledge acquisition, a number of processes take place in their self-realization and socialization. Adolescents face a number of difficulties when using social networks they have not encountered before. Bullying and aggression are serious problems of virtual space. Adolescents are especially sensitive to it.

Based on the data obtained during the study, both positive and negative effects of video games were identified. It is noteworthy that the game specifics also determine the kind of impact it may have on the adolescent. The positive impact combines the development of logical and creative thinking, developing the skill of optimal problem solving, understanding team collaboration tactics, and so on. Among the most important negative effects is the addiction to computer games. For example, as it turned out, half of the adolescents surveyed could not control the time spent at the computer, which causes to disorganize the connections in the adolescent's reality and reduce the ability to allocate time rationally. Therefore, it is important to keep the balance, especially in the case of adolescents. The most vulnerable age for unwanted addiction is 10 to 18 years old because of primary socialization and the formation of the psyche and worldview during this period. Therefore, it is important to provide the relevant information to adolescents at this time, to arouse their interest in media literacy, to help them realize that technology is a means to learning, to benefit, to have fun, to meet needs, to plan rationally, and so on. Based on the judgment above, we can conclude that the promotion/support of cognitive skills and psycho-emotional development of the child using computer games is possible only if the parents are involved in some way and participate in the choice of games.

Nowadays, media and technology are one of the main achievements of modernity, despite the criticism due to the negative impact of its consumption. In a broad sense, the role of the media as the creator and disseminator of popular culture, which accelerates the development of society, the accumulation of knowledge, the dissemination, the discovery, the testing, and the introduction of innovations over time, is crucial. A new vision of popular culture is possible thanks to new media

models that are radically different from their predecessors. Their interactivity is characterized by a different range of influence on society as it is no longer distanced from its members. On the contrary, it is realized, developed, and even acquires a new look with their participation.

In the context of globalization, the media continues to perform its core functions. In its original function, it remains a source of information, and the development of its new forms is directly related to the information revolution. It seems like an endless adventure that offers an incredibly exciting and challenging future, where even conflicting forms legitimately coexist and create a variety of content that spreads with unprecedented speed and is linked to major trends in globalization.